

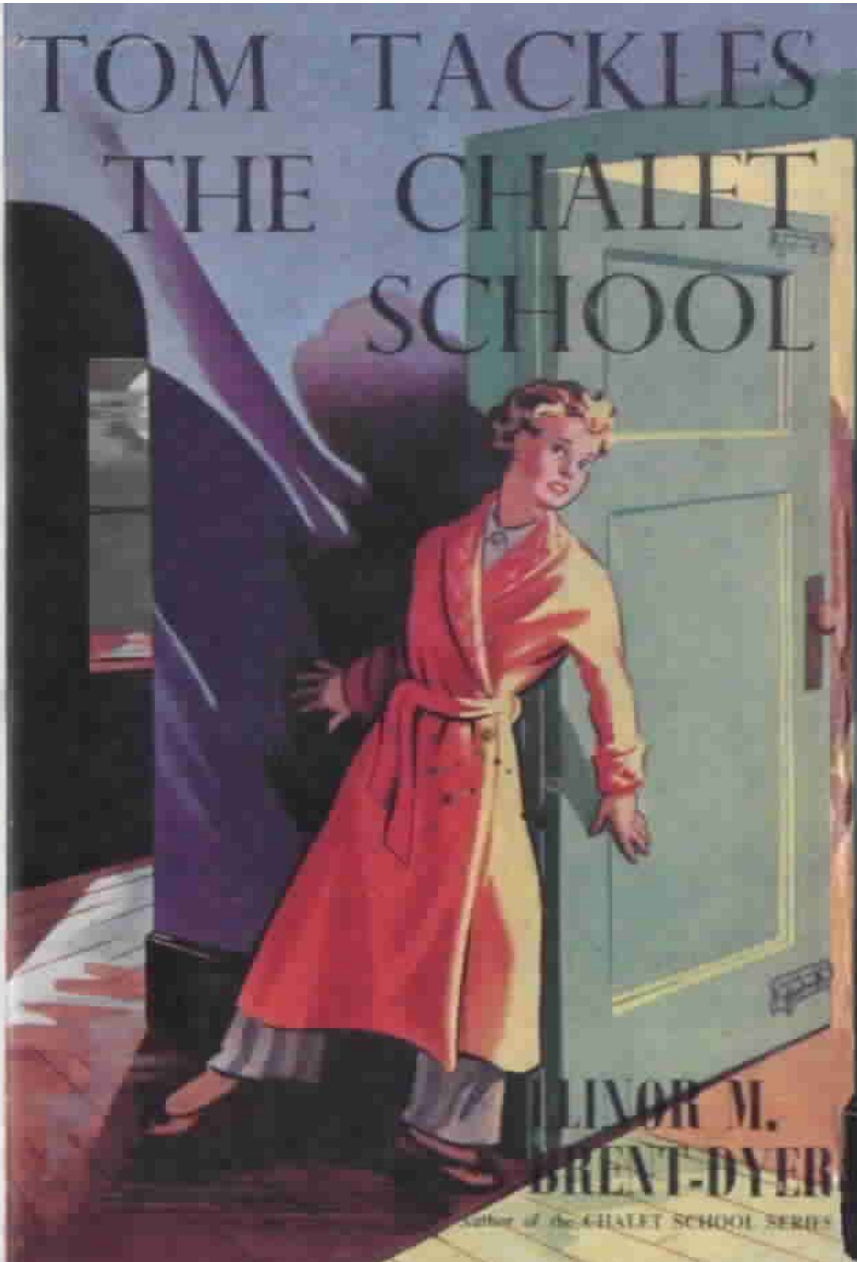
TOM  
TACKLES  
THE  
CHALET  
SCHOOL



ELINOR M.  
BRENT-DYER

CHAMBERS

# TOM TACKLES THE CHALET SCHOOL



ELINOR M.  
BRENT-DYER

Author of the CHALET SCHOOL SERIES

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"I've never been so scared in my life," Barbara confessed.

# TOM TACKLES THE CHALET SCHOOL

*By*

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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1  
TOM

“And this,” said Mrs. Gay briskly, “is Tom.” Then she added in an urgent aside to the aforesaid Tom, “Do try to stand still! Miss Wilson will think you have fleas if you wriggle like that!”

Before the flabbergasted Head of the Chalet School could break in with an assurance that such an idea had never crossed her mind, Tom spoke for herself.

“Nonsense, Mater!” she said calmly. “Vicarage kids don’t have fleas—not as a rule anyhow.”

This remark took away Miss Wilson’s remaining breath for the moment. When it returned, she was able to note that Tom was standing in a manly way, feet slightly apart, hands shoved deep into her coat pockets, head cocked a little to one side. The Head somehow got the impression that it was only by an effort that her mouth wasn’t pursed up into a whistle. Such an unusual pupil was of deep interest to Miss Wilson. She gave the girl a keen look, taking in the short, brown hair, cropped and parted at the side, boy-fashion, the wide mouth with its humorous curves, bearing out the humour in the honest, grey eyes that met hers so steadily; the clear tanned skin. This girl was plain as far as looks went, but she had character. There was no mistaking that. Miss Wilson preferred girls with character, but she had a rooted objection to discussing them before themselves, so she merely said, “I hope you will be very happy with us. I think we can pride ourselves on the fact that very few Chalet School girls are ever anything else. And now I am going to send for someone to take you to your dormitory to change, while your mother and I have a few words together. Will you touch that bell by the fire-place, please?”

Tom did as she was asked, and a pretty young maid appeared, who was dispatched to send one Bride Bettany to the library. While they awaited her arrival, Mrs. Gay turned to the Head to say, “What a quaint name!”

“Yes,” agreed Miss Wilson. “Bride is the niece of Lady Russell, and her elder sister, Peggy, is one of our Seniors. Lady Russell’s own eldest girl is here too, but she is younger than your daughter. I think you told me she was nearly thirteen?”

“Not till next August,” said Mrs. Gay.

“Ah! Bride is just eleven. And here she comes!” as a light tap sounded at the door. “Come in, Bride!”

Bride entered on the word. She proved to be a serious-looking young person with big glasses and curly, brown hair. She bobbed a curtsy as she came in—Tom’s eyes nearly fell out of her head at the sight!—and said in a peculiar, clear, sweet voice, “You sent for me, Miss Wilson?”

“Yes; I want you to take this new girl in charge. She will be in your form, I expect, but I don’t know where Matron has put her. Take her to Matron, and ask which dormitory she is to have, and explain things, and bring her back in twenty minutes’ time.”

“Yes, Miss Wilson,” said Bride. She turned to Tom. “Will you come with me, please?”

“Right you are,” said Tom casually, and it was Bride’s turn to get a shock. Her eyes nearly bulged at this off-hand reply, though she said nothing, but led the way out of the library, along the corridor and to a flight of uncarpeted stairs up and down which girls of all kinds were

streaming, some of them bearing light wicker trays laden with piles of clothes, others greeting friends with great gusto.

“What’s your name?” demanded Bride when they were well away from the library.

“Tom Gay.”

“*Tom* Gay? D’you mean that really, or is it a leg-pull? You weren’t christened Tom, surely?”

“As much as you were Bride,” retorted Tom.

“Oh, of course my real name’s Bridget; Bride’s just the short for it. I s’pose Tom’s a short, too. What for—Thomasina?”

“No blinking fear!” returned Tom. “It’s nothing to do with my christened name, but it’s what I’m always called.”

“What is your real name, then?” asked Bride curiously.

“Never you mind!” growled Tom as they reached the head of the stairs and Bride set off down the long corridor lit by winter sunlight. “It isn’t Thomasina, at any rate.”

“Well, you needn’t be so rude about it!” flashed Bride. Then she relented. “Some names can be the limit! Here’s Matey’s room, so we’ll soon know where you’re to go.” She rapped at the door.

“Come in!” said someone curtly; and Bride entered, towing Tom after her, into what appeared to be a pretty sitting-room, where a small, wiry woman, in full nurse’s uniform with “angel’s wing” cap of crispest white over greying hair, and an equally crisp, white apron over well-starched dress of butcher-blue, was standing by the window, reading a letter.

“Well, Bride?” she said, putting it into her pocket as the pair entered.

“Please, Matron, this is a new girl—Tom Gay—and Miss Wilson said I was to bring her to you and find out where her dormy is.”

Matron gave Tom an incredulous look. “‘*Tom*’, did you say? What is your proper name, child?”

Tom flushed up. “Tom; that’s what I’m always called.”

“At home, perhaps. But——” A bell interrupted her, and she stopped speaking, and crossed the room to take up a house telephone, saying, “Matron speaking.”

Of what followed the two schoolgirls naturally made nothing. Matron said, “Yes—yes—Oh, I see—Very well, Miss Wilson. Thank you.” Then she put the receiver back on the rest and turned to them. “It’s all right; Miss Wilson has given me your full name. Now let me see!” She turned to an open desk, took up two or three sheets of foolscap lying there, and scanned them rapidly. “Yes; here you are: Blue South; Cubicle Five—your dormitory, Bride, so you will look after her. Tom can unpack when you do, and you will take charge of her for this week. Tom is the only new girl on your floor this term.”

“Yes, Matron,” said Bride properly.

“Then be off with you, and don’t be late coming to unpack.”

“No, Matron. Come along, Tom.” Bride led Tom from the room, bustled her back along the corridor, up another flight of stairs, and into a long room criss-crossed with iron rods at about six feet from the ground, over which were flung cretonne curtains, though in one or two cases the curtains had been let down, and there came a murmur of voices from the far end.

Bride led the way to one of the narrow, white beds set against the wall, and said, “This is yours. We’ll drop the curtains so you can see what it looks like.” She caught at the hems, and Tom found herself in a small, curtained-off space, with a bureau at one side of the bed, and a chair at the other. A mat lay beside the bed, and that was all. “Here you are,” went on Bride.

“This hook in the pole here is for your dressing-gown. You keep your clothes in those drawers. This lid lifts up and is the mirror, and your brush and comb and things like that are kept underneath. Your frocks and coats are hung up over here”—diving under the curtains and making for a deep recess hung round with hooks. “You’ve four of these, but it’s plenty, ’cos you can’t have more than four frocks besides your velvet and gymmer. They go on two, and the other is for your big coat and skirt. This locker place is for your hats, and this one below is for shoes and slippers. You’d better hang up your coat,” she added. “Where’s your hat? Your gloves go into one of your drawers.”

“Haven’t a hat—only a beret, and it’s here,” said Tom, pulling it out of one of her coat pockets. She hung up her coat, pushed the beret into its proper place, and then followed Bride, as that young lady led her to another cubicle.

“This is mine—two from you. We’ve got Anne Webster and Lavender Leigh in between.” She turned to Tom. “I saw your initials in the closet—‘L. M. Gay’. We’ll call you Tom, of course, if Bill—I mean Miss Wilson—says so. But be a sport and tell me what the ‘L. M.’ stands for.”

Tom blushed violently. “It’s such a sickeningly soppy name!”

“Still, it’s the one you’ve got,” Bride pointed out. “You might as well tell me.”

“Oh, all right then! But mind, you aren’t to tell anyone else. It’s ‘Lucinda Muriel!’ After my two grandmothers! I *ask* you!”

“I’ve heard worse in my time,” said Bride judiciously. “I don’t think much of ‘Muriel’, and ‘Lucinda’ sounds like a sick dog!”

Whereat Tom was moved to giggle.

“I think,” continued Bride sedately, her head on one side, “‘Tom’ is a lot more like you. S’long as no one says we aren’t to, we’d better call you Tom.”

“They won’t stop you,” Tom stated positively.

“You never know with grown-ups. They jolly well may.”

“They jolly well won’t! I told the Mater I wouldn’t go to any school where they tried to call me either ‘Lucinda’ or ‘Muriel’, and she gave me her word she’d make them promise to call me ‘Tom’, so you needn’t worry about that!”

Bride grinned. “We’ll see! Meantime, you’d better get to know a few folk. It’s nearly time to go back to the lib’ry.” She raised her voice. “Hi! Vanna and Nella! Come here!”

There was a scutter of light feet, then Bride’s curtains were pushed aside, and two girls, very much alike, entered. “Hello, Bride!” They turned politely curious looks on Tom.

“These are Vanna and Nella Ozanne from Guernsey,” said Bride. “They’re in my form where the Head thinks you’ll be. Vanna and Nella, this is Tom Gay!”

Then she stood back and watched the effect.



## JO GIVES AN INVITATION

Tom Gay intrigued the whole Chalet School.

There were other new girls, of course, but none like her.

“What on earth is the meaning of it?” demanded Miss Burnett, history mistress and old girl of the school. “She isn’t *like* a girl at all. It always gives me rather a shock to see her in blouse and tunic.”

Miss Wilson chuckled, “Tom was a little bit of a disappointment—or so her mother says.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, they hoped for a brother or two to follow along, but none came, so her father tried to make up for this by calling her Tom and educating her himself. He had a nasty accident when she was a small child, and was laid up for months. So far as I can gather, Mrs. Gay left Tom to him, and ran the parish activities—they’ve never had a curate; couldn’t get one, since they’re few and far between these days. The result is what you see. Some aunt or other from Canada came to stay with them last summer, and was so horrified that she gave them no peace until they agreed to send Tom to a girls’ school, in the fond hope that in this way she would become more—feminine. There you have the whole thing in a nutshell.”

“A nice job for us!” grumbled Mary Burnett.

“What’s a nice job for you?” demanded a new voice from the doorway. “Hello, everyone! I’ve come for exactly one hour!” And the voice’s owner came into the room and shut the door behind her, to be fallen on by most of the younger members of Staff with cries of joy.

“Joey—Joey Maynard! Why you can’t come up the *first* day instead of leaving it till a week later I can’t think!” exclaimed pretty Miss Linton, one of the Kindergarten mistresses. “Don’t say your family have started something *this* term!”

“Not so far.” Joey Maynard tossed off her big coat and cap, and sat down in the armchair Miss Wilson had pulled up beside her own. “What a glorious fire! Is that coffee I see before me? Yes, thank you: I’ll have a cup. I couldn’t come before, Gillian, my lamb, because I’ve been indulging in a streaming cold, and I knew just how unpopular I should be if I turned up and scattered germs all over the shop.”

“I should think so!” Miss Wilson handed her a cup of coffee.

Joey grimaced at her. “Most unwelcoming you’d all have been. And Matey would have eaten me, so I kept my germs *to* myself. In point of fact, Jack made me stay in bed for four days. Margot seized on the chance to fall from top to bottom of the stairs and take most of the skin off her nose. It’s healing, but she looks an awful little sight still.”

“Even if you’d been up that might have happened,” said Mlle Berné.

“Oh no, it wouldn’t. Those three imps took advantage of my being *non est*, so to speak, to try sliding down the banisters. Margot was the only one to be damaged, but the other two got a nice fright when they saw her rolling down the stairs. I only wonder you didn’t hear their shrieks! I did, and thought someone was being murdered. However, they aren’t likely to try that game again for some time to come.” And Jo finished up with a gurgle of amusement at the misadventures of the youngest of her triplet daughters.

“Just as well,” agreed Miss Wilson. “I suppose every babe tries sooner or later to slide down the banisters, but four is rather young to begin. Sure you’re all right now, Joey?”

“Perfectly. Don’t I look it?” And Jo turned her face, with its frame of straight black fringe and huge “ear phones” of plaits, to the mistress who had taught her in her own turbulent youth.

Miss Wilson surveyed the face, with its sensitive features, big, black eyes, and clear, creamy skin, in silence for a moment. Then she smiled. “You look remarkably fit, but not a day older than seventeen at the present moment,” she added, laughing. “It seems hard to believe that you are married and the mother of four. I only wonder you didn’t join in the banister-sliding yourself.”

“I was in bed,” retorted Jo with a tilt of her chin. “Well, I really didn’t come to see you people at all——”

“Jo! You little—horror!” cried Miss Burnett.

Mrs. Maynard was on her feet at once. “Stand up, Mary Burnett!”

“What for? You aren’t going to fight me, surely?”

“Ass! Stand up!” Then, as Mary got to her feet; “There! Look at that, everyone! Here am I a head taller than she is and she has the cheek to call me ‘little!’”

The Staff collapsed. When they had recovered from their giggles, Miss Wilson said, “If you didn’t come to see us, then why *did* you?”

“To issue my usual beginning of term invitations to all new girls, of course. How many are there, Bill?”

“Seven—three Middles, and four very small people. I don’t think I’d have them altogether, Jo. The Middles are all three twelve-year-olds, and the tinies are sevens and eights, one of them is only six.”

“Poor infant! Why on earth did her people park such a kid as that at boarding-school?”

“She hasn’t any—only trustees in the shape of her father’s solicitors, who are also her guardians. Her parents were lost in that air crash two months ago. The solicitors were Truscott, Leeming and James. We have Joan Leeming and the two James girls here, so it was decided to send Linda along as well, and Katharine James is keeping an eye on her. You needn’t pity her too much, Jo. She’s quite happy.”

“Well, I think you’re right, Bill. I’d better have those four separately, and the other three on Saturday. That suit you?”

“Perfectly. I suppose they’ll come about three and we must send for them sixish as usual?”

“No need. I want Daisy to come, too, so she can take charge of them and their little pals. Send Beth and Gwensi along. I haven’t seen anything of either of them all the holidays, and I always feel partly responsible for Gwensi, anyhow.”

“Very well. And you can have the babies any afternoon except Tuesday or Thursday, when they have games.”

“I’ll see what we can fix up. Well, thanks for the coffee. Now, as I’ve got to catch the bus back, since ‘Caroline’, the car, is out of action at the moment, I’d better go and invite my little lot. They’ll be in the Hall, I suppose, as usual?”

Miss Wilson glanced up at the clock on the mantelpiece. “Yes; and you’d better hurry. It’s nearly eight now, and eight is bedtime for all Junior Middles. Will you come back to say good-bye?”

“No; my love. I shan’t have time to do more than invite them and run. That bus passes the gates about eight-thirty, and if I miss it, it means going home on my own arched insteps—three miles of it on a cloudy, moonless night, and I’d rather be excused. Come and see me, all of you! Give me a ring first, though, in case I should be out and you have your trudge for

nothing. And now, farewell!" And Jo grabbed her cap and coat, and fled, pulling them on as she went.

At the door leading to the Hall, she paused to make sure that she looked passably tidy. Then she opened it quietly, and slipped in. The girls were dancing Chelsea Reach, most of the Junior Middles looking on since the complications of the dance were too much for them. No one noticed her at first. Then a tall, very fair Senior, with a thick pigtail hanging down her back, glanced in her direction, and, with a yell of "Joey!" broke away from her partners to come racing across the floor, followed almost at once by half a dozen other folk. They clustered round Mrs. Maynard with exclamations and questions, and for a minute or two she was very much occupied. Tom, who had been perched with Bride on the end of a table, was amazed when that young lady deserted her with a shriek of, "Auntie Jo!" and joined the crowd of elders.

But Jo Maynard had no mind to walk home. She glanced at her watch, saw that she had little more than twenty minutes left, and broke away from the crowd, springing on to the nearby dais, and clapping her hands loudly for silence.

"Listen, people!" she cried. "I can't stay more than a few minutes, as I've got a bus to catch. I only came to say that I want the three new Middles to come to tea on Saturday as usual and each bring a friend with them—the others will explain to you. I'm having the Juniors separately."

The tall, fair Senior who had been the first to see her, followed her out of Hall, demanding, "Can't you possibly stay, Jo? What's the matter with 'Caroline' that you're yammering about buses?"

The door closed behind them at this, and the girls returned to their dancing. Bride trailed back to where Tom still sat.

"I'd scarcely a word with her," she complained as she swung herself up again.

"Does it matter?" asked Tom, staring at her. "Who is she, anyhow?"

"My Auntie Jo!"

"Well, what about it? Aunts are sickeners as a rule, *I* think."

"Mine aren't! Auntie Madge is a duck. And as for Auntie Jo—well, you'll see for yourself what she's like on Saturday."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, didn't you hear what she said? She's having you and Moira Fitzpatrick and Carol White to tea. She always has the new girls at the beginning of their first term."

"Why ever? It strikes me as a daft idea. What can your aunt want with the school? I s'pose she was here; but that isn't any reason why she should go on. Didn't you say you had cousins?"

"Dozens of them," said Bride. "Auntie Jo has four children—three girls and Stephen, who is nearly a year old. Auntie Madge—and it's *her* school by the way—four, too. There's David, who's thirteen now, and Sybil and Josette, and Ailie who came in September last year. And then we've cousins in Ireland—Mother's sister's children; and there are five in one family, and three in the other, so that's sixteen, anyhow."

"Oh, well, they don't really matter here, but why should your Aunt Jo want to keep in with the school?"

One of the Seniors who was passing heard her. "There's a reason, Tom," she stopped to say. "No; I'm not going to tell you. You must find out for yourself. I can tell you, however,

this school is very thankful that Joey Maynard still cares enough about it to want to ‘keep in’ with it, as you say.”

Gwensi Howell passed on, and Tom was in some little awe of her, so made no reply. When she had gone, the young woman turned to Bride to say, “It’ll be some silly, sentimental idea, I sh’d think. Girls are awfully sentimental usually. The Pater said so.”

“You’re a girl yourself!” flashed Bride.

“I know that—worse luck, but my Pater’s done his best to cut out any soft ideas *I* might have.”

Bride glared at her speechlessly. Elfie Woodward, who happened to be sitting farther along the table, decided to take a hand. “You do talk a lot of rot, Tom Gay!” she exclaimed contemptuously. “You won’t find people being sentimental here, I can tell you! We haven’t time, for one thing. For another, no one approves of such tosh, any more than you and your precious pater do. As for Mrs. Maynard, of course we like to have her barging in and out. For one thing, she’s Josephine M. Bettany—if *that* means anything to you.”

“It doesn’t,” said Tom promptly. “Who’s *she*?”

“An author,” replied Elfie impressively.

“Never heard of her, then.”

“Then you’ve missed a lot! Oh blow! There’s the bell!” And Elfie scrambled down from her perch, an example followed by Bride and the rest. They knew better than to be late upstairs. Matey *could* be a dear. On the other hand, she had a tongue that, as Bride had once said, “stung you up worse than nettles,” and no one liked it. Tom followed because, whatever else her training had held, she had been taught obedience.

They parted, for Elfie was at the far end of the lower corridor, and Bride and Tom had another flight to run up. But when she found herself safely in her dormitory, Elfie told a select group of her own chums what Tom had been saying. “She isn’t a bit like a girl of any sort,” she wound up. “She ought to have been a boy!”

## DIFFICULTIES

Tom Gay found it hard to settle down in an almost entirely female atmosphere. Except for the art master and one or two music masters, the Staff were, of course, all women, several of them old girls of the school. Having been brought up on exclusively boyish lines, she made heavy weather of taking in the feminine point of view. It is true that many small girls are very like small boys, but there *are* differences, and Tom soon found them out. Her new mates were an honourable crowd. They would have scorned to tell tales or lies, and the majority of them had not yet reached the stage when a girl takes much interest in her looks. To be quite truthful, Bride and her gang were only anxious to be clean and tidy enough to pass muster with Matron. Beyond that they cared little what they looked like. But there *were* one or two girls among the Junior Middles who really did like to keep hair and hands in immaculate condition, and who fussed over clean blouses and dainty collars and cuffs on their evening brown velvets. Them Tom treated with a contempt completely outspoken.

Her former education, too, was, as Mary Burnett feelingly said, “a real pain in the neck”—thereby descending to slang that would have meant a fine for any girl. Tom’s classics were excellent for her age, and so were her mathematics, but she knew little French; her history and political and commercial geography were beneath contempt if the Staff were to be believed, and while she was fairly well read from a literary point of view, she knew absolutely nothing about the sort of stories most girls of her age enjoy. Art was a sealed book to her, and she was so unmusical, that she was unable to sing “God Save the Queen” without branching off into “Rule Britannia.” Of needlework, she knew less than nothing, and her first sewing lessons were enough to turn anyone’s hair grey, from all of which it will be seen that, when it came to a question of “placing”, the Staff were in a quandary. For the moment, Miss Wilson had put her into Upper Third, sending her to Upper Fourth for some lessons, and Upper Second for others. It was the best they could do, but had its drawbacks, for it was difficult to fit in all lessons.

Tom sniffed at having to learn French thoroughly, and after having been accustomed to about sixty lines of construe to prepare, she complained to Mlle de Lachenais, who took all classics in the school, that they never got *on* with their Caesar. Whereat the entire Upper Fourth looked at her as if she were some fabulous animal, and for ever after were prepared to regard her with deep dislike. *They* found twenty lines enough at a time!

“But there’s one thing,” said Bride two days after her aunt’s visit. “I will say for her that she doesn’t put on airs about what she knows. And she jolly well could, you know. Peggy says she has them all beaten to flinders when it comes to Latin. She even *likes* the stuff!”

“She’s a freak,” said Elfie with decision.—“Yes, Beth? Did you want me?” For Beth Chester, Head Girl and one of the triumvirate of which Daisy Venables and Gwensi Howell formed the other parts, had called her.

“I want you to find that new child, Tom Gay, for me,” said Beth. “Send her along to my study at once, please.”

“Yes, Beth.” And Elfie went off on her errand forthwith. You didn’t keep any of the prefects waiting at the Chalet School—especially when it was the Head Girl who gave you an order.

Elfie found Tom, after a long hunt, in a bathroom, perched on the side of the bath, wiping her hands on a towel which looked as if it had been used to clean up ink, and whistling under her breath.

“What on earth are you doing here?” demanded Elfie. “We aren’t supposed to use the bathers except at bedtime and first thing in the morning. What do you think the splasheries are for?”

“Matey sent me to wash my hands,” returned Tom, dropping her towel and holding out hands that had palms of a pale, greyish hue. “I got ink on them.”

“I’ll say you did! *Tom!* Just look at your towel! Matey will have a fit when she sees it!” And Elfie regarded the maltreated towel with horror. Then she remembered why she was there. “Beth Chester wants you.”

“The Head Girl? What’s she want?” demanded Tom, taking up her towel and folding it carefully to hide the inky side.

“I don’t know. Prees don’t generally tell you what they want other girls for,” retorted Elfie with an effort at sarcasm. “You’re to go to her study, she says. You know where it is, don’t you?”

“Yes—that little room near the foot of the big staircase.” And Tom set off.

“You can’t go like that! Put your towel away first. And *don’t* go down the great stairs! You’ll only get into a row if anyone catches you.”

“Oh—raspberries to that!” retorted Tom. “I never knew such a lot of footling rot in my life!”

“’Tisn’t then—it’s the rule and always has been! Who do *you* think you are to come and call our rules footling rot?” demanded Elfie.

Tom disdained to reply, but she went and put her towel away, and then descended by the back staircase—mainly, it is to be feared, because it was nearest. She went down the corridor with the boyish stride which looked so funny with her skirts, and gave her usual hearty bang on the door.

“Come in!” called Beth, and Tom entered to find the other new Junior Middles there: Carol, a pretty, fair-headed child of her own age, who was in Upper Second, since she possessed only very average brains, and Moira Fitzpatrick, who had achieved Upper Third and was a good six months older than either Tom or Carol. Tom joined the pair, and stood regarding Beth Chester with the direct look that Miss Wilson had noted in her at first sight.

Beth smiled at them. “I only wanted to ask you which girl you would like to take with you to Mrs. Maynard’s on Saturday,” she said. “You may each choose someone—a friend, I mean—as your partner.”

“Please may I have Anne Webster?” asked Moira shyly.

“Certainly.” Beth made a note on her writing-pad, and turned to Carol. “Who’s your choice?” she inquired.

“I’d like Nicole la Touche,” said Carol, looking with awe at the big girl sitting there. Beth was seventeen, and her thick, chestnut curls were tied back from her face and pinned up at the back of her head. She was a rather lovely person, with her glorious colouring and delicate, regular features. She also had plenty of brains, and was credited—among the younger members of the school, at any rate—with having an almost superhuman gift for guessing at evil pranks. That Beth herself had been just as bad as anyone at their age never dawned on them.

“Nicole? Very well—always supposing Nicole contrives to keep out of trouble till then,” said the Head Girl warningly. “If you two are becoming chummy, I’d advise you to keep an eye on her doings.”

Carol flushed and murmured something incoherent. Beth turned to Tom. “Now, Tom.”

Tom considered. “I’d better make it Bride Bettany, I suppose,” she said at last. “She seems to think her Auntie Jo is the cat’s bath-mat, so I’ll bet she’ll come all right. That do?”

“Bride,” said Beth, scribbling the name down, and inwardly deciding to have a word or two with Tom some time on the need for using good English. “Very well, then; that’s all settled. Now what about Guides? Are any of you members?”

