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**The Meadow-Brook Girls by the
Sea Or The Loss of The Lonesome
Bar**

Janet Aldridge

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

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The Sea Lay Sparkling in the Sunlight.

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The Meadow-Brook Girls by the Sea

[7]

CHAPTER I

A DELIGHTFUL MYSTERY

"I think we are ready to start, girls." Miss Elting folded the road map that she had been studying and placed it in a pocket of her long dust coat. There was a half-smile on her face, a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"Which way do I drive?" questioned Jane McCarthy.

"Straight ahead out of the village," answered Miss Elting, the guardian of the party of young girls who were embarking on their summer's vacation under somewhat unusual circumstances.

"It's the first time I ever started for a place without knowing what the place was, or where I was going," declared Jane McCarthy, otherwise known as "Crazy Jane."

"Won't you please tell us where we are going?" lisped Grace Thompson.

Miss Elting shook her head, with decision. [8]

"Do my father and mother know where we are going?" persisted Grace.

"Of course they know, Tommy. The parents of each of you know, and I know, and so shall you after you reach your destination. Have you everything in the car, Jane?"

"Everything but myself," nodded Jane. The latter's automobile, well loaded with camping equipment, stood awaiting its passengers. The latter were Miss Elting, Jane McCarthy, Harriet Burrell, Grace Thompson, Hazel Holland and Margery Brown, the party being otherwise known as "The Meadow-Brook Girls." "Get in, girls. We'll shake the dust of Meadow-Brook from our tires before you can count twenty," continued Jane. "If Crazy Jane were to drive through the town slowly folks surely would think something star-

ting had happened to her. Is there anything you wish to do before we leave, Miss Elting?"

"Not that I think of at the moment, Jane."

"Oh, let's say good-bye to our folks," suggested Margery Brown.

"I have thaid good-bye," answered Grace with finality.

"We'll give them a farewell blast," chuckled Jane. With that she climbed into the car, and, with a honk of the horn, drove down that street and into the next, keeping the horn going almost [9] continually. As they passed the home of each girl the young women gave the yell of the Meadow-Brook Girls:

"Rah, rah, rah,
Rah, rah, rah!
Meadow-Brook, Meadow-Brook,
Sis, boom, ah!"

It was shouted in chorus at their homes, and as the car passed the homes of their friends as well. Hands were waved from windows, hats were swung in the air by boy friends, while the older people smiled indulgently and nodded to them as the rapidly moving motor car passed through the village.

"I think the town knows all about it now. Suppose we make a start?" suggested Miss Elting.

"We haven't therenaded the pothmathtter yet," Tommy reminded her.

"Nor the butcher, the baker and the candle-stick maker," answered Harriet Burrell laughingly. "How long a drive have we, Miss Elting?"

"Four or five hours, ordinarily. Jane undoubtedly will make it in much less time, if she drives at her usual rate of speed. Straight south, Jane. I will tell you when to change." [10]

The faces of the girls wore a puzzled expression. They could not imagine where they were going. Miss Elting had made a mystery of this summer vacation, and not a word had the girls been able to

obtain from her as to where they were to go: whether to tour the country in Crazy Jane's automobile, or to go into camp. Tommy declared that it was a perfectly delightful mythtery, and that she didn't care where they were going, while Margery on the contrary, grumbled incessantly.

The start had been made late in the afternoon. The day had been cloudy. There were even indications of rain, but the girls did not care. They were too well inured to the weather to be disturbed by lowering skies and threatening clouds. In the meantime Jane McCarthy was bowling along to the southward, throwing up a cloud of dust, having many narrow escapes from collisions with farmers' wagons and wandering stock. They had been traveling about two hours when the guardian directed their daring driver to turn to the left. The latter did so, thus heading the car to the eastward.

"I think I begin to understand," thought Harriet Burrell aloud.

"What ith it that you underthtand?" demanded Tommy, pricking up her ears. "You know where we are going, don't you?" [11]

"I can make a close guess," replied Harriet, nodding brightly.

