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Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
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Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
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Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
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Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
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**The Meadow-Brook Girls in the
Hills The Missing Pilot of the
White Mountains**

Janet Aldridge

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Janet Aldridge

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-5227-7

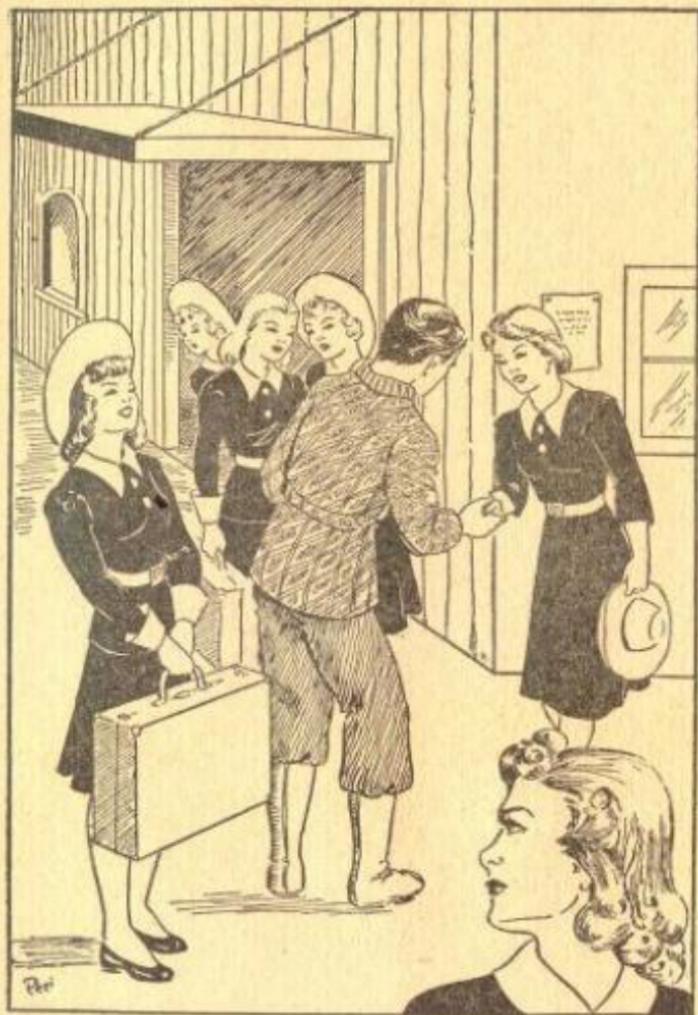
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"I'm the guide, Janus Grubb."

[Frontispiece: "I'm the guide, Janus Grubb."]

The Meadow-Brook Girls in the Hills

OR

The Missing Pilot of the White Mountains

By

JANET ALDRIDGE

Author of the Meadow-Brook Girls Under Canvas, The Meadow-Brook Girls Across Country, The Meadow-Brook Girls Afloat, The Meadow-Brook Girls by the Sea, etc.

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"I'm the guide, Janus Grubb." _Frontispiece_

"Green goggles!" cried Harriet excitedly.

Up and up wound the trail.

The Meadow-Brook Girls in the Hills

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WITH GREEN GOGGLES

"I hear that Janus Grubb is going to take a passel of gals on a tramp over the hills," observed the postmaster, helping himself to a cracker from the grocer's barrel.

"Gals?" questioned the storekeeper.

"Yes. There's a lot of mail here for the parties, mostly postals. Can't make much out of the postals, but some of the letters I can read through the envelopes by holding them against the window."

"Lemme have a look," urged the grocer eagerly.

"Not by a hatful. I'm an officer of the government. The secrets of the government must be guarded, I tell ye. There's six of them —"

"You don't say! Six letters?" interrupted the grocer.

"No, gals. One's name is Elting. She's what they call a chaperon. Another is Jane McCarthy — I reckon some relation of the party who wrote me a letter asking what I knew about Jan. I reckon Jan got the job on my recommendation."

"Who are these girls, and what do they think they're goin' to do up here?"

"Call themselves 'The Meadow-Brook Gals.' Funny name, eh?" grinned the postmaster, balancing a soda cracker on the tip of his forefinger, then deftly tossing it edgewise into his open mouth. "They pay Janus ten dollars a week for toting them around," he chuckled. "Read it in the McCarthy party's letter to Jan."

"What are they going to do up in the hills?"

"Climb over the rocks for their health," grinned the postmaster.

"Huh! When they coming to town?"

"On the evening mail train to-day. Hello! There's Jan now on his way to meet them. Say! Will you look at him! Jan's had his whiskers pruned. And, I swum, if he hasn't got on a new pair of boots. Git them of you?"

The storekeeper nodded.

"How much?" demanded the postmaster.

"Four seventy-three. Knocked down from five dollars. Wish I'd known he was going to draw down ten dollars a week for this job. I'd have got four seventy-five at least for the boots."

"Never mind, you can let Jan make it up on something else," comforted the postmaster. "Reckon I'll go down to the station to see the folks come in."

