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An Exciting Term

ANGELA BRAZIL

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A Dead Secret

"Only one week left of the jolly old hols," said Meg, sitting on the top rail of the garden fence, and throwing paper pellets at Molly, who squatted on a log below. "Just one precious week, and then the merry old grind begins again. I wonder if we shall have Madame Mottier for Maths this term? Julie said she was afraid we should, and that she's an absolute terror! Molly, you're not listening!"

"Yes, I am, I hear you all right."

"I believe you like Maths!"

"Indeed I don't!"

"Well, why don't you grouse too?"

"What's the use? My motto's 'don't trouble trouble till trouble troubles you'. Perhaps we shan't have Madame Mottier after all, and anyway, let's enjoy our last week of hols without bothering to think of school. It's my birthday to-morrow!"

"You won't let us forget that!"

"Well, you didn't let us forget yours. What fun we had up at Glion. I'm going to ask Dad to take us to Champéry for my birthday treat."

"Oh no, let's go round the lake on the steamer; it would be far nicer."

"It's *my* birthday!"

"Yes, but wouldn't you like to be unselfish and do what *I* want?"

"That's one way of looking at it," laughed Molly, picking up the paper pellets and throwing them back at Meg.

The two girls were sitting in the garden of a little villa on a hillside that overlooked the town of Montreux and the lake of Geneva. Below them stretched terraces of vines, groves of trees and shrubs, white houses, and the gleaming lake, with its background of tall mountain peaks, all shimmering in the soft light of an early September afternoon. It was a glorious view, and one which they had grown to love, both in its winter dress of snow and in its summer robe of green, each so different and so perfect in its own way.

Meg and Molly Campbell were first cousins, and had been brought up almost as sisters. Meg, the elder by a month, had lost father and mother when she was three years old, and had lived ever since with her uncle, Mr. Donald Campbell, sharing everything alike with his daughter Molly. Mr. Campbell was a scientist, who had been a professor in a university in Canada until rather more than a year ago. Then, on the sudden death of his wife, he had resigned his appointment and had come to Switzerland, to join a colleague, Monsieur Henrich, in some important scientific research work. He shared Monsieur Henrich's laboratory and also his villa, and Madame Henrich looked after the two girls, who attended a day school in Montreux.

It had been a great change for Meg and Molly to leave Canada, where they had both been born, and to settle in Switzerland. At first they had disliked the Swiss school, where all the lessons were in French and seemed so difficult. They had grown accustomed to the language now, and classes were comparatively easy, though they always spoke to one another in English out of school.

Madame Henrich was quite kind to them, and they were tolerably fond of her one little girl Greta, a child of seven. After the sad loss of Mrs. Campbell, who had seemed a mother to Meg as well as to Molly, it was perhaps wise for the Campbells to come to Europe to make a fresh start. Mr. Campbell was absorbed in his scientific work. With Monsieur Henrich he spent most of his time in the laboratory, and had small leisure for other pursuits. Sometimes he would take the girls for a mountain walk, but as a rule they were left to the society of Madame Henrich, Greta and Marie, the Swiss maid.

Molly adored her father. The few golden occasions when they could have a ramble together were red-letter days in her calendar. She was looking forward now to her thirteenth birthday, and had secured a promise that she might choose an

excursion to celebrate the fête. That it fell on 3rd September, and therefore in the holidays, she regarded as a particular piece of good luck.

By a family coincidence the girls had been christened the one Margaret, the other Margaret Mary. As their fathers were brothers they bore the same surname. Yet they were not in any respect alike. Meg with her blue eyes, auburn hair and brilliant complexion was much the handsomer of the pair, and always interested strangers, who hardly glanced at Molly's little freckled face, though a few noticed her grey eyes and dark lashes.

"She is intelligent—that one," said Madame Henrich to her husband. "She is also ready to help. Now Meg is full only of promises. When she ought to be making her bed she is looking into the mirror. Yes, so I have seen her."

The two girls, however, got on extremely well together and were excellent friends. Molly was shy, and allowed Meg to take the lead in public, but could hold her own in private. If they occasionally quarrelled between themselves at home, they invariably supported one another at school and were ready to fight each other's battles. Their classmates had nicknamed them "les jumelles" (the twins).

The Villa "Mon Désir" was a small detached house on the outskirts of Montreux. In the upper portion of it there was a large laboratory. Here the girls were never allowed to penetrate. Since their arrival they had not even had a peep inside. The door was always kept locked, and if they had to take a message or summon Mr. Campbell or Monsieur Henrich to a meal, it was only opened about an inch, not wide enough to afford them any view of the interior. What was happening within in the way of research they could merely guess. The two scientists preserved the utmost secrecy about their work. The girls had been strictly warned not to mention it or the existence of the laboratory to their schoolfellows or to anybody, as the success of the experiments would depend upon the privacy in which they were conducted. Meg and Molly had been perfectly loyal in the matter, and never referred to Mr. Campbell's occupation when they were outside the villa, but they were intensely curious about the laboratory, and often discussed between themselves what it could possibly contain.