"Oh, tell uth, tell uth," begged Tommy.

Harriet shook her head.

"I couldn't think of it. Miss Elting wishes it to be a surprise to you."

"Well, won't it be jutht ath much of a thurprithe now ath it will be thome other time?" argued Grace Thompson.

"Perhaps Harriet just imagines she knows. I do not believe she knows any more about our destination than do the rest of our party," said the guardian. "But why worry about it? You will know when you get there."

Jane stopped the car, and, getting out, proceeded to put the curtains up on one side, Harriet and Hazel doing the same on the opposite side. The storm curtain, with its square of transparent isin-glass, was next set in place to protect the driver from the front, the wind shield first having been turned down out of the way.

"Now let the rain come," chuckled Jane, after having taken a quick survey of their work.

"Yes; it is nice and cosy in here," answered Miss Elting. "I almost believe I should like to sleep in here during a rainstorm."

"Excuse me," objected Tommy. "I'd be thure to get crampth in my neck."

"She would that," answered Jane laughingly, [12] starting the car and a moment later throwing in the high-speed clutch.

The party was not more than fairly started on the way again when the raindrops began pattering on the leather top of the car.

"There it comes," cried Jane McCarthy. "Sounds like rain on a tin roof, doesn't it?"

The downpour rapidly grew heavier, accompanied by lightning and thunder. The flashes were blinding, dazzling Jane's eyes so that she had difficulty in keeping her car in the road. It was now nearly evening, and an early darkness had already settled over the landscape. There was little hope of more light, for night would be upon them by the time the storm had passed. True, there would be a moon behind the clouds, but the latter bade fair to be wholly obscured during the evening.

Despite the blinding storm that masked the road, and the sharp flashes of lightning that dazzled the eyes of the driver, Crazy Jane McCarthy went on driving ahead at the same rate of speed until Miss Elting begged her to go more slowly. Jane reduced the speed of the car, though so slightly as to be scarcely noticeable.

The guardian smiled but made no further comment. Being shut in as they were, they would have difficulty in getting out were an ac [13] cident to befall them. All at once, however, Jane slowed down with a jolt. She then sent the car cautiously ahead, this time driving out on a level grass plot at the side of the road. There she shut down, turned off the power, and, leaning back, yawned audibly.

"Whoa!" she said wearily.

"Why, Jane, what is the matter?" cried Miss Elting.

"Like a sailboat, we can't make much headway without wind. As it happens, we have no wind on the quarter, as the sailors would say."

"I don't understand."

"She means the tires are down," explained Harriet Burrell.

"Yes. I told Dad those rear tires were leaking, but he declared they were good for five hundred miles yet."

"Can't we patch them?" queried Harriet.

"We can," replied Jane, "but we aren't going to until this rain lets up a little. Please don't ask me to get out and paddle about in the wet, for I'm not going to do anything of the sort." Jane began to hum a tune. Her companions settled back comfortably. It was dry and cosy in the car and the travellers felt drowsy. Jane was the only really wide-awake one. Margery finally uttered a single, loud snore that awakened the others. The girls uttered a shout and began shaking Margery, who pulled herself sharply together, protesting that she hadn't been asleep for even one little minute.

"That ith the way thhe alwayth doeth," observed Tommy. "Then thhe denieth it. I'm glad I don't thnore. Ithn't it awful to thnore, Mith Elting?"

"Having too much to say is worse," answered Jane pointedly. "The storm has passed. Let's get out and fix things up. Harriet, will you help me? Miss Elting, if you will be good enough to engineer the taking-down of the side curtains and the lowering of the top I shall be obliged. We shan't need the top. We aren't going to have any more rain to-night, and I want all the light I can get, especially as we are going over strange roads. Have you been this way before?"

"No, Jane, but I have the road map."

"Road map!" scoffed the Irish girl. "I followed one once and landed in a ditch!"