“I am,” said Carol. “We had a Guide Company in the parish, and I joined when they were divided—I mean they got too many for one company, so they made it into two.”

“I see,” said Beth. “What about you, Moira?” Moira shook her head. “Then, Tom? Were you a Guide?”

“No blinking fear! They had ’em in the parish all right, but I never had any use for ’em. Mater wanted me to join, but Pater said I needn’t if I didn’t like—and I didn’t like.”

“Well, you’d better attend Saturday’s meeting and see what you think of them here—Moira, too. Carol, I’ll just speak to Miss Wilson—she’s Commissioner for this district. We must see about having your transfer put through. Now about Saturday. You change before lunch, and be ready to catch the 2.30 bus. Daisy Venables, Gwensi Howell and I are coming with you. You three and your friends had better be at the door by 2.5. Bring your slippers. That’s all for now. There goes the bell for prep, so you’ll have to run.” And she dismissed them.

Since they might not talk on the corridors, they went in silence till they reached their form-rooms, which were in the usual turmoil. People were getting their books from the lockers, seeing that they had ink, and sharpening pencils. The trio, who knew by this time that the second bell would go in less than five minutes and they must then go to their desks and sit down, and would not be allowed to take more things from their lockers till the end of Preparation, hastened to join the throng milling about at the far side of the rooms. Tom, who had at least been drilled to habits of neatness where books were concerned, got hers speedily, and went to her desk, while Moira, who never knew where anything was, struggled valiantly to find her poetry anthology, French exercise book and atlas. By the time the second bell rang, she had everything but the poetry book. However, Bride Bettany slipped her copy into the new girl’s pile, saying breathlessly, “You have this. I know it—more or less!”

Moira, who had looked ready to burst into tears, cheered up as she whispered, “Thanks most awfully!” Then Daisy Venables entered to take Preparation, and there could be no more talking.

Tom set to work in methodical style. Her father’s drilling had taught her to concentrate on what she was doing, and this stood her in good stead now. She prepared her Latin—an easy task for her—worked three problems in algebra, and then turned to her atlas with a grimace. Latin and algebra were all right, but *how* she hated geography, especially when it meant doing a sketch-map! Tom heaved a sigh that was almost a groan, opened her atlas at the map of England, and spent ten minutes in producing a barely recognizable outline of that part represented by the six northern counties. As she refrained from showing any of Scotland or the northern Midlands, the effect was of an island, but that didn’t worry Tom. Besides doing the outline, she had to insert the names of two ports on the east coast and two on the west, as well as naming the rivers on which they stood, and drawing these in. Tom heaved another of

those sepulchral sighs, hunted in her atlas for the whereabouts of Newcastle, which she vaguely remembered as being one of the chief ports of the region. She had just nailed it down when she felt a gentle poke in her side, and turning in surprise, saw Anne Webster's hand held out pleadingly.

"What do you want?" demanded Tom in an undertone.

Anne frowned at her, then pretended to rub her paper violently.

"Oh—bunji! Right you are!" And Tom handed over her rubber. Luckily for both of them, Daisy was too deep in a German sentence, which she couldn't translate to make sense, to heed what they were doing. But the rest tried to indicate to Tom that talking in prep was never done—you must use signs instead.

Now Mr. Gay, with the best intentions in the world, had told Tom that girls often saw nothing wrong in breaking rules *sub rosa*, but that such things were not straight.

"Remember this, Tom," he had wound up his discourse, "you are going to school to learn to be a lady. I must say quite a good deal of your talk is scarcely to be called ladylike, so perhaps it's just as well. However, before everything else, I want you to be a gentleman. Never descend to an ungentlemanly act, whatever you do."

"No, Pater; I won't. That's a promise," had been Tom's reply. And she meant it. She was quite prepared to break an occasional rule if there was any fun to be got out of it, but that would be open disobedience. Therefore, if she wanted anything during silent periods, she would ask for it openly, and take the chance of being caught and punished. She wasn't going to talk by signs or notes—not if she knew it! Now she glanced round, and said calmly, "Oh, don't be mokes! If you want to break a rule, *break it*—"

By this time, even the absorbed Daisy had roused up to the fact that something was wrong. She gave up her German and glanced round the room. "Turn round, you people over there," she said with authority. "Tom Gay, why are you speaking? If you want help with your prep, put up your hand and ask for it. Bring your work here."

Tom was not telling any tales, either. She picked up her map, and marched up to the desk with it. Daisy looked at it.

Then a small voice was uplifted agitatedly,

"Please, Daisy, it was my fault. I asked Tom for some bunji. She didn't want any help."

Daisy grinned suddenly. "That's what *you* think," she said. "I should say myself she needed a jolly lot of help. As for you, Anne, lose a conduct mark and do try to keep to the rules. Otherwise you'll have to go to Punishment Desk for a week, and you won't like that."

"No, Daisy," said Anne meekly. "I'm sorry I spoke."

"Right! Go on with your work now, and try to keep your tongue still for the rest of prep. Now, Tom, what on earth do you call this?"

"A map of the north of England," said Tom sulkily.

"Who takes you for geography?"

"Miss Linton."

"H'm! In that case, I'd advise you to have another shot. Put in what your atlas shows of Scotland, and draw lines round to frame the thing. By the way, Newcastle isn't in the middle of the Pennine Chain, whatever you may think. It's a good thirty miles or so nearer the coast than you've put it. Now get back to your seat. Oh—while I remember, did you talk, too?"

"Yes, I did. It was me all the time, really."

"Very well," said Daisy, wisely passing over the last part of her speech. "You can lose a conduct mark, too. And remember, Tom, that you aren't supposed to talk in prep, and that



means you've got to be silent. Some of you kids have tongues that hang in the middle and waggle at both ends, but you can just learn to keep them still in prep."

Tom slunk back into her seat, very red at this unexpected harangue, and produced a second map that was much better than the first. Warned by Daisy's strictures, she was rather more careful in placing her ports, but she hunched herself over her work, kept her head down, and looked so sulky, that no one interfered with her further.

When prep was over, and Daisy had gone, the others swarmed round her, and told her in no uncertain terms what they thought of her for speaking so that Daisy could hear, and so getting Anne into trouble.

Tom stood her ground sturdily. "I don't mind breaking rules a bit," she said, "but I'm not going to break 'em in a sneaky way. If I want to talk, I'll talk, and take what's coming to me if I'm caught, but I won't use signs or deaf and dumb, or notes. Those are cads' tricks!"

"We *don't* use notes!" cried Elfie Woodward indignantly. "We know it's caddish just as well as you do! But there's nothing wrong in just nudging someone and holding out your hand if you want anything. It's—it's just keeping quiet so's not to interrupt other folk. We don't try to hide if we're caught. Anne owned up at once to-night."

"Yes; Anne's a gentleman," owned Tom.

Anne went purple at this stately compliment, but Elfie retorted, "Anyone in the form would have done the same thing. We don't like sneaks here!"

Their supper bell rang just then, so they had to give it up and streamed away to the dining-room, where they were separated. Tom sat silent throughout the meal. Somehow, it seemed to her, her father must have got a wrong idea of girls—modern girls, anyhow. She must think this out!

4  
Letters

(1)

*From Tom to her Mother*

“Dear Mater,

“Thanks for yours, and also for the stockings. I didn’t know I’d left them till I unpacked, and Matey—who’s a holy terror—held forth. This isn’t a bad sort of place after all. They think a fearful lot of French and things like that, and Pater would be amazed at the fuss they make over an extra line or two of construe. But they have quite decent ideas about some things. Yesterday all of us who are new this term went to have tea with Mrs. Maynard. She is Josephine M. Bettany, who writes books, and they seem to think she is just wizard. Her nieces are here, some of them, and Bride, who came for me that first day, is one of them. She has lent me one of the books, and it doesn’t seem such muck as most girls’ books are. It’s just on time to get ready for Church so I must scam.

“Good-bye!

“Tom.”

(2)

*From Bride Bettany to her Mother in India*

“Darling Mummy,

“I was so glad to get your letter yesterday. Auntie Madge sent it along by Uncle Jem, who had come to look at some kids who have spots. It’s lovely hearing from you so often, but I do wish you and Daddy would come home. It’s such years and years since we all saw you. And we’ve never seen Maeve and Maurice yet, and they’re almost eight. When are you coming?”

“We’ve got the queerest new kid in our form this term. Her name is Tom Gay, and she looks just like a boy, or would if she could wear a suit. Her father, who is a parson, brought her up like one, and you’d never believe the lots of Latin and Greek she knows. She’s rotten in French, though, and says it’s a beastly, finicking language. She can’t work with us in it, but has to go down to Upper Second, but then she goes to Upper Fourth for Latin, and Peggy says she’s simply wizard at it, and skims through it just as if it was English. She has some funny ideas about girls, but I rather like her on the whole. Now I must finish as I’ve got to write to Auntie Biddy in Ireland. She sent me some of the loveliest hankies last week. Heaps and heaps of love to you and Daddy and the twins.

“Your own loving

“Bride.”

*From Daisy Venables, Games Prefect, to Robin Humphries at Oxford*

“My Dear Rob,

“I still can’t get used to school without you. Are you still as much in love with Oxford as you were last term, or has that simmered down as the newness has worn off?”

“I’m really writing to you for some advice. Here are the facts:

“A new kid has come to the school, Tom Gay by name. At least, that is what she is known as. I forget her proper name, but Bride says it’s an awful thing, and she doesn’t blame Tom for not using it. She’s a queer kid—been brought up like a boy, and has a holy contempt for girls and all things to do with them, but some aunt or other came to visit the family, was horrified by Tom, and got them to send her to us. I like the kid. She’s an honest, downright sort of girl, and there is certainly no nonsense about her. She strides about the place like a boy, is always being hauled over the coals for whistling and her language, and is, I should imagine, a real headache to the staff over her lessons. The thing is, I’ve managed to get across her in some way, though how, I just don’t know. The only thing I can think of is that one night last week when I was taking prep I thought she couldn’t do her work, hauled her out, and made sundry remarks about a map she was supposed to have drawn. You know what a demon Gillian Linton is for sketch-maps. She once told me she’d never been made to do them much before she came to us when she was fifteen, and she had a most ghastly time with them, so she makes her kids do dozens of them.

“It turned out later that Tom hadn’t been stuck over her work—or so she said, though how she thought any mistress worth her salt was going to pass the scrawl she was pleased to call a ‘map’ beats me! So far as I can make out that little ass Anne Webster wanted to borrow something and played the usual sign game. Tom was willing to lend, but she thinks making signs is a cad’s trick, so she spoke outright. Anne, of course, owned up at once—she’s quite a decent kid if she *is* an ass—and I took conduct marks from the pair of them, and warned Tom about having their tongues hung in the middle. Then I turned to Tom’s map, and made a few comments thereon, and sent her back to her seat to produce something rather more possible. Ever since then, Tom has scowled at me when we meet; goes out of her way to be rude to me; and when I took her crowd for a netball coaching this afternoon, she made remarks, and not in any undertone, either, about sappy girls’ names.

“Now, Rob, this has gone on for more than a week. I don’t quite see what I can do about it if it *is* the map that’s done it. On the other hand, I can’t think how to find out if it is. Tom won’t be too jolly if she’s busily engaged in hating anyone all the time. Besides, I don’t like it on my own account. I’ve had spats with people before now, but nothing quite like this, and it worries me. What can I do about it? Do write and give me some advice. I’d go to Jo, but she hasn’t been too well this last day or so, and Jack says we aren’t to worry her, as she is having bad nights with Steve, who seems to be cutting teeth at an appalling rate, and is taking care to let everyone know about it.

“Write soon and give me a helping hand. If I could only know what I’d done it would be better, but even Bride doesn’t seem to have any idea, and anyhow I can’t go pumping the kid

about her chums. Can't you get over for a week-end? I'd like a confab, I can tell you.

“DAISY.”

*From Miss Wilson to Miss Annersley, her Co-head and Close Friend*

“Hilda, My Dear,

“I wish to goodness you were here and could help us out in a very queer problem. Now, don’t let this inspire you to set all the doctors at defiance and come before next term. We’d all a thousand times rather carry on as best we can without you, and be sure of you for the future, than have you flighting across here for a week or two, and then going sick again as you almost certainly *would*. That head of yours isn’t strong enough to cope with all the noise and tumult that goes on in the best regulated girls’ school. Besides, it’s advice I want.

“You may remember I told you about one of the new girls—Tom Gay. I believe I said at the time that I thought she might prove something of a problem. Well, I was right, but the problem hasn’t come about as I rather expected it would. For the first ten days or so Tom seemed likely to settle down as well as anyone could hope, considering the extraordinary way in which she had been brought up. Then, one morning she came out of lessons with a full-size scowl on her brow. No one pays much heed to that sort of thing, as you know, but when the whole day had passed and it still didn’t move, I began to wonder. That was on Monday, and she’s looked sulky ever since. I’ve made inquiries among the Staff, and no one can give any reason for it. Gillian Linton says she was sarcastic about something Tom showed up as a map, but that, so far as I can make out, was the fate of at least half that crowd, and none of the others seems to be worrying about what she may have said. I am sure it has nothing to do with her home. She had no letters until Wednesday this week, and apart from that, a good deal of her spleen seems to be reserved for Daisy Venables of all people. I heard her speaking to Daisy this morning in a tone that made me take the matter in hand myself. I gave the young lady a sharp scolding and made her apologize, but I brought her to it only with the greatest difficulty. And the apology, when it did come, was a mumble that might have meant anything.

“Do you think I’m making a lot of fuss about nothing? It sounds like it, I know. The fact of the matter is that this outsize in sulks is affecting the child from other angles. Her work is falling off, and Beth Chester, who has her table, says that her appetite is poor, and she refuses half her food. That sort of thing can’t go on. I should say it means that the child is definitely unhappy. I can’t exactly have her in for questioning when I’ve really nothing to question about. You know yourself how that age resents anything that looks like grown-up interference. I should probably do harm, and gain nothing. If I could have got at Jo, I’d have had her up, but she’s got her hands full with Stephen just now, and Jack says he is having very bad nights with his teeth, and Jo is really getting worn out.

“You are a wise old bird, my dear. Write to me, and give me your considered opinion as to what I should do about it! There’s nothing out of the way to worry over otherwise, thank goodness!”

(The rest, having nothing to do with this story, is omitted.)

(5)

*Postcard from Robin Humphries to Daisy Venables*

“Many thanks for letter. Sorry; can’t get over for a week or two yet. Get hold of Peggy Bettany, and put her on to Bride, and see if she can find out what’s wrong. Poor Jo! She has had a time with Steve’s teeth! Have written to Jack and suggested he should borrow someone to take Steve over for a night or two to give Jo a chance to rest.

“LOVE,

“Robin.”



(6)

*Answer from Miss Annersley to Miss Wilson*

“——And now about your problem. Put Matey on to the child. You have a good excuse for doing so if she is not eating. Perhaps the big change from her former life to school discipline is upsetting her. At any rate, I should get Matey to take her out of school for a day or two and see if that helps. Write in a few days' time and let me know.”

*From Mrs. Bettany to her two Girls, Peggy and Bride*

“My Dear Pegs and Bride,

“This will have to be a joint letter for once as I am so busy I’m having difficulty in pushing it in.

“Bride, your wish is to be granted. Daddy has resigned from the Forestry, and we are coming home. If you ask Auntie Madge, she will tell you all about an old great-uncle of theirs who died last year—Uncle Tom. He has left Daddy his house in Devonshire, and so we shall have somewhere to come to in England. Daddy has decided to leave India and make a home for all of us at The Quadrant, which is on the North Devon coast, not far from Bideford. We expect to sail in about two months’ time, and, as we must sell most of our possessions here, what with one thing and another, I scarcely know which way to turn. If we sail in March, we ought to be home for your Easter holidays. Won’t that be fun? I have written to Auntie Madge by this mail, asking her to arrange to have the house cleaned and made ready so that we can go straight there. If we arrive in time—as we both hope—you four will come to us when term ends, and we’ll be together for the whole three weeks. And when you two go back to school Maeve will come with you. It is high time she and Maurice were at school. We are sending him with Jackie to Armiford.

“My own colleens, work hard and have the best reports ever as a beginning to our new lives. Have a good time, too. I don’t want to see two skinny creatures looking as if they needed a month of Sundays in bed to recover from the term’s work. I don’t think there’s much need to tell Rix that. Daddy nearly had a fit over his last report!

“I think we’ll be just by ourselves this first time, but in the summer you can each ask a friend to come and stay. Daddy tells me that The Quadrant, from his memories of it, is a big, rambling place, with plenty of space—dozens of rooms, and big ones too. It’s at the top of a cliff and the back looks over the sea. No more news now, but just think of the lovely time we are going to have soon now, and don’t worry if you don’t hear from us as often as usual, though we’ll try not to lose any mails. Much love to you both.

“Mummy.”

## GROWING PAINS

The cause of Tom's troubles was not far to seek, though she herself would have been horrified and disgusted if anyone had told her about it. The fact of the matter was that the child had begun to feel a natural kind of hero-worship for Daisy Venables. Daisy, with her fresh, pink and white face, well-groomed fair hair in its thick pigtail, and jolly grin, was just the kind of girl to appeal to any junior's imagination. She had showed herself uniformly kind to all the new girls. Above all, there was about her an air of straight dealing and uprightness that Tom was quick to sense and appreciate. Here was one girl, at any rate, who wasn't likely to sneak nor do anything dishonourable!

Unfortunately, in criticizing the maps that Upper Third had given in, Miss Linton had seized on the opportunity to say a few words in season about the proper use of time in preparation. Even more unfortunately—so far as Tom was concerned—she had applied most of her remarks to Tom and Anne Webster. There could be only one explanation of it in Tom's mind. Daisy Venables had told tales!

Most girls would have discussed the matter with the rest, but not Tom. She was of a reticent nature where her deeper feelings were concerned. Moreover, this was her first experience of anything of the kind; she did not know what to make of it, so, she retired into her shell, and was miserable to the point, as we have learnt already, of refusing her food, letting her work go, and, very naturally, showing Daisy what she felt by almost unmitigated rudeness, greatly to that damsel's surprise.

Bride might have helped her, for Bride was almost as outspoken as Tom herself, but there was no getting much sense out of Bride at this date. She went about in a state of solemn ecstasy, and whenever they could manage it, she and her elder sister Peggy retired into corners, where they made plans for the Easter holidays, most of which were unlikely ever to be fulfilled. Poor Tom was left to struggle as best she could with a state of things for which her early life had not prepared her.

The day after the various letters had arrived at the Chalet School, Matron, who had been duly warned and was keeping an eagle eye on the young lady, summoned Tom after dinner to her room. Tom went with a wonder as to why she had been called. She knew that her cubicle was as tidy as hands could make it. Her father had had no patience with any sort of carelessness, and she had been trained to keep things in their proper places. So far as she knew, she had broken none of Matey's rules, and even Tom in her present "upheaved" state would never have dared to be rude to Matey. That lady was the smallest of all the Staff, being a bare five foot three in height, but she ruled everyone with a rod of iron—even the masterful Miss Wilson.

"Well," demanded Matron, when Tom stood before her, "what was wrong with your dinner?"

"Nothing," said Tom, eyeing her with amazement.

"Then why didn't you eat it?"

"I did—at least—well, I ate everything on my plate."

"One spoonful of mince, one spoonful of potato, one spoonful of sprouts, and one spoonful of custard and damsons. That's no sort of a dinner for a growing girl like you. You

ate well enough the first fortnight of term. What is the matter with you now?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Let me see your tongue."

Tom stuck it out promptly, and Matron examined it. No fault to find there. The girl was heavy-eyed, however, and looked pale. Matron took pulse and temperature. The one was quite normal, the other a point or two down.

Matron put a few more questions and found out that Tom was not sleeping very well, and—yes—her head *did* ache a bit. Matron acted promptly.

"The change from the north-east coast to this area," she said briskly. "I'll give you a dose for the headache, and you can go to bed for the rest of the day. Don't get up to-morrow till I've seen you. You needn't go to San. There's nothing much wrong with you. Run along to your dormitory, and I'll come in ten minutes and bring your dose."

Tom opened her mouth to argue, and then shut it again. She turned and left the room and went meekly to bed. Here, Vanna Ozanne found her an hour or so later when she came running upstairs to get a fresh handkerchief, having obtained leave to do so. Matron had told Tom she need not draw her curtains, as the fresh air streaming through the dormitory would be good for her, so the first thing Vanna saw when she entered the room was Tom lying in bed, hands clasped behind her crooked head, a very miserable look on her square-jawed face.

Vanna stopped dead. "Tom!" she exclaimed. "Whatever is the matter?"

Tom grinned feebly. "Matey says it's the change from home to here. I've got a bit of a headache—nothing to shout about, but when Matey says, 'Scram!' you scam—and don't ask questions, either."

"You don't," agreed Vanna whole-heartedly. "Poor old Tom! Is there anything I can get you?"

"Nothing, thanks. Matey won't let me have my books, for I asked her and she said, 'Certainly not! What next, I wonder?' If she thinks I'm well enough, I can have a story-book after tea," said Tom solemnly. "Until then I'm supposed to rest and sleep if I can. What are you doing here, Vanna? I thought we weren't to go upstairs during the day?"

"We aren't, but I dropped my hankie at netball and someone trod on it, and you know what the ground's like. I asked leave to get another," Vanna explained, exhibiting a handkerchief that had seen better days. "It was Daisy, thank goodness! If it had been Beth, I'd have got a lecture a yard long, but Daisy only laughed and said I might. She's a sport, isn't she?"

Tom went dull red. "That's what *you* think," she said, turning over. "Get your sniff, and clear out, or Matey may say things if she catches you. I'm supposed to be having a nap, I told you."

Vanna stared at her. She might have begun to argue, but Tom's remark about Matey reminded her that she was due at afternoon prep *now*. Miss Slater was taking it and would ask questions if she were too late. She went to her cubicle at the far end of the room, got her clean handkerchief and departed, after another curious look at Tom, who was lying on her side, her eyes tightly shut.

Tom remained as she was till the sound of Vanna's steps had died away; then she sat up, rubbing her hands through her hair before she clasped them round her knees and began to think hard. Vanna had said that Daisy was a sport, and Tom herself had certainly thought so at first. But she *must* have told Miss Linton about that prep business. If she hadn't, why had the mistress said, "If you girls would only stop talking and making signs to each other in prep, and get on with your work, you might manage to give me something better than this, but you

dig at each other, and use sign language, and if you get a chance, you chatter, chatter, chatter. The result is that your work is disgraceful, just because you don't give even *half* your minds to it."

What Tom had forgotten, if, indeed, she had ever known it, was that Miss Linton herself had been a pupil at the Chalet School, and not so very long ago, either. Also, while she herself had been a worker, she possessed a young sister who was quite definitely *not*. Joyce Linton had been one of the laziest little monkeys who ever became a Chalet School girl, and, indeed, had been so far below the average for her age when she first went there, that she had had to be coached in most subjects for the first two terms. Gillian knew all about how the Middles behaved in prep both from her own experiences as a prefect, and from what she heard from Joyce. She had spoken out of this knowledge, and not from anything Daisy had said, that damsel having passed over the episode with Tom and Anne as being all in the day's work. In any case, no prefect would have reported such a thing to any mistress, since it was all too common.

Tom, knowing next to nothing about girls' schools and accepting her father's statements in all good faith, did not know this, or even think of it. Nor could she talk it over as the others might have done. All she knew was that she had been mistaken in a girl who, she had thought, would be straight and decent in every possible way, and it made her miserable—so miserable that she couldn't work, and she did not want to eat. It was all very silly, of course, but it was very real to poor Tom.

"Why on earth should I *mind*?" she asked herself as she sat up in bed, staring out of the window, but seeing nothing there. "She isn't in my form—she's a prefect and years older than I am, so what's it matter to me if she goes and sneaks? Why should I feel so browned off about it?" She thought hard for a minute or two. "I s'pose it's because I thought she was so smashing. It makes you look such a fool if you make mistakes like that about people. I don't like feeling I've been a fool."

Further thought produced another reaction. "Of course, I'm being a fool to mind so much. After all, it isn't my concern if she's a sneak and tells tales. All I've got to do is to see that I don't do anything she *can* sneak about. It strikes me I've been a good bit of a ninny. I'll lie down and try to go to sleep. My head is rather rotten."

Whether it was the result of Matron's dose or whether it was because she had cleared things up in her mind for the time being, Tom, once she had lain down and pulled up the bedclothes, actually did manage to fall asleep, and slept for an hour or more, only rousing when Matron came in to switch on the lights, pull down her curtains, and settle a tempting tea-tray on her knee.

"And mind you eat everything," she said as she tucked an extra pillow behind Tom's back. "I'll be back in half an hour or so, and I shall expect to see all those plates empty, and that egg eaten."

"Yes, Matron," said Tom, eyeing the egg with eagerness. Her nap had given her a little more appetite, and she loved a boiled egg. Matron had no need to complain when she returned. The bread and butter and piece of cake had vanished and the egg-shell was empty.

"That's better," she said. "Now, here are two books for you. As long as you sit up like this, you may read, but if you want to lie down, you must close your book. No reading when you are flat!" She dumped two fat books with gaily-coloured jackets on the bed, picked up the tray and departed.

Left alone, Tom took the books and looked at them curiously. Both were by Josephine M. Bettany. One was called *The Fugitive of the Salt Caves*, and the other was *The Secret House*. She glanced through both, and finally settled down to *The Fugitive of the Salt Caves*, a really thrilling tale about some salt caves in the Austrian Tirol, which were unknown to anyone, and where a girl, who had incurred the wrath of the robber baron of the district, had hidden herself with her great St. Bernard dog. She had sundry hair-raising adventures, from most of which she was rescued by her own wit and the faithfulness of her dog, which was called Rufino. She finally won her way to safety, thanks to meeting with a young hunter, who turned out to be a grandson and heir to the baron. He fell in love with Moidl, the girl, and after marrying her, presented her and Rufino to his grandfather at a lucky moment, and so won pardon for her.

Tom sniffed at the very mild love-making scenes, but she thrilled to the adventures that filled most of the book. On the whole she decided to try a few more of Mrs. Maynard's stories, if they were all like this. Not, of course, that she finished the book that night. Matey appeared with her supper at half-past seven, and when she came to take the tray away, sent Tom to wash, and then insisted that she must lie down and go to sleep if she could. However, as she kept Tom in bed for a couple of days, by which time the young lady was on the verge of rebellion against the regime, since she loved bed in the daylight no more than the average healthy youngster does—it was possible for the invalid to finish the book. When she had read the last words, Tom turned to the beginning to find out what other titles Jo Maynard had written, and made a list of them. Then she flipped it over, and found herself looking at the dedication.

“To my niece Daisy,” she read, “because she loves adventures and Tirol.”

Once more the old puzzle came back. How could any girl who seemed such a sport as Daisy Venables be a sneak? Tom just couldn't square things, and she was thoroughly worried. She gave it up after a while, and took up *The Secret House*, a story of a family who spent a holiday in North Wales, and during the course of their ramblings found an old, ruined house in a cleft in the mountains. All sorts of exciting events occurred, for the house was really the headquarters of gangsters, and the family—consisting of two girls and three boys—had some hectic times, one of the boys being captured by the gangsters, and only rescued from their clutches by the daring and courage of the rest. By the time she had finished it, Tom was quite certain that Mrs. Maynard was well worth knowing, and had also resolved to read everything of hers obtainable. Matron produced two more, and Tom made the most of her time. One was a school story, and as she read it, she began to see that, if this was what girls' schools were like, then her father was mistaken in his ideas. On the third night, when Matron brought her supper-tray, she summoned up courage to ask a few questions.

“Matron, is—is this the sort of school Mrs. Maynard went to?” she asked, holding up *Cecily holds the Fort*.

Matron looked at it. “Well, she certainly got most of her ideas from the Chalet School,” she said. Then, as she saw Tom's face, she added, “Good gracious, child! Didn't you know that Mrs. Maynard was the first pupil in the Chalet School?”

“Some of the others said something about it that night she came up to ask us to go to tea,” said Tom thoughtfully. “I'd forgotten; but then, Matron, are girls really like *Cecily* and her pals?”

Matron settled the tray. “Here; take this. Mind you don't spill your milk. Of course they are. Jo Maynard's people are generally alive. What do you mean?”

“Well—are girls like boys, then?”

“Very much so in some ways.” Matron sat down, and looked at Tom. Was she going to get to the bottom of her queerness? “Girls of your age, at any rate, are very much like boys of the same age. Prefer games to work; aren’t too tidy; use slang.”

“I wasn’t exactly thinking of that,” said Tom.