On this particular afternoon the room was empty, and as usual locked. Monsieur Henrich was spending a few days in Paris, and Mr. Campbell had gone in the morning to Geneva and was not expected back till evening. After an early lunch Madame Henrich had started off for Vevey to visit her sister, and Greta was at school, as she attended a small Preparatory, ten minutes' walk from the villa, and her term had already begun.

No sooner was Madame Henrich out of the way than Marie, the maid, informed the girls that some things required for dinner that night had not been sent, and that she must go to fetch them. She asked them to look after the house and answer the door during her absence, and set off carrying a basket. So Meg and Molly happened to be left in sole charge of "Mon Désir".

"I believe Marie invented that errand!" said Molly. "She has her best hat on!"

"Yes, there's a fair down in Montreux," laughed Meg. "We shan't see her back for ages in my opinion."

"Well, I don't care. It's rather fun having the place to ourselves for once."

"What shall we do?"

"We can't do anything much. If Marie had been here we might have gone into Montreux."

"We can't leave the house."

"No, of course not."

"I wish we could peep into the lab."

"You know the door's locked."

"It is, but I'd like to look through the window."

"That's not possible."

"Isn't it? I've an idea in my head. A jolly good one too."

"What?"

"Well, some men have been painting a house down the lane there, and they've left a ladder in the road just outside our garden. I expect they've scooted off to the fair. Nearly everyone has, this afternoon. Let's fetch the ladder, put it up to the window of the lab, and peep in. The blind isn't down. We should see something."

"Oh, Meg! Dare we?"

"Why not? We shouldn't do any harm."

"Wouldn't Dad be angry?"

"He won't let us go in through the door but he never told us we mightn't peep through the window."

"Suppose someone saw us?"

"There's nobody about. Come along! Be a sport!"

It was certainly a very tempting proposition. Meg had jumped down from the fence and was running across the garden. When Meg led Molly invariably followed. The ladder had been left in the most handy place outside the gate. It was not too heavy to lift, and they easily carried it over the small grass plot and tilted it against the side of the house. It reached right to the laboratory window-sill. It was Meg, of course, who went up first. Standing near the top, she could look through the glass and see a table with bottles and retorts. Then she made a further discovery. The window was not absolutely shut. By pulling it with her fingers she swung one side open. The next moment she had climbed over the sill into the room.

"Come along, Molly! Let's explore!" she called.

Molly could not resist it. She scrambled up after Meg.

There was nothing in the room that looked particularly interesting. It was rather like the chemical laboratory at school. There were various kinds of apparatus, the use of which they could not guess, bottles and test tubes, and an untidy litter in the corners. On the whole it was distinctly disappointing.

Hardly worth the trouble they had taken. They were walking round the table when they heard a slight noise at the window, and turning hastily saw the impish face of Greta, followed by her body as she scrambled from the ladder.

"Greta! What are you doing here?" asked Molly, aghast. "You naughty girl!"

Greta grinned cheerfully. She understood English very well, and could speak it after a fashion.

"I come because you come," she replied.

"But why aren't you at school?"

"Maman is at Vevey, so—I not go to school this afternoon."

"Then you're playing truant."

"Is that how you call it—'playing truant'? But yes. I stay in the wood shed till Marie has gone out. I see you bring the ladder, and I am here. Now I shall look."

"You mustn't touch anything," warned Meg.

"We can't have this kid here. We'd better be going," said Molly, walking back to the window. "Come along, Greta!"

Greta by that time was at the other side of the table, hidden by some apparatus. Among the bottles and tubes lay a small card, rather smaller than a post card. It happened to be exactly the size that she required for a purpose of her own. Unobserved by the elder girls, she slipped it into the pocket of her jersey.

"Come, Greta! Be quick!" urged Molly.

Meg hurried round the table, seized the child by the arm, and hustled her to the window.

"Now you go down first!" she commanded.

Molly followed next, and then Meg, standing on the ladder, carefully closed the window again and descended. The two girls carried the ladder back to its place in the road, closed the gate and returned to the garden. Greta stood watching them with her finger in her mouth.

"Your Daddy would be very angry if he found out you had been climbing into his lab," said Meg severely.

Greta removed the finger from her mouth and pointed it accusingly at the two elder girls.

"Papa would be also more angry with you for you went first," she remarked.

It was such a self-evident proposition that Meg and Molly stared at one another guiltily.

"Look here!" said Meg. "We must all three keep this a dead secret and promise not to tell. We didn't do any harm, we only walked round the room and never touched anything. If you were to tell, Greta, they'd find out you played truant from school! You'd get into a jolly scrape about that."

"Oh, I shall not tell."

"Then let's all three join hands and promise."

The compact was made and Meg, who felt responsible for suggesting the whole affair, heaved a sigh of relief.

"Now you go back to school at once!" she said.

But Greta shook her head.