"That ith nothing for Crathy Jane to do," lisped Grace.

"Right you are, Tommy," answered Jane with a hearty laugh. "Just as I thought, the tires, the inner tubes, are leaking around the

valves. We shan't be able to do much with them, but I think we can make them hold until [15] we get in. I'll have some new inner tubes sent out to us. By the way, are we going to be where we can send for supplies and have them delivered?" questioned Jane shrewdly.

"Oh, I think so," was Miss Elting's evasive answer.

"Aren't you glad you found out?" chuckled Harriet.

Jane grinned, but said nothing. The work of patching the two inner tubes occupied nearly an hour before the tires were back in place and the car ready to start. Harriet, in the meantime, had lighted the big headlights and the rear light.

"All aboard for Nowhere!" shouted Jane. The girls again took their places in the car, which started with a jolt. "Is it straight ahead, Miss Elting?"

"Yes."

"I hope you know where you're going. I'm sure I don't," remarked Jane under her breath.

They had gone but a short distance before the driver discovered that which displeased her very much. The lights on the front of the car were growing dim. Her companions noticed this at about the same time.

"The gas is giving out," exclaimed Jane. "Isn't that provoking? With us it is one continuous round of surprises." [16]

"What are we going to do?" questioned Margery apprehensively.

"Just the same as before: keep on going," replied the Irish girl. "I've driven without lights before this. I guess I can do it again. I can see the road and so can you."

"Please reduce your speed a little," urged Miss Elting. The driver did so, for Jane was not quite so confident of her ability to keep to the road as she would have had them believe. "There comes some one. Please stop; I want to ask him a question."

A farmer on a horse had ridden out to one side of the road, where he was holding his mount, the horse being afraid of the car. Miss Elting asked him how they might reach the Lonesome Cove. The girls were very deeply interested in this question as well as in the

answer to it. They had never heard of Lonesome Cove. So that was to be their destination? They nudged each other knowingly. The farmer informed Miss Elting that the Cove was about eight miles farther on.

"Take your third right hand turn and it'll lead you right down into the Cove," he said. "It's a pretty lonesome place now," he added.

"Yes, I understand," replied the guardian hurriedly, "but we know all about that. Thank you very much. You may drive ahead now, [17] Jane." Jane smiled and started on. "I keep watch of the turns of the road. You pay attention to your driving exclusively," added Miss Elting. "And, girls, you keep a sharp lookout, too."

"Where irth thith Lonethome Cove?" questioned Tommy. "I don't like the thound of the name."

"You will like it when you get there," answered the guardian. "But I said I would not tell you anything about it. Time enough when we reach there. You shall then see for yourselves. You are going too fast, Jane."

"I'd like to reach there some time before morning. The road is clear and level. I'm going only twenty miles an hour, as it is. That's just a creeping pace, you know," reassured Jane.

"Yes, I know," answered the guardian, with a shake of her head. They continued on, but without much conversation, for Jane was busy watching the road, her companions keeping a sharp lookout for the turns. They had already passed two roads that led off to the right. The next, according to their informant, would be the one for them to take to reach the Lonesome Cove.

"Here is the third turn," announced Jane finally, bringing her car to a stop. The high [18] way on which they had been riding was shaded with second-growth trees, as was the intersecting road. The latter was narrow; but, from Jane's investigations, she having stepped down to examine it, it was hard though not well-traveled. "Have you been here before, Miss Elting?"

"No, Jane; I have not. Go ahead and drive carefully, for I hardly think it a main road."

"It's a good one, whether it is a main road or not."

They moved on down the side road, and, gaining confidence as they progressed, Jane McCarthy let out a notch at a time until she was traveling at a fairly high rate of speed. Their way wound in and out among the small trees and bushes that bordered the road, the latter narrowing little by little until there was barely room for turning out in case they were to meet another vehicle. However, there seemed little chance of that. The motor car appeared to be the only vehicle abroad that night.