“Then what *were* you thinking of?”

“Well—boys on the whole are awfully—well—honourable. Don’t sneak, or tell lies to save themselves, or cheat. Things like that, I mean.”

“What about it? Neither do girls if that’s what you’re after.”

“Oh,” murmured Tom. Then she added, “But, Matron, they do silly things—like adoring someone, a senior or some mistress, and giving them flowers and things, and trying to meet them all the time, and wanting to do things for them. Boys aren’t like that.”

“I’m not so sure. Boys have their heroes, you know, just as girls have their heroines. They don’t express what they feel in quite the same way, I grant you, but then, in any decent school, neither do girls—not nowadays. You won’t find any of that nonsense here, for instance. We don’t encourage it. And when I say ‘we’ I mean the girls themselves. It’s a good thing for younger girls to be able to look up to the Seniors; good for them, and good for the Seniors. If an elder girl finds that younger ones are influenced by what she says and does, if she has any decency in her, it makes her careful. As we all need some sort of ideal as soon as we can think for ourselves, it’s right that girls should be able to find that ideal among themselves. However, when it degenerates into sloppy sentimentality, then it’s a very bad thing for every one concerned. We’ve never had it here, thank goodness! The outlook has always been too healthy and sane for such rubbish! You do come across it sometimes, of course. At any rate, you’ll find nothing of the kind in Joey’s books. Now, you are much better, and can get up with the rest to-morrow and go back to school. I hope you will keep all right, too. I’ve precious little time for running round after you people needlessly! Get your supper!” And Matron stalked off.

Next day Tom returned to school with some of her ideas considerably altered. She was, however, no further on with the problem of Daisy.

## THE GYM TOURNAMENT

“Fog *again!* I must say I think the weather’s the edge! It’s more than a week since we had either games or a walk and some of those kids are simply spoiling for a row—any sort of row!” Beth Chester spoke with finality as she glared disgustedly out of the window.

“Jo said last night that she rather expected the fog would turn to snow when it went,” said Daisy thoughtfully.

“Wish it would. Anything for a change! I’m sick of this!”

“What that new kid, Tom Gay, calls ‘browned-off’?” suggested Gwensi Howell, the third member of the Triumvirate.

“Exactly! But,” and Daisy turned to the subject of the weather again, “this really is awful. Here we are at the second week in February, and so far we’ve contrived to play off *one* match—ONE! The rest have all had to be cancelled. Hilary Burn had a ring from Monkton Priory just before brekker to say that visibility was nil in their part of the world and hadn’t we better postpone. Considering we’ve had next to no practices this term, I wasn’t sorry when she said she quite agreed. Monkton are a strong set, and we’re minus Jesanne and Lois this term. I wish they hadn’t had to leave so suddenly.”

“It was some business about Jesanne’s father’s farm in New Zealand, Lois said. It was jolly lucky for them. I’d love a trip to New Zealand,” put in Gwensi. “Ernest, my brother, you know, says he’ll take me somewhere when he leaves the Navy. But it won’t be till this year ends, anyhow. Not so long as I’m at school.”

“Heigh-ho!” Daisy stretched. “I loathe to think of leaving school.”

“You’ll have to next term,” said Beth. “Do you realize that we three will be eighteen next month? We can’t stay at school much after that.”

“No; and there’ll be Oxford to look forward to. It might be worse. However, that’s not till next term. In the meantime, will you two kindly stop yapping, and try to give me some ideas of what we should do to keep the kids quiet this afternoon,” commanded Beth. “*This* isn’t likely to shift to-day. There’ll be Guides this morning for most of them, anyhow, but in the afternoon we simply must have something to do.”

“Ask Miss Burn if they can have a gym tournament,” suggested Gwensi.

“A gym tournament? Gwensi, I believe you’ve got something there! How would you work it?” demanded Daisy, perching herself on the corner of a table. “The whole school couldn’t do it. There wouldn’t be time.”

“Yes there would. Divide them off into teams—or what about using the Houses? We don’t worry a lot about them just now, but we are all in different Houses. Let’s get Miss Burn to arrange for an inter-House gym tournament. That’ll give them something to think about! What’s the time, anyone? Ten to nine? Good! We all did our mending during Games yesterday and the day before, and Guides don’t begin till eleven. Come on, you two! We’ll go and find Miss Burn and ask her to start it up at once. The Houses must meet in their own rooms. Then they can pick their teams. Miss Burn will fix the competitions——”

“What about prizes?” asked Daisy.

“We must manage those among ourselves.” Beth looked round her little study. “There’s that china dog of mine. I’ll give that for one. And this little photo frame can be another. What



can you subscribe, you two?"

Daisy thought. "I've got a hanky-case someone sent me for my last birthday. I've never used it, and it's here—luckily. You can have that. And there's that copy of *Gipsy Jocelyn*. Jo will let me read hers if I want to, so I can spare it. That makes four. Gwen, what about you?"

"Come up to my room and we'll see what we can unearth," said Gwensi, whose home Plas Howell really was. She slept in the dormitory with her friends, but her own little room was still hers, and most of her possessions were kept there. "It's my idea, so I ought to give a few of the prizes. There are those necklaces of iridescent shells for one thing. I adored them when I was a kid, but I've plenty of other things, and never wear them. There are three or four. I should think they would appeal to the babes, anyhow. I've got some other junk, too. Come on!"

The three made their way upstairs to the dainty room, and were soon busy turning over various treasures that Gwensi dug out of drawers and cupboards.

"Here are three Indian glass bangles. They'll do, won't they? And I've about a dozen sets of these Maltese lace collars and cuffs. I could give a couple of those. And what about this sandalwood box?"

"Here! That's enough from you!" protested Daisy. "You can't give all the prizes yourself, you know. Besides, we haven't asked Hil—I mean Miss Burn. She mayn't like the idea."

"She'll like it all right," said Beth confidently. "But you're quite right about Gwen. I expect the others will find something each. Let's go and hunt up Miss Burn and ask her what she thinks."

They gathered up Gwensi's contributions and went downstairs, pausing only to leave the things in Beth's study before they trooped down the corridor to the staff-room to find Miss Burn, the Physical Training mistress, and another Old Girl of the school. She was sitting writing letters, Miss Slater and Miss Linton keeping her company, while Mlle Berné was busy correcting the Upper Fourth's French exercises. All four looked up with interest when the three prefects came in. Their proposition was received with acclamation.

"A very good idea," said Miss Burn with approval. "Only, what are we to do for prizes. No one can go to Armiford and back in time. All buses are off the road in these parts, thanks to the fog."

"We thought we'd provide those ourselves," said Beth. "Daisy and I can give one or two things, and Gwensi has lots."

"I have lavender bags," put in Mlle Berné. "I could give you a dozen of those, Beth. And the beadwork I made last term. There are two necklaces, one pink, one gold and green. Would they do?"

"They'd be marvellous," said Beth. "Thank you, Mlle."

The other three were sure they could find trifles, and trifles were all that was required. Hilary Burn suggested that she and the three girls should get out a programme while Mlle put up a notice in the Hall, and summoned the rest of the two Sixths to make a collection of oddments for further prizes.

"And it's a good idea to make it an inter-House affair," she added. "I'll just go and see Miss Wilson about it first. Then we can get off on our various jobs. Miss Linton, you might find the different House mistresses and ask them to come here first. They'll have to hold House meetings as soon as possible to choose the teams. Sit down, you three, and wait for me. I shan't be long." And she raced off in search of Miss Wilson, as excited as if she were a schoolgirl again.

Miss Wilson agreed cordially. "The very thing! The school is getting bored to the verge of revolution, and it's certain they won't be able to go out to-day. This will give them something to think about. Work them for all you're worth, Hilary. Then, this evening, we'll give them a paper games party, with odd competitions to exercise their little brains, and we shall send them all off to bed more than ready to sleep! I'll see to the competition prizes, since you tell me you can manage the tournament prizes among yourselves. But you'll have a rush," she added, glancing at the clock. "It's nearly ten now, and you have Guides at eleven."

"I'm going to beg off from Guides for once," said Hilary. "Teddy can run my company to-day. And I'll keep the Triumvirate, too, if I may. We can make the arrangements, and the House mistresses can see to the teams. Could we have dinner at twelve-forty-five for once? Then those who aren't competing could see that chairs are put round the gym for the spectators. We'd better let them keep on their tunics until after tea, hadn't we? I'll put up a notice to that effect."

"Yes; do! Let me have your programme as soon as you've made it, and Rosalie can type off copies for each House. Guides had better begin at ten-thirty and finish at eleven-thirty. They can hold House meetings after that, and get their entries. Off you go! You've got more than enough to do if you're to be ready by two-thirty this afternoon."

Miss Burn nodded, laughed, and vanished to get on with her share of the work. Miss Wilson bundled her papers into a drawer and then called her secretary, one Rosalie Dene. She had been among the first pupils at the school when it was begun by Mrs. Maynard's sister, now Lady Russell, in Tirol beside the shores of the lovely Tiernsee. Rosalie came prepared for dictation, but was sent to the kitchen to summon Cook, with whom Miss Wilson went into conference forthwith, while Rosalie herself was set to typing the notices about frocks, invitations from Miss Wilson to the school at large for a paper games and competitions party at six o'clock that evening, and—when they came to hand—the lists of the gym competitions.

The school buzzed with excitement. They were all so sick of staying indoors. This was a new idea, and promised well.

"I should love to be in the Middles' relay race," said Bride wistfully.

"I'd rather like the trapeze exercises and rope-climbing," said Vanna Ozanne thoughtfully. "We *can* climb, you know."

"Gymnastic obstacle race? What on earth is that?" demanded Daisy of the rest of the prefects. "It's Open, anyhow, so I'll put my name down for it. I should think it'll be rather fun."

House meetings were called for half-past eleven, and when Guides ended, they all streamed off to the various places set aside as the House rooms, and riotous meetings ensued.

There were four Houses, all named after Saints. The first was St. Thérèse, named from little St. Thérèse of Lisieux; next came St. Clare's and St. Scholastika's. The last and smallest was St. Agnes. The Staff had their own House, those of them who were not House mistresses, and this had been named from the English St. Hild.

It had been decided that each House might send up two pairs for the graded competitions. Anyone who liked could enter for those which were open. These were rope-climbing, obstacle race, trapeze and certain exercises on the ribstalls. The gymnasium was a large one, so it was possible to have fairly big classes, and in the graded competitions, Juniors, Seniors, and Middles could be taken in their sets at the same time for most things.

Left to themselves, the girls might have wasted time, but the House mistresses, ably assisted by the House prefects, saw to it that entrants were quickly voted for, and with as little

friction as possible. Tom, to her great joy, was one of those chosen to represent St. Clare Middles pair for leap-frog race, and was also allowed to enter for rope-climbing and trapeze. Vanna also entered for rope-climbing, and Bride was one of the relay race team for St. Thérèse. The lists were handed over to Miss Burn by half-past twelve, and then the school was given ten minutes to change into tunics and blouses, and they had dinner.

After dinner, those who had not been selected tore off to carry chairs over and place them round the three walls clear of ribstalls. A small gallery ran across each end of the huge place, which had once been a barn, and here the Juniors would be put in charge of various mistresses. Just before the bell rang to summon every one to the gymnasium, the prefects made a solemn procession from the House, each carrying a tray covered with a napkin, and the joyful word went round that these were *prizes!* In view of the fact that the whole thing had been got up at short notice, no one had expected such a thing, and it put the final touch to their excitement. Then the bell rang, and they all marched over though the thick fog which blanketed the world, and found themselves in the brilliantly lit gym. People who were competing were sent to one end; the juniors were marched upstairs to the galleries in charge of mistresses, and the rest found seats along the two remaining walls. When all were settled, Miss Burn blew her Guiders' whistle for silence, and then stood in the middle to explain.

"Relay race first!" she said briskly. "Seniors to the competitors' end; Juniors in the middle; and Middles at the other end. St. Thérèse's will play St. Scholastika's and St. Clare's will play St. Agnes. The winning teams will then play each other, and the winning team there will play a team from St. Hild's." At this a rousing cheer went up. They had not expected the Staff to join in.

The teams took their places, the little girls looking very solemn and important, and Miss Burn handed a netball to the leader of each. The ball had to be rolled between the straddled legs of the team, picked up by the last man who must run to the head and send the ball down again, and the winners would be the teams whose leaders got back to their place first.

It was great fun. The big balls were not easy to handle, and on more than one occasion blandly rolled to the side, to be chased by shrieking leaders who had to take their places at the head and roll through again. Finally, St. Clare's won the Seniors' and Juniors' events, and St. Agnes the Middles'. Then the Staff came to compete with each of these, and were badly beaten by the Middles and Juniors, but just contrived to defeat the Seniors. Miss Burnett was breathless and scarlet as she tore to take her place at the head of the team once more, beating long-legged Daisy by half-a-second. The school cheered the Staff long and loud, and then all settled down for the leap-frog race. Each girl had to leap over twelve people standing doubled in readiness down one side of the gym, and then run to take her place as "Stander". Miss Wilson acted as starter, and Miss Burn, with a stop watch, checked them. Quite a number had entered for this, and it was very close indeed. Finally, the prize was declared won by Elfie Woodward, who was a featherweight, and seemed to skim up and down through the air. Tom was a good second. About five people came third, and Miss Wilson congratulated Miss Burnett on the prowess of her gymnasts.

The ribstalls competition was won by Daisy Venables, and the trapeze also went to the Seniors. Tom won the rope-climbing, to her great joy. She went up the ropes like a monkey, and came down hand over hand in best Navy style. Then she went up again, and when half-way up, grabbed the second rope, and turned a neat somersault. This was all very well, and quite within bounds. However, when she proceeded to do the same thing somewhere near the top, the spectators held their breath, and Miss Burn owned afterwards that she could

cheerfully have shaken the young lady. Still, there was no doubt that Tom was at home on the ropes, and she easily outdid anyone else.

Perhaps the best fun of all was the obstacle race. Miss Burn explained it while other members of the Staff hauled things into place. "You begin by hopping on one foot from the door to the opposite wall," she said. "Then you do a vault over the horse and three cartwheels. After that you do a prone-fall on your back, and get up without putting your hands or arms on the floor. If you get through *that*, you run three times round the room, keeping inside the lines that are being chalked now, climb one of the ropes, and blow the trumpet tied to the ring at the top. Come down, vault over the horse again, and hop down to Miss Wilson. The first girl to reach her wins."

There were cries at this programme, but the girls set out to do it. Juniors and Junior Middles had not been allowed to enter, but everyone over fourteen might do so, and a good many did. They were divided into teams of eight each, and when the heats finished, the winners would compete for the prize. As many girls as possible were crowded on to the stairs leading to the two galleries in order to clear the floor. The rest were sent to the two ends of the place, and then the race began. It was exceedingly funny, especially the prone-fall obstacle. To see the various squirming and writhing people trying to get to their feet from a recumbent position without touching the floor with hands or elbows, produced roars of laughter from the audience. The more experienced people contrived to get to a sitting position, then crossed their legs, and so rose to their feet; but in the excitement, quite a number merely turned and twisted with the most amazing contortions. Some of them gave it up, and so were out of it. Others managed in one way or another. In the end, the prize went to Dorcas Brownlow, an ornament of Lower Fifth, who reached Miss Wilson nearly a minute and a half ahead of anyone else in the final. That finished the tournament, and Miss Wilson was then called upon to present the prizes. All the Sixths, and most of the Staff had contributed to the prize-list, so most people got prizes, and some of them were really good.

Tom was secretly thrilled to receive the copy of *Gipsy Jocelyn*, and Dorcas won a charming paper knife in carved ivory, presented by Miss Burn, whose brother was on a cocoa plantation in Africa.

Mlle de Lachenais had devoted her morning to running up lavender bags on the school sewing machine, and her friend and colleague, Mlle Berné, had filled them with lavender, rose petals, and pot-pourri, and these were given as consolation prizes. Both Frenchwomen were quick workers, and everyone had contributed any scraps of silk, muslin or ribbon she could, so there was a great pile of them. All in all, the tournament was voted a huge success.

Tea followed. Most folk were tired enough to be glad to sit quietly down to paper games during the evening, and Miss Wilson had various dainty booklets for prizes in the competitions. Finally came supper at eight o'clock, and an enchanted school feasted on sausage rolls, jam tarts, blancmanges and jellies, instead of the usual Saturday night shepherd's pie and junket. Urged thereto by everyone, Beth Chester rose to her feet at the end of supper, and proposed a vote of thanks to Miss Wilson and the kitchen staff for such a surprise.

The Juniors and the Middles were all hustled off after that, for it was well past bed-time for everyone under fourteen, and time for the Middles. The Seniors united in tidying up the big dining-room where they had had their games and competitions, and then retired likewise.

Beth pulled aside the curtains just before she got into bed. The fog still held, but she could hear the bare branches of the trees beginning to creak a little, and knew that the wind was

rising.

“That’ll finish *that*,” she said to Daisy and Gwensi, who shared her dormitory. “With any luck, we ought to get a decent walk to-morrow—or if not to-morrow, then Monday. Well, it’s been good fun, but I’m dead. I’m going to call it a day and get to bed. Last one ready switch off the light please. Good night, you two.”

“Good night,” they replied, while Daisy obligingly switched off the light, plunging the room into darkness, and raising a shriek of dismay from Gwensi, who had to grope her way to her cubicle at the other side of the room. Daisy chuckled as she snuggled down on her pillow. Then the bell sounded for silence, and the day ended.

## A WINTER'S WALK

The girls woke up next morning to find a gale blowing and the snow flying. Already the ground was covered with a thin veil of white, and at the rate the snow was falling, it was clear that by noon it would be a good inch thick. There could be no question of a walk. They must stay in and make the best of things. However, they had plenty to discuss in the previous day's doings, and there were the usual services, for the two chaplains managed to get to Plas Howell, coming on the motor cycle of Mr. Sandon, who was curate at the parish church of Howells village. Father Antony came from the big Benedictine monastery nine miles away. He held a service in a barn at Howells for all the Catholics in the district, and usually those girls at the school who were Catholics attended this. However, Miss Wilson had rung him up to ask him to come to their own little chapel, as it was impossible for the girls to go to Howells on such a day. Similarly, none of the Protestants could attend service at the parish church; hence Mr. Sandon's visit. Father Antony always stayed with him, coming over on the Saturday night, and having a room in the house where he boarded. The two were great friends, having been at Oxford together.

When the services were ended, the girls read, wrote letters or talked quietly. After dinner, the little ones were gathered into the junior common room, where one of the mistresses read to them for an hour. Then they were free to amuse themselves with jigsaw puzzles, books and various "Sunday" games. Their elders read to themselves during the silence hour, and then they, too, had quiet amusements. After tea, they all came into Hall for hymn-singing and then parted for Prayers. Supper followed and the Juniors were whisked off to bed, while the others returned to their pursuits.

On Monday, they woke up to find a white world with a pale blue sky arching over it, and no wind.

"There will be no morning school," Miss Wilson announced at breakfast. "According to the seven o'clock news, this snow will come again later in the day, and further heavy falls are forecast. That being the case, we must take advantage of the present fine spell. As soon as you have finished your beds, wrap up warmly. We are all going for a good walk!"

The girls beamed. It would be a joy to get out into the fresh air again after being cooped up for so long. They were accustomed to being out so much as a rule, that long days in the House affected them badly. There was no need for anyone to adjure them to be quick. They made their beds and did their dusting at top speed, and by a quarter to nine everyone was waiting to be told how the walks would be arranged.

Juniors went in forms with their own form mistresses. The Seniors had agreed that something was owing to the Staff for all they had done on the Saturday, so they had sent a deputation to Miss Wilson, with the result that the Middles were divided up into small groups, and one Senior took charge of each group, thus giving the Staff a chance to go off by themselves for once. The elder girls were all quite trustworthy people, accustomed to taking charge at times, for it was part of the policy of the Chalet School to train the girls to accept such responsibilities. Miss Wilson put the younger girls on their honour not to play any silly pranks, said that everyone was to be back by half-past eleven, and saw them off. Then she

went to put on her own cap and coat, and go for a tramp through the snow with some of the Staff.

Tom found herself one of a group in charge of Daisy Venables. The others were the Ozanne twins, Bride Bettany and her sister Peggy, Lady Russell's elder girl, Sybil, Elfie Woodward, and Peggy's chum, Daphne, who was no relation to the Russells, though she bore the same name.

"Which way are we going, Daisy?" asked Peggy, when they had reached the big, iron gates that opened on to the high road.

Daisy chuckled. "If you wait you'll see," she informed Peggy.

"Daisy! Don't be so mean!" cried Sybil Russell, who was Daisy's cousin, and saw no reason for being on prefect-Junior terms with her out of school. "Tell us where we're going—do!"

Some of the prefects would have squashed Sybil for this, cousin or no cousin, but Daisy was an easy-going person, not given to standing on her dignity, so she laughed outright, and said amiably, "Keep your hair on, Sybs. We're going to the Round House with a parcel Bill wants your mother to get as soon as possible—and *don't* shriek like that on the high road!" she added hastily, as Sybil set up a yell of joy at the news.

"Oh, sorry," said Sybil. "But it's weeks since we saw Mother, and I'm longing to see if Ailie has grown any more."

"In five weeks—and at her age? Of course she will!" retorted experienced Daisy. "Babies grow like fun when they're Ailie's age. Come on, you folk! Get in twos, and we'll start. It's a good distance to go in the time. Elfie, you and Sybs walk with me. Tom, you and Bride go next to Peggy and Daphne, and you Ozannes can walk in front of us. Now get cracking!"

The little procession set off, walking briskly, for, as Daisy had said, it was quite a good distance to the Round House, the Russells' home; and apart from that, the air was bitterly cold although there was no wind to bother them.

"Have we got to 'croc' all the way?" asked Peggy as they set off.

"Only along the road. Whenever we turn off, we'll break ranks. I thought we'd turn up by the post office, and go through the spinney," explained Daisy. "It cuts off a good half-mile, and then you can go as you like, once we're in the lane, as long as you don't straggle behind."

"Good-oh!" Peggy turned back to Daphne with a beam.

"Why is it called the *Round* House?" asked Tom of Bride as they marched smartly along the road.

"Because it's round of course," returned Bride.

"*Round?* Do you really mean that?" demanded Tom doubtfully.

"Of course I do. I don't mean it's a perfect circle, but it hasn't any corners outside—like a Tower, but a lot bigger, of course. And the garden is round, too."

"And are the rooms round as well?"

"They are in places—where the windows come, you know. Of course, the inside walls are straight. It's a lovely house. If there's time, I'll show you Peggy's and my bed-room. However," went on Bride with a little skip, "I don't suppose it'll be ours any more, now that Mummy and Daddy are coming home. But it's the one we've always had ever since Auntie Madge and Uncle Jem came to live in it. Before that, we were in Guernsey, and before *that* in Tirol. I don't remember much about Tirol. I was a very small kid when we left. It's *wizard* to think that we'll have a home of our own now! I'm just aching for term to end. I do hope they can manage to get the ship they thought of!"

“Where will you live when they come?” asked Tom curiously.

“In Devonshire, in an old house Daddy’s great-uncle left him. It’s called The Quadrant, and Daddy said in his last letter that there’s a garden in the middle of the house. I don’t see how that can possibly be, can you? I mean—in the middle of a house! However could it?”

Tom was quicker than Bride. “I expect he means the house had been built round an open space,” she said. “It won’t have rooms back and front, at least, not in the usual way. It’ll be a square and the house will go all round it, and it’ll be just one room and a corridor wide. I say! What a lark! If the kitchen is in the back part, and your dining-room in the front part, you’ll never have a hot dinner!”

“Good gracious! How awful! I say, Peggy,” Bride poked Peggy in the back, “did you hear Tom?”

“I did,” said Peggy, turning her head. “Don’t be silly, you two. Of course, if it’s built like that, and the kitchen is at one side, the dining-room will be there, too. And if it isn’t, Mother will see that it’s moved, so you needn’t worry, Bride.”

“Hi, you people! Turn up here!” called Daisy from behind. “You’re going past. What are you so keen on, that you’re missing the turn?”

“The Quadrant,” explained Peggy, as she and Daphne wheeled to go up a narrow lane past the red-brick house that contained a small post office. “Tom thinks it’s built round a garden. What do you think, Daisy?”

“Most likely, since Uncle Dick says there’s a garden in the centre,” said Daisy, as they broke rank and walked up the lane in an amiable group, “It’ll be jolly useful if it is, for it’ll mean that there won’t be many days when you can’t get out. Wind won’t matter much, anyhow—not unless it’s blowing a howling gale. I should think you’ll be able to grow all sorts of flowers in a garden like that.”

“It’ll be like a cloister garth, won’t it?” asked Daphne. “I say, Peg, was it ever a monastery or a convent, do you know?”

“I haven’t an idea, but I’m longing to see it,” replied Peggy, her blue eyes sparkling at the thought.

Daisy said nothing, though she glanced down lovingly at the fair little face at her shoulder. She knew that of late years Peggy, at any rate, had longed for her own mother, though their Aunt Madge had done her very best to supply her place. Daisy had been motherless herself for a good many years, and knew what that longing meant. “Though with Auntie Madge and Jo, Primula and I are jolly well off really,” she thought. “We mightn’t have had a soul but each other. But I can remember Mummy, and even Peggy wasn’t more than a babe when Auntie Mollie and Uncle Dick went back to India.”

“It won’t be so awfully long now,” said Daphne. “Half term comes in a fortnight’s time, and you know how the days simply *race* away after that! I expect your next letter will tell you that they’re starting.”

Peggy shook her head. “No; not yet. Mother said they wouldn’t sail till March. However, Father has promised that, just before they sail, he’ll send air-mail letters to us, and Rix, and Auntie Madge, so that we shall know. They hope to be here before the hols begin, but if they aren’t, we’ll go to the *Round* House until their boat is due. Then Auntie Madge says someone shall take us to Southampton to meet them, and we’ll all travel to Devonshire together to The Quadrant.”

“Won’t it be fun!” cried Bride excitedly. “And there’ll be Second Twins, too. We’ve never seen them, you know, Tom, though they’ll be eight in May. Mummy says she’s sending Maeve



to school with us when next term begins, and Maurice will go with Jacky—Here are the bars!” They had come to a stile leading into a kind of spinney with firs, pines, a few deciduous trees and thick undergrowth.

They climbed over and found themselves in snow to their ankles. However, all wore gum-boots, so that didn’t matter, but it made progress rather difficult, and, by the time they had struggled through the spinney and reached a narrow meadow, they were hot and breathless. They raced across the meadow and turned into a gravelled drive, which wound through tall trees to the Round House. It was a matter of a few minutes only before they arrived at a wide lawn. This was circular in shape, as Bride had told Tom, and surrounded the Round House, which was roughly circular, too, with a great door set in a deep embrasure, and windows also set deeply. Three steps led up to the door, and as they ran towards it, Daisy set up a “View-ahllloo-oo!” in which the rest joined.

The door was flung open almost at once, and a slender woman stood there, waving to them eagerly, and the next minute, Tom found herself looking up into the face of the owner of the Chalet School.

Lady Russell was not much like her sister, Mrs. Maynard. She had black hair, it is true, but where Jo’s was straight as an Indian’s, hers waved and curled over her head and round her face. Her eyes were deep, velvety brown, and she was blessed with a clear, pink and white complexion. She was dressed in a crimson frock, and she had flung a crimson shawl round her shoulders before she came to the door. At sight of her, Sybil gave a wild yell, and rushed forward to hug her vehemently.

“Give me air!” gasped Lady Russell. “Syb, you’re strangling me! Stand back and let me see you. Yes; you look very well and bonny. What a lovely surprise to have you, precious! And Daisy-girl, you’ve grown *again!*” accusingly.

“Just the same height as Jo,” said Daisy with a chuckle. “We can wear each other’s clothes now—but *not* boots nor gloves,” she added, with a glance at her feet. “Jo takes a whole size smaller than I do.”

“Just as well,” laughed her aunt. “Peggy and Bride, come and kiss me, girlies. And come in, all of you. Rosa shall make chocolate, yes, Daisy; real Austrian chocolate! But why aren’t you at lessons?” as she ushered them into a charming drawing-room where she established them round the fire. “This is a new girl. Tom Gay, isn’t it? I’m so glad to see you, Tom. Come and sit here. Syb, where are you going?”

“Up to the nursery to see Josette and Ailie,” said Sybil from the door. “Can’t I?”

“I’ve just got Baby off for her mid-morning nap. You may peep in, but don’t disturb her. Bring Josette down here when you come.”

“Right! I won’t be a minute!” And Sybil galloped off to see her small sisters, while the rest sat down, loosening coats and scarves at their hostess’s suggestion, for the room was warm after the sharp air outside.