"No, I cannot return to school to-day. I stayed here to occupy myself. To-morrow is the fête of Mademoiselle Molly. I go now to my room. Do not ask me why."

She ran away hastily into the house, and the girls did not follow her. Birthday secrets were a matter of privilege.

"You think she'll keep this dark?" queried Molly.

"Yes, she won't want to get herself into trouble. She's quite safe, I'm sure," replied Meg.

They had only taken the ladder back just in time.

A few minutes later the workmen returned and carried it away. The girls watched them from the shelter of the garden.

Greta meantime had sought sanctuary in her own small bedroom. She was fond of Molly, and she wished to give her a birthday present. She intended to make a needlebook for her. She took out her workbox and some pieces of silk. The card which she had found in the laboratory was exactly what she needed for the purpose. Certainly there was some queer writing and a few figures on it, but that did not matter, for the silk would cover them up. She was rather clever at sewing, and in course of time produced quite a creditable little needlebook, in blue figured silk, with a piece of flannel inside to hold the needles, and blue ribbons to tie it together. When it was finished nobody could have guessed that the foundation was a card on which were written unintelligible hieroglyphs. She was sure Molly would be pleased, and that she would not criticize the size of the stitches. She wrapped it in a piece of tissue paper and placed it in an envelope, on which she wrote in a neat French hand "A ma chère amie Molly". Then she put it away in a drawer and joined the others in the garden. Marie, the maid, had not yet returned. As the girls were left in charge of the house they could not go for a walk, so played "darts" on the grassplot. There was a target, and they each threw six darts in turns, scoring according to the rings which they hit. Greta was quite a good shot and had the luck to make a bull's-eye. She was clapping her hands in much triumph when they heard footsteps on the pathway and a ring at the electric bell.

"Somebody at the front door! Marie's not in! You go, Molly," said Meg, picking up the darts, for her turn came next.

Molly ran in through the kitchen and along the passage and opened the front door. A stranger stood there, a tall man with a pointed black beard. He spoke in French, with a rather guttural accent, and asked for Monsieur Campbell or Monsieur

Henrich.

Molly replied that her father was in Geneva and Monsieur Henrich was in Paris.

"Is Madame Henrich at home?" he inquired.

"No, she is at Vevey this afternoon."

"Perhaps she may return soon? Will you kindly allow me to come in and wait for her? It is important."

Molly hesitated. She wished Marie was there.

The stranger seemed to take it for granted. He walked into the hall, and seeing the door of the salon open he entered and seated himself on a chair.

"I will remain here until Madame arrives," he announced, and drawing a newspaper from his pocket he began to read.

Rather uneasy, but not knowing what to do, Molly returned to the garden and communicated the news to Meg.

"I suppose it's all right?" she queried.

"Well, I hope so. Marie ought to be back soon. How long will your maman be in Vevey, Greta?"

"I don't know. She has gone to see Tante Lulu, and sometimes she stay long there."

"Well, I suppose he'll go when he gets tired of waiting," said Molly. "It's my turn now. What's your last score, Meg?"

The girls went on with their game, and in the course of about half an hour Marie put in an appearance, making excuses for her long absence on the ground that the shops had been full, and she had been obliged to wait before being served.

"There's a man in the salon," volunteered Molly. "He wants to see Madame. He said it was important."

Marie hurried indoors, but returned almost directly with the information that there was nobody in the house.

"He must have gone, then," said Meg.

"I hope he took nothing with him," said Marie.

She ran back, followed by the girls, and examined the rooms in much agitation. Everything, however, was as usual. The silver cups won by Monsieur Henrich at various skating contests were in their places on the sideboard. Nothing seemed missing. Evidently the stranger was not a burglar. Whatever his important business might have been he had not cared to wait, nor had he left his card or any message. He must have heard the voices of the girls in the garden and could easily have sought them out had he wished. Instead he had just mysteriously vanished.

"I expect he had to catch a train," suggested Molly.

"Well, never mind, so long as he wasn't a burglar it's all right," said Meg.

Madame Henrich returned about six o'clock, so full of her visit to her sister that she made no inquiries about the events of the afternoon, assuming that all had gone well in her absence. Mr. Campbell arrived soon afterwards, and the family sat down to their evening meal. When it was finished Meg and Greta ran back into the garden to fetch the target and darts, but Molly lingered behind. From the hall she could hear her father speaking to Madame Henrich in the salon.

"I expect your husband will be returning by the night train from Paris," he was saying. "I sent him a telegram from Geneva this morning. I have some most important and splendid news for him."

Madame replied in an undertone which Molly could not catch, and afterwards Mr. Campbell went upstairs to the laboratory. He ran down again in a few minutes looking extremely agitated.

"Has anybody been in the house while I was out?" he inquired. "There is something missing from the laboratory! The door is locked as usual. Is it possible it can have been tampered with? Who has been here to-day?"

Madame Henrich, equally disturbed, summoned Marie, who was obliged to confess that she had gone to Montreux and

left the house in charge of the children. Meg and Molly were called, and reported the visit of the stranger who had waited some time in the salon for Madame and then taken his departure.

