

**NORMA:**  
A FLOWER SCOUT

By LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

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The hostess would dig up a small plant and place it carefully in the basket.

# **NORMA: A FLOWER SCOUT**

## CHAPTER I

### NORMA'S LETTER HOME.

“DEAR FOLKS AT HOME:

“Here I am at Green Hill, just as much at home after a few hours' time, as if I had been here for years. But, oh, Mother! Such an arrival as we three girls experienced! I wish you could have seen us when we finally reached the farm. How Daddy would have laughed! But you, Muzzer, would have wept at the sight of my shoes, they were so covered with mud. And you would have reminded me that you had just paid fifteen dollars for them, downtown. But it was not my fault—that mud. It was Amity Ketchum's fault. I'll tell you about it.

“When Belle Barlow, Frances Lowden and I jumped from the poky local train that stopped at Four Corners on signal only, we looked all around for some sort of a hack to take us and our luggage to Green Hill. We remembered what Mrs. James had told us about the lazy driver who took them to the farm when they arrived, but he was not to be seen when we got there.

“Then we went to the ticket-office to ask the agent about some sort of a conveyance, but the place was closed and not a soul anywhere about the building. We looked at each other and laughed.

““There's but one alternative, girls—walk!” declared Belle, in her usual calm superior manner.

“The drizzle that was sifting down when we left New York had become a fine rain at Four Corners, making the roads muddy and

full of small pools. We had our suitcases and smaller traps to carry, as well as hold up our umbrellas to keep our new straw hats from becoming discouraged and droopy. Can you picture us?

“As Frances remarked after we had hiked for a hundred yards and suddenly caught a squall of wind sweeping over the fields: ‘The luggage acted as ballast and anchorage at the same time, to keep us from flying up in the air with temper.’ Struggling along in spite of handicaps, we finally reached the Post Office store.

“Now what do you think! There sat that lazy Amity Ketchum tilted back in an old wooden chair, his feet crossed on top of a small cylinder stove, discussing present-day politics. If the three of us had not felt so aggrieved, we must have laughed outright at the sight of the solitary hackman in the profession at Four Corners, absolutely regardless of trade, or the difficulties his clients must experience on such a day, with their misplaced confidence in Amity causing them such free exercise as we were having.

“Why will doting parents misname their progeny as this man Amity was named, Mother? He is so far from being amiable that his name should suggest just the opposite of what ‘Amity’ means. We girls learned from the store keeper that Amity Ketchum was the local Jehu, so Belle spoke to him in rather an imperious tone.

“‘Why were you not at the station to meet this train, as we wired you to do?’

“Amity carefully lifted one foot after the other, from the cold stove-top to the floor, and slowly turned around in his chair to stare at us. Then he actually ignored us and replaced his feet on the fireless stove, and tilted back the chair and resumed his discussion where he had abruptly interrupted himself to take a good look at

Belle. This made the other country men, who were lounging about the place, grin at us as if we were big sillies. But Belle was furious. I knew Amity was in for it when she said in her most cutting voice:

“I believe you are the driver of that sorry-looking freak standing outside that goes by the name of Cherub. Was ever a beast as that, or a man like you, so contrarily named? Why, just look at the poor excuse called Cherub! His coat of fur has not been shorn for countless moons, and the size of his hoofs must have caused the holes in the road which are now filled with water like miniature lakes. Then give a thought to those queer tufts of hair growing from above the hoofs—like the Scotchman’s precious emblem that swings from his belt. And the vehicle! ye gods, what a rare picture for the movie camera! Its wheels running at different angles from each other in the most independent way, and the dashboard that was broken through by the last passenger, several weeks ago, still dangling to trip the Cherub’s heels. Well! Four Corners must sit up, now, and take notice. A group of *live* young people have come to stay, and sleepers like this driver and his spirited steed, will be left behind unless he churks up a bit.’

“Amity Ketchum had never experienced any controversy with the natives over his indolent habits, as they accepted him and his profession just as he was. But Belle’s denunciation caused his lower jaw to drop and render him speechless, while the farmers who had nothing to do on a rainy day, laughed heartily at Belle’s words.

“We turned to go out, but Frances suddenly had a brilliant idea. ‘People like you seldom appreciate what you have until you lose it. If some other young farmer about here would start a cab line for

Four Corners, we would send him all the patronage we will have daily at the farm.’

“But no one rose to this tempting bait, so we poor bedraggled girls had to plod onward to Green Hill, carrying our bags and umbrellas as before, with injured pride weighting us down.