The road now was so dark that it was only by glancing up at the tops of the bordering trees, outlined against the sky, that the driver of the car was able to keep well in the middle of it. She was straining her eyes, peering into the darkness ahead.

"How far?" demanded Jane shortly, never [19] removing her gaze from the trees and the roadway.

"We must be near the place. Surely it cannot be far now," answered the guardian. "I thought we should have seen a light before this."

"We're coming into the open," broke in Jane. "I'm glad of that. Now we needn't be afraid of running into the trees or the fences, if there are any along the track. I can't make out the sides of the road at all. I—"

A sudden and new sound cut short her words. The girls, realizing that something unusual was occurring, fell suddenly silent. The roadway beneath them gave off a hollow sound, as if they were going over a bridge. The fringe of trees had fallen away, while all about them was what appeared to be a darkened plain or field. Yet strain their eyes as they would, the travelers were unable to distinguish the character of their surroundings, though Harriet Burrell, with chin elevated, had been sniffing the air suspiciously.

"I smell water," she cried.

"Tho do I," lisped Tommy. "But I don't want a drink."

Jane began to slow down as soon as the new sound had been heard. The car was rolling along slowly. For some unaccountable reason the driver put on a little more speed. Then [20] came Jane McCarthy's voice, in a quick, warning shout:

"Here's trouble. Jump, girls! Jump! We're going in!"

They did not know what it was that they were going into, but not a girl of them obeyed Jane's command. Margery half-rose from the seat. Hazel pulled her back.

"Sit still, girls!" commanded Miss Elting. "Stop the car, Jane!"

The driver shut off and applied the brake. But she was too late. The automobile kept on going. The roadway underneath it seemed to be dropping away from them; for a few seconds they experienced the sensation of riding on thin air; then the car lurched heavily forward, and, with a mighty splash, plunged into water. A great sheet of solid water leaped up and enveloped them.

"Everyone for herself!" cried Harriet Burrell. "Jump, girls!"

This time they *did* essay to jump. Before they could do so, however, they were struggling to free themselves from the sinking car, the water already over their heads.

[21]

CHAPTER II

WHAT CAME OF A COLD PLUNGE

Five girls and their guardian struggled free from the sinking motor car and began paddling for the surface. All knowing how to swim, they instinctively held their breath when they felt the water closing over them. Fortunately for the Meadow-Brook Girls, the top had been removed from the car, else all would have been drowned before they could have extricated themselves. Jane had the most difficulty in getting out. She was held to her seat by the steering wheel for a few seconds, but not so much as a thought of fear entered her mind. Crazy Jane went to work methodically to free herself, which she succeeded in doing a few seconds after her companions had reached the surface.

"Thave me, oh, thave me!" wailed Tommy Thompson chokingly.

There followed a great splashing, accompanied by shouts and choking coughs. About this time Jane McCarthy's head appeared above the water. She took a long, gasping breath, then called out:

"Here we are, darlin's! Is anybody wet?" [22]

"Girls, are you all here?" cried Miss Elting anxiously. "Call your names."

They did so, and there was relief in every heart when it was found that not a girl was missing. But they had yet to learn how they happened to be in the water. The latter was cold as ice, it seemed to them, and their desire now was to get to shore as quickly as possible. Which way the shore lay they did not know, but from the looks of the sky-line it was apparent that they would not be obliged to go far in either direction to find a landing place.

"Follow me, girls," directed the guardian. "We will get out of here and talk about our disaster afterward. Harriet, please bring up the rear. Be sure that no one is left behind."

The splashing ceased, each girl starting forward with her own particular stroke: Tommy swimming frog-fashion, Margery blowing, puffing, and groaning, paddling like a four-footed animal.

"Oh, help!" she moaned.

"I'm glad I'm not tho fat ath you are," observed Tommy to the puffing Margery.

"That will do, Tommy! Buster is quite as well able to take care of herself as are you. I've touched bottom! Here we are, girls. Oh, I am so glad!"