Mr. Campbell was furiously angry; he scolded everybody, blaming Madame, Marie and the girls for their culpable carelessness. What exactly was the matter Meg and Molly could not tell, but they gathered he suspected the visitor of having been into the laboratory. Things were so unpleasant that they were glad to retire to bed.

"Ought we to tell Dad we went up the ladder?" asked Molly, when they were upstairs.

"No! We only walked round the lab, and we none of us touched a single thing. That I could swear to."

"Perhaps he ought to know."

"There's no need. He's angry enough as it is. Why should we get into a worse scrape?"

"I just thought—perhaps——"

"Well, don't think! You promised faithfully you wouldn't tell. And it isn't as if we'd had anything to do with it. You know we touched nothing."

"Perhaps he'll find whatever he's lost when he looks again, but I wish it hadn't happened," said Molly, as she jumped into bed.

A Birthday

The household at the Villa Mon Désir always rose early. Schools in Switzerland began work at eight o'clock instead of at nine as in England, so the family breakfasted punctually at seven. On the following morning Greta indeed woke the girls at six by bursting into their room to offer her birthday present. Molly, still rather sleepy, sat up in bed to examine the needlebook and to express admiration and thanks and due astonishment.

"I made it myself. No one helped me. You did not know I was making for you a surprise?" said Greta, jumping on to the bed.

"No, indeed, I never guessed. It's very kind of you. But you needn't sit on my feet, please! You're heavy."

"You like it?" asked Greta, dancing round the room.

"Very much."

"You shall put it inside—but no, I must not yet tell you! Maman, she also has a present for you. She is already downstairs. I hear her. Do you not wish to get up?"

Fully awake by now, the girls dressed leisurely and were in the salon before the coffee was ready. On the table Molly found a lovely interesting bouquet of flowers and several parcels. There was a workbag from Madame Henrich, in blue silk, a paintbox from her father, a carved Swiss pencilbox from Meg, and a small package with an English stamp on it, that the postman had just delivered. This contained a green necklace and a letter from her Aunt Maggie in England.

"Are you not lucky?" said Greta, who watched the opening of the parcels with intense interest. "Now you can put my needlebook inside Maman's workbag. How happy it is to have a birthday!"

"I like the necklace," said Meg. "What a good thing you wrote to Aunt Maggie at Christmas and gave her our address in Switzerland. She forgot you last year. I wish she'd remembered *my* birthday."

"Well, you see, she's *my* aunt, not yours."

"Great-aunt!" corrected Meg.

"Great-aunt or little-aunt, what does it matter?"

"Well, she knows we live together, so I wish she would remember *me* too."

"She does. Here's her letter. She says:

"HEATH HOUSE, PARK ROAD,
Rillington.

MY DEAR MARGARET,

I send you this necklace with my love and best wishes for your birthday. It is many years since I was in Switzerland, and I fear I shall not get so far again as Montreux, for travelling does not suit me nowadays. I hope, however, that you and your cousin will come sometime and pay me a visit in England. I should like to see you, as I was so fond of your mother. Tell your father he must try and arrange it.

Your affectionate aunt,
MARGARET

NORTON."

"Oh!" exclaimed Meg. "That *would* be jolly! We've never been in England. Tell her we'd love to come."

"I shall. I'll write and thank her for her present, and say we're 'looking forward to accepting her kind invitation'. Is that the way to put it?"

"Yes, give her my love as well as yours. She sounds rather an old dear."

The early part of the morning passed happily. Mr. Campbell came down to breakfast, kissed Molly and heartily congratulated her upon having entered her teens. He did not refer to the trouble of the previous evening.

"Will you take us for an excursion, Daddy?" asked Molly hopefully. "Can we go for the whole day?"

"Impossible. I'm too busy," he replied, hastily finishing his coffee and going upstairs to his laboratory.

"Perhaps he will in the afternoon," whispered Meg, as Molly's face registered disappointment.

Greta was being packed off to school, with her books in her satchel, and shortly after she had left the house Monsieur Henrich arrived, having travelled by the night train from Paris. He drank a cup of coffee, then went to join Mr. Campbell in the laboratory. About ten minutes later, the girls were making their beds—a daily duty which Madame required them to perform—when they heard an unusual commotion upstairs. Loud and angry voices issued from the laboratory, as if a violent quarrel were in progress. Monsieur Henrich came out on to the landing, shouting at the pitch of his lungs, the door banged, he clattered downstairs, and called excitedly for Madame.

Meg and Molly looked at one another in consternation. Evidently something very unpleasant was happening. Mr. Campbell and Monsieur Henrich had always been on such friendly terms it seemed unthinkable to imagine any altercation between them. What could possibly be the matter?

"I vote we go for a walk!" suggested Meg.