When Sybil came down ten minutes later, bringing with her little Josette, they were all sipping delicious chocolate, with sponge fingers to go with it, and even Tom had lost her first shyness.

“Come and get your chocolate, Syb,” said her mother. “You people mustn’t stay too long. I don’t like the look of those clouds in the north.” And she waved towards one of the windows.

The girls turned to look, and saw that far away in the distance were yellowish wisps of cloud, and the blue sky was turning to grey.

“Oh, Jemima!” cried Daisy. “That means more snow. Drink up, you folk! We must get off as soon as possible. I don’t want to be caught in a snowstorm. Auntie Madge, do you think we’d better wait for the bus?”

Lady Russell glanced at the clock. “No, my child; I do *not*! You’ve just missed the half-past ten, and there isn’t another for two hours. I think you’ve plenty of time to get back. The snow won’t come yet. But I’d advise you not to loiter in the way.” She glanced out of the north window again. “The clouds seem pretty stationary at present, but there’s no telling when they move. I wonder if you’d better wait until your uncle comes back from the San? He could run you over in the car.”

“Not this pack!” protested Daisy. “And Bill might worry. She says your phone was off this morning when she tried to get you, so you can’t phone her. No; we must go. I meant to go round by the road, but in the circles, we’ll go back by the spinney. It cuts off quite a decent bit.”

“I didn’t know the phone was off!” exclaimed her aunt. “I’ll go and try it. If it’s on, I’ll tell her we’ll keep you till Uncle Jem comes back and he can bring you over. Hand those biscuits round, Bride. I won’t be a moment.” And she sprang to her feet and ran out to the hall.

She came back, shaking her head. “No use; it’s completely dead.” She went to the window for another look. “I don’t think the clouds have shifted. Daisy, are you sure you can manage through the spinney?”

“Oh, definitely, as long as the snow keeps off.” Daisy was quite confident. “It’s a straight road once we’re through. Nothing can go wrong unless it gets really bad, but if it comes down as it did last winter we might spend quite a time circling round and round. I don’t think it’ll do that before we reach school, if we go now.”

“But we’ve just come,” mourned Sybil, who was at her mother’s side.

Daisy glanced down at her, a frown on her face. Then it cleared. “Look here, Auntie, suppose we leave Sybs and the twins with you, and Uncle Jem can run them over when he comes back. I could tell Bill, and she wouldn’t worry. The rest of us could get off at once, and I think we’ll be back by the time it’s likely to come on really hard.”

“Leave Peggy, too,” said Madge Russell with a quick glance at her eldest niece. As a small child, Peggy had had measles very badly, and while perfectly healthy, she was by no means so strong as the rest. “You and Elfie and Bride get off as fast as you can. Tom, too! I don’t suppose Tom minds tearing over the road. I’ll keep Peggy and Daphne and the twins, and Syb, and get Uncle Jem to bring them in the car. Get your things on while I scribble a note to Miss Wilson. You’ll go as fast as you can, won’t you Daisy?”

“Like bandersnatches!” laughed Daisy, looking relieved. “Shall Bride wait and come with the others?” She knew that her aunt was very anxious to hand over to her twin brother and his wife in as fit condition as possible the children with whom they had entrusted her so long ago.

“Very well,” agreed Lady Russell. “You and Elfie and Tom can make quick time over the roads, but I shall be thankful when it’s possible to hear that you are all safely at school.” She found her pen and some paper, scribbled a few lines, and gave them to Daisy. “Give that to Miss Wilson as soon as you get in. Now wrap up, you three. I wish I could keep you all, but the Doctor won’t be in till nearly one, and if there’s anything like a storm, Miss Wilson would be nearly frantic with worry.” She went to the window once more. “Those clouds are still not moving. You’ll do it all right. Now get off, and whatever you do, *hurry*! I wish I could come with you.”

“You couldn’t possibly!” cried Daisy, making for the door. “Come *on* you two. It’s us for the open road, and no dilly-dallying! Good-bye, Auntie. Don’t worry about us. I’ll be careful,

and I do know the way.” And she swept off her pair, scarcely giving them time to say good-bye.

She rushed them across the lawn, explaining that they could get into the spinney from the far end, and cut across to the stile leading into the lane, and so save a little more time. In the spinney itself they had to go more slowly, for the undergrowth as well as the snow made movement harder. They could no longer see the northern sky, but as they fought their way along to the stile, it seemed to Daisy that it was growing darker. However, they got there safely, and climbed over. Then the Senior held out an arm to each.

“We’ll link,” she said firmly. “I don’t want to lose anyone.” She glanced up at the sky as she spoke. “That snow’s going to be here pronto. Come on!”

They did as she told them, and then set off down the deeply rutted lane as fast as they could go. Daisy was wiser than to let them run. She knew that, if she did, they would only tire, and be longer in the end, but she made a good, brisk pace which they could keep up most of the way. Before they had reached the high road the first flakes of snow were drifting down in ones and twos. Daisy set her lips and hurried them on. Then Elfie gave a cry and fell, dragging on Daisy’s arm so that she wrenched it badly. She tried to get up again, of course, but sank back with a groan.

Daisy knelt beside Elfie at once, forgetful of snow and discomfort. Elfie was biting at her lips in the effort to keep from crying, but the tears stood in her eyes. Daisy knew there was only one thing to do. She tugged, and despite the younger girl’s bravely suppressed cry, pulled off her boot, and ran a hand over the ankle. Then she sat back.

“That’s torn it!” she said desperately. “Elfie’s sprained her ankle!”

## ADVENTURE IN THE SNOW

It was only too true. Already the ankle was swelling badly, and Daisy, with a feeling that she must do what she could, anyhow, told Tom to bring her handfuls of snow from the ditch, while she tore off Elfie's stocking. She plastered the swollen ankle with the snow, and then bandaged it as firmly as she could with her scarf.

"Oh, Daisy! You shouldn't! You'll catch cold!" Elfie half-sobbed.

"Not I!" Daisy sounded very scornful. "Now, the point is, how are we to get you back?"

"Could I go back to the Round House and tell them?" asked Tom.

Daisy shook her head. "You don't know the way, and you might lose yourself in the spinney. Let's see; where are we?" And she looked round through the snowflakes which were falling lightly still. "H'm! Not so very far from the high road. Then the best thing to do is to get you there and try to thumb a ride, at any rate as far as the lodge. If we can reach that, they're on the phone and we can ring school. They'll send someone or something to cart you back. The real job will be to get you to the road. And anyhow we can't stand about. This is going to become thicker in half no time."

"If—if you and Tom each gave me an arm I could hop," said Elfie.

"I doubt it—with that ankle, but we can't stay here, so we must try something. The first thing is to lift you up. Put your arm round my neck; that's it! Now, Tom, you come to the other side, and Elfie can put her other arm round you. Ready, Elf? Then wait till I say 'Go' and hang on for all you're worth, and we'll try to put you on your feet—foot, I mean! Got a good steady stance, Tom? Right! Now, Elfie—go!"

Between them, they lifted Elfie to an upright position, though the tears streamed down her face with the pain. What Tom also noticed, was that, as they were struggling, Daisy gave a little gasp, and when the younger girl glanced at her, she saw that all the pretty colour had drained from her cheeks, and she was biting her lips.

"She must have been hurt when Elfie fell. They were both nearly down," thought Tom shrewdly. She had no time to dwell on this, however, for Elfie, brave till this moment, could bear no more. She gave a gasping cry, and began to sob in real earnest as the blood rushed to her foot, and the pain gripped her.

"Oh—oh! Please put me down! I—I c-can't sta-and it! Oh, *please!*"

But Daisy was adamant. "Sorry, Elfie, but it can't be done. We daren't wait a moment longer than we must. Look at it!" And indeed the snow had thickened during the minute or so they had taken to lift Elfie. "Look here!" said Daisy persuasively, "I'll stoop down and make a back, and Tom will help you up. If we can manage that, then she can walk in front and hold up your foot, and the pain will be better. I know it's horrid, but it'll be over in a minute or so now. Set your teeth, and get on with it. I'm stooping *now!*" And she bent lower. "Ease her up, Tom, but for goodness' sake be careful *you* don't damage yourself."

Thus urged, and helped by Tom, who was a muscular girl, and very sturdy, Elfie pulled herself together, and somehow they managed to get her up. Then Tom moved in front of Daisy. "Put up your hands on my shoulders to get up," she said, standing straddled, while Elfie clung round the Senior's neck, sobbing quietly to herself. Then in an undertone, "Go on, Daisy. You've hurt yourself, and you can't lift without some sort of lever."

Daisy put one hand on her shoulder. "I've wrenched my arm," she whispered. "I can't use it properly."

"All right. Hang on as you are. I'll manage." And before Daisy had grasped what she was going to do, Tom had twisted round, still doubled, and was slowly straightening herself. It was an effort, but Daisy was quick to grasp what she was after. With a silent prayer for help, the prefect forced herself to lift the injured arm, and use it, too. It was over in a moment or so, but Daisy felt sick with pain when Tom stood back and put a hand under Elfie's foot.

"Now you're all right, Elfie," she said. "Come on; let's get to the road."

"Go carefully, Tom," Daisy warned her. "We can't risk anything more."

"I'll watch my step. Don't you worry," was the reassuring reply.

Somehow they got to the post office. Then Daisy leaned against the low wall that surrounded the little garden, easing Elfie on to it. "Tom, you go and ask them to ring up school from here," she said in a half-whisper. "What an idiot I was not to think of it before! You all right, Elfie?" Tom, releasing Elfie's foot, darted through the snow now falling rapidly, and made for the little house.

"Yes; it doesn't hurt—quite so much," gasped Elfie.

Daisy slipped a hand under her knee. "I'll hold it up for you. It'll be all right now. Someone will come in a very short while, and we'll get you into Matey's hands in less than an hour. Just hang on till the—Mercy! Is Tom going to batter the door down?" as a violent knocking reached them. "What *can* be the matter? Are they all asleep there?"

There was something very much the matter, as Daisy learnt five minutes later. Tom came back, looking scared, to say that she could get no answer at all. She had gone round the house and peered in at the windows and, though there was a fire in the kitchen, she could see no one.

"They must be all out," she said.

"Out? But they *can't* be!" returned Daisy sharply. "That's one thing you can't do if you're in charge of a post office—go away and leave it. You've got to be on hand to attend to phone calls and so on."

"Well, I can't make anyone hear. What shall I do?" asked Tom.

"Here, stand by Elfie, and I'll see if I can get through to them." Daisy returned. "Put your hand under her leg to keep the foot up. I won't be a minute or so."

Although Daisy sounded a positive drum-roll with the knocker, she got no answer. She went round the house, and found that the fire Tom had seen was nearly out. It seemed quite clear that no one was at home. Moreover, all the windows were not only latched, but had screws through the sashes, so there was no hope of getting in short of smashing the glass, and Daisy felt that that was more than she dared do. Sick at heart, she went back to the two younger girls. The snow was now whirling madly down, and she knew that they must not stand there. How she and Tom were to get Elfie over the two miles or so to the lodge gates was more than she could think.

"What shall we do?" asked Tom, who was standing with one arm round Elfie, the other hand holding up the poor foot.

"Do the best we can," snapped Daisy. "Good *night!* Elfie's asleep!"

However, she roused up when they got her on to Daisy's back once more, for the mere moving of her foot sent a sharp sword of pain through it, and she cried out.

"You've got to stick it, Elfie!" gasped Daisy. "Come on, Tom. We definitely can't stay here. We must shift as fast as we can."

With slow steps they got down to the road, and turned along it. In one way, Daisy felt relieved. At least they were on the high road, which was in good condition, so there was less chance of anyone having another fall. Also, she herself was growing accustomed to the dull aching of her arm and shoulder, and felt she could plod on, so long as no worse effort was asked of her. Tom seemed all right. The cold had whipped a colour into her brown cheeks, and she went on steadily, despite the dizzying dancing of the snow flakes. As for Elfie, between the pain and the cold she was turning drowsy again. She hung round Daisy's neck, a dead weight, and if it had not been for Tom's holding up the bad foot, and so reducing the weight a little, Daisy thought dully that she could never have managed.

Plod, plod plod! Would they never get there? And why was it that nothing in the shape of a vehicle had come past? Daisy listened intently as she went for the sound of motor engine or hoofbeats, but nothing broke the silence except the occasional creaking of tree-branches overhead.

Tom was listening too, and her mind was also occupied with other thoughts. How on earth could such a sport as Daisy Venables was showing herself ever have been a sneak? It seemed impossible. And yet if she *hadn't* sneaked, how had Miss Linton known about them talking and signing to each other in prep? It was a complete mystery to Tom, and she kept turning it over and over in her mind as she went. Finally she came to the conclusion that she must ask Daisy herself as soon as she could. She couldn't let things go on like this.

"For she *is* being a blinking hero over all this," thought Tom miserably. "I know that arm's hurting like fun, and she's not saying a thing about it. Carrying Elfie can't be any piece of cake when she's got an arm like that! Oh, this beastly snow! I wish to goodness it would stop! I don't believe we shall ever get there, and if we are buried in the snow, this is England, and there aren't any St. Bernards to come and dig us out—except Mrs. Maynard's Rufus, and he's miles away at the moment." She stared round trying to pierce the mist of falling snow. Then she uttered a cry. "Daisy! We're here! There's the lodge!"

Daisy, roused from a nightmare of aching arm, a weight on her back that seemed to be getting heavier and heavier with every step she took and worried as to what was happening both at the Round House and school, lifted her eyes. Yes; there was the little one-storey house standing by the gates, which someone had set right back—probably in case the snow drifted them up and they couldn't be opened easily.

"Thank heaven!" she muttered. "I thought we'd never get there! Go on and ring the bell, Tom. Elfie's only half-conscious, I believe."

Tom gently released the foot, and struggled through the snow to the door, where she found the bell-handle, and tugged at it heartily. A peal rang through the house; enough to wake the dead, thought Tom as she stood, waiting for someone to come—probably Mrs. Williams. But no one came. The house was silent. Tom's heart sank. Were they to be disappointed again? Was Mrs. Williams away from home, too?

Daisy was leaning up against the fence, with Ellie half-seated on it. She had roused again when Tom let go her foot, and was sobbing with the pain. Tom rang again; and a third time. It was no use. The lodge was clearly empty at the moment. With slow steps she went back to Daisy.

"No one there," she said. "Mrs. Williams is out. D'you think we can get up to school by ourselves?"

Daisy set her teeth. "We've *got* to," she said. "Just give me a minute or two, and we'll go on again. It isn't so far now, thank goodness!"

Tom looked at her anxiously. "You do look rotten! Look here, Daisy, will you wait here with Elfie, and I'll run on to school and send someone to help you?"

Daisy thought. "Do you think you can keep to the drive and not wander off over the lawn?" she asked. "It's all right till you do get to the lawn. All this part has railings on either side, so you couldn't stray if you wanted to, but the drive goes halfway round the lawn. If you're not careful, you might very well get off it, and—well, that lawn is a fair size to go wandering over."

But Tom was paying no heed to the last part of her speech. "Railings?" she cried. "Where are the railings? There aren't any here!"

"*What?*" Daisy was galvanized out of the state of dull misery in which she had been standing, and she stared wildly round. "Where on earth are we, then? There isn't another house with a lodge between the Round House and school. Tom, you haven't gone far enough up the drive. Go a little—not far, mind!—and see."

Tom went. She trudged cautiously up the drive for about a hundred yards. Then she returned, shaking her head. "Not a railing in the place!"

"Then where in the world—Oh! I know what's happened! Tom, we've missed the turn, somehow—or rather, we've followed round the curve of the road into Upmill Lane. This must be Fairmeads, the Jesmond's place. We've still a good half-mile to go before we get to Plas Howell. *And* we've got to get back to the main road first."

"Would it be of any use to go up to the house and get them to phone to school from there?" suggested Tom.

Daisy shook her head. "No use at all. The Jesmonds are away—have been all the winter—and the house is closed. No; we must just try to get back to the high road and go on again. Oh, what a mess it all is!"

"If it's only half a mile it isn't so bad as it was when it first happened. We've come so far, anyhow," Tom said practically. Then she added with a look at the Senior's white face, "Look here, Daisy, supposing I take Elfie for a bit? There's next to nothing of her, and I'm strong. I can carry her quite well."

"*No!*" exploded Daisy. "You'll do nothing of the kind! You might hurt yourself inside. I can manage the carrying if you'll do the guiding. I've had this few minutes' rest, and I feel better now. Help me up with her, and remember that we turn *left* from the gates, and then *right* when we get to the main road. It's straight going after that till we reach the lodge. Elfie's drowsed off again, and I don't like it, but I can't do anything in the circs. Give her a heave. Thanks! Now on!"

However, help was close at hand. They had contrived to reach the main road, and were just beginning to make the best of their way along it, when Tom caught the humming of a motor. With a wild yell, she dropped Elfie's foot, thus rousing that young lady to a cry of pain, and bounced out into the middle of the road, waving her arms wildly. By a merciful Providence, the car was going very slowly. Otherwise, she might well have been run down. It drew up, and a man's head was thrust out of the nearside window. "Want a lift?" asked a voice which brought a shriek of joy from Daisy.

"*Uncle Jem!* Oh, Uncle Jem, it's you! Thank heaven for that!"

"*Daisy!*" cried the car's owner, deep dismay in his tone. The next moment he had flung open the door, and was out and advancing through the thickly falling snow to where Daisy stood, Elfie, still on her back, crying piteously now. "Daisy, what on earth are you doing here? Madge thought you'd have got well on the way home before the snow fell and would be there

now. Do you know it's after one? Here! Give Elfie to me. What on earth have you been doing with yourselves? Elfie, stop crying!"

While he spoke, he took Elfie from Daisy, and carried her to the car, where the rest of their party were sitting "goggling at us as if we were the special wonders of a freak show" as Tom said later to Bride. Daisy made no attempt to follow him. With his arrival and the moving of her responsibilities to his broad shoulders, the brave spirit gave way, and she sank to the ground where she stood, too weary even to cry. He saw at a glance what was wrong, and after ordering the other girls to crowd together and make room for Elfie, whom he laid down, he went and picked up his tall niece as if she weighed no more than his previous fairy-like burden. He carried her to the car, bundled Sybil and Nella Ozanne from the front seat, and put Daisy in their place. Then he turned to Tom. "Squeeze in," he said curtly. "Don't touch Elfie if you can help it."

Once they were safely in the car, and going, still carefully, along the white road, Tom felt better. She really had been wondering, however, how they were to get as far as even the lodge. Now all was well.

"What *have* you been doing?" demanded Bride from the corner where she sat with Sybil on her knee, and Vanna Ozanne on her feet.

"Elfie sprained her ankle, and the post office was all shut up, and we took the wrong turn. Daisy has carried Elfie all the way from the post office," said Tom. "I say, I knew we'd been a long time, but I never thought it was *so* long. It came on to snow when we were going down the lane. And Elfie couldn't walk a step after she'd hurt her foot."

Peggy looked at her with blue eyes limpid with pity. "Oh, you poor things! What a time you must have had."

"It was worst for Daisy," said Tom honestly. "She did all the carrying—wouldn't let me try even. Seemed to think I'd conk out if I did. And then I s'pose she felt she had to look after us. She's been a jolly good sport all round; I'll say that for her."

"What else did you expect?" Bride demanded with some indignation. "Daisy's always been a good sport. I've never known her do a mean thing or funk anything all the years and years I've known her!"

Daisy herself interrupted the conversation at this point. "There's the lodge," she said. "I never expected it to see so soon."

"It looks kind of—nice, doesn't it?" said Tom as they passed it and then went swiftly up the drive, for now he was off the road, the doctor felt safe in accelerating.

"I should think your *dinner* would look kind of nice," said Vanna. "We've had ours—at the Round House. But you poor creatures haven't had a thing since brekker except that choco and biscuits Auntie Madge gave us. You must be *ravenous!*"

"I could do with something," admitted Tom. "My inside's empty!"

"You'll get it very shortly," the doctor said, speaking over his shoulder. "Here we are at school. And here," as he performed a violent fantasia on the horn, "comes Miss Wilson to claim her lost lambs. All of you who can, get out and let her see you are safe. Daisy, wait till I've got Elfie out. Here's Matron come for her. Well, you two, did you think this crowd were all buried beneath drifts?"

"No; I imagined Madame would keep them all till you brought them safely," retorted Miss Wilson. "What's happened?"

"Daisy and Tom must tell you that. In the meantime, neither they nor Elfie have had any dinner. They'd better all go to San—Elfie *must*, in any case, with that foot of hers—and you



can have three lordly trays brought there for them. The rest *we* fed.” Then, as Matron bore Elfie off to the San, followed by Tom in obedience to a quick jerk of their tyrant’s head, he helped Daisy out of the car, and carried her in. “Judging by what that kid Tom was telling the others, Daisy has turned up trumps, but she’s feeling all in, Nell. You go and see about food while I attend to their injuries and so forth. The rest,” and he looked at them with a twinkle, “are all right, and may go to lessons as usual. And now for the San!”

## IT WORKS OUT WELL

It meant San for all three of the adventurers,—though Tom was out again as soon as the very bad cold in the head that she had caught was cured. Elfie's foot was a longer affair, and so was Daisy's arm. Elfie's drowsiness had saved her from much that Daisy had gone through. The sprain was a bad one, and made no better by the length of time it had had to go without proper treatment, as well as the prolonged carrying. All the same, Sir James Russell told his niece that her very rough and ready first aid had saved Elfie from an even worse sprain. As for Daisy herself, she had a very bad time for ten days or so. Quite apart from the effects of the mental strain she had undergone, the carrying of Elfie when one arm had been badly wrenched had made things much worse than they would otherwise have been. The pain was relieved when the arm and shoulder were strapped up, and a proper sling had been applied, but it was a good many weeks before the injured muscles and ligaments healed. Daisy had to give up her violin for the rest of the term, greatly to her master's disappointment, because she had been entered for her Final in the Associated Board Examinations, and would, he thought, have done well.

At first, she was put into the little, inner room in the San, for the whole affair had upset her badly, and she was very feverish and inclined to ramble a good deal for the first day or two. Then her temperature went down, and presently she was able to come into the big room to keep Elfie company, looking very washed-out and big-eyed, but more like herself. By that time, Tom's cold was over, and she was back in school, none the worse for the unpleasant experience.

Lady Russell had descended on them together with Baby Ailie the day after it all happened, and insisted on taking charge of Daisy herself. The school was charmed to have the pair of them, especially when the invalid improved so much that she did not need constant attention. Lady Russell refused to leave her for at least another week, and came into school and gave the Seniors a course of her delightful talks on English literature.

"I wish you could live here and give us these talks always, Madame," said Gwensi Howell one morning after an interesting discussion on Shelley. "The house is fairly big, and we could all squash together a little if you'd come."

Madge Russell laughed. "Sorry, Gwensi, but it can't be done. You forget what a large family I have in the holidays."

"But Mr. and Mrs. Bettany are coming home, so Peggy and Rix and Bride and Jacky will go to them for the hols," urged Beth Chester. "We know all about that! Bride can't talk of anything else, and Peggy isn't much better. That would leave you only Sybs and David and Josette and Baby."

"And Daisy and Primula," added Madge. "Yes, they are going to make their home with us again when the Bettanys have gone. They ought to, you know, as they're really Sir James' nieces. Mrs. Maynard will have a full house without them, for she and Dr. Jack are guardians to the McLeod girls as long as they are school age; and they certainly won't give up Robin Humphries. No, you people; it definitely isn't possible. I'll promise to give you a course during next term if Miss Wilson and Miss Annersley will agree. Miss Annersley will be back

next term, you know, so you'll have her again. And now I must go and see to Baby." And she departed to attend to her small daughter's needs.

It was after Half Term before either Daisy or Elfie came back into school, though both were allowed to have visitors before then. Elfie bemoaned herself loudly, for the doctors had forbidden all games or gym till after the Easter holidays, and as she said, "It's awful luck losing such things when you've made up your mind to be a physical training mistress!"

"Half a term isn't much to lose," said Daisy, who was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, while Elfie lay on a sofa and held forth to Tom and Bride, who had been permitted a half-hour's visit. "You'll be all right by next term, and then you can hoe in at tennis and cricket."

"What are you going to do when you leave school, Tom?" asked Bride suddenly. "I want to be a librarian, 'cos I love books so much. I'm going to Oxford first to get my B.A., and then I'll have to take special library training, and go in for the librarian exams. But it'll be jolly well worth it. I'd like," she added modestly, "to get a post as librarian at the Bodleian, or else at Windsor Castle. Something like that, you know. Or the British Museum wouldn't be too bad."

"You don't want much!" cried Daisy. "The Bodleian, Windsor, or the British Museum! Upon my word, Bride, you don't lack for cheek!"

"Auntie Jo says it's no use aiming low," Bride retorted. "Aim at the sky and you may hit the top of the tree! I'm aiming at the sky."

"So I should jolly well think. Well, I hope you may get it; that's all. What about you, Tom? Got any ideas about *your* future?"

Tom had. "I mean to be an analytical chemist," she said. "The Pater says he'll give me four years at London University if I can get through my Matric. I'll see to it that I do that all right."

"You're an ambitious crew," said Daisy. "I hope you get somewhere."

"What are you going to do?" Tom demanded.

"Oxford in October, I hope, and a three years' course. Then one of the big London hospitals. I'm going to be a doctor."

"Dr. Daisy Venables," said Elfie, trying it out. "It sounds rather nice, I think. Will you go to the San over the mountains when you're through?"

"I don't know. What I would like to do—if I only could—would be to run a hospital entirely for children," said Daisy.

There was silence for a little. Then Daisy stretched out her good hand for a fresh log to put on the fire. It was a bitterly cold night, for the snow had continued and the thermometer had gone down to zero. Tom stopped her. "I'll do that," she said; adding as she heaved one on, "You know what the doctor said about keeping yourself quiet till your arm was healed."

"Thanks," said Daisy. "There isn't any need to remind me, my child. I get plenty of that from Matey and Auntie Madge. There goes the bell for prep, so you and Bride must scam. Come back again to-morrow."

"You bet!" The pair made for the door, for they dared not be late, as they knew well enough there would be no more visits to San for them.

Three days later, when Elfie was back in school, and Daisy, who had been ordered to remain quietly where she was for another week, was alone in San, Tom appeared at the door shortly before supper. Daisy looked up from the book she was reading with a surprised smile.

"Tom? I didn't expect you after Elfie had gone, but I'm very glad to see you. I've quite missed you and Bride since I've been alone up here."

"I'll tell Bride and she'll come to-morrow," said Tom, shutting the door behind her. "She's got her comp on *Gardens* to write over again. Her desk shut up on her, and the inkwell fell out, and the ink poured all over it—the comp, I mean—and she can't give it in like that."

"What on earth were you all doing that the desk folded up?" asked Daisy with interest. "Those folders are steady enough as a rule."

"We were—having an argument," said Tom aloofly. "Oh, it's all right. The bell had gone for the end of prep. We were just packing up when it happened."

"I see." Daisy suppressed a grin. "Well, come and sit down, and try a piece of this fudge which Jo sent me this morning."

Tom accepted the fudge, and promptly became dumb for a minute or two. Jo had cut it up into large lumps. Tom soon disposed of it, but shook her head at a second piece. She had come to talk, and meant to get it over. You can't talk with your mouth full of fudge.

"I say, Daisy," she said, and then stopped.

"Yes?" Daisy replied. "What is it?"

"It's—well—Look here, Daisy, do you remember the night Anne Webster and I got into a row with you for talking?"

Daisy cast her mind back. "No; I don't think so. If I remembered all the rows I had with people for talking in prep," she added with a grin, "I wouldn't have much chance of thinking of anything else. Why?"

Very scarlet, Tom mumbled, "You ticked us off. And next day Miss Linton did, too, 'cos our maps were so awful. You *told* me to do mine over again, anyhow."

Light dawned. "I remember that!" Daisy exclaimed. "And I believe I *have* got a vague recollection of ticking you two off for talking, too. What about it?"

"Well, it's just—look here! Did you report us to Linny?" blurted out Tom desperately.

"Report you—for talking in prep? Of course I didn't! No one reports for a thing like that; not unless anyone goes on with it after being ticked off. What on earth made you think I did?"

"Well, Linny—said things to us about—about talking and signing to each other in prep," explained Tom. "I didn't see how she could know anything about it unless you'd told her."

Daisy threw back her head and shouted with laughter. Tom stared at her, not very sure how to take this.

"It wasn't so jolly funny as all that," she said half-offendedly.