“Well, we finally reached the farm where Mrs. James and Natalie and Janet were eagerly watching for us. They had heard the engine whistle an hour before, and wondered what delayed us so. We described our differences of opinion with the hackman, much to Mrs. James’s amusement, and the girls’ hilarious laughter. But Rachel who stood in the doorway, listening, was furious. She declared that if she only owned an automobile she’d telegraph for her nephew, Sambo, to come right out to Four Corners and earn a decent living by taxi-cabbing in Four Corners. But her suggestion inspired Frances who is writing a letter to her Father about some scheme she has in mind. ‘She won’t tell us a thing about it until she hears,’ she said.

“Now that the unpleasant walk is over and we are comfortable again, we can laugh at the incident. I can honestly say that I wouldn’t have missed the fun for anything, as it will prove to be one of the laughable experiences of our summer at Green Hill. There goes the dinner call, folkses—I’ll have to finish this letter later.” \* \* \*

“It is now supper time, dear folks, and I am sitting in my room to add a few lines to this letter. This noon, directly after dinner—every one in the country has dinner at noon and supper at night—so we fell into the same customs at the farm. Right after dinner, Natalie informed us three girls that we were all invited to visit



Solomon's Seal Girl Scouts' Camp. This is the group of girls I told you about, that Miss Mason organized last year, and now has in camp at the woodland of the farm.

“We had a most interesting visit with the girl scouts. They did so many stunts for us that it would fill a book were I to try and write it all for you now. The object of the meeting was to discuss the plan of having Mrs. James form a second Patrol of Solomon's Seal scouts. Miss Mason's scouts form Patrol Number One, and we girls will be Patrol Number Two. Then we can apply at the National Headquarters in New York City for a charter which officially registers us as a Troop.

“It was decided that we girls, being five, and the three girls Natalie and Janet know, and asked to join the Patrol, will comprise the membership of the new Patrol. But we will be Tenderfeet for a month, before we can call ourselves regular scouts.

“This evening, after supper, we sat talking about the work Natalie and Janet are doing on the farm. Natalie started a vegetable garden soon after she arrived at the farm, and now you ought to see those beds! Really, you would be amazed to see how the cuttings and seeds Natalie planted are growing. She says she is going to sell the produce to the scouts at camp, and to Rachel, for the house-table. If there is more than enough to supply these needs, she is going to send it to New York to friends to buy. In this way she expects to earn enough money during the summer to pay for her own board and keep. Then Jimmy (Mrs. James, you know) can save the cost of Nat's board and deposit it in the bank for her future.

“When Janet found Natalie was working for a living in such a delightful way, she, too, got the idea of starting something to earn

her living this summer, and save the board money that her folks send every week to Jimmy, for a future college education. Janet started a stock farm. She bought three darling little pink pigs and some chickens. She expects to sell the eggs the hens lay, and sell the broilers the setting hens will soon hatch out for her. This will bring in ready money every day, and in a short time she will be able to buy a cow, a calf, a lot of ducks, geese and turkeys, and maybe some sheep and everything else that belongs to stock work on a farm.

“You really won’t believe how much money Janet will have by the end of this summer, all cleared out of the stock investment. But she proved it to me by showing me the actual figures on paper. Eggs are so expensive now, and broilers, too, always bring a fancy price in the market. Then, when she sells the milk, butter and cheese from the cow, the squabs from the pigeons, the ducks, geese and turkeys at Thanksgiving time, she will be repaid for her labor during the summer. The three pigs will fatten and grow without any care or cost to Janet, as they just eat whatever is left from the house; but pork brings awfully high prices when sold, so Janet will clear about a hundred and fifty dollars on her three pigs, when she sells them to the butcher. I wish I had been here first, and had had the opportunity to start a stock farm such as Janet has.

“But I suppose I would have made a failure of it, as I love to dream and idealize things. And Janet certainly can’t sit and idealize pigs and cows and such creatures, because I watched her tonight—she almost cried because she forgot to feed the pigs their supper, and they squealed unmercifully for hours until she mixed the corn-meal mush and carried it to them.

“It was suggested by Jimmy that I cultivate flowers in the beds already laid out but, thus far, nothing is planted in them. There are several hardy shrubs and flowers that come up every year which were left here by the former tenant, but they need pruning and cleaning out before they will look tidy and thrifty. Jimmy says she will help me all she can in the flower-gardening, so I have decided to try it, anyway.