"I agree with you!" said Molly, putting on her hat. The girls hurried away, glad to get out of the house. Squabbles between themselves were bad enough, but quarrels between grown-ups were serious. They went for a long ramble, in search of flowers, and did not return to the villa until lunch time. Monsieur Henrich was not present at table, and both Madame Henrich and Mr. Campbell were very quiet and scarcely spoke to one another. Greta chattered as usual, but Meg and Molly felt the atmosphere was uncomfortable.

When the meal was over Molly made another appeal to her father.

"Daddy! It's my birthday! Can you take us somewhere this afternoon? You promised!"

At first he shook his head, then, seeing her eyes swimming with tears, he relented.

"Be ready by half-past three, and I'll take you to have tea at the Casino," he said.

This, though not the kind of excursion for which she had hoped, was much better than nothing. She ran to tell the good news to Meg.

"The music's jolly and there are always delicious little cakes," commented Meg. "I wish we could have gone on the steamer."

"Well, if we can't we can't!"

"Perhaps we may do the lake trip another day."

"Yes, if there's time before the hols end."

"We've nearly a week left. School doesn't begin till the 9th."

The girls were ready and waiting by half-past three, and soon afterwards Mr. Campbell joined them in the hall. They caught a motor-bus at the end of the road, which took them to Montreux and put them down close to the Casino. The concert had already begun when they arrived. The orchestra was playing a "Danse Espagnole" by Sarasate. The large hall was fairly well filled with visitors, both below and in the surrounding gallery. A table close to the foot of the great staircase was vacant, so they seated themselves there, and Mr. Campbell beckoned to a waitress and ordered tea. It was really very festive. They were in a little alcove, banked on one side by pots of tall flowers, and commanding a good view of the orchestra and also of the hall. Tourists of all nations were sitting listening to the music and having refreshments.

"Don't you feel as if you were in the wide world?" said Meg, with a sigh of satisfaction.

She settled herself comfortably in her seat, looking round at the other visitors. Meg was fond of society and enjoyed the atmosphere of a crowd.

"Rather different from school, I must say," replied Molly, who was equally delighted.

"Yes, we don't get much fun at school."

"That's Marie Chenier over there!"

"So it is!"

"And her mother with her."

"Do they see us?"

"Yes, she's smiling."

"I'm glad for Marie to see *us* here!"

"She often goes to the Casino."

"The Cheniers are rather fashionable."

"I like Madame's hat."

"So do I."

It was undoubtedly an opportunity for seeing French fashions. Certain of the ladies were gowned in the latest creations from Paris. Some had pretty children with them. There was a general appearance of gaiety. In the intervals between the pieces on the programme everybody seemed to chatter.

Molly began to feel that at last she was having something in the way of a birthday fête. The cakes were particularly nice, and they were allowed to have ices afterwards. The first part of the concert was over, and there was a long interval before the second part of the programme would begin. The musicians had left the platform, and were possibly fortifying themselves with coffee behind the scenes.

"Isn't it all jolly?" murmured Meg, leaning back luxuriously in her cushioned corner.

"Simply marvellous," said Molly, finishing the last spoonful of her vanilla ice.

"Enjoying yourselves?" asked Mr. Campbell.

"Rather, Dad!"

"Would you like any more cakes?"

"No, thanks!"

"Another ice?"

"Really not, thanks!"

"Slimming?"

"No, Dad! I'm not fat enough to go in for that."

"I thought perhaps you wanted to cultivate a willowy figure like the lady over there."

"She's very elegant, but she's eaten nothing. I watched her."

"Those German children at the next table have had three platefuls of cakes," remarked Meg.

"Well, I hope they'll be none the worse for it. Germans generally have excellent digestions."

They were sitting in their alcove, chatting thus, and quite jolly and amused, when a sudden interruption occurred. Monsieur Henrich and two other gentlemen walked into the hall, looked round the tables, located the Campbells, and came and sat down with them, ordering black coffee. Their appearance was not at all welcome to the birthday party.

Molly wondered why they had intruded. She glanced at her father, but his face was non-committal.

The men began to speak in low tones in French, but Mr. Campbell, with a meaning glance at the girls, changed the conversation into German, a language which most Swiss people speak fluently but which Meg and Molly did not understand. What they were saying seemed to be of an unpleasant character. Mr. Campbell first flushed, and then went very white. He appeared to be making a most indignant denial. Monsieur Henrich turned to the two strangers, who nodded emphatically, and murmured something. Mr. Campbell rose, and spoke hurriedly to the girls.

"You two had better go home! Take the bus. Here's a franc for your fares. Run along now!"

Thus unexpectedly and peremptorily dismissed, Molly and Meg got up and walked to the door. They turned there to see Mr. Campbell still standing, evidently watching their exit. He sat down again as they passed through the barrier.

"What's the matter?" asked Meg, when they found themselves in the road.

"I can't imagine. Only that Dad and Monsieur Henrich have quarrelled. It's simply horrible."

"It's spoilt your birthday."

"It has."

"What have they quarrelled about?"

"I'm sure I can't tell."