Daisy sobered. "No; I see that. But good gracious, Tom! Miss Linton was at school herself. *And* she has a sister who was the limit when she first came. I could tell you some hair-raising stories about Joyce Linton and her ongoings! I was a very junior Junior then, but I've heard all about them from Jo, who was Head Girl of the school at the time. Gillian, I rather think—I mean Miss Linton, of course—" she added in some confusion, "well, she wasn't like that. And then she was fifteen. Joyce was only fourteen, and a lazy little beggar at that. She's married now and lives in Exeter. Miss Linton was Head Girl of the school herself later on, you know. She's taken dozens of preps as a prefect. And I believe Joyce told her a great deal as well. If you think the Staff here don't know what girls are like, you're jolly well mistaken, my child. Of course she guessed what had been happening. As for reporting you or anyone else for that sort of thing, as I told you before, we just don't do it. The Staff have enough to do with their own jobs without having to worry over things like that."

"Then," said Tom slowly, "I've been all wrong."

"You certainly have, if that's what you've been thinking," Daisy said briskly.

There was a silence after that, broken only by the crackling of the fire into which Tom sat staring. Then she made up her mind.

"I'm glad," she said briefly. "I—I thought you were a decent sort, and that sort of thing looked to me like sneaking. I didn't think you were a sneak."

Daisy looked at her curiously. "I hope not! Auntie Madge and Jo would have several fits if any of us turned out sneaks. But what put such a thing into your head?"

"Well, I've never been much with girls till I came here. Pater said girls didn't think about such things as boys do, and I'd promised him I'd try to be a gentleman. I'd thought you were one, too. And then I thought you weren't, and—and——" Tom suddenly ran down.

Daisy was thoughtful for a minute or two. "I see," she said at last. "Then that's why you suddenly took to being rude to me—for you *were* rude, you know."

"When you've thought a chap's a gentleman, and then things happen which make you think she isn't—well, it's a bit of a—a let-down," Tom mumbled, desperately embarrassed.

"Well, now you know you were wrong. But why didn't you come and ask?"

"I couldn't!"

Again Daisy became thoughtful. She was a humble-minded person, nothing in her life having happened to give her a great opinion of herself, but what lay behind all this was quite clear. "I know our crowd always thought a lot of various prees," she thought, "but I never imagined it would ever happen to me. And certainly not with anyone like Tom. It strikes me I'd better be very careful what I say or do. When she could get into such a state over a stupid thing like that row over talking, I should think I could very easily upset her for keeps. What a *ghastly* thing to happen!"

But Tom had recovered some of her self-possession, and was going on. "I wondered, you know. It didn't seem like you. Then, when we had all that awful business of the walk, and you were so jolly decent to Elfie and stuck it out with your arm hurting like blazes, well I felt that I *must* have made a mistake somewhere. I nearly didn't do anything about it, but then I remembered the Pater always says, 'Have it out, man to man,' so when I knew you'd be alone, I just came. And I'd like to say," she added with a gasp, "that I apologize for thinking you *could* sneak."

"That's all right. I quite see that, in a way, it wasn't all your fault. But Tom, do get it out of your head that girls aren't just as strict about sneaking and things like that as boys are. They *are*! At any rate, all those I've known are. I can only remember about two in all the years I've been at school who weren't; and one of *them* was a German and she'd been rottenly brought up."

"I think," said Tom slowly, "that perhaps the Pater was mistaken, too. Perhaps he hasn't known many girls who were gentlemen. After all, he hasn't any sisters or cousins, or things like that. And he and the Mater were *old* when they got married. They had to wait till he got a living, you see. And—you mayn't know it, but it's so—some of the old tabbies in a parish are the screaming edge. I'll let him know that in this school, at any rate, girls aren't like he thinks. Besides, I'm going to ask Bride to spend some of the summer hols with me, and Bride's a real gentleman, too."

"Yes; Bride's a gentleman," agreed Daisy. "But I don't know if her folk will spare her for the next few hols. You see, they've been apart so long."

The supper gong sounded, and Tom got up to go. "Anyhow, I'm jolly glad on the whole I came here," she said. "It's a decent school, if it *is* a girl's school."

“It’s the Chalet School,” said Daisy. She held out her hand. “We’ll shake hands on that, Tom.” They gravely shook hands.

“Good-night!” Tom left, and Daisy heard the clattering along the corridor and down the stairs, and grinned to herself.

“Thank goodness that’s over! And—I won’t swear to it, but I think I’m right in this—Tom Gay is really a Chalet School girl at last!”

## BREAKING THE SILENCE

"I just wish Miss Slater had to do all these beastly sums herself," Bride Bettany grumbled, looking in dismay at an arithmetic book which showed line after line of red ink drawn through her work.

"You goop! She could do things like that standing on her head—and get them right," Anne Webster told her bracingly. "She wouldn't be teaching *us* if she couldn't, now would she?"

"I simply don't see how you can be such a dud at maths." Tom Gay took a hand. "You're good enough at most other things, and tops in some. *Why* can't you do maths?"

"I expect I take after Mummy. She always says she never understood *tables*, let alone sums. Peg and I don't either, though Jackie loves anything to do with figures, and I heard Uncle Jem say that Rix could beat most boys of his age when he liked," Bride returned, still pulling a long face over the sums. "This will take me most of prep to get right, and I've loads of other stuff to do as well."

"Hello, Bride! What's the trouble?" asked a very sweet voice, and the three turned to find Daisy Venables, a beloved prefect, behind them.

"Oh, Daisy, just *look* at my sums!" Bride held out the book. "I did so want an all-round decent report to take to Daddy and Mummy at Easter—their first one I've ever been able to give them myself," she added with a charming disregard for both grammar and construction. "If I go on like this, though, it'll be even worse than usual—for arith."

Daisy bent over the book. "Why, they're just fractions! Bride Bettany, you don't mean to tell me you can't do those at your age?" she scolded. Then she relented. "Look here, I'm on duty with your crowd for prep and letter-writing to-morrow. Keep your corrections till then, and I'll go over them with you and see if I can help. Get everything else done to-night, so that you've nothing else to bother with."

"I can do my French and geography and comp, but I can't do my new sums. Miss Slater makes us do c'rrrections first before we do new work."

"Don't be an idiot. Do them in your scribbler and copy them in after."

"I didn't think of that. Yes, it's a jolly good idea." Bride's face was quite clear by this time, and Daisy, after a nod, went off on her lawful occasions, and the three finished collecting the books they would need for prep, which was due to start in ten minutes' time.

It was not usual for any of Upper Third to be ready. In fact, most of them preferred to spend every second they dared of the time between tea and prep on their own ploys, and then rush in at the last moment to grab their books helter-skelter. This, however, was Friday, and Hobbies Club night. Also it was the night when their form mistress *might* be moved to go round the lockers and inspect. Miss Burnett was a dear in most ways, but she was quite capable of dragging out of Hobbies anyone whose locker did not meet her requirements, making her take everything out and then put everything back tidily. It had happened only last week to Anne Webster, and that young woman was taking no chances. Meeting Tom and Bride in the corridor, she had suggested that they should follow her example, and they had done so.

There came a clatter of feet down the corridor, and half a dozen of Upper Third rushed into the room.

“Is my locker decent?” demanded Nella Ozanne of the others. “I don’t want to be yanked out when I’m busy. Besides, I’m gluing to-night, so I’d be sticky and have to go and wash first, and that’d be *more* waste of time.”

“Let me see!” Her twin Vanna pushed forward. “You’d better shove that atlas down at the bottom instead of on top. It looks all right except for that. Now look at mine.”

*Crash!* Primrose Day, another ornament of the form, had opened the door of her locker, and half the contents promptly cascaded to the floor, including her pencil-case and paint-box.

“*Oh!*” wailed Primrose. “Just look what a ghastly mess!”

“Serves you jolly well right for shoving everything in just any old how!” Tom told her severely as she came to the rescue. “Here; I’ll help. Come on, Bride and Anne. *We’re* ready, anyhow.”

The three picked up the books, and then Tom, after a swift glance at the locker, pushed its owner out of the way. “What a hurrah’s-nest! You pick up those loose paints, young Primrose, and I’ll fix this. If Burny saw it she’d have forty fits and take a running jump backwards! Bride, pick up the rest of those books like a sport, and I’ll pack ’em. Really, Prim!” as further inspection showed her the wild confusion of it, “you *are* a messy blighter!”

“I wasn’t born tidy,” Primrose said simply as she picked up the pans of paint and fitted them into their places. “You have to be born tidy to keep things as Burny likes them—specially when you’re always in a hurry. I had to rush to Matey for a tooth inspection, and I just slammed everything in anyhow.”

“It looks like it,” Tom grunted as she cleared out the few oddments left and began to tuck things in tidily. “Here’s that Latin book you were yelling about yesterday. And here’s your ‘Cornelia’.”

“Good-oh! I thought they must be in Lost Property, and I didn’t want any more fines, I can tell you. I’ve had to pay thruppence this week for slang already.” Primrose clutched the books joyfully.

Thanks to Tom’s swiftness and method, it was all done and Primrose sitting in her place, all her prep in a neat pile on the floor at the side of her folding desk, when the warning bell rang and the rest of the form tore into the room, pell-mell. Prep began three minutes later, and when Clare Denvers, the prefect on duty, arrived, only one or two stragglers were not in their places. Clare was easy-going, so she only bade them hurry up and settled down to her own work at the mistress’s desk.

Tom polished off her Latin with the usual ease. Educated by her vicar father for so long, she had been taught to concentrate on one thing at a time and get it done before she tackled something else. Mr. Gay had been strict in his requirements, and his tomboy daughter frequently turned up her nose at the wails of Upper Fourth, with whom she took Latin and mathematics, over the amount of work they were set to do.

On the other hand, French had to be taken with Upper Second, and she groaned inwardly as she took up her “Florian” and set to work to translate the half-dozen sentences Mlle Berné had given them for homework.

Bride, taking Daisy’s advice, finished her French verbs and geography, and then turned to repetition after an envious glance at Tom, who was working out an interesting problem on quadratics. Prep was half over, and she must hurry so that she could tackle those wretched fractions before it ended. Composition she had left for the morrow. She never had any difficulty there—unlike Tom, whose efforts were pitifully bald.



Suddenly the silence of the room was broken by the sound of a scuffle at the far side where the Ozanne twins sat behind each other, with Primrose Day beside Nella. Even as the girls looked up there was a wild squawk, and Nella, her chair, and her desk all crashed to the ground in a wild flurry of books, pencils, ink, and paint-box.

Everyone stopped working at once, and several people jumped to their feet—including Clare, who stopped the riot promptly.

“Sit down, all of you!” she said imperiously as she hurried across the floor. “Nella, are you hurt? Let me see!”

“She’s banged her head,” Vanna said—somewhat unnecessarily, as Nella was touching her head gingerly.

“Let me see!” Clare knelt down and pushed aside the long golden curls which had lost the big ribbon bow that caught them back from Nella’s face as a rule. There was a large bump coming up above her right eye, and Clare frowned as she surveyed it. “Yes; well, you’d better come with me to Matey. This wants attention, or you’ll look like a young prize-fighter in the morning.”

“Oh, Clare—*must* I?” wailed Nella, pluckily blinking back the tears that were rising. “She’ll send me to bed, and I did so want to get on with my furniture at Hobbies! If I go and sponge it with cold water, won’t that do?”

Clare shook her head. “Not after a knock like that. My good child, you’ll have a really ripe black eye by morning if it isn’t dealt with at once. Can’t leave that sort of thing to take care of itself.” Clare got to her feet, stooped down, and raised Nella in strong arms. “Can you manage to walk, do you think? Then come with me. Vanna, you pick up her things, and Primrose, you run to the kitchen and ask for cloths to mop up that ink. The rest of you go on quietly with your work till I come back. Now, Nella!” And she departed with an arm round Nella, who, between the blow and her disappointment, was hard put to it not to weep, though she gulped down her sobs as well as she could.

When they had gone, Vanna gathered her twin’s possessions together after she had picked up the chair and desk, and Primrose went to the kitchen in search of cloths, while the rest of the form turned its attention to its prep—more or less, and chiefly less. There was no talking. They knew Clare had put them on their honour, and the Chalet School was strict about honour; but there were little giggles, and people were restless, especially when Primrose returned with a bucket and cloths, and began to mop up the ink with due care for the evening velvet frock with muslin collar and cuffs which, like all the others, she wore. Ink, however, could not be permitted to stain the fine parquet of the floor. Plas Howell was only leased, and it was the pride of the school that the fact that they were there had not damaged the property as it might have done. So inkstains had to be remedied at once.

Primrose was still busy when Clare returned alone, having left the unlucky Nella to Matron’s tender mercies. She went to the little rostrum, mounted it, and then tapped on the mistress’s desk with a pencil. Twenty-seven pairs of eyes were fixed on her at once. Clare might be easy-going, but there was nothing wrong with her discipline when she exerted it.

“Take that bucket away if you’ve finished, Primrose,” she said. “Hurry up about it. I’ve got something to say, and I want you *all* when I say it.”

Primrose fled. No more than anyone else did she want to lose any more time. That would mean using up her spare time to-morrow morning. She hastened back, and when she was in her seat Clare leaned forward.

“Listen to me, all of you,” she said impressively. “Nella was tilting her chair when she fell. I thought you all understood that that was strictly forbidden? Apart from the damage you do to the furniture and the floor, there’s the question of the damage you may do to yourselves. If ever I see a girl tilting her chair again, either backwards or forwards, I shall make her stand for the rest of prep. Is that understood? It is? Very well, then. Get on with your work, and don’t waste any more time or you’ll have to finish to-morrow morning.” She sat down, and the form, sharply pulled up, gave its attention to work.

Tom finished her French ten minutes before the end of prep, and then, opening her poetry-book, though she already knew the sixteen lines of “The Pied Piper of Hamelin” which was their repetition, sat gazing at Blake’s “Tiger, Tiger” with eyes which saw no letter of print, but in a position which would have convinced Clare she was working hard if that young lady had been disposed to question it, and revolved a problem in her mind.

Every Easter term the Chalet School held a Sale of Work in aid of the big Sanatorium at the other side of the mountains. It had been begun in Tirol when the first Sanatorium had been established on the Sonnalpe at the far side of Tiern See, on whose banks the school had also been founded. When both school and Sanatorium had been forced by events to leave Tirol they had been reopened, first in Guernsey, later in Armishire, where the school had found refuge in beautiful Plas Howell and the Sanatorium had been enabled to take over a small cottage hospital, to which had been added wings and many wards so that now it was a big place indeed.

Both school and “San”, as the girls called it, were closely connected. The school belonged to Lady Russell, once Madge Bettany, sister of Joey Maynard, and still, to the school, their beloved “Madame”. The Sanatorium had been the inspiration of Sir James Russell, her husband, known to the girls as “Dr. Jem”. Many of the girls had come to the school in the old days because some near relation was a patient at the San. That custom still held good. One or two of the doctors attached to the great place had their homes around Howells village too.

The Sanatorium had several wards for children, and the girls supported a bed in each. Besides this, they always provided the funds for Christmas and Easter festivities for the little patients. Work was carried on more or less through the year; but during the Easter term they gave up their “Hobbies” evening, to making things for it. In the Upper and Middle school each form had its own stall, and the Kindergarten always ran a “Dip” in some form or other. Each form tried hard to outdo the rest both in quantity and quality, and the results were always good. Hence the anxiety of Upper Third not to miss a moment of the two hours allotted for the purpose. This year they had been given the toy stall, which offered them plenty of scope; they were determined to make it even better than the one Lower Fifth had had the year before.

Nella, who was keen on fretwork, had cut out the frames for some sets of furniture in plywood. Then she had stained and varnished them, and to-night she had hoped to be able to glue them together so that they should be ready next week for the little cushions she had coaxed Frau Mieders, the “Dommy Sci” mistress, who also took needlework throughout the school, to let her make. The Sale would take place in three weeks’ time, and Nella had hoped that if she could get on with the furniture she had already done, she might be able to add two more suites to the collection. It was a long and tricky job, however, and if she had to miss to-night’s meeting she certainly would not be able to do it.

Tom herself had made a doll’s house in the carpentry class which was her great joy, and had also produced a box with a fitted lid. Very ambitious, she had not been content merely to stain and varnish it, but had french-polished it. She had meant to finish the actual polishing to-

night—a tedious job, and one that would take some time. All the same, she was nearer finishing than Nella, and her only other plan had been to produce whistles made out of the pith of various trees. Sitting there, her legs thrust straight out before her, and her hands stuffed into her blazer pockets, Tom pondered the problem with a frown.

Vanna could never do the gluing for Nella. She was a wild scamp, who complained that her fingers were all thumbs, and her contribution to the Sale would consist of woollen reins with bells sewn on them which she had made with the aid of an empty cotton-reel which had four tacks knocked into one end—French knitting, the girls called it.

Tom knew very well that Vanna was no use with delicate jobs; but *she* could quite well undertake Nella's gluing. But her box! She had wanted to make a really good job of it, and it was a slow business.

The bell rang for the end of prep before Tom had made up her mind what to do. Clare gathered her books together, and stood watching while the younger girls put theirs away with due care for what Miss Burnett's eyes might see if that lady were moved to make a locker raid. Vanna finished quickly and came to the desk.

"What about Nella?" she asked wistfully.

"Bed," Clare told her succinctly. "That was a nasty knock she had, and Matey takes no chances."

"Oh, Clare!" Vanna wailed. "And she was going to glue the furniture she's finished to-night! She wants to do a kitchen set and another bedroom, but if Matey's docked her off to-night she'll never get it done. And she *did* want our stall to be decent!"

"Can't you do it for her?" queried Clare.

"No; it isn't my cup of tea."

"Vanna Ozanne! Where on earth did you pick up such an expression?"

Vanna went red. "My brother Bill uses it."

"Well, whatever *he* may do, you're not to use it here," Clare said with a sudden grin. She knew "Bad Bill", as his entire family called him. His cousin Beth Chester, the head-girl, was a friend of hers, and she had heard plenty about the doings of the gentleman.

"I won't," Vanna said meekly.

"See you don't. Finished, you people? Then run along and wash your hands for supper. Vanna, I'm sorry about Nella's furniture, but I'm afraid it can't be helped." Clare carefully refrained from pointing the moral against tilting. "Perhaps you can get someone else to do it. Isn't there anyone in your form who could fit it in? I should ask round and see." And with this final piece of advice Clare chased the last of Upper Third from the room, switched off the lights and shut the door. She gave Vanna a pleasant nod, and then hurried off to the Prefects' room, leaving her junior to race along to the Splasherics to wash her hands.

"You're awfully silent," Bride said to Tom half-way through supper. "What's wrong?"

"Thinking," Tom said briefly.

Bride took the hint and applied herself to the baked apple and left her chum to her thoughts.

Presently, across Tom's absorption, a few sentences from Daisy and Daisy's two chums, Beth Chester and Gwensi Howell, came to rouse her.

"When are the rest to know?" Beth asked.

"To-night," Daisy returned. "Rather a jolly scheme, isn't it?"

"Just like Mrs. Maynard," Gwensi agreed. "It'll put everyone on their mettle, and we ought to have a super show this year."

“The only thing is, I do wish she’d thought of it sooner,” Beth complained. “It’s giving us such awfully short notice.”

“Well, it only occurred to Jo last night. She couldn’t very well give us notice before she’d thought of it,” Daisy said reasonably. “Besides, I’m not sure that it isn’t just as well we didn’t know sooner. You know what some of those kids are in the Middles. They’d have been spending all their time on the Sale, and everything else would have gone to the wall. That age,” she added in an elderly way, “never *can* do anything by halves!”

“D’you know what the picture is?” Beth asked—“Pass the sugar, please.”

“Here you are—It’s a seascape by that artist, What’s-his-name Barras.”

“Oh, I’ve seen some of his work.” Gwensi sounded eager. “A seascape by that man would be tip-top for the form-rooms! And it’s so decent that it’s to be competed for each year, for that means every form will have a chance to have it for a year. It ought to ginger everyone up, and we should have some really decent stalls.”

Tom, sitting back-to-back with the big girls, wondered what all this was about. She knew next minute, for Beth spoke again.

“Is Bill telling us to-night? She is? Then I can see some intensive work after this. Everyone will want to be sure that her form stall is best, for everyone will want to be able to swank about having a signed Barras picture in her form-room.”

So that was it! Mrs. Maynard was offering a prize for the best stall. Tom’s mind was made up. Nella’s furniture simply *must* be done so that she could go on and make more. Then their stall would have a jolly good chance of winning, for they had some quite decent things already. She could finish her box all right, and if the number of whistles had to be cut down, well, that didn’t matter so much. But that furniture of Nella’s really was good.

“Smashing!” thought Tom as she disposed of the last of her apple. She looked round for Vanna, who was at the same table. That young person was looking very gloomy. She had asked one or two people if they could do the gluing, but they had firmly refused. Nella’s furniture would need very careful work, and they were afraid to tackle it. Why, oh *why* had Nella made such an ass of herself?

At that moment she glanced up and met Tom’s eye. The broad grin that character projected at her made her own brown eyes open till they were like saucers. What on earth was Tom Gay grinning like that for?

Vanna learned the explanation after supper when Tom caught her up as they were going along the corridor and, in defiance of all rules, whispered excitedly, “I say! I’ll stick those things of Nella’s together if you like. Then she can get on with the seats next time.”

“Tom! Do you really mean it?” gasped Vanna, her face clearing as if by magic. “But what about your own work?”

“Now then, you two! Rules, if you please!” said Gwensi’s voice behind them. “An order mark each of you, and don’t talk in the corridors again. Wait till you get to your common-room.”

Gwensi passed on, having done her duty, and the pair scuttled along to their common-room, not noticeably depressed. Indeed, it is doubtful if they had taken in what she said. Vanna was delighted to have found someone who would help her twin, and Tom was full of her own ideas. They went to the table where their overalls awaited them, and donned them while Beth and Daisy, the two prefects in charge of the junior Middles, unlocked the big cupboards where handwork was kept and began to distribute various objects to their owners. Bride, coming for her toy animal, was stunned to hear her friend say to Daisy, “Thanks

awfully, but I'm not having my box to-night. Nella's gone to bed, and I'm going to stick her gadgets for her so she can go ahead next time."

Bride said nothing until they were safely ensconced at their table. Then, nodding her brown head in the direction of the little frames, she said, "I think that's jolly decent of you, Tom. You're a gentleman—that's what you are!"

## BE PREPARED!

The prefects handed over the last half-finished toy, and then went to the small table where they began on their own work once everyone was settled. Tom, Bride, Vanna, Anne Webster, Elfie Woodward, and Primrose Day were all seated together at one of the small trestle-tables that had been set up all over the room. Besides the rose-pink, serge cat which Bride was carefully stuffing with shreds and scraps of cut-up stockings, Vanna's reins, and Nella's furniture, Anne was busy dressing a doll; Primrose was finishing a most artistic scrapbook; and Elfie was sorting stamps into cellophane packets. It had been her own idea, and she had pestered all and sundry for the past week for any duplicates they could spare. Each packet was to hold ten stamps, and they would cost twopence. She had manufactured the envelopes herself from cellophane covers begged from the kitchen, and she hoped to have at least three dozen packets.

"How are you going to show off those things?" Primrose asked as she arranged a wreath of flowers cut out from wallpaper patterns round the Christmas cards already pasted on her page.

"Daisy said she'd give me some brown-paper sticky and I could make hinges of it and stick them to sheets of cardboard," Elfie explained as she tried to decide between two stamps—"Where are you going, Tom?"

"To get some sandpaper. These edges aren't smooth enough," Tom explained. Nella had done her work quite well for a small girl of twelve, but Carpenter Tom was not satisfied with the finishing. She went to Daisy and Beth and made her request.

Beth, busy with some delicate painting on a white-wood tray, waved her to Daisy. "Ask Daisy: there's a good kid. I can't leave this for a few minutes or I shall get hard edges."

"What is it?" Daisy looked up from her leatherwork.

"Please may I have some sandpaper from the cupboard?"

"All right. But why didn't you get it before, when we gave out the things?"

"I didn't know I'd need it then."

Daisy got up and went to look for the sandpaper. She saw Tom's box standing in lonely glory on the shelf, and suddenly realized that the young woman was not working at it, a fact she had not taken in before.

"What on earth are you doing?" she exclaimed. "I thought you meant to get the polishing finished to-night?"

"Well, I told you Matey's sent Nella to bed, so I'm just sticking her stuff together for her," Tom explained unwillingly.

"Are you? I never noticed with all you folk milling around. What's wrong with Nella?" Daisy asked as she found the sandpaper.

"Banged her head, so Matey bunged her off to bed."

"I see. Tilting again, I suppose?"

Very red, Tom mumbled something, and Daisy let her go.

"That young cousin of yours has been tilting again," Daisy told Beth as she sat down to her work again.

Beth, her flower finished, surveyed it with her head on one side for a moment, and then turned to her chum. "What's that? Which young cousin?"

"Nella. Really, Beth, that kid's the absolute edge!"

"You're telling *me*! It's a weird thing," went on the head-girl as she washed out her brush preparatory to mixing a vivid red on her palette, "but, except for Paul—and he can beat the lot when he likes!—every one of Auntie Elizabeth's family is wicked. Look at Bad Bill! And the twins are a pair of little nuisances more than half the time!"

"Well, your own family aren't such little angels," Daisy said placidly. "Nor, may I remind you at this late date, were *you* at their age." Then she began to giggle. "Do you remember all the fuss there was when we three got lost down Gwensi's tunnel?"

"What years ago that all seems!" Beth suddenly put down her brush. "That was the year we left Guernsey and came here. How Gwen loathed us and the whole school in general, taking her home as we did!"

"I know. But if we hadn't, the Government would have collared it. And I doubt if you could tear Gwen from the school now with ropes and pincers!"

"She'll have to come to it after next term. Heigh-ho! You and she will be eighteen in a fortnight's time, and I was eighteen last June. How elderly it makes us all!"

"When I was ten and in Tirol, eighteen seemed a green, old age to me," Daisy agreed. "Do get on with your work, Beth. You'll never get that thing finished to-night if you don't."

Beth picked up her brush, sucked it thoughtfully, and eyed her design in critical manner. "I'll have to take one whole night for varnishing. This makes the ninth thing I've done. Where are you going *now*?" For Daisy had laid down her tools and got up again.

"Just going the rounds. Bride's in trouble with that moke of hers, judging by appearances."

"It isn't a moke—it's a cat. Don't insult the kid!" Beth called after her, but Daisy only waved her hand.

"What's the trouble, Bride?" she demanded when she reached their table at the far side of the room.

"It's his legs," said Bride sorrowfully. "He just *won't* stand up. Every time I try him, he doubles up at the joints. I've stuffed him as full as I can, too. But look!" She set the thing on the table, and it promptly keeled over on to its side.

"Let's have a look! Perhaps I can fix it," Daisy said. "Shove up, you folk, and make room for a little 'un!"

Tom and Elfie moved up on the small settee they had dragged to the table, and giggled, and Daisy squeezed in beside them, lifted the cat, and inspected him thoroughly.

"Where's your wires?" she asked. "And why didn't you put cardboard rounds for the base of his feet? You can't expect the poor thing to stand up if he hasn't any proper support. We'll unpack him and start over again. What are you using? Oh—that. Well, we'll see if we can cure him of his fainting tendencies." Whereat the five Middles giggled whole-heartedly.

She began to rake out the scraps with which he was stuffed, and when the case was empty looked round. "I'll go and get some pasteboard and wire. He'll never stand without. Shan't be a minute!"

She dashed from the room, and Bride, surveying the case contentedly, said, "It'll be all right now. I was an idiot to forget about the wire, but Daisy will fix him."

"Daisy's a sport," said Primrose with conviction as she pressed blotting-paper down on the last bit of her wreath. "How's that, everyone?"

"Smashing!" said Tom, craning her neck to see.

“If Daisy or Beth hears you say that, you’ll be fined,” Elfie said warningly. “What are you charging for the book, Prim? I’d rather like it for my kid sister’s birthday.”

“I haven’t an idea. Herr Laubach is going to look at it and the others and tell me what to put,” said Primrose cheerfully. “This makes the third. But these wreaths take an awful lot of doing.”

“They must,” Bride agreed. “Here’s Daisy! ’Ware slang, Tom!”

Daisy returned with some odd lengths of stout wire and a sheet of pasteboard which she handed to Bride. “Get a ha’penny, and draw four rounds on this. Then cut them out. I’ll stuff his tail while you’re doing that.” She glanced round the table. “That scrapbook’s going to be a thing of beauty, Primrose. Auntie Jo will want it for the triplets and Stephen. How many stamps now, Elfie?”