“Natalie told me that Mrs. Tompkins, the wife of the man who owns the post office store, offered to give them all the slips and cuttings we needed to plant around the house at Green Hill. I am sending to a large seed store in New York, for a catalogue of their seeds and flowers, and will choose those which will grow quickly, as it is July and several months have been lost before I got here.

“Nat said that Mrs. Tompkins has the most beautiful flower gardens back of the house! I am going there to visit her and see her flowers. Jimmy thinks this work is just suited to my temperament, as I always loved flowers, and feel quite enthusiastic over the prospect of growing them and taking care of them. I couldn't see where any profit could come to me out of the work of planting and watching over the flowers, but Jimmy says there are as many ways for me to dispose of my flowers for money, as it is possible for Natalie to sell vegetables, or Janet to sell stock.

“Before you see your dreamy Norma again, she will be a professional floriculturist. As a beginning in the business, Mrs. James authorized me to take charge of the landscaping of the grounds about the house. I am also going to have charge of the lawns. To keep the grass cut short and the edges trimmed neatly, and the people from walking across the grass and wearing footpaths over the lawn. I am to be paid for all garden or lawn

work, the same as Farmer Ames charges the household for his time. Jimmy also told me that I shall be paid for any work I am asked to do about the place, whether it is helping Natalie weed or plant her vegetable gardens, or doing odd jobs.

“But the flower beds will be all my own to do with as I like, so there will be no pay for planting or raising flowers. It is such fascinating work—this flower seeding and planting, that I count every moment as wasted when I am not doing something to improve the garden or lawns.

“Mrs. James is the heart of everything at Green Hill Farm, from Rachel as house-worker, down to the dog, Grip, who belongs to Sam, the handy man; everything turns to her for advice and help. What would we all do without her?” \* \* \*

“10 P. M.—I was interrupted in my letter just as I finished the last paragraph. The girls called me to hurry downstairs and walk with them to Four Corners. I went, but Mrs. James and I stopped to visit Mrs. Tompkins’s gardens while the other girls went on, with Hester Tompkins, to see Nancy Sherman and Dorothy Ames about forming a scout patrol. I can’t go to sleep without telling you about Mrs. Tompkins’s flowers, so I am sitting up to write, but all the others are fast asleep.

“I never thought the plain old earth could produce such lovely colors and the delicate perfumes Mrs. Tompkins’s flowers have. She has a large area devoted to her flowers, and there I saw almost every kind of plant, blossom, shrub, vine or tree that grows north. She says it is because she loves them so much that they bloom and thrive so splendidly for her.

“I believe that I could love flowers that way, too, and maybe they will bloom and thrive successfully for me, too. I told Mrs. Tompkins that I knew of no pleasanter way to live than to see such lovely rewards as the flowers, for one’s time and patience.

“She looked at me very searchingly, for a minute, and then said: ‘Norma, I think you will be a successful florist if you keep at the work. But you cannot slight such a calling once you undertake to grow the plants.’

“I wish you could see the great basketful of slips, roots and cuttings that I brought home from Mrs. Tompkins’s gardens tonight. I am going to get up at sunrise in the morning and plant them. Jimmy and I were visiting Mrs. Tompkins for almost two hours, yet it seemed like ten minutes.

“Now that this letter is finished, it can be mailed in the morning and I am free to start my garden work. Don’t be alarmed if you do not hear from me again for a long time as I will not have much time to spare once I begin gardening and landscaping the farm. When it begins to look like a real picture garden I want you both to come out and see what I can do. But do write often,

To your loving  
NORMA.

P. S.—If you possibly can send me my two months’ allowance in advance, I would be very grateful, as I want to buy seeds and bulbs, and lots of things for my work. Please send it *at once*.

NORMA.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **MRS. TOMPKINS COACHES NORMA.**

The foregoing letter was sealed and mailed that forenoon when Farmer Ames drove past on his way to the general store. But there may be some readers who have not met Natalie and her friends at Green Hill Farm, and so, are not aware that Natalie left New York City with Mrs. James, her valuable companion and friend, and Rachel, the old southern cook who had been with the Averills for many years, to live on a farm in Westchester County that had been left the girl by her mother.

The old Colonial house on the farm was large and comfortable, so Natalie's four school chums had agreed to spend the summer there, and board with Mrs. James. This income would help pay current expenses of housekeeping, and the girls could enjoy the freedom of country life and be happy in each other's company.

All the amusing incidents that occurred to Natalie when she launched her plan and started a vegetable garden to help defray expenses, and the still more ludicrous experiences Janet had after she began her stock farm, are told in the two preceding volumes of this country life series, namely: "Natalie: A Garden Scout," and "Janet: A Stock-Farm Scout."