"I was going to ask you to look after the store while I went down," returned the grocer.

The postmaster decided that he wouldn't go. The other man hurried out, while the government employe helped himself not only to another handful of crackers, but to a liberal slice of cheese as well. He stood munching his crackers and cheese and gazing out reflectively into the gathering twilight, when he suddenly started and peered more keenly. That which had attracted his attention was a stoop-shouldered man. The fellow wore a soft hat, the brim of which was slightly turned up in front, but his face was well masked by a huge pair of green automobile goggles.

"Well, I swum!" ejaculated the postmaster. "If I didn't know the feller was in jail up at Concord, I'd say that was Big Charlie. Hm-m-m. No. This one is too stooped for Charlie. Charlie's six foot two in his socks. I wonder who this fellow is?"

Even then the mail train was whistling, and the postmaster began bustling about preparing to receive the evening mail, always an event for him as well as for the villagers, who ordinarily flocked into the office, hoping to catch sight of a familiar handwriting or hear a name mentioned that would give them foundation for a bit of gossip.

It was while he was thus engaged that five young girls and a young woman some years their senior got down from a coach to the

railway platform, where they stood gazing expectantly about them. The young women were dressed in tasteful blue serge suits, with hats of the same material, a sort of uniform, the villagers decided, and, had not the station platform been too dark, the eager spectators would have seen that the faces of the visitors were tanned almost to swarthinness.

"Shall I ask some one if Mr. Janus Grubb is here?" questioned one of the girls.

"No, wait a moment, Harriet," answered the young woman in charge of the party, "I will ask. Surely the guide should be here to meet us, since Miss McCarthy's father had arranged for it."

"You are looking for a guide, Miss?" questioned a voice at her side. Miss Elting, the guardian of the party, glanced up inquiringly. She looked into a face of which she could see but little. The most marked feature of the face was a pair of huge green automobile goggles. These gave to the face, which she observed wore a peculiar pallor, a sinister effect, caused no doubt by the goggles.

"We are looking for Mr. Janus Grubb. Are you he?" she asked sharply.

The man nodded.

"This way," he said in a hurried voice.

"Come, girls," urged the guardian; "I thought Mr. Grubb would not fail us."

"And a funny looking person he is," scoffed Jane McCarthy. Her companions, Hazel Holland, Margery Brown and Grace Thompson, giggled. Harriet Burrell plucked the sleeve of the guardian's light coat.

"I wouldn't go with him, Miss Elting," she urged.

"Why not, dear?"

"I don't like his looks. Make him take off his glasses. There is something peculiar about him."

"This way, please!" the guide's voice took on a tone of command. They had nearly reached the upper end of the platform when he

issued his peremptory order. Just then a shout was heard to the rear of them. A man came running toward them.

"Hey, there!" he called. The girls halted. "Are you the Meadow-Brook Gals?"

"Yes, sir," answered Miss Elting, brightly.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to know about it. 'Pears as if you didn't know where you was going."

"And who are you, sir?" demanded the guardian.

"I'm the guide, Janus Grubb."

"Will you listen to the man!" chuckled Jane.

Harriet nodded with satisfaction.

"Janus Grubb? Why, sir, I don't understand. We have already met Mr. Grubb," cried Miss Elting.

"Somebody is crazy," muttered Jane, "I think the man with the green goggles is the lunatic."

"Show me the man who said he was myself," roared the newcomer.

Miss Elting turned to point out the man who had been piloting them along the platform. She uttered a little exclamation. The man with the goggles was nowhere in sight. "Why, where did Mr. Grubb go?" she exclaimed.

"I'm Janus Grubb and I'd like to see the man who says I'm not," shouted the guide indignantly, forgetting that he was addressing a woman.

"Please come to the station agent with me. If he identifies you, I am satisfied," declared Miss Elting with dignity, looking disapprovingly at the excited man. She moved back toward the station, followed by her charges, and a moment later the railroad agent had identified Janus to her entire satisfaction.

The girls giggled. There was something funny about their having been deceived so easily, but Miss Elting did not regard matters in that light. "Can you tell me who the man with the goggles is"? she

demanded, turning to the real guide after the identification had been made.

"If I knew him there'd be trouble," threatened Janus. "What kind of a looking feller was he?"

Harriet answered, giving a very excellent description of the man with the goggles.

"Don't know him," said Janus, stroking his whiskers reflectively. "Lucky for him that I don't. What do you want to do now?"

"Go to the post-office," cried the girls.

"There must be mail for as there," added Hazel. "I'm so anxious to hear from home."

"Yeth, tho am I," lisped little Grace Thompson.

"You have arranged for us at the hotel for to-night, haven't you?" demanded Jane McCarthy. "Father said you would look after these matters for me."

"It's all right, Miss. We'll go to the postoffice now. I'll look after your baggage when we get you settled for the night. We won't take it away from the station till we talk over what you want to do. Are you ready?"