"Those other men looked very angry too."

"Yes. Oh, there's the bus! If we run we shall just catch it."

When the girls arrived at the villa they found Madame Henrich and Greta had gone out. They were rather glad, as there was now no need to explain why they had returned so soon. Feeling very depressed, they wandered about the house for a while, not quite knowing what to do with themselves.

"I think I shall write a letter to Aunt Maggie to thank her for my necklace," said Molly, opening the bureau in the salon, and finding a sheet of notepaper.

"Very well. I'll go and read in the garden," replied Meg.

Molly was not a remarkably good correspondent. It needed much thinking to compose a suitable reply of thanks to a great-aunt whom she had never yet seen. And when she was half-way through she made such a frightful blot that she felt obliged to write it all over again. She had just finished and was directing the envelope when Mr. Campbell entered the room. He flung himself wearily into an armchair. He looked pale and upset. Molly glanced at him uneasily. She did not dare to refer to the occurrence at the Casino, or question him.

"Dad, can you give me a stamp?" she asked. "I've been writing to Aunt Maggie to thank her for her present. She sent such a nice letter with the necklace. She says she hopes Meg and I will go and stay with her sometime."

"Go and stay with her in England?" queried her father.

"Yes. Here's her letter if you care to look at it. I'd love to go some holidays. Meg and I have never been in England."

Mr. Campbell seized the sheet of notepaper and read it attentively.

"That's an idea certainly. It might solve an immediate problem," he said.

"What would, Dad?"

"Never mind. I'll write to Aunt Maggie too, and enclose it with yours."

He took Molly's place at the bureau, pulled his fountain pen from his pocket, and began. It seemed to cause him considerable thought, for he paused occasionally and frowned. He had finished at last, and hearing Madame Henrich and Greta returning, he hastily put his letter inside the envelope with Molly's and stamped it.

"Run with this to the pillar-box at the corner," he said. "It will just catch the night mail. It ought to reach Rillington by Monday."

"Right-o, Daddy! I won't miss the post," said Molly hurrying away.

The next two days that followed were some of the most unpleasant that Meg and Molly ever remembered. Mr. Campbell and Monsieur Henrich did not appear to be on speaking terms. Madame Henrich was also very gloomy and silent, and short in her manner towards the girls. The whole atmosphere of the villa seemed charged with electricity, as if a mental thunderstorm were in progress. Meg and Molly kept out of the house as much as possible. They went for walks, or played in the wood-shed with Greta, who was the only member of the family who remained normal. She was too young to notice much, though she remarked once or twice that everybody was cross.

"I shall be very glad when school begins again," declared Molly.

"So shall I," agreed Meg. "And we were going to enjoy this last week of the hols!"

"Not much fun at present, is there?"

"Rather not!"

"Hope things will calm down soon."

"I hope to goodness they will."

On Sunday morning the girls as usual put on their best dresses. Their clothes were chosen by Madame Henrich, who had good taste, and these Sunday frocks were pretty. Meg's was a milky green that went well with her auburn hair, and Molly's was in a shade of saxe blue.

She took out her new necklace to try the effect.

"You can't wear that green chain with your blue dress!" declared Meg. "It looks awful. It goes far better with mine."

"Pity Aunt Maggie didn't send me a blue one!"

"Yes, these blue Venetian beads that I had last Christmas suit your frock better. They're just the right colour."

"So they are."

"Look here! Shall we swop chains?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Why not? Mine's a very good one, quite as good as yours. You keep the Venetian and I'll keep the green. Is it a bargain?"

"Well, if you like. They certainly suit our dresses better. Do you think Aunt Maggie would mind?"

"Why should she? Besides, she won't know anything about it. Now I think this is a very good arrangement. We're both satisfied."

Molly was doubtful if she were entirely satisfied, but as usual she was swayed by Meg, and agreed. Greta, who was beginning to be interested in dress, noticed the exchange and approved.

"Now you are both à la mode," she exclaimed. "When I next have a birthday I shall beg for a chain of pink beads to suit my pink frock."

"You'll have grown out of the frock before your next birthday!" laughed Meg.

"Then I shall ask Papa to buy me the chain soon. I saw some beautiful ones in a shop in Montreux."

"Perhaps he'll say no."

"Ah, but I can always coax Papa, or I can ask Grand-père; he also is very kind, and often gives me what I wish."

Early on Monday afternoon a telegram arrived at the villa for Mr. Campbell. After reading it he left the house, telling Molly he was going to Montreux. He was away for several hours. When he returned he called to both the girls, took them upstairs to his bedroom and shut the door.

"Sit down!" he said. "I have some very important news for you, and I don't care for anyone to overhear. How would you like to pay a visit to Aunt Maggie?"

"We'd love it!" said Molly.

"When? At Christmas?" asked Meg.

"No. Straight away."

"But there isn't time before school begins!"

"The term starts on Thursday."

"You're not going back to school here," replied Mr. Campbell. "I'm sending you to England, to Aunt Maggie. She promises to keep you till Christmas and to arrange for you to go to Rillington College for this term."