The same day that Norma's letter went to her parents, a letter written by Frances Lowden was also mailed at Four Corners. In Frances's letter she begged her parents to leave the automobile at the farm when they went to Colorado for the summer months. The reason for wanting the car at Green Hill was explained in the other

volumes; that Frances proposed running a jitney as her business venture that summer, and thus put Amity Ketchum out of his profession for the time being.

How this venture succeeded and how Frances added to this undertaking the other branches of work that won her the badges in scoutdom, is told in full in her book which follows this one.

The preceding evening, while four of the girls called on Nancy Sherman and Hester Tompkins to make an appointment for the meeting of the two scout patrols, Mrs. James took Norma and introduced her to Mrs. Tompkins, the flower lover.

“I trust we are not disturbing you, Mrs. Tompkins, but I wanted to introduce Norma to you, as I think you two will be very close friends after you get acquainted with each other’s ideals,” said Mrs. James.

“I’m glad you came in, as Hester just went out to visit Nancy Sherman for a little time this evening, and I am quite alone. I was just on the point of going out to my garden and watch the bud on a night-bloomer. I hope it opens tonight.”

“Oh, then, let us go with you, as Norma is going to start the flower gardens at the farm, and will be very grateful to you for any hints or helps you can give her,” explained Mrs. James.

“I’m glad to find someone who is interested in my hobby,” was Mrs. Tompkins’ reply, as she smiled at Norma. “Come right out and let me introduce you to my favorites in the flower beds.”

Norma and Mrs. James followed their hostess out to her large gardens, and Mrs. Tompkins began describing various plants as they passed them.

“You’ll find that most of my flowers in the beds nearest the house are all of the old-fashioned variety, because they give out such sweet perfume. I love to sit by my back window and smell their refreshing odors. It is payment in full for all the time I give to their food and growth.”

The two visitors walked slowly along the neat footpath and stopped frequently to stoop and smell of a bright blossom, or admire a wonderful color of a flower.

“I try to use good judgment in the arrangement of my plants, too, as well as to group the colors so they will blend instead of fight with each other. Sometimes, I have great difficulty in this arrangement, as a flower will open and surprise me with an entirely different color or shade than I expected. Quite often, the bees, or birds, will carry a germ from one flower to another when they visit it to sip the nectar, and this fertilization of the seed, after the flower dies, is made manifest in a totally different color in the next production of the plant.”

“Oh, how interesting! I never knew such things happened in a flower garden,” exclaimed Norma.

Mrs. Tompkins laughed at the girl’s very evident interest. “You will find stranger and more absorbing things happening in a flower garden, than this very common occurrence. Because you see, it really depends upon the breezes, the bees, or the birds—sometimes, on a creeping insect or caterpillar—to carry pollen and the fertilizing germs from one flower to another. And Nature seldom errs in her judgments, either.”

“Mrs. Tompkins,” now asked Mrs. James, “do you know anything of the quality of the soil in the flower beds at Green Hill?”



“I’m afraid I am not well enough acquainted with it to render any verdict on it now. But I could visit you and examine it, so as to give you an intelligent answer on what flowers it will raise. The last tenant of the farm did not waste much time, or money, on the floral side of the grounds. His hobby was vegetable growing and the barn yard, and his wife cared little for gardening, so the beds were generally neglected.

“Fortunately, there is no danger of spoiling soil when it is not planted, and it is a very easy matter to enrich it so that any plant will thrive in it. The only impossible soil is what is known as ‘hard pan,’ but we find little of that around here.”

“I forked over some of the dirt in one of the beds and found it was rather dry and lacking in richness. Now this may be due to a sandy soil, or it may mean the soil is impoverished and needs more vitalizing properties before we plant the flowers,” said Mrs. James.

“If the ground was well manured early this spring or if you use good barn yard manure this fall, the beds will show a fine condition by next spring. I should use about a half-barrel full of manure to a square yard of the soil. But that will not do you any good for immediate planting. I would have to see the soil before I prescribe now for it,” explained Mrs. Tompkins.

“If Janet adds to her poultry business and buys pigeons and other feathered fowl very soon, we can use that manure for the beds. I’ve heard that poultry manure is best for flowers,” ventured Mrs. James.

“I’ll tell you what I do,” returned Mrs. Tompkins. “I believe poultry manure is one of the best to be had for any purpose with plants, as it is rich in nitrogen, easily stored and handled, and does

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