“Twenty-seven packets done, and these left over,” said Elfie.

“Well, it’s quite a good idea, though you’ve been a maddening brat for the past few days.” Daisy fell silent for a minute or two while she stuffed the tail till it stood out stiffly. “It’s a pity I couldn’t scrounge more wire,” she said presently. “His tail should have stood upright. But that was all I could get.”

“Here are the rounds,” Bride said, giving them to her. “What next?”

“Put them into the feet—like this.” And Daisy showed her.

Bride did as she was told, and then Daisy explained about the wires and showed her how to use them, finishing off one leg herself. “Now you do the others,” she commanded. “Is this all the stuffing you have? My good child, there’s not nearly enough there!”

“Matey said she’d given me every shred she could find,” said Bride, looking apprehensive. “What shall I do, Daisy?”

“It’s a pity you couldn’t get sawdust,” suggested Tom, who had finished her rubbing and was now beginning to glue the frames together.

“It wouldn’t be any use. That stuff’s too loosely woven. It would leak through in no time.” Daisy looked at the thing pensively. Then she jumped up again. “I’ve got it—cotton-wool!”

“But I haven’t any,” Bride protested.

“No; but Matey has. I’ll just pop up to her and buy some. You can pay me back later, Bride.”

“It *will* be later,” said Bride with a giggle. “I’ve only my church c’llections, and stamps, and——” She suddenly dried up.

“Oh, well, it can wait till the hols. I’ll go and get the wool.” Daisy ran from the room again, and Tom asked inquisitively, “What’s the other thing you’ve got cash for?”

“Daisy’s birthday. It’s in a fortnight’s time.”

“What on earth do you want to give her a present for? Oh, I know she’s an awful sport, but I think giving presents is soft and sentimental unless it’s to relatives; and then you can’t help yourself.”

“Well, so Daisy is a relative!” flashed Bride. “She’s my cousin—and so’s Primula. I told you so ages ago.”

“Oh, sorry! So you did. But there’s been such crowds of things happening I forgot all about it,” Tom apologized.

Bride calmed down. “I s’pose when you come to school for the first time it does rather feel like that, though I don’t remember it,” she said with her usual amiability. “And then, of course, you had all that business in the snowstorm before half-term. But as for giving presents,



I agree with you. It *is* soft unless it's to cousins and aunts and *family*. Besides," she added practically, "I couldn't run to it, even if I wanted—which I jolly well *don't*!"

"What are you giving her?" asked Primrose from the other side of the table.

"A new address book. I heard her say she'd have to have one for when she goes to Oxford, so I thought it'd be a jolly good idea."

"What's she going to do at Oxford?" Tom asked.

"Learn to be a doctor—medicine, I mean."

"Rather she than me," observed Vanna the lazy as she bit off her thread and held up a lurid pair of reins for general admiration. "There! How's that, everyone?"

"Lovely!" said Bride. "I'm going to have a pair of those for our kiddy twins. Must take them something when it's the first time I've ever seen them." And Bride, whose parents had been in India for the greater part of her short life, so that she had never even seen the twin brother and sister born a few months after they had arrived there eight years before, beamed round on everyone. "Isn't it marvellous to think Peg and I will have them all at last?" she added.

Her friends grinned sympathetically, though Vanna said severely, "You do know what they look like, 'cos you've had photos of them."

"Oh—photos!" Bride was at her most scornful. "Photos aren't much use, really."

Daisy came back then with a pound packet of cotton-wool, and they dropped the subject for chatter about the Sale while she opened the packet and showed Bride how to cut, roll, and pack the wool. Bride was quick at grasping what was wanted and once she felt that her young cousin was all right, Daisy left them and went back to her own neglected work.

Presently Beth took her turn at inspection. She strolled round the room, pausing now and then to give help where it was needed. Finally she came to the table where the five were working and talking as hard as they could. She stopped to look at Primrose's scrapbook, and commended its artistic pages heartily. "It's really a lovely thing, Primrose. Quite the prettiest scrapbook I've ever seen."

Primrose blushed. "D'you really like it?" she asked shyly.

"I should think I do! Those wreaths are simply wizard, and they make such a beautiful finish to the pages. I only hope that the kid that gets it appreciates it properly."

Then she looked at the little chair-frames Tom had been assembling with her usual deftness and speed. A long whistle broke from her.

"Do you mean to tell me that that kid Nella cut those?" she asked incredulously. "She did?" as an indignant chorus assured her of the fact. "Then all I can say is Auntie and Uncle should have her properly trained. I shouldn't have thought she had it in her." She picked up a little chair and looked.

"Do you know if the sets are to be sold separately or in one lot?"

"She *wants* to do another bedroom and a kitchen," Vanna explained. "When they could be sold to furnish a complete house. Why, Beth?"

Beth laughed. "If that's her idea, it'll be beyond me. If she'd been selling them in separate sets I'd have bought one for Babs," she said, referring to her five-year-old sister at home. "She rather likes playing with our old doll's house, and her birthday's in May."

"I remember." Vanna looked grave. Babs Chester was a frail, little mortal, the only delicate member of the large Chester family—indeed, of all the cousins. The five knew that though Nancy, the second of the Chester girls, at present at home recovering from a broken

leg and arm, the result of a wild prank during the Christmas holidays, often talked of the time when Janice, the seven-months baby should come to school, she never hinted at it for Babs.

“Couldn’t Nella take an order?” practical Tom suggested. “If she did that, you could pay her, Beth, and the money could go to the stall, and Nella could make the things in the hols.”

“That’s a good idea, Tom. What about it, Vanna? Think Nella would, undertake it?” Beth turned to her little cousin.

“Certain sure she would! I’ll tell her when I see her. She’s only banged her head a bit, and nearly got a black eye.”

“So I heard. I wish you infants would try to remember about tilting. She might have been badly hurt.” Then Beth changed the subject. “Tell Nella I’d like to order a sitting-room suite for Babs. Our old one is a bit shabby and lacks legs here and there. If she’ll do it, I’ll give her the money on the day of the Sale.”

“Right-ho! Bill said they ought to be five shillings each.”

“If you mean Miss Wilson, I’d say so,” said Beth warningly as she moved on.

“It’s all very well,” Vanna said when she had gone, “but when you talk to Beth as a cousin you forget she’s a head-girl too—at least I do. Julie and Betsy seem to manage all right”—this with reference to two other cousins who were members of the Junior School. “I say! Those do look decent, Tom!”

“Well, don’t touch ’em till the glue’s set!” Tom warned her sharply.

Vanna hastily set down the little chair-frame she had picked up. “You didn’t tell Beth that.”

“Owl! Was it likely? She’s the blinking head-girl. I’d have been jolly well ticked off for cheek in two twos. She isn’t *my* cousin, you know. And come to that,” she added, “I don’t believe you’d dare, either.”

Vanna, who knew very well that she would *not* have dared to speak in that way to Beth at school, whatever she might do in the holidays, held her tongue, and choosing a virulent green began on another set of reins, while Tom, having finished the chairs, turned her attention to a little settee. Then a sudden shriek of delight from Bride startled them all.

“Look! He’s standing—he’s standing!” she cried triumphantly. “Look at that!” And she pointed to her pink cat, which stood securely on his four feet.

“He’s a rum colour for a cat,” Tom said critically.

“It was all the stuff I could get. When he gets his eyes and whiskers he won’t look half bad,” Bride said sturdily. “Tell me, everyone; do you think I’ve got enough in him, or should I try to *squeeze* in some more?”

Tom picked him up and pinched him thoughtfully, her head on one side. “I think you might get a bit more in his chest,” she said finally. “He’s really wizard, Bride. How many does he make?”

“Three—Auntie Madge has two more she’s keeping for me. I wanted to bring them back after the hols, but she said better not. One’s a rabbit sitting up. He’s blue. The other’s a dog. He’s squatting. He’s brown. This is the first I’ve tried to do with legs.”

Elfie slipped her last stamp into its case and looked up. “He’s jolly good. And that’s the last stamp I could scrounge from anywhere—unless the mistresses have any. Shall I have a go at them?”

Pat on the heels of this remark Miss Wilson herself waked into the room, and Elfie looked distinctly floored for a moment. However, if “Bill” had overheard what she said, she took no notice of it. Instead, she began making her usual rounds, pausing now and then to admire

some especial contrivance or neat bit of work. When she had finished, instead of leaving the room as most of them had expected, she wandered back to the big hearth and clapped her hands for attention.

“Spare me a minute, please, everyone. I’ve some news for you.”

Everyone’s eyes were promptly fixed on her. What was coming now?

“Mrs. Maynard—Joey Bettany, as I know a good many of you still think of her—rang me up last night to make a suggestion. She has bought a seascape by Adrian Barras, the artist who has a show in the Modern Galleries in London. It’s a view of Pleinmont, and she proposes to present it to the school, to be used as a prize to the form which makes the best show for the Sale. The form that wins it will hold it for the year, and then it will be awarded to the form that does best then, and so on. That means that every form will have a chance to win it in turn.”

“How absolutely super of Auntie Jo!” cried Bride.

“Pleinmont Bay, did you say, Miss Wilson?” Beth asked, her face suddenly glowing, for she had spent the first thirteen years of her life in Guernsey and knew Pleinmont well. “Oh, how wizard—I—I mean,” with a violent blush, “how very delightful!”

Miss Wilson chuckled. “I excuse you this time, Beth—Bride too,” with a glance at Bride, who promptly rivalled the head-girl’s blushes. “Well, now I’ve seen everyone’s work and imparted my news, I’ll leave you. It’s almost time you were beginning to clear up, isn’t it?” She glanced at the clock. “Twenty past eight; bedtime for most of you folk in ten minutes. Daisy and Beth, they had better begin to bring their work to put away. Oh, by the way, one more piece of news for you all. You are to have two extra nights at Hobbies next week so that you may do all you can. The Sale will be on us before we know where we are, now. That’s all. Good night, girls!” She left the room to a polite chorus of “Good night!” and the prefects adopted her hint and summoned the junior Middles to bring their work to be put away.

Daisy looked with admiration at the little chair-frames Tom handed to her.

“These really are jolly, Tom.”

“Glad you like ’em, but they aren’t mine,” said Tom. “I’ve only glued ’em. The real work is Nella’s.”

Daisy said no more; but when the half-past eight bell had summoned their charges upstairs she turned to Beth, who was washing out her brushes.

“You know,” she said soberly, “whatever else her folk may or may not have done for her, they’ve rubbed generosity and decent feeling into Tom Gay. To quote herself, she’s a real gentleman!”

12  
RAIN

The school rose next morning to find the rain pouring down in torrents. "I'm *sick* of the weather this term!" cried Daisy, glaring out of the window. "We had to cancel three matches because of the snow before half-term, and now we'll have to cancel to-day's—if St. David's hasn't done it off its own bat already."

"It has," said a voice from the doorway. "I've just been having a chat with Elsie Carr, their P.T. mistress—remember her in Tirol, Daisy, when you were a very small girl?—and she asked what the weather was like here as at their end it was coming down wholesale. I told her that hockey was definitely off, but offered her water polo in exchange, which she declined with regrets and thanks."

The Sixth shouted at this, and Miss Burn came in and sat down on a small table. Hilary Burn, ex-pupil and former head-girl of the school when it was in Tirol, was a great favourite with everyone, perhaps because she so frequently forgot that she was grown-up. She was a very pretty person, with a "Bubbles" crop of golden-brown curls, wide blue eyes, and a rose-petal skin. When she raced about the courts or playing-field in her tunic she still looked like a schoolgirl and not a mistress.

"What shall we do instead?" Daisy queried.

"If you take my advice, you'll get on with the things for the Sale. Also, some of us ought to begin to see about the dresses and so on. An *Alice in Wonderland* sale will take some doing!"

"Plenty of time for that," Daisy said. "But it's a good idea about the Sale. Will you put up the match notice or shall I?"

"You, my child. I've plenty of work of my own without taking on any of yours."

"Is the list for the stalls made out yet?" Clare asked.

"Apart from the fact that the scenes will be taken from the two 'Alices', I know nothing. There's the bell for mending and prep! I'm off to rub Elfie Woodward's ankle. Dr. Jem was in yesterday, and he thinks massage is best for it now. I've promised her I'll explain just what I'm doing and why, so I'd better go and think out how to put it into words of one syllable."

"Did she really ask you?" Beth laughed.

"She did. She's taking up P.T. when she leaves school, and she wants to learn all she can as she goes along—wise child! How is your shoulder, by the way, Daisy?"

"It aches a bit if I use my arm very much," Daisy admitted.

"Better come to me after Guides and I'll give it a rub."

"Thanks awfully. Jo said she was going to ask you about it."

"She hasn't done it yet." Miss Burn got up and strolled to the door. "I've had an idea!"

"Oh, what?" demanded a chorus.

She gave them a grin and shook her head. "You must wait. If it comes off you'll be quite pleased; I know that much!" And she escaped down the corridor, leaving them to wonder what she meant.

"What I like about Hilary," said Daisy as she picked up her mending, "is that she is always so jolly."

“Oh, definitely,” Beth agreed. “All the same, just try to take a liberty with her and she leaves you wondering how much is left of you. What was she like in Tirol, Daisy?”

“A fearful sport! Everyone liked her. She was a jolly good head-girl too—the best I’ve ever known except Jo.”

“I wish I’d been at the school when Mrs. Maynard was there!” sighed Clare. “She seems to have kept things alive.”

“She did all that!” Daisy chuckled to herself; but when they asked her for details she refused them. “No time now. I’ve got to write that notice, and you ought to be with your forms or the kids will be pulling the house down. Lend me a pen, someone; I’ve left mine upstairs.”

Gwensi Howell came to the rescue, and Daisy dashed off the notice cancelling that afternoon’s match, and sallied forth to pin it up on the notice-board in Hall. As she turned away she was met by her young cousin Bride and Tom Gay.

“Hello,” she said. “What are you two doing here?”

“It’s all right; we’ve got leave,” Bride told her. “We only wanted to ask you if you’d get Beth to ask if Miss Wilson will let us do Sale this afternoon as there can’t be any match—not with *that!*” She waved her hand to the windows, down which the water was streaming.

“How right you are! Oh, I expect that’s what will happen,” said Daisy.

“Goody! We’ve lots to do, and if we could have the whole afternoon we might get it done.”

“How’s Nella, by the way?” Daisy asked, pausing before she went to take supervision with Lower Second.

“All right. Matey said she’d better not try to do any mending as she might go headachy again; but she’s up and with us.”

“Well, let’s hope it’ll be a lesson to your crowd not to tilt.” Daisy spoke austerely, and the two Middles looked sheepish. She gave them a nod and went off to her duty, while they returned to their form-room. They sat down to darn stockings—a much hated labour—and to join in the chatter that was permitted so long as they kept within bounds.

“Is it all right?” Vanna asked eagerly.

“Daisy says she expects so,” Bride answered. “Someone thread this needle for me, please. I can’t do it.”

Bride suffered from eye-strain, which meant wearing glasses for the next few years, and was under orders not to try her eyes, so two or three people promptly answered her appeal. She handed the needle to Primrose, and sat back in her chair.

“I only hope Daisy is right,” observed Barbara Smith, sewing away at a button. “I’ve got oceans to do to my dolls’ hats. I’ve just got twelve finished and another seven plaited, and I want to have three dozen—only I’m running out of trimmings.”

“Go and ask Matey,” advised Primrose, handing the threaded needle to Bride. “She generally has lots of bits and pieces.”

Barbara looked conscious. “I can’t very well. Matey isn’t loving me just now,” she admitted.

“What have you been doing?” demanded Bride.

“She dropped her tube of toothpaste in the dormy this morning,” said Leslie Pitt; a giggle went round among those who shared Barbara’s dormitory.

“It fell out of my sponge bag,” that character said defensively. “I didn’t know it had gone till I wanted to brush my teeth.”

“Well, anyway, you *dropped* it!” Lesley retorted. “No one noticed it till Matey came to rub Audrey Simpson’s chest with camphor oil, and she didn’t exactly *notice* it. She stepped on it, and bust it, and skidded half-way down the dormy and then sat down with a bang!”

Splutters rose at this. The picture of Matron, their much-feared if much-loved tyrant, sliding across the floor and then sitting down was too much for them.

“Shut up, idiots!” muttered Primrose. “You’ll have Beth cutting our talking if you make a row like that.”

They swallowed their chuckles at once, and Tom said, “Well—go on! What happened next?”

“Oh, Matey got up, glaring at us, and asked—”

“In the most *awful* tone!” interjected someone.

“Look here! Who’s telling this—you or me?” Leslie demanded.

“I was just letting them know what she sounded like,” Judy answered in aggrieved tones. “Tell it your own way since you’re so much cleverer than me!”

“I mean to, so you pipe down till I’ve done!” Leslie told her with dignity.

Judy subsided with a snort, and Leslie went on with her tale. “She asked who had been so careless, and of course none of *us* knew anything about it and we said so. Then Barbara came in, asking if anyone had seen her toothpaste, as she’d lost it and could only do her teeth with water, and Matey held it out—what was left of it—and said, ‘*Is this yours?*’”

“I’ve never been so scared in my life,” Barbara confessed. “She sounded as if she was going to *eat* me!”

“I’ll bet she did!” Tom spoke with conviction. “But if that’s what’s happened, you’re right. You’d better keep well away from her till she’s had a chance to forget it a bit. It hurts when you sit down like that.”

“It would have been worse if it had been Bill or Miss Burn.” Vanna spoke cheerfully. “They’re miles taller than Matey, and they’d have so much farther to fall, and they’d go with a *huge* bang!”

“Matey went with quite a huge enough one,” Leslie informed her. “She simply *glowered* at Barbara and then said, ‘You may go and get cloths and clean up this mess. Come to me for a fresh tube, and I’ll stop the cost out of your pocket-money.’”

“And she *has*!” Barbara sounded ready to cry. “She’s only given me sixpence instead of two shillings, and it’ll all have to go into the church c’llections to-morrow, ’cos it’s two thrip’nies.”

“What rotten luck!” Tom exclaimed. “I say, Barbara, if you want anything I can lend you a bob.”

Barbara shook her head at this munificent offer, and Bride cried in horrified tones, “She can’t *borrow*, Tom! It isn’t allowed!”

“Why on earth not? ’Tisn’t as if she wouldn’t pay me back. Of course she would, and I’ve got the cash and don’t want it specially this week.”

“Can’t help that!” Bride looked and sounded as austere as a round-faced twelve-year-old could. “We’re not allowed to borrow or lend money, and that’s that!”

“It’s awfully decent of you, Tom.” Barbara herself chimed in, “but I just couldn’t take it. There’d be the most ghastly row if anyone ever found out. No; I’ll just have to put up with it. After all, it’s only for a week; and I have stamps for my letters—luckily!”

“Why don’t you go to the School Bank?” Primrose asked.

Vanna answered this query. "If Matey stops your pocket-money for anything, the *last* thing to do is to try to get some from the Bank. Nella did it three terms ago—didn't you Nell?—and as soon as Matey heard of it she had her up and said—oh, *disgusting* things about lack of honour, and going behind her back. Nell hadn't meant anything like that, and she cried pints afterwards."

Tom thought this over. "I suppose it *is* going behind her back when you come to look at it," she owned. "All right, Van; I'll remember that."

"I hadn't thought of it that way either," Primrose admitted.

"Well, that's what Matey said—I say!" Vanna changed the subject hurriedly, for her twin had gone very pink over all this, "I don't know about *you*, but I've only got one stocking done and there are two left to do. We'd better get on a bit, hadn't we? If we're not finished, Matey might say we'd got to do it this afternoon."

This was a timely reminder. In their interest in the chatter no one had done very much mending. They set to work, and for at least ten minutes there was no more talking, rather to the relief of Beth, who had been on the point of speaking to them. Tom sighed heavily several times as she struggled with a hole in the heel of her stocking. Sewing had been an almost unknown art to her until she came to school, and only the fact that she knew it *must* be done kept her at it.

The bell for the end of this period rang at half-past ten, and they had to report what still had to be done before they put away their work and streamed off for biscuits and milk. Guides followed, those unfortunates who for one reason or another did not belong either going for a walk if it was fine or working under Matron if it were not. On this morning everyone had managed to finish, so Beth dismissed them in short order, picked up the literature she had been studying when her own mending was done, and departed to the prefects' room, where she found most of her own clan in a high state of excitement.

"What's going on now?" she demanded as she tossed her bag into the cupboard. "You all look very revved up!"

"Hilary's just been in," bubbled Daisy, forgetful for the moment that in school at any rate this was not the way to speak of *any* mistress. "What d'you think, Beth? She's rung up Jo, and she's coming this afternoon with the babes. They'll stay for tea, and Jo's going to give us a hand with things for the Sale. Isn't that super?"

"Wizard! Aunt Jo's always got such jolly ideas for things. It'll be fun to see the babes too. I haven't set eyes on them this term!"

Indeed, the whole Sixth were pleased. They were one and all devoted to Joey Maynard, who as Joey Bettany had become almost a legend in the school—or rather, since she was in and out as much as she could manage, her doings had. The stories of her adventures were legion. Jo, as anyone who knew her could have told you, was hardly a tranquil person, and even marriage and motherhood had scarcely calmed her down in many ways. In addition, her school-stories were among the girls' favourite light reading. Thus the Sixth went to Rangers and Cadets after their "elevenses" in a state of pleased anticipation.

Jo had been very little at the school this term, for her small daughters had all indulged in violent head-colds at the beginning of term and later the heavy snows of February had tied her to the house.

The girls were all in the big gymnasium when she arrived, trestle-tables having been set up there. Everyone was hard at work when the door opened and she entered. Daisy, engaged in

the trying task of fitting fasteners into a leather bag, tossed her tools aside and leapt to meet Jo with a cry of delight.

“Jo! Oh, Joey, it’s been such ages since we saw you!”

“I know; let’s look at you!” Joey put the long-legged girl away from her and scanned the fresh face with loving black eyes. “Yes; very well and fit. Where’s my Primula? Let me look at you, pet!” as a tiny girl of nine, with Daisy’s primrose-fair hair only cut short and very straight came running up.

Jo kissed Primula, and then greeted her other nieces and wards, the McDonald twins, before she wandered round the room, admiring and criticizing as she went.

“Where are the babes?” Daisy asked when at last Jo dropped into a chair beside her. “Hil—I mean Miss Burn—said you were bringing them.”

“So I did; but Bill met us and bagged the lot to show them round the Staff. Stephen was nearly asleep anyhow, so she said she’d put him down in her room for his nap. She’ll be bringing the girls presently,” Jo said. “What can I do to help?”

“Nothing at present. Just sit there and let us admire you,” Daisy replied as she wrestled with a patent fastener and the flap of her bag.

“What a ghastly suggestion! I should be shattered with boredom in ten minutes! Where’s Hilary Burn? She got me here, so she can just find me something to do.”

“Hello Jo,” said Hilary from the doorway where she had just entered, burdened with a large tray that was piled up with old calendars, pieces of glass, and other oddments. “So you’ve got here?”

“I have; and I hope you’ve got a job for me. Otherwise, you’ve brought me here on false pretences.”

Hilary chuckled. “Don’t worry! I’ve got a job for you all right! All these things have to be framed, and you are going to help me, my love. Come on and get sticky,” she invited.

Jo advanced. “Hilary Burn, I hate you!” she announced. “You know very well that my fingers are all thumbs when it comes to a thing like this. But I’ll sit beside you and criticize your work,” she added kindly.

“Will you indeed! Seat yourself in that chair and begin to sort out the pictures with the glass that fits them. That’s the first thing. And don’t, I implore you, smash any of the glass! I’ve had an awful time going the rounds and bagging every bit I could.”

“I can let you have some big pieces if you can get anyone to cut them to the size you want. I can’t do it. I did try once with my diamond brooch, but it didn’t work, though I’ve always been told you can cut glass with a diamond,” Jo complained.

“I think it has to be a diamond cut in a special way. Anyhow, make a start with these.” Hilary sat down at the table.

Jo began; then she glanced round as there came a babbling of very young voices and the door opened to admit the Head and the Maynard triplets.

The little girls, just four years old, rushed to their mother, all their tongues going at once as they bubbled out questions and comments. She answered them gaily as they clustered round her, and Tom, looking up from her work, decided that, except for Connie, the middle one, they were most unlike Mrs. Maynard, for Margot was honey-fair, and Len, the eldest, had chestnut locks and grey eyes, and all three had rosy cheeks; whereas Mrs. Maynard was black-haired, black-eyed, and possessed of a clear, creamy pallor. Besides, the children had curls and their mother’s hair was as straight as Primula Venables’s, cut in a level fringe across her brows, with big “earphones” of plaits at either side.



“The kids are awfully pretty,” thought Tom as she rubbed away at her box, “and Mrs. Maynard isn’t a bit really. But there’s something *in* her face that makes you want to look again. Wonder what it is!”

At this point the three, sent off by their mother to amuse themselves, with a warning not to be nuisances, made straight for her table and Nella’s furniture. One little chair already had its padded seat fitted in, and Nella was busy with another. The triplets crowded round with cries of delight.

Margot darted back to her mother. “Oh, Mamma!” she cried. “Just see what Nella’s doin’! *Please* mayn’t we buy vem?”

“There’s to be no selling till the Sale itself,” Jo returned. “You must wait for that, precious. Besides, where’s your money?”

Margot gave her mother a look from wicked blue eyes. “I foughted you might have it,” she said sweetly.

“Oh, *no*, my lamb! If you want things like that you must save up your pennies and buy them for yourself.”

Nella looked up eagerly, prepared to offer to make some; but the look Jo gave her made her return meekly to her work. It had never been any part of the training of the Maynard children to give them everything they wanted when they asked for it.

Margot pouted, but she knew better than to ask again, and Jo sent her flying across the room to see what “Auntie Daisy” was doing. Her sisters followed her, and then Nella demanded help with an obstinate cushion which would *not* fit into its frame, so Tom put down her cloths and turned to see what she could do.

It was a busy and very jolly afternoon, and when the warning bell rang and they had to clear away, everyone was declaring that more work had been done than expected, and certainly the trays, which carried all finished articles away to what was known as “the small stock-room” where they were stored, were well laden.

After tea, Jo swept off her family and raced it home to bed, while the girls ran upstairs to change into their velvet frocks, and presently came down to demand what they were going to do.

“Dancing as usual, I suppose?” remarked Beth to Gwensi.

“No—not to-night,” Miss Wilson said, overhearing this.

“Not? Oh, what, Miss Wilson?”

Miss Wilson laughed. “Wait and see. You people might go down to the Gym, Beth, and make sure that all handwork is cleared away. Leave the tables. You’ll want them later.” She looked provoking.

“What on earth can it be?” Gwensi asked as they threw on their hooded cloaks and sallied forth into the dusk of the March night.

“No idea. Something unexpected, though. It’s no use asking, Gwen. No one’s going to tell us when Bill looks like that.”

They left it at that, and went to attend to their task.

What the surprise was, they did not find out until supper and Prayers were over. Then Miss Wilson directed all Seniors and Middles to put on their cloaks and go to the Gym, while the Juniors played in Hall with their own Staff to look after them.

When the others arrived at the Gym, they found to their amazement that Jo Maynard was awaiting them, and the tables were set round with big and little boxes.

“This is my do,” she announced. “You sit two to a box, and I’m giving prizes to the pair who finish first.”

“Finish *what?*” cried Daisy.

“Making the puzzle. These are jigsaws—and while I think of it, do *not* lose any pieces. They’re all complete at the moment. Each form has its own table, and I’ve put names to each box,” she added blandly. “Now get cracking!”

The girls scattered with laughter. The next moment a howl went up from Daisy and Gwensi, who had sat down to a big box.

“Jo! This is a puzzle I’ve never even *heard* of! We shan’t have a look in!”

“Oh, Mrs. Maynard! How horrid of you!”

“Blatherskites!” retorted Jo, whose command of slang remained a perennial source of wonder to everyone. “You’ve as much chance as anyone if you don’t waste time squalling. Get going!”

It was an exciting competition, and went on till nine o’clock, when the relentless Jo called time and then went the rounds. In the end the prizes fell to Peggy Bettany and her chum, Daphne Russell, who were nearer being finished than anyone else. Jo patted their heads—much to their fury—and presented each with an enormous parcel, which on being opened was found to contain a hideous rag doll.

“Bimbo and Quimbo,” said the donor briskly. “They were to have been part of my contribution to the Sale, but I decided to use them as prizes for you instead.”

“Thank you, Auntie Jo,” said Peggy. “But if you think we’ll keep them, you’ve missed the bus! They’ll go to the Sale, and people can guess their names at threepence a go. And they won’t be the names *you* gave them, either,” she added.