This was indeed stupendous news. The girls could hardly believe it.

"When do we start?" gasped Molly.

"On Wednesday, I wrote to your aunt to ask if she would take you both in and let you attend a good school, and she sent me a telegram to say she could receive you any time. I went at once to Cook's office in Montreux. The cashier there told me that a conducted party of English tourists would be returning home from Montreux on Wednesday evening. Their conductor would take charge of you on the journey. Two of the party—lady teachers—happen to be going back to Rillington, and he would ask them to put you in a taxi when you arrive at the station there, and tell the man to drive you to your aunt's house. I've taken your tickets and made all arrangements."

"Couldn't you come with us, Daddy?"

"No, I'm going away at once, to New York. I shall leave to-night by the eleven train for Paris, and catch the mail steamer at Havre. Madame Henrich will see you off at the station on Wednesday evening."

"Oh, Daddy!"

"Now there's something I want to impress upon you both," continued Mr. Campbell. "You must neither of you say anything to Aunt Maggie or to anybody else about my work in the laboratory; it mustn't be mentioned."

"We never have done!"

"That's right. Well, don't in future. And don't tell her that I've had any—er—differences with Monsieur Henrich. You can just say I was obliged to go to America on some very important business, and wished you to go to school in England, as I thought you had learnt enough French in Montreux. Now, can you remember that?"

"Yes," agreed both the girls.

"Will you write to me, Dad?" added Molly.

"Yes, when I arrive in New York. Run away now, because I must talk to Madame Henrich, and then I must pack. It's a fearful rush to get off to-night."

Monsieur Henrich was not present at supper that evening, and Madame scarcely spoke. Mr. Campbell seemed preoccupied and hurried, and the girls were embarrassed.

About nine o'clock a taxi came to the door, and Marie helped to carry down luggage. Mr. Campbell shook hands with Madame, and kissed Molly and Meg, giving them each an English pound note for pocket-money.

"That must last you till Christmas," he said, "so don't be extravagant. Well, good-bye, my dears! I hope you'll be happy at Rillington."

In another minute he had gone, and they watched the taxi driving along the dark road towards the lights of Montreux.

Molly was wiping away some tears. Madame Henrich put her arm round her quite kindly and kissed her on the forehead.

"You had better go to bed now, chérie," she remarked.

Upstairs in their room the two girls discussed the situation.

"I can't understand it in the least," said Molly.

"No more can I. Why had Dad gone away so suddenly?" replied Meg. (She had always called her uncle "Dad" since she was three years old. She could scarcely remember her own father.)

"He said it was business."

"Yes—but—Molly, do you think he has done something dreadful?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, why is Monsieur Henrich so fearfully angry with him? And those other men at the Casino were angry too! And why must we never mention about the lab? I must say it looks queer."

"I'm sure Dad hasn't done anything. How can you suggest it?" burst out Molly indignantly.

"I don't know. There must be some reason for all this quarrelling."

"Then it's not Dad's fault, I'll undertake that!" flared Molly.

Meg kept silent.

"I'm glad we're leaving Montreux," said Molly presently.

"Yes, I shouldn't care to be staying on at the villa."

"And probably Madame doesn't want us."

"If you ask me, I think she'll be jolly glad to get rid of us!"

Aunt Maggie

Molly's mother, whose maiden name was Mary Paton, had been born in England and spent her childhood there. She had been a great favourite with her aunt, Margaret Wingfield, but when the latter married Captain Norton and went to India, and afterwards the Patons emigrated to Canada and Mary married Mr. Campbell there, aunt and niece were separated by the distance of half the globe. They kept up a correspondence, though in later years it had dwindled to an annual letter at Christmas and an occasional present. Mrs. Norton was now a widow; she had retired to England and settled at Rillington, where, as she had no family, she lived with a companion. She had been informed of Mrs. Campbell's death, and had written to express sympathy and to say that she should take an interest in Mary's child, who was christened Margaret and therefore was her namesake. When the Campbells came to Switzerland Molly wrote at Christmas to Mrs. Norton, telling her their address at Montreux and signing the letter "your affectionate niece, Margaret M. Campbell". She had received a picture post card in reply, but had heard no more until her birthday, when the necklace arrived. If she gave the matter a thought she supposed Mrs. Norton had forgotten her, so it was a great surprise to have an invitation for herself and her cousin, and an utter amazement to find that her father had accepted it so hastily, and that she and Meg were to set off for England. Beyond a few things which her mother had told her, she knew nothing about Aunt Maggie, except that by now she must be an elderly lady, that she had no children, and that she was probably kind, or she would not have asked two girls to pay her a long visit.

Their future seemed all in the clouds, and she hoped it would prove satisfactory. Anyhow, it would be better to go to her own relation than to stay at Montreux after her father had started for America. To remain at "Mon Désir" without him would be miserable, especially in the present awkward circumstances.