They walked down the street, laughing and chatting, a happy lot of girls, followed by a group of curious villagers, who even accompanied them into the post-office. It was unusual to see so many pretty girls in Compton, for summer visitors seldom came to the place. Furthermore, these were different from any visitors ever seen there, so far as dress was concerned. While waiting for the mail to be distributed, the girls laughed and talked, apparently utterly oblivious of the presence of the staring villagers. Miss Elting inquired for mail for the party as soon as the wicket was opened.

"Here, Tommy, is a letter for you," she smiled. Grace took the letter eagerly. "And here are letters for Harriet, Hazel, and Margery. There is one for me, too. It is from your father, Jane."

"I have a letter here from Dad. I—will you look at that?" Jane stood staring at the window. For a brief instant she had caught sight of a man wearing a huge pair of goggles. He was peering through

the post-office window at them. But as she looked, the man disappeared. "It was our friend with the green goggles again as sure as I'm alive!" she exclaimed. "He was staring in here for all he was worth, but the minute he saw me looking at him he vanished."

"I am afraid we are going to have trouble with this mysterious individual," declared Harriet. "He seems to have developed a peculiar interest in our affairs that is far from flattering."

"We are not going to be annoyed as we were last year," said Miss Elting firmly. "Mr. Grubb, there is something very strange in all this. If for any reason you know this man or have even the slightest idea of his identity I must ask you to be perfectly frank with me."

Janus Grubb declared solemnly that he had not the least idea who the man could have been. Nor had he been able to find any person who had seen the fellow approach them. Miss Elting and the guide stepped out to the porch, followed by the girls, still chatting over the news from home contained in their letters.

"Now, where do you want to go first?" asked the guide after they had reached the porch.

"We will trust to your judgment," answered Miss Elting. "You know best. We wish to try a little mountain climbing and we wish to see the larger of the White Mountains. We would like to see everything of interest in the White Mountain country."

"That's a pretty big contract," chuckled Janus; "but I reckon we can show you what you want to see. For instance, there's Mt. Chocorua, Moosilauke, Mt. Washington, Mt. Lafayette and as many more as you like, all the real thing and offering all the climbing you will care to do, unless you want to follow the trails that all the visitors take."

"No, we do not. We prefer to blaze our own trails, or, rather, to have you do so, and the rougher they prove the better, as long as it is safe. My girls are equal to any sort of rough-and-tumble climbing. How do we get to the mountains?"

"I've engaged a carry-all to take us out to the foothills. From there you can walk or ride. If we take the rough trails, of course we'll have to climb."

"I shall ask you to lay out your route, then arrange to have some of our baggage shipped on to meet us, say a week from now. Our necessary equipment we can carry. The girls are used to shouldering heavy packs. You will provide climbing equipment. I understand from Miss McCarthy that you are a climber."

"I'm everything and anything in the White Mountain Range," answered the guide boldly.

"Then, what do you say if we make Mount Chocorua first?"

"Perhaps you had better decide for us."

"This mountain is three thousand five hundred feet high. The way we shall take you will, I think, find rugged enough to please the young ladies," added Janus, with a grin behind his whiskers. "What time will you be ready to start?"

"As soon after daylight as we shall be able to get our breakfast."

"He had better bring our baggage from the station to-night. Then we can have our packs in readiness," suggested Harriet Burrell.

"Yes, please do that, Mr. Grubb."

"Anything else, Miss?"

"Not that I think of for the moment. We have our tent in sections. We also shall pack our blankets and such other things as will be needed. The rest of the equipment can be sent on ahead to meet us wherever you say. I don't know what the most convenient point would be. Where would you suggest?"

"I can send it to the Tip-Top station on Moosilauke. Will that do?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll be going," said the guide. "I'll take you over to the Compton House, and if you want to see me again this evening, you can call me on the telephone."

Janus had started to move toward the steps preparatory to going about his duties, when an exclamation from Harriet Burrell caused them to turn sharply to her.

"There he is! There is the man with the goggles!" she whispered, pointing toward the store. They saw a stoop-shouldered man stand-

ing with his back against the large window. He was facing them, but, his face being in the shadow, they were unable to distinguish the features. The light in the store being at his back, and his head slightly turned to the steps, toward which Janus was moving, Harriet Burrell was enabled to look directly through one of the lenses. She saw that the glass was green and that it masked effectually the eyes of the strange man.

"Quick, Mr. Grubb!" cried the girl. "The man again! Find out who he is!"

Janus, who had moved down to the second step, now started back, and was on the porch with one bound, thrusting the Meadow-Brook Girls aside in his eagerness to reach the man who had impersonated him.

"Where is he?" shouted Janus, in a voice that brought most of the villagers from the store on the run. "I see him!" Grubb made a leap, when, as though he had vanished into thin air, the stranger disappeared from sight.

The Meadow-Brook Girls gasped in amazement. But Harriet Burrell, quicker in thought and action than even the guide himself, leaped from the end of the porch and sped swiftly around the side of the store toward the rear yard.