"Where ith it? I can't thee the bottom." [23]

"Stop swimming, and you'll feel it," suggested Jane, who, having reached the shore, waded out of the water and ran, laughing, up the bank. "My stars, what a mess!"

One by one the others emerged from the cold water and stood shivering on the beach.

"Wring out your clothes," directed Miss Elting. This, some of them were already doing. Margery sat down helplessly. Harriet assisted her to her feet.

"You mustn't do that. You surely will catch cold. Keep moving, dear," ordered Harriet.

"I can't. My clothes weigh a ton," protested Margery.

"Buttther thinkth it ith her clotheth that are heavy," jeered Tommy. "It ithn't your clotheth, Buttther; it'th you."

"Make her stop, Miss Elting. Don't you think I am suffering enough, without Tommy making me feel any worse?"

"Yes, I do. Tommy, will you please stop annoying Margery?"

"Yeth, Mith Elting, I'll thtop until Buttther getth dry again. But I'm jutht ath wet at thhe ith, and I'm not croth."

"Girls, we have had a very narrow escape. I dread to think what would have happened had that automobile top been up. We should give thanks for our deliverance. But I don't under [24] stand how we came to get in there, or what it is that we did get into," said the guardian.

"I know. It wath water," Tommy informed her. "It wath wet water, too, and cold water, and—"

A shivering chorus of laughs greeted her words. Some of the girls began whipping their arms and jumping up and down, for all were very cold.

"Can't we run?" asked Harriet.

"Yes, if we can decide where the water is, and where it isn't," replied Miss Elting. "Suppose we find the road? We can run up and down that without danger of falling in."

"It is just to the left of us; I can see the opening between the trees," answered Harriet. She moved in the direction she had indicated, "Here it is. Come on, girls."

The others picked their way cautiously to her. Harriet started up the road at a run, followed by the others and accompanied by the "plush, plush, plush!" of shoes nearly full of water. Tommy sat down.

"What are you doing on the ground?" shrieked Margery, as she stumbled and fell over her little companion. "Why don't you tell me when you are going to sit down, so that I won't fall over you?"

"You wouldn't, if you weren't tho fat." [25]

"Tommy!" broke in Miss Elting. The whole party had come to a halt, following Margery's mishap.

"I beg your pardon, Mith Elting. I forgot. Buthter ithn't dry yet. What am I doing? Yeth, I'm bailing out my thhoeth. Ugh! How they do thtick to my feet. Oh, I can't get them on again!" wailed Tommy.

"What a helpless creature you are," answered Harriet laughingly. "Here, let me help you. There. You see how easy it is when once you make up your mind that you really can."

"No, I don't thee. It ith too dark. Help me up!"

"Take hold of my hand. Here, Margery, you get on the other side. We three will run together. Everyone else keep out of our way."

"Yeth, becauthe Buthter ith—" Tommy, remembering her promise, checked herself. The three started up the road at a brisk trot. Reaching the main road, Harriet led them about, then began running back toward the water.

"Look out for the water," warned Jane shrilly, after they had been going for a few minutes. But her warning came too late. Harriet, Tommy and Margery had turned to the right after reaching the open. The three fell in with a splash and a chorus of screams. The water was shallow and there was no difficulty in get [26] ting out, but the girls now were as wet as before, and shivering more than ever. At this juncture the guardian took a hand. She directed them to walk up and down the road in orderly fashion, which they did, shivering, their teeth chattering and the water dripping from their clothing. Reaching the main highway the guardian turned out on this, walking her charges a full mile in the direction they had been following before turning off into the byway.

"This part of the country appears to be deserted," she said. "I think we had better return. In the morning we will try to find some one."

"Thave me!" moaned Tommy. "Mutht we thtay here in our wet clotheth all night?"

"I fear so. What else is there for us to do?"

"But let uth get our dry clotheth and put them on," urged Tommy. The girls laughed at her.