“You rude brat!” Then Jo laughed. “All right; have it your own way. Now I must go to be sure my family doesn’t set fire to the house or something equally evil. Good-bye, everyone! From what I’ve seen this afternoon, it’s going to be the world’s worst business to judge those stalls of yours!”

The next moment she had gone, and the laughing Seniors cleared up the room while the Middles were marched off to bed—and quite ready to go for once.

## TRAPPED!

Tom stirred in her sleep and rolled over. She had been dreaming that all the toys made by their form had suddenly grown to life-size and surrounded her in a solemn circle. Round and round they paraded in a silence that was frightening, growing ever larger and larger, till she was scared as she had never been before. Then she saw a way out. Bride's pink cat suddenly stopped dead and looked at her with an amiable grin, and she thought that if she could only manage to slither through its wide-spread legs she could get away, for somehow she knew that everything else would go on marching, regardless of whether she stayed there or not. She hurled herself to the ground to wriggle her way out—and found herself lying on the dormitory floor in a welter of sheets, blankets, pillow, and eiderdown. In other words, she had been having a most ghastly nightmare and had tumbled out of bed. "That," said Tom to herself as she lay there for a moment, "is what comes of eating rich cake last thing at night. Wonder if anyone else is dreaming? Hang Primrose and her cake! If she smuggles it in, I do wish she'd give it to us at a decent time!"

She began to disentangle herself from the bedclothes, and finally stood up and regarded the muddle on the floor with disgust. "Now I s'pose I've got to make my bed again. Bother, dash, and blow! Oh, well, here goes!"

She stooped down, and began to remake her bed after a fashion. Half-way through she suddenly stopped and goggled at nowhere in particular.

"*What's that?*" she thought, the short hairs on her neck suddenly stirring as she stood listening.

It was a still night, with a full moon sailing serenely over the star-powdered skies—which was just as well, seeing that she had not dared to switch on the light. The prefect on duty always drew back the curtains before she switched off the lights, and the dormitory was flooded with a clear, silver radiance. Tom cautiously padded out into the aisle running between the two lines of cubicles, and along to the window at the far end, which was wide open. She poked a rough head out as far as she could to see if she could find out what the noise was that had caught her sharp ears.

Nothing was to be seen, but Tom was certain that she had heard something. She drew in her head and looked round. Everyone else seemed to be sound asleep. She appeared to be the only one to have suffered from the effects of the rich and plummy cake which Primrose Day had contrived—strictly against rules—to smuggle upstairs and hide under her best Sunday hat. They had all feasted lavishly on it after Lights Out. Primrose had pointed out that it would be stupid to leave any, as you never knew when Matey might make a tidiness raid. Far better eat it up and have the pleasure of it while the going was good! As Mrs. Day had intended it to last for at least two tea-times at their table, it had been a good size, and Primrose had carved generous hunks with a penknife. Standing there listening, Tom ardently wished that she had refused the last wedge. She was not a greedy child, but that cake had been good.

"I feel a bit rummy," she thought. "Hope I shan't cat! Matey would want to know what I'd been eating, and she does ask such gimlety questions! She'd have it out of me at the rate of no man's business!"

Then she heard again the noise which had first startled her, and all thoughts of being sick vanished. Instead, she slipped noiselessly back to her cubicle, arrayed herself in a manly dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, and then looked round for a weapon, for by this time she was fully convinced that someone had broken into the school.

There was nothing that would be much use in dealing with a determined burglar, so she gave it up and left the dormitory, hoping to pick up some adequate weapon in the corridor.

In the upper one the only things available were the fire extinguishers, and with the best will in the world she could not see how she could use one of them as a weapon. She passed them by, and reached the head of the stairs, shivering a little from both cold and excitement. Here she hung over the banisters, listening. Yes; she had not been mistaken. There was certainly someone about downstairs, even though Tom considered it must be the middle of the night. She leapt to the conclusion that whoever it was was after the things intended for the Sale. And the Sale took place on Saturday! If a burglar cleared up everything they had done, they couldn't possibly replace them in the time, and then the Sale would have to be cancelled, and a nice disgrace to the school that would be!

"And that," she thought, "is just what's jolly well not going to happen! I'll go and have a dekkko first and see if I can find out who it is before I do anything about it."

No sooner said than done. She mounted the banisters, slid silently down them, easing herself off scientifically at the foot, and then tiptoed down the hall, listening intently until she had located the place whence the sounds came. Just as she had thought! It was the little stock-room where all articles for the Sale that were finished had been stored. What was more, she could see a thin line of light under the door.

Tom withdrew as quietly as she had come, and retired round a corner to think things over as quickly as she could. Judging by the sounds, there was more than one person involved. She had been able to find nothing that would do to hit anyone over the head. Besides, if she did succeed in knocking out one of the burglars, the other would probably return the compliment on her. That wouldn't do!

Then an idea came to her, so simple and yet so sure of success that she felt like kicking herself for not thinking of it at once.

The little stock-room was really not very much more than a large closet with only a slit of a window at the far end, and that was wired over, as the place had originally been used for keeping extra stores. It was blessed with a good strong door, secured top and bottom by two stout bolts, as well as with a lock. If Tom could only shut the door and fasten those bolts before anyone could prevent it, it would be an easy matter to turn the key, and then the intruders would be well and truly trapped.

No sooner thought than acted upon. Tom tiptoed back to the cupboard and listened for a second or two to the confused murmur of voices that came from it. Then, very cautiously, she took hold of the door-knob, pushed the door softly to, and then stooped and shot the lower bolt home. The bolt needed oiling, and it made a grating sound that seemed to the wrought-up Tom like the screeching of a tramcar's brakes.

An unknown voice said sharply, "Who's that?" but Tom was beyond answering. She was beyond even finishing her task. She left the top bolt and the lock to take care of themselves, and scuttled off upstairs to her cubicle like a terrified rabbit. She swooped down on the last blanket and the eiderdown lying on the floor, flung them over the bed, and then scrambled under them, dressing-gown, slippers, and all, and pulled the clothes well over her head.

For some minutes she lay there, hardly daring to breathe. Then she managed to pull herself sufficiently together to push her feet out of bed and kick off her slippers. Three minutes later, worn out with nightmare, too much cake, and thrills, she was fast asleep again, and this time dreamlessly.

Meanwhile, from downstairs began to come strange sounds. There were calls and bangs from the little stock-room. But it was at the end of a little-used passage, and had no dormitories or bedrooms overhead so there was no one to hear. The sounds went on intermittently for a good hour or more. Then they ceased for a short while, to start again with a renewed vigour that finally did attract attention. Hilary Burn had been out for the evening, and had come in late. She had gone straight upstairs to her room and got into bed as quickly as she could, being both tired and cold. She had imagined that the latch on the door was secure, but it was not so, and the breeze, beginning to spring up, blew it open. Consequently, Hilary was roused from a sweet sleep by certain unwonted noises drifting up the staircase.

“Oh, hang!” she thought aggrievedly as she sat up and groped for her lamp switch. “Who’s doing what *now*? I must say I think it’s a bit thick to start games and fun at this hour of the morning!” She got the switch at last, turned on the lamp, and glanced at her watch, which lay on the bedside table. “Twenty to two! My guns and trumpets! Who *are* the silly idiots, and what do they think they’re doing? They’ll have the whole place roused at this rate!”

She got up, arrayed herself in her dressing-gown and slippers, seized her torch, and stalked off downstairs in a very bad temper. Like Tom, she quickly located the sounds, and turned down the cul-de-sac that ended in the little stock-room. There she remained transfixed, for she recognized one of the voices as Matron’s.

“*Matey!*” she gasped when she had recovered from the first shock.

There was an immediate silence. Then Miss Wilson’s voice demanded in infuriated tones, “Who is that, please? Open this door *at once!*”

Inwardly one large exclamation mark, Hilary directed her torch at the door, found and tugged back the bolt, and threw the door open with dramatic suddenness. There, standing in a group, all looking annoyed to say the least of it, stood Miss Wilson, Matron, Mademoiselle de Lachenais, head of the languages department, and—Lady Russell herself.

“Oh, it’s you, Hilary, is it?” said Miss Wilson; and such was her tone that Hilary mentally skipped back several years and shook in her shoes.

“Ye-yes,” she stammered. Then she pulled herself together. “I was asleep and the sounds woke me. Whatever *has* been happening?”

“That is what I intend to find out as soon as possible,” Miss Wilson returned in her grimmest tones. She turned to the others. “We’ll go to the library, I think. I left a good fire, so it may still be smouldering. Hilary, switch on the lights, please, and come with us. Matron, will you fasten that door behind you?” Then she stalked off down the passage and along the corridors to the library, which was also the Head’s room, leaving the others to follow or not as they chose.

The library grate proved to contain a few red embers. Miss Wilson threw on a handful of brushwood from the log basket, and when it was fully ablaze added a block or two, and in ten minutes’ time the fire was burning briskly. Meantime, Mademoiselle had gone to a big cupboard which was fitted up with a gas-ring and a tiny sink and tap, and was busy making fresh coffee in the percolator. Lady Russell curled herself up in a corner of the big settee drawn across the hearth, and Hilary, still seething with curiosity, went to help Mademoiselle.

Matron seemed to have vanished. However, she came back just as the coffee had “perked”, to report that everything seemed normal in the dormitories.

“I’ve done a full round,” she said, “and every girl seemed to be asleep.”

Miss Wilson, who had sat down at her desk, nodded. “Sit down,” she said briefly. “Coffee will be ready in a minute.”

Matron sat down, and then Hilary, bearing the trayful of cups while Mademoiselle followed with the percolator, was able to keep silent no longer.

“But what’s been happening?” she burst out. “Why were you all shut in there? Who did it?”

“That,” Miss Wilson said icily, “is exactly what I should like to know myself—and as soon as possible.” Her tone added, “And I intend to find out!”

Mademoiselle set the percolator down. “Me, I cannot understand it at all,” she said in her most plaintive tones. She began to fill the cups and Hilary meekly handed them round. “Voyez-vous, Hilairie, we go to finish the pricing that all may be in readiness for to-morrow. We are still busy, when we suddenly hear a scr-r-ree-eech! The bolt, he is being fastened! Then there are hurrying steps, and—that is all! We call, and we knock on the door with our fists, but no one comes. We tire ourselves, so we stop. Then we begin again, for it is cold there—Brrr! How cold!” At this point she shivered dramatically before she went on, “Then you come and set us free. Voila tout!”

“That’s about the size of it,” Matron assented as she took her cup.

“Well, I don’t know anything about it,” Hilary began. “I came back from Jo’s a lot later than I meant to. Jack said he would run me up, and I don’t doubt his intentions were excellent. Unluckily, half-way here the car died on us, and nothing he could do would make her go. He brought me to the door, and went back to see what he could do about it, and I came in. It was nearly midnight by that time, and I couldn’t see a light anywhere, so I concluded you’d all gone to bed, and went up on tiptoe to avoid disturbing anyone. I must have fallen asleep soon after lying down, for I don’t remember anything until I heard the noise you folk made—my door hadn’t latched properly and it swung open, or you’d be there yet, let me tell you! I got up under the impression that some of the Middles must be up to no good and came down to find out just what was going on. I really did expect to catch Middles,” went on Hilary, imp dancing in her eyes, “and certainly never expected to collect a clutch of our noble selves!”

Lady Russell, who had been sitting listening, suddenly doubled up in wild laughter, and the air cleared at once, even Miss Wilson chuckling unexpectedly, while Mademoiselle and Matron laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks. Hilary’s peals had to be hushed in the end, lest she should wake the school.

“Oh dear—oh dear!” gasped the Head as she fumbled for her handkerchief. “I’ve had a good many weird experiences in my time, but I certainly never expected to be bolted into my own stock-room—and that when Joey was no longer here! If she had been, I mightn’t be so surprised.”

“That’s a libel!” cried Lady Russell, mopping her eyes. “Jo may have done a few odd things in her time, and I’ll agree with anyone that she has never been anything but a stormy petrel all her life. But never, to my certain knowledge, has she so much as *dreamed* of making any member of Staff prisoner.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” Miss Wilson commented sceptically. “More coffee, anyone? Hand me your cups.”

“But there’s another thing I don’t understand,” Hilary said as she got up to pass cups. “What’s Madame doing here, anyhow?”

“I’ve come to spend the week-end,” Lady Russell explained. “Ailie can do without me more or less now, and Dr. Jem thought it would be as well if I had a few days away from home, so Miss Wilson invited me to come here for the week-end as I was coming for the Sale anyhow. The rest you’ve heard. Nell, can’t you find a few buns or biscuits?” she wound up. “Anything will do so long as it’s food. I’m hungry after all this!”

“I’ve got two or three scones left from tea,” Miss Wilson said, rummaging in a tin box. “Hilary, look in my biscuit-tin, will you? There should be some chocolate biscuits. If you want anything more, I’ll have to go and forage in the kitchen, for I haven’t anything else.”

Hilary turned. “I’ve got some small cakes Jo gave me. I’ll scoot and fetch them, shall I?”

“Not if I know it! You’d fall over your own feet and rouse the entire school,” Miss Wilson said cruelly. “I don’t know that I want anyone else to know of our predicament. It wasn’t dignified, to say the least!”

Then they all began to discuss the affair.

“Who could it possibly have been?” Lady Russell demanded as she nibbled her biscuit abstractedly.

“It’s a mystery to me,” Matron declared. “I’m as sure as I can be that the girls were all sound asleep when I went the rounds just now. I didn’t bother the Seniors, by the way; but girls of that age ought to have more sense than to play silly practical jokes. I don’t think they had anything to do with it at all. You’re right, Nell. We *don’t* want the thing broadcast round the school.”

“How they’d gloat!” Hilary chuckled, a reminiscent light in her eyes.

“Meaning that’s what *you’d* have done?” queried Lady Russell.

“Madame, I *ask* you! What would *you* have done?”

“Chortled madly! Is Joey to know, by the way?”

“Not if I can help it!” Miss Wilson left her seat and came to stand in a manly attitude before the glowing fire. “You know what Jo is, Madge—or if you don’t, you ought to! She’d never let it rest! Oh, no, thank you! Jo is to be the *last* person to hear of to-night’s mishap.”

“How she’d love it!” Hilary chuckled again. “Bill, I do think you’re mean! Think what a lovely chapter it would make in one of her books!”

“Not even to supply Jo with copy—not that I can see she has any need of it—will I allow any of you to tell her!” Miss Wilson declared firmly. “It *may* leak out, of course; but till it does, just be quiet so far as Jo is concerned, every one of you!”

“At the same time,” Mademoiselle added her quota, “I do not see how we can let such a thing pass without some remark. Voyez-vous, someone has left the dormitory after Lights Out. That means that one of our strictest rules has been broken.”

“I know that!” Miss Wilson sounded irritated. “It’s the sort of thing we’ve always set our faces against most severely. But what we are to do about it is more than I can tell just now.”

Hilary began to giggle. “It may be one of our strictest rules; but just the same it *has* been known to be broken. Do you remember that ‘play’ Elizabeth Arnett and her crowd got up on the roof of St. Clare’s when we were in Tirol? And I’ve heard a tale about Joyce Linton and a midnight she organized too.”

“Joyce nearly died of it,” Matron said reminiscently.

“And further back,” Madge Russell added, “there was the time when Jo, and Elisaveta of Belsornia, and Bianca di Ferrara climbed out in the middle of the night to affix snails to the

window of your immediate predecessor, Matey. That was in Briesau too. I must admit," she went on, "that there wasn't one of us who didn't loathe the woman and all her works."

"Quite right," Miss Wilson agreed. "I remember that episode too. But, Madge," she turned to Lady Russell, "you surely don't mean to tell me that those three young demons had any hand in the matter?"

"Didn't they just! I knew nothing about that part for ages, of course—not until after Jo had grown up and left school. Hasn't she ever told you, Nell?"

Miss Wilson shook her head. "Never breathed a word of it to me. The *imps*! Yes; that rule has certainly been broken more than once. That doesn't mean, though, that it isn't strictly forbidden. Something must certainly be done. But how to go about it is beyond me at the moment."

"Let's call it a day and get off to bed," suggested Hilary, smothering a yawn as she spoke. "I'm half asleep, whatever you folk may be."

"Don't set us off," implored Madge Russell. "Nell, let's go to bed. You people have work to do in the morning; and so, I imagine, shall I."

"Bed it is! Hilary, you might put up the guard. Jeanne, help me shove this crockery into the sink. We won't bother to wash up to-night. There's three o'clock chiming! Mercy! We shall all be dead to-morrow night as it is!" And Miss Wilson hustled them all round until even Matron's door closed on her, when the weary Head of the school retired to her own bed, too tired even to bother about how she was to find out who had bolted them into the small stock-room.

However, no investigations were necessary.

Early next morning, Tom arrived in the library to announce to Miss Wilson that she had caught some burglars during the night, and they were bolted into the stock-room.

"But if you thought you heard burglars, Tom," said Miss Wilson with the utmost gravity, though inwardly she was consumed with wild laughter, "why didn't you come to myself—or Matron—or another mistress?"

Tom said nothing. You can't very well explain to your Head that the reason why you haven't done the obvious and common-sense thing is because you and your little friends have been breaking a strict rule.

"Well," said the Head when the silence was becoming oppressive—besides, she was on the verge of wild giggles!—"I'll have it seen to. Another time, please use your common sense." She paused to get her muscles under control before she added, "Now run along, or you'll be late for breakfast. And, by the way, please say nothing about it to the rest or we shall have half the school imagining it hears burglars at night for the rest of the term."

Thankful to get off so easily, Tom produced the weird contortion she called "a curtsy" and departed—just in time, so far as "Bill" was concerned. That lady only just managed to restrain herself until the sound of Tom's footsteps had died away. Then she let herself go; and anyone not knowing would have had reason for grave doubts as to the Head's sanity if they had happened to come into the room in time to see her literally writhing in her chair with laughter!



## THE SALE

“Tom—Tom! Oh, *there* you are!” Daisy Venables, hurrying down the big entrance hall, grabbed Tom by the arm as that young lady was going in the direction of Hall. “Look here, my child, you haven’t given Miss Wilson the envelope with the name of your house, and she’s asking for it. Hurry up and get it, and I’ll take it. I’ve got to see her about two or three other things, anyhow.”

“Oh, crumbs!” Dismay filled Tom’s face. “I clean forgot about it, and I haven’t chosen it at all.”

“Tom Gay! You really are the limit! Have you forgotten that the Sale is *this afternoon*?” Daisy was so perturbed that she forgot to rebuke Tom’s slang and used it herself. “Well, before you do another thing you trot off and go through that list you’ve been waving around, and *do* something about it. And hurry up, too! The Head’s waiting, and she doesn’t like to be kept waiting.”

“Right you are! Where shall I find you when it’s done?”

“Come to me here—just by the settle. I’ll give you ten minutes.” Daisy looked at her watch. “And while I think about it, *print* that name in block letters, please. The writing of some of you kids is as bad as a jigsaw puzzle!”

“I’ll be seeing you!” Tom turned and fled to the form-room and her locker, whence she extracted the old exercise-book in which had been written out the list of names from which the one for the house was to be taken. Miss Dene, the Head’s secretary, had typed out three copies of it, to be laid on the table on which the house was standing, and people entering for the competition would make their choice from the list, Miss Wilson having decreed that the thing must not be left to chance alone.

The two Thirds had spent a lovely evening choosing names, and various other members of the school had added them, so that there were about two hundred from which to choose, beginning with Bride Bettany’s matter-of-fact “The Elms” and ending with Joey Maynard’s outrageous “Tomadit” which, she blandly explained, really stood for “Tom Made It”.

Tom squatted down on the floor and looked through the list. Finally she grinned, tore an unused leaf from the book, and carefully printed the name of her choice. Then she jumped up, rummaged until she found an envelope in which she enclosed the sheet, and after licking and sealing down the flap with many thumps of her fist, raced off again to hand it to Daisy, impatiently awaiting her arrival. That damsel took the rather grubby envelope from her and looked at it.

“You haven’t said what’s inside,” she complained. “Here—I’ll do it for you. Didn’t you realize that the Head has about seven others into the bargain: the weight of the cake, the doll’s name, and the names of those two awful rag things Jo made, as well as one or two more? Now hop, and see what you can do to help. We’ll never be ready at this rate!” And she dashed off at full speed, leaving Tom to scuttle away to Hall, where final touches were being put to the stalls.

It was a most delightful scene. In the centre of the room stood the White Rabbit’s House, which held the work of Upper and Lower Sixth—handcrafts of various kinds, from leatherwork and painted-wood articles to hand-thrown pottery, pillow-lace, and knitted

jumpers and cardigans. Upper Fifth had concentrated on needlework, both plain and fancy, and their part of Hall was arranged as the seashore, where Alice and the Gryphon meet the Mock Turtle. The “rocks” were made of packing-cases, chairs turned upside down, and heaps of cushions, all covered with brown canvas which had been painted in different shades to imitate rocks of all kinds—incidentally, the geography mistress vowed that she had never heard of a place which incorporated so many different eras of rock!—and over these, or drawing-pinned to them, were bags, cushion-covers, tea-cosies, as well as piles of plain work in the shape of overalls, aprons, handkerchiefs, pillow-cases, and quite a number of good ideas such as pie-lifters, which were merely two kettle-holders, fastened to tapes, stitched to a waistband.

Lower Fifth had concentrated on produce, and the last scene from “Alice in Wonderland” had given them the chance to use all their members. The various tables were heaped with pots of jelly, jam, and pickles; the prisoner’s dock had been filled with cakes; there were raised pies, buns, loaves of home-made bread. The judge’s seat was full of vegetables. It really was, as Tom remarked, a magnificent show.

The Fourth Forms, with a White Elephant stall, had chosen to represent the Queen of Heart’s Garden Party. Piles of books were built up to look like croquet hoops. The posts were represented by an enormous and hideous ware vase at one end and a bunch of old tennis racquets at the other. The sticks were aged umbrellas, elderly golf-clubs, and such articles; and the balls were paper ones, each holding something small unknown to the purchaser until it was unwrapped.

The Thirds had been awarded the Mad Hatter’s Tea-party, to their great glee, and between the cups and plates, and in the middle of the longest trestle-table the school could provide, stood their games and toys, Elfie’s foreign stamps, Barbara’s dolls’ hats, Primrose’s scrapbooks, and everything else they had contrived to make, including Tom’s box, which looked most professional. At the far end was a smaller table on which stood the house in all its glory, fully furnished, thanks to everyone in the form, with another table in front of it on which were the two “gardens”.

Seconds and Firsts had worked together, and the Queen of Heart’s Rose Garden, made of the boughs torn off the trees during the gales, turned into rose-trees by means of paper roses and leaves, looked very well with all the raffia and canework they had produced.

The Kindergarten had the “Lucky Dip” as usual, and they had the Old Sheep’s Shop. You bought a numbered ticket from one of the two excited people at the door, and then passed in to the “counter”, manufactured out of a kitchen table and sheets of brown paper, and handed your ticket to one of the attendants there, who searched through the shelves for the parcel with the corresponding number.

Tea was to be served in the dining-room by Special Sixth, who were very grown-up young ladies working for Inter Arts or Science, or else specializing in music or art. They had agreed to represent the “Alice” period, and all the crinoline dresses the school owned had been raked out for them.

Besides all this, there were various entertainments to be given in the Gymnasium, including a couple of one-act plays, a display of folk dancing, and a short concert arranged by Miss Cochrane, head of the Music Staff. There were competitions and raffles as well, and the school hoped that, by the end of the day, they would have a goodly sum to send for the beds they supported in the children’s wards at the Sanatorium.

Tom skipped across Hall to her own crowd, and stood to admire the tables and their burdens.

“I say! I didn’t know we’d got such a wizard lot of things!” she said to Anne Webster. “Aren’t those games of Miss Burnett’s super!”

“Awfully jolly,” agreed Anne. “And Barbara’s hats are completely nifty. I’m going to have that green one for my biggest doll, Ethelinda.”

Tom, who had never played with dolls in her life, grinned. “Nothing in my line. But I’m getting one of those games if poss. Well, what shall I do? Daisy sent me to do a spot of work.”

“I don’t think there’s much left,” said Anne thoughtfully. “Let’s go round the place and have a look at things, shall we? Coming, you two?” to Bride and Elfie, who joined them at the moment.

“May as well. We’ve finished our job,” said Bride; and the four promenaded round the room, admiring and criticizing with a point and freedom that might have given their elders furiously to think, if they had had any time to attend to their chatter.

“Well, I like ours best,” decided Elfie when they had finished their round. “The Sixth have some topping things—isn’t that cloth of Gwensi Howell’s *gaudy*?—and the other stalls aren’t too bad either. But there isn’t one of them has anything like the dolls’ house. Have you chosen the name yet, Tom?”

“Only just,” Tom grinned. “I’d forgotten all about it, what with——” Tom suddenly remembered that she had been told not to talk of her nocturnal adventure, and stopped short.

“What with *what*?” Bride demanded.

“Oh, lessons, and games, and everything else. We’ve had a rushed time of it lately, haven’t we?”

“*That* wasn’t what you set out to say,” Anne said shrewdly. “Go on!”

“I’ve said all I’m *going* to say!” Tom snapped.

Her chums glanced at her, and then gave it up. They knew Tom well enough by this time to realize that it was useless to tease her for any other answer. Luckily, the Ozanne twins came flying up to them, babbling about a knitting-bag they meant to buy for their mother’s birthday, so the matter was shelved, much to Tom’s relief.

Meanwhile, the Staff were hard at work attending to the thousand and one details the girls would never have remembered. Half-way through her task of cutting balls of string into various lengths, Hilary Burn suddenly stopped and looked across at Jo Maynard, who had come up for the morning, with eyes that were alight with wickedness and laughter.

“Jo! Do you remember our Fairy-Tale Sale in Tirol?” she asked.

“Rather! You were a Peri and I was Snowdrop’s Prince,” Jo said, innocently falling into the trap. “You were Snowdrop, Gill.” She turned to Gillian Linton, who was finishing off home-made carrier-bags.

“Wasn’t it fun!” Gillian stopped work for a moment.

“Yes, indeed,” Hilary agreed. “Especially when Jo tried to lay Bill out!<sup>[1]</sup> Remember, Joey *de-ar*?”

[1] *The Chalet School and the Lintons.*

“Hilary Burn, you obnoxious toad! I never did anything of the kind!” Jo cried indignantly. “I fell—and if that ass Corney Flower had used her sense, even *that* wouldn’t have happened. You know very well that she jumped off the far side of the steps just the moment when I was balancing *most* delicately, trying to get the chimney fixed to our cottage. Corney always was a

lump, and she shook the whole room, and of course I overbalanced. If Bill happened to be passing by, that wasn't *my* fault; it was *her* misfortune! You talk as if I'd set out to slay her!"

Gillian dissolved into giggles at the memory. "Remember how she sat there on the floor, crowing like a demented cock?"

The three shrieked so loudly at this reminiscence that Miss Wilson herself, busy at a far table with oddments of pricing, looked up to demand what the joke was.

"That *moppet* of a Hilary has just been reminding us of what happened when we were getting ready for our Fairy-Tale Sale at Briesau," explained Jo when she could control herself enough to speak, and even then her voice wobbled ominously.

Bill chuckled. "I can feel those bruises yet," she said seriously. "I've often wondered if you made a violent effort of mind and hardened your muscles and joints specially to do me a grave injury."

Mlle Lachenais nodded. "How scared we all were! And before that, Simone had let a hammer fall."

"*And* nearly brained you," Jo finished the tale. "Heigh-ho! What happy days those were!" And she sighed in her most elderly manner. "I wish we could have more fun like that nowadays! Wouldn't it be super?"

"Well, upon my word, of all the murderous yearnings I think that beats everything I ever heard!" cried Miss Wilson. "You aren't safe to have about, Joey!"

Jo grimaced at her. "You know better, my love! Isn't it time we went down to see what the little darlings are all doing in Hall?" she added, neatly changing the subject.

"In about a quarter of an hour," the Head agreed, one eye on the clock. "I told them 'elevenses' would be at ten-thirty sharp, and it's about ten past now. I propose we inspect just before. Meanwhile, as you have to go home to collect the family and have lunch, you'd better get on with what you are doing, and chatter less. Are you bringing Stephen this afternoon, by the way?"

"No blinking fear!" Jo had tossed aside all grown-upness and reverted to schoolgirl ways and language. "Jack has to be in this afternoon as he has some important letters to write, so he'll look after Steve. The girls will be quite enough for one poor creature to look after at a show of this kind." Jo turned to her task of cutting up large sheets of brown paper into smaller ones, ready for packing parcels, and "Bill", after a secret grin to herself, was merciful and took the hint.

By two o'clock everyone who was taking a special part was dressed, and the others were scrambling into their own velveteens, for the bell summoning them downstairs would ring at any minute. The Sale was to be opened at three p.m. sharp, but the first-comers would certainly arrive some time before then.

Tom, standing at the dormitory window, suddenly reported, "I say! There's a *herd* of cars coming up the avenue! And droves of folk too. Hadn't we better scoot? Aren't you people *ready* yet?"

"Can't go till the—There's the bell!" Bride made for the door in a violent hurry, to be hauled up by a passing prefect with the severe remark, "Bride Bettany! Form into line and don't rush! Surely you don't need to be told a thing like that *yet*?"

Bride went red and obeyed orders at once. Gwensi Howell was a strict disciplinarian. She waited till her Juniors were in line, and then sent them to the head of the back stairs, where they tailed on after two other dormitories and were followed by four more. The prefects standing about gave the order, and they marched down and into Hall, gaining their places just

before the big doors at the head of the room opened and some of the Staff ushered in the first visitors.

“What *sweet* dollies’ furniture!” gushed one lady, stopping at the Third Forms’ stall. “I really must buy a set for my little niece!”

“No buying till the thing’s been properly opened,” Tom said austerely. “That’s the rule.”

“Dear me!” said the lady blankly. “I see. I must come back later, then.” She moved on, and the Mad Hatter, otherwise Fiona McDonald, said reproachfully to Tom, “You needn’t have been so rude about it, Tom.”

“I wasn’t rude. I only told her straight,” Tom retorted cheerfully. “I say! Nella doesn’t look half-bad as ‘Alice’, does she?”

Naturally it would have been absurd to have an “Alice” for each stall, and the choice for the character had fallen on Nella Ozanne, who, besides being very pretty, possessed a mane of wavy, golden hair which responded very well to the “Alice” style. All the other well-loved characters from the two books were presented, however. Miss Phipps, head of the Kindergarten, had nobly sacrificed herself and was got up as the Old Sheep, complete with sock. She spent the entire afternoon in the “Shop”, knitting industriously and keeping a firm eye on the small assistants, who were nearly off their heads with excitement and importance.

Tom and Bride had been put in charge of Tom’s house, and they did a roaring trade, everyone being anxious to have at least *one* chance of it.

“We’ll have pounds and *pounds* to hand over!” Bride whispered gleefully to her partner during a momentary lull. “Have you any idea what it is so far, Tom?”

Tom, who had carefully piled up the money as it came in little heaps of one pound each, counted her piles. “Three pounds odd so far. It’s rather a good idea to let people take tickets and guesses before we begin selling isn’t it? Hi! They’re coming on to the platform, so I guess that means we have the opening now.”

The opening was performed by a charming, elderly countess, who, out of mercy for the junior saleswomen, spoke very shortly and to the point, and then declared the Sale open, and set the example to everyone by going to the nearest stall to make some purchases.

“All my stamps are gone,” Elfie informed her chums an hour later.

“We’re getting a fortune for the house,” Bride replied. “Auntie Madge had bought my pink cat for young Ailie, and some of Barbara’s dolls’ hats for Josette and my kid sister Maeve.”

“Lady Erroll snaffled my box,” Tom chimed in, referring to the Opener. “And she’s bagged one of the gardens as well. Are you two in for those idiotic dolls Peggy and Daphne shoved in?”

Bride chuckled. “Aren’t they *awful*? It was just like Auntie Jo! Oh, yes; I bought a ticket for one. I chose ‘Sempronia’ as my name. What did you have?”

“Adelicia,” said Elfie.

Unfeminine Tom shook her head. “Nix! I’ve no use for dolls. But I’ve got two goes for the cake.”

“I have one. It’s awfully lavish, isn’t it? I wonder how they got a tin big enough for it?”

“Now then you folk! Attend to business, please!” The three looked up. Jo was there, her triplet daughters round her. “The girls want a shot each at that house of yours, Tom. Now then, you girls! Choose your name!”

Bride grinned at her small cousins, licked her pencil, and said, “Come on, then? Len, you first.”

“Here’s the list,” said Tom, handing it over while Elfie went back to her duties at the stall.

Four-years-old Len took it gravely, and began to run her finger down the typed list of names. "I'll have this one, please."

Bride looked, licked her pencil again, and inscribed the name in her book. "'Thatched Roof'; right! Give your cash to Tom. Con, which do you want?"

Brown-eyed Con followed her sister's tactics, and pointed to Bride's own choice, "The Elms". "I'd like this one, please."

Margot grinned at her cousin. "I can't read," she said sweetly. "*You* choose for me, Bride."

"No fear! You've got to choose for yourself, and then if you're not lucky it's your own affair," retorted Bride, who knew her small cousin.

Jo came to the rescue. "Shut your eyes and dab," she advised her youngest daughter. "Bride will lend you her pencil."

This appealed to Margot, who took the pencil, screwed up her blue eyes and dabbed, lighting on "Les Fleurs", Vanna Ozanne's contribution.

They paid their shilling to Tom, who was cashier, and then Jo firmly moved them on after she herself had selected "The Hut" in the name of the Sanatorium. "The girls have 'La Maison des Poupées' and don't really need another," she said cheerfully. "Come on, now, you three, and visit the Old Sheep's Shop."

"Can you change this?" asked a very sweet voice beside them, and they turned to see the Countess waving a pound note.

"Yes—if you don't mind nearly all shillings," said Tom, beginning to count out change in a businesslike manner. "How many guesses, please?"

"Two, I think." The Countess took the list and glanced down it, smiling as she did so. "I'll have 'The Dene'; and this end one—*what* is it?"

"'Tomadit' ", said Tom serenely as Bride wrote them down.

"It means 'Tom Made It' really," Bride explained. "This is Tom," she added with a wave of her hand at the suddenly scarlet Tom.

"Did you really make it yourself?" Lady Erroll looked at the slim, boyish schoolgirl with interest.

"I made the house," Tom explained honestly. "The lot of us did the furniture, though; and Elfie Woodward and Primrose Day made all the curtains and sheets and carpets and things like that. I can't sew worth a cent, but they're wizard at it."

"Well, I think you are all to be congratulated. I never saw a prettier dolls' house in my life. I think it really is one of the best things in the Sale."

"Here's your change." Tom thrust the pile of shillings into her hands. "Will you count it, please, in case I've made a mistake."

Lady Erroll laughed. She counted out another eight shillings, and dropped them into the box used as a till, putting the rest into her bag. "It's well worth it," she said as she moved away with a last smile at the delighted pair.

"The ripping *sport!*" gasped Bride before she was well out of hearing. "I call that a smashing thing to do!"

"So do I," Tom agreed, hurriedly rearranging her money before turning to attend to another customer.

They had just finished with him—it was the doctor of the village—when a bell rang. The babble of talk ceased, and everyone turned to look at the platform, where Miss Wilson, the Countess, Lady Erroll, and Jo were standing.

The Head stood forward. "I have an announcement to make," she said. "Mrs. Maynard, sister of Lady Russell and one of our Old Girls, a short time ago offered an Adrian Barras picture to be awarded to the best stall and to be held by that form for the year, when it will be competed for again. We have now chosen the winners. Lady Erroll?"

Lady Erroll smiled charmingly at them, and then, after complimenting the school at large on the results of its labours, went on, "All the stalls seem delightful to me, but one stood out by reason of the originality of its contents. I think I need hardly say I refer to that run by the members of the Third Forms. The cuddly animals, the dolls' clothes, above all, the ingenious games and Tom Gay's beautifully made little house with all its furnishings, which, I am told, everyone had a hand in making, made the whole stall outstanding. I have much pleasure in announcing that the first award of Mrs. Maynard's picture is to the two Thirds. I understand that each form will have it for six months. Will the form prefects please come forward?"

Whole-hearted applause broke out; but even as Bride and Judy tried to disentangle themselves from the mob there was a scuffle, and then Tom Gay strode up to the dais and stood in her most manly attitude.

"Please," she said, "it's only fair to tell you that though it would be simply smash—er *frightfully jolly*—if we really had won it, the games weren't ours. Miss Burnett did those."

The Hall rang with laughter, and there was some clapping. Miss Wilson held up her hand to hush it, even as Tom, very red in the face, wriggled out of sight among the crowd.

"I was about to explain to Lady Erroll about the games," the Head said, rather flushed as she struggled with her own laughter. "Tom Gay has anticipated me, however."

Lady Erroll straightened her face. "In spite of what Tom says, I still think the Third have produced the best stall this year," she declared, "so will the form prefects please come."

Bride and Judy finally reached the dais and received the big picture with blushing pride while the throng clapped loudly.

When people had once more turned to the business of the afternoon, Lady Erroll turned to the other ladies. "An original young thing," she said, smiling broadly.

Jo chuckled. "Tom's the daughter of a father who is bringing her up to be 'a gentleman'," she said.

"Bill" nodded. "All the same, any of our other girls would have done the same thing—though, I must admit, not quite so publicly."

The ladies laughed again, and then parted, Jo to retrieve her family, and the others to seek tea.

At the stall the form told Tom frankly what they thought of her performance, but she remained unperturbed.

"I know Bride and Judy are a bit on the shy side," she said. "I was just saving them."

"Well, you jolly well needn't have bothered!" retorted Judy. "We've got tongues in our heads just as much as——" She stopped short, for Barbara had nudged her violently. Five people were waiting to register their guesses about the house's name, and others wanted to buy. Bride rushed to do her duty, and the others became busy, and in the turmoil the affair was forgotten for the time being.

At five o'clock the results of the competitions and raffles were announced. Jo's rag dolls were won by the Vicar of Howells village and Bride; a charming water-colour sketch went to a parent; the cake came to Jo, who promptly presented it to Miss Wilson for the school's Sunday Tea; and Lady Erroll won the house with the absurd name "Tomadit".

“I’m glad *you* got it,” said its maker when the Countess came to claim her prize. “You jolly well *deserve* it!”

“Thank you,” said the lady gravely. “I’m glad too. You see, I mean to send it to the children’s ward at the Sanatorium.”

“Why, that’s what Auntie Jo was going to do if *she* won it!” Bride exclaimed. “She *will* be bucked!”

“I must go and tell her at once,” rejoined the Countess, who had taken a great fancy to young Mrs. Maynard. “And as it and the little garden will be very difficult to pack, I wonder if some of you people would help me to carry them out to the car, and put them in the back seat?”

“Rather! Everything else you’ve got too,” Tom agreed.

So ten minutes later Lady Erroll followed a procession of girls all laden with her purchases and the bouquet the school had presented to her, with Tom and Bride heading them and carrying the little house between them.

“We took nine pounds eleven for that alone,” Bride said exultantly when the Sale was over and they were counting up their money prior to handing it over to the mistresses. “I call that a wizard effort!”

Later on, the Staff, checking up on the amounts, agreed.

“The best Sale we’ve ever had,” announced Miss Wilson as she wrote down the final total and handed it and bags of money over to a committee of Sir James Russell and two other doctors from the Sanatorium. “Unless someone has made a stupid mistake—and I don’t expect it—this year’s takings are £179, 19s. 2½d. Not a bad effort at all!”

Dr. Jem, as the school at large called him, fished solemnly in his pockets and produced a handful of change. “There you are, Nell!” he said, dropping a sixpence, two pennies and three-halfpence into the nearest bag. “Unless someone *has* made a mistake, it’s £180. Well done the Chalet School!”



## GENTLEMAN TO THE LAST!

Miss Wilson always said that it was just as well that the Sale took place on the last Saturday of term, thus leaving only three more actual school days to get through.

"The girls would never settle down to ordinary lessons after such an excitement," she declared; "or not without a good deal of fuss for all concerned. As it is, we've just enough time left to finish up everything on Monday and Tuesday, since Wednesday is packing and clearing-up day. Thursday, of course, can't count, seeing that the majority of them have to catch the 10 a.m. train from Armiford."

It was on the Sunday that she made this remark. Everyone was feeling very flat and rather tired, though the authorities, wise in their generation, had seen to it that everyone under fifteen was in bed by half-past eight the previous night and the rest had gone up at nine. Luckily, Sunday had been a glorious day, and after the morning services they had taken a short walk before lunch. This had been followed up by a good long one in the afternoon. Tea, with Jo's cake, had been a great success, and after tea came the usual services, and then supper and bed, so no one had had much time to grumble or squabble.

"Well, thank goodness there can't be any more excitements this term!" said Hilary Burn in reply to her Head's remark. "I've had all I want for once."

The younger members of the school had still not fully recovered from the Saturday when Monday morning arrived.

"I hate Monday!" groused Vanna Ozanne as she brushed out her golden-brown locks. "Old Testament—arith.—dic.—French—rep.! Ugh! All the horriddest subjects of the lot!"

"Dic.'s the worst," her twin agreed. "It's unseen this morning, too. Well, thank goodness all marks are finished for this term, so it can't matter awfully much that way."

The rest were of the same way of thinking. Apart from Bride, Tom, and perhaps three others, their spelling was what Gillian Linton had once rather aptly described as "impressionistic"; and she should have known, since it was her lesson!

This morning, it seemed good to her to vary her custom of giving them a passage from their usual book, and dictate lists of words instead. When you get "siege" and "seize" one after the other, you feel that you may be pardoned for getting tied into knots over the "i-e" problem. "Disciple" caused the downfall of several people; and "disc" was another stumbling-block. But, in the opinion of Upper Third, she crowned all her unkindness by desiring them half-way through the lesson to spend the rest of the time in writing down the meanings of the words she had given them.

"It's not much use your learning to spell them if you can't use them properly," she said briskly as she shut up her book. "Write down all you can without help. If there really *are* any you don't know, you can look them up in the dictionary. The big 'Chambers' is up there on the shelf. Put a cross beside each one you look up. Now I must leave you. No talking, please, and have them finished when I come back."

She whisked out of the room to keep an appointment made with Miss Wilson earlier that morning, and left a thoroughly dismayed form behind her.

Prohibited from talking, the girls looked at each other disgustedly, and then set to work to do what they could.

Bride, who could spell well enough but who found it difficult to express meanings, was very soon floored. Out of the twenty-five they had been given, she contrived to put down meanings for eleven. Then she sat eating the end of her pen and looking at “ensconce”, indignation rapidly rising within her. How *mean* of Miss Linton! She couldn’t even ask anyone, since they mustn’t talk. She would have to get that dicker and look it up, and of all things she hated the bother of hunting down the pages. There! Vanna had jumped up and run to get the big red “Chambers” which was the standard dictionary at the Chalet School, so she would have to wait!

“It’s foul!” thought Bride, using a strictly forbidden expression to herself. “Oh dear! What a horrid day this is! There’s not a single nice thing about it!”

There came a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of her elder sister, Peggy.

“What do you want?” demanded Bride as form prefect. “Miss Linton’s not here.”

Everyone looked up with relief. Anything for a change!

“She went away about ten minutes ago,” Vanna volunteered.

“But she didn’t say where she was going,” Primrose chimed in.

“She told us to write out the meanings of the words she’s been giving us for dic. and not to talk,” added Barbara Smith, while Audrey Simpson, a far from shining light, put in despairingly, “We can’t do it, either. Was it her you wanted, Peggy?”

“No—Bride,” returned Peggy. “Miss Wilson’s sent for us, Bride. Come on! I can guess why she wants us all right!” She screwed up her fair, little face into a knowing expression, nodded violently, squeezing her hands together, and then grinned.

“It’s more’n I do,” grumbled Bride, who had certainly got out of bed the wrong side that morning. “All right; I’m coming.” She pushed her chair back and followed Peggy out of the room, leaving most of the form wild with curiosity which they had no means of relieving.

It was hard work to go back to those tiresome meanings after that; but Miss Linton, though very jolly, could be stern on occasion, so they did their best. It must be said that the dictionary was in great demand, and as they had only one copy, some people were nearly dancing with impatience before their turn for it came.

Miss Linton returned just before the end of the lesson to collect her books and demand that the “Chambers” should be replaced in its proper place on the shelf. Then she informed them that Mlle Berné was busy and could not come for French, so she was going to read to them for a while.

“But first,” she said, “put everything away, and then sit up straight in your desks. Be quick! I’ll give you three minutes!”

When every book, pen, ruler, and piece of blotting-paper was out of sight, and they were all sitting very upright and prim in their desks, she said, “Line up at the door. Now then, a run round the front lawn and back, and don’t be longer than five minutes. Off you go!”

This was no unusual thing in the school, where health was the first object, too many of the girls having connections with the great Sanatorium at the other side of the Welsh mountains for the authorities to run any risks. Upper Third set off in the glorious, April sunshine, and when the last girl came back breathless their hair was tossed, their cheeks glowing, and all the fidgets shaken out of them. Lesley Pitt shut the door and sat down, and then Miss Linton produced a fat anthology and read them various story-poems until the bell rang.

“That’s all,” she said, closing her book. “Line up at the door.”

Tom put up her hand. “Please, Miss Linton, there’s nothing wrong with Bride and Peggy, is there?”

Miss Linton smiled. "It's the other way round. But it's their secret, so I'll leave Bride to tell you herself when you see her again—which will be very shortly. Meantime, go and make yourselves fit to be seen. I'm going upstairs, so I'll tell Matron I'm sending you up to tidy your hair. Run along!" Then she departed, leaving them to obey her orders.

It was not until they were marching in for lunch, however, that the two Bettany girls appeared. Tom, sitting next to Bride, could hardly wait until Grace was over and they were sitting down before she asked breathlessly, "What's happened? Are you two in a row?"

Bride was bubbling over with excitement and joy. "Oh, *no!* Oh, Tom, it's just too wizard for words! Daddy and Mummy are both in England, and Daddy came with Auntie Madge to see us. They've gone back now, but Mummy is coming this afternoon with our kid brother and sister that we've never seen, and they're going to stay at the Round House till Thursday, and then we're all going to The Quadrant together!"

"The Quadrant?"

"Yes—our new home; the one Daddy's great-uncle left him. They've been there already seeing it, but they motored to the Round House yesterday so we could all go home together. I told you about it before. Isn't it a thrill!" Bride beamed round happily on all and sundry.

"I wonder your dad didn't take you and Peggy out for the day," observed Primrose as she attacked her plate of cold meat and vegetables.

"Well, I did say something about it," admitted Bride, "but he said we were breaking up so soon it would be better to wait, 'cos he knew if we were once with them all we wouldn't want to come back, and anyhow, it wouldn't be fair on the boys. We *are* seeing them first; but Rix and Jack can't until Thursday."

"Bride, you must stop talking and eat your lunch," said Beth Chester from the head of the table. "Oh yes, you can! Anyhow, you don't leave the table until you do. So get on with it!"

Thus adjured, Bride lapsed into silence and did her best to make up for lost time; but behind the big glasses her grey eyes were dancing with excitement, and her face was pink.

"When did your folk get back—to England, I mean?" queried Tom as the plates of treacle pudding were being handed down.

"Last week—Wednesday, I think, and they went straight to The Quadrant to see if it would be all right for us to go to. They didn't let us know 'cos they wanted to surprise us, though Auntie Madge knew. She and Uncle Jem were the only ones who did. Daddy asked them not to tell us—Oh, thank you, Primrose," as that worthy dumped her pudding before her.

Then Miss Wilson's little bell tinkled, so Bride had to stop talking with the rest, and they all turned to look at the long Staff table running across the head of the room.

"Games for everyone this afternoon," the Head announced. "The Seniors will pick teams for hockey and lacrosse; netball for the Middles; rounders for the Juniors. At three you come in to change, and then you will have mending. We can't send you home unmended, you know! That is all. Finish your pudding, and then go for your rest as usual." Miss Wilson sat down, and the room buzzed with delighted comments on this change of the programme.

After lunch and the half-hour rest, all the girls streamed off to change their shoes. Matron had caught the two Bettanys at the dining-room door and told them to go and change into their velveteens as their mother would be coming at half-past two. They went off, both beaming broadly, and the elder folk smiled in sympathy.

"It's been a long time," said Miss Carey, the handwork mistress, as she and Miss Burnett went to the Staff-room to go on with reports.

Mary Burnett nodded. "More than eight years now. Second twins weren't even born. Bride was just a tiny, and Jackie nothing but a baby."

"And now Peggy and Bride are full-blown schoolgirls. I don't know what the boys are like, but I remember Rix, at any rate, as a regular imp when he was in K.G.!"

"Still is, if all Jo says is to be believed," Mary returned tersely. "Well, come on and do a spot of work. You can have all my reports to fill in, and Slater's are ready for you too, I believe."

Meanwhile, Hilary Burn was assembling her teams. She set the prefects to referee various sets, turned the Juniors over to Miss Phipps and Miss Stevens, the heads of the Kindergarten, and then looked round for someone to take over the last netball practice.

"Not nearly enough people here," she grumbled to Miss Phipps. "I suppose I must send someone to the Staff-room for assistance—*Joey!* The very one! Come and look after Lower Third netball; there's a lamb!"

Joey Maynard, who had suddenly strolled round the corner of the house, grinned amiably. "Not on your life! I came up to have a dekko at Millie and the kids. Apart from that, I'm under orders to take life a little more easily for awhile. Yesterday's effort was to be the last for some weeks. I'd better do as I'm told or Jack will talk!"

"Joey Maynard! You don't mean——?"

Jo nodded. "Good job, too. Steve's the only boy in a family of four. He'll be the better for a brother," she said serenely. "By the way, keep it under your own hat for the present, please."

"Of course! No; if it's that way you'd better *not* do any refereeing. I know what you're like when you do—all over the place like a demented spider!"

"All right; be as insulting as you like! I am going to the library to sit quietly and be a lady," quoth Jo haughtily.

"You—a lady! Don't try impossibilities!" Hilary raced off, laughing, looking about sixteen in her tunic. "See you later!" she shouted over her shoulder as she went.

Jo chuckled and went to the library to join Miss Wilson, who was looking nearly as excited as her ex-pupil. Peggy and Bride were not there. They were upstairs in Peggy's dormitory, which had an excellent view of the avenue, flattening their noses against the window-panes while Peggy put a last gloss on her silvery-fair curls.

Suddenly she cried, "There's the car! Come on!" And tossing her brush on to the nearest bed she tore out of the room, followed by Bride, and both went leaping down the wide, front staircase with a complete disregard for rules, to hurl themselves on the tall slim person who had scarcely given Madge Russell time to pull up before she had wrenched the door open and sprung out, to rush up the steps and catch the two in her arms and hug them as if she never meant to let them go again.

"Mummy—mummy!" they cried, clinging to her.

"Sure, I left babies, and here they are, two great, leggy things!" cried Mollie Bettany in dismay when at last they let go each other and she could look at them properly.

"Don't be an idiot!" her sister-in-law retorted as she came up the steps with her smallest Bettany nephew and niece holding her hands. "That was nearly nine years ago. You didn't expect them to stand still, did you? Peggy's thirteen, and Bride's twelve, let me remind you. Besides, you've had piles of snaps and photos, so you knew what to expect."

Mollie blinked away the tears which had risen to her eyes and laughed. "I know. But all the same it's a shock. Peggy, you're going to be like Daddy, all but your eyes. And Bride is the picture of my mother. Why the glasses, mavourneen?"

“She overstrained her eyes. The oculist thinks there’ll be no need of glasses after another year or two, so long as she wears them now; and she is very good about it,” her aunt said.

Peggy had been looking shyly at the little brother and sister neither of them had seen before, and they had been returning the look with interest. Now the small girl spoke.

“Mummy, which is which?” she asked in a clear, little voice.

Mollie turned, laughing. “I’d forgotten you two! Peggy—Bride, here are Second Twins. Maeve, this is your big sister Peggy, and this is Bride. You’re coming to school with them next term, and Maurice will be going with Jackie.” She stooped to run her fingers through Maeve’s coppery curls and stroke Maurice’s smooth, black head. “Bride and Maurice are the only two without curls, Madge.”

“Well, it makes a nice difference,” said Madge placidly. “As this is rather a public place, though, I think we’ll move to the library. Come along, you people! Bill’s expecting us!”

Mollie slipped her hands through the arms of her schoolgirls, and Lady Russell led the way with the twins. There was a second hugging when they got there, for Jo, who was perched on a table, chattering, when the door opened, flew across the room to grab her sister-in-law and tousele her properly before she turned to inform Second Twins that she had seen *them* when they were howling babies.

“Maeve’s like Syb’s, though, isn’t she, Madge?” she said. “As for Maurice, he’s completely hop-out-o’-kin. I don’t know who he’s like.”

“He’s the picture of Father,” her sister said. “Now let’s sit down and talk properly.”

A joyous time followed which only ended when they had had tea and the elder folk had managed to catch up a little on family gossip. Then Lady Russell stood up after a riotous tale of one of Jo’s madder exploits.

“Well, we must go,” she said. “Joey, are you and Jack going to be at home to-morrow, for Mollie and Dick want to come to see your house and family in the afternoon.”

“O.K.! Come when you like,” Jo replied. “You’ll find them quite nice,” she added complacently.

“How’s that for conceit?” gasped Madge. “All the same,” she added, “I must say Jo’s not far out. And now, Moll, what about your request?”

“Oh, yes!” Mollie turned eagerly to Miss Wilson. “You’re to say ‘yes’, Nell. You will, won’t you? Sure ’tis the first thing I’ve asked you for all these years.”

“You tell me what you want, and I’ll see. I’m buying no pigs in pokes from you, Mollie Bettany!” Miss Wilson retorted.

“’Tis the hard-hearted creature you are,” sighed Mollie. “Well, I know I can’t ask for a *whole* holiday for the school; but would you be letting them off to-morrow afternoon? Dick and I want to meet Peggy’s and Bride’s chums, and we thought maybe if ’tis as fine as to-day you’d give them their tea, and let them bring groundsheets, and we could all picnic in a meadow Madge says lies beyond Jo’s house. Be the angel ye are, and say you agree!” Mollie laid a hand on the Head’s arm and looked up imploringly at her with glorious, blue eyes. Then she whirled round on Madge. “*You* help coax, Madge! Sure, isn’t it your school?”

Bill, however, had already given in. “I don’t know what the parents will think,” she said resignedly. “Still, we never do much the last day or two. All right! Have it your own way!”

“Didn’t I say ye were an angel! You’ll all come, won’t you, Nell? I want to know what the mistresses say about our girls. ’Twill be the very best way of all.”

“You’ll get their reports on Thursday.”

“That’s not the same thing at all, at all! All of you come—ah, do!”

“Oh, be off with you! I dare say you’ll find us all there!” But Miss Wilson was laughing.

So it was arranged. What the school said when they heard of it may be left to the imagination! Luckily, it turned out another glorious day, so they were able to have their picnic, and during the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Bettany began to know their daughters’ friends. The friends were also delighted to meet them, and Tom only voiced the feelings of all when she said seriously as they sat down to supper after a delightful time, “You’ve got a topping pa and ma, Bride. I call this a super wind-up to the term.”

After that, Wednesday seemed a mere farce with its packing and clearing away, and the great house rang with laughter, chatter, and the flying feet of the girls. At last it ended, and half-past eight brought the exhausted Staff to the library for a last coffee.

“It’s been a jolly term on the whole,” said Hilary as she sipped hers.

“For us, remarkably peaceful,” Miss Wilson added. “No one has tried to kill herself, and we’ve had no more than the average mishaps. Here comes Matey! Well, Matey? Are they all asleep at last?”

Matron took her coffee and sat down. “All in bed, anyhow,” she said thankfully. “I found some of those Middles indulging in a circus, with Tom Gay turning cartwheels round and round the room till it made me giddy to watch her. Bride, if you please! was a clown. But they’re all safely in bed now.”

The Staff shouted at the picture. Then they began to clear up, and trailed off to bed by twos and threes. Matron was last, and made a final round as she generally did.

In Upper Third’s dormitory she heard voices and went in to hush them.

“What is the meaning of this?” she demanded.

Tom, sitting up, gave her a grin. “I was just saying that though I was awfully peeved at having to come to any girls’ school in the beginning, I’m jolly glad I did—seeing it’s the Chalet School. It really *is* a school with some sense! Don’t blame the rest, Matron. They didn’t say a word. It was me.”

“‘It was I’ would be better English,” said Matron severely. “Lie down now, and don’t let me hear another word from any of you.” She came to tuck Tom in, Matey’s bark being always ten times worse than her bite. “There you are. No more talking. It’s time you were all asleep. Good-night, girls!”

“Good-night!” came a sleepy chorus.

Matron switched off the light and left them. When she was safely between the sheets she said to herself, “They’re a good little set. And Tom Gay remains a gentleman to the last!”

[The end of *Tom Tackles the Chalet School* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]