Matters seemed more pleasant in the villa when Mr. Campbell was gone. Monsieur Henrich indeed was moody, but Madame was manifestly relieved and was tolerably kind to the girls. She packed all their possessions, and on Wednesday evening took them and their luggage to the station at Montreux.

Here they found a large party of tourists assembled for the return journey to England, and special carriages had been reserved for them on the train. Madame Henrich placed Meg and Molly in charge of the busy conductor who was to escort the party; he found them seats in a compartment, and introduced them to the two teachers who were going to Rillington, and who promised to look after them.

"I'll see you through the customs myself," he said, "and you join the party for breakfast in Paris and lunch on the Dover-London express. You have your passports? Your father paid in advance for your meals, together with your tickets. Now are you all right, young ladies?"

The guard was blowing his horn, Madame Henrich was waving from the platform, the train started, and their journey commenced.

As it was night time and quite dark, there was nothing to be seen through the window. The compartment was full, and they had not corner seats. The other passengers seemed to know one another and talked gaily about their experiences on their Swiss tour. One of the teachers lent the girls a picture paper, and the other offered them some chocolates. Meg was excited, and interested in her surroundings, but Molly felt suddenly forlorn. She was going away from all she knew, and the noisy party in the carriage bewildered her. For a very long time they laughed and chatted, went into the corridor to exchange jokes with friends in other compartments, and finally drew the shades over the lamps and settled themselves to try and snatch a few hours of rest.

Rattling along in a crowded train is not particularly soothing, but the girls slept till dawn. By this time they had left Switzerland and were speeding across France, and by seven o'clock had reached Paris. Breakfast was prepared for the whole company in the restaurant at the "Gare de Lyon", after which they went on to Calais and crossed by the steamer to Dover. It was rather a choppy passage. Meg stood it well enough, but poor Molly succumbed to *mal de mer* and had to lie down in the ladies' cabin. One of the teachers rescued her afterwards and escorted her on shore and into the train, where lunch was being served in the restaurant car. She was much too limp, however, to eat anything but biscuits.

"Cheer up!" said Miss Lawson. "You'll feel better soon, and I'll get you a cup of tea at Victoria Station. That'll put you all right again. Your sister hasn't lost her appetite!"

Back in their compartment Molly was given a corner seat, and, though still feeling shaky, amused herself by looking out

of the window. She was intrigued with the English landscape—the green meadows surrounded by hedges, the stooks of corn which still stood in some of the fields, the country houses with beautiful gardens, the churches and pretty villages, all were so utterly different from the scenery of Canada or Switzerland. It seemed a new and homely country.

Meg was chatting eagerly with Miss Lawson and Miss Hales, asking many questions about Rillington. She always made friends quickly with strangers. They were telling her also about their holiday in the neighbourhood of Montreux, and comparing notes on the places they had visited. When the party reached London the two teachers hailed a porter, retrieved all the luggage, secured a taxi, and escorted the girls to Paddington station. Here they had just time to get cups of tea from a restaurant truck on the platform before their train started for Rillington.

"Feeling better now, aren't you?" asked Miss Lawson. "You don't look so pale."

Molly nodded gratefully.

"These Channel crossings are very trying, especially if you're not a good sailor," said Miss Hales.

They arrived at Rillington at last. The teachers put the girls in a taxi, gave the address to the driver, and said good-bye, anxious to go to their own homes. Meg and Molly had started on the final stage of their long journey. They motored through a town and along a road shaded with trees, and finally drew up at a red-brick house with two large bow windows and a small, gay garden in front. The driver walked up the path and rang the bell. The door was opened almost immediately by a maid.

Meg had got out of the taxi first, and Molly, suddenly overwhelmed with shyness, followed her into the house. An elderly lady hurried into the hall and greeted the two girls.

"Well! So you're here, my dears! I'm glad to see you. Which is which?"

"I'm Meg!"

"Short for Margaret, I suppose?"

"Yes. This is Molly."

Mrs. Norton kissed them both, and turned to settle with the taxi driver.

"Miss Marsh will take you upstairs," she said. "I'm sure you must be tired. Supper will be ready very soon."

A gentle-looking lady, presumably the companion, showed them into a bedroom, where the housemaid was putting down some of their luggage and unstrapping suitcases.

"Hot water, Nellie, please!" said Miss Marsh. "Now, can I help you to unpack? I expect you'd like to change your dresses after the journey."

Feeling very travel-stained the girls agreed. Fortunately their Sunday frocks were easily found, and when they had washed and combed their hair they looked more presentable, and able to make a good impression on Aunt Maggie. Meg had put on the green necklace, and handed the blue Venetian chain to Molly.

"Be quick! Shall I fasten it for you? There's the gong!"

Miss Marsh came upstairs and took the girls to the dining-room. It was a handsome room, and there was a very nice supper. Meg looked round with much approbation. She was delighted with her new surroundings. She answered readily to questions about their journey, and was soon giving Aunt Maggie an animated account of Montreux and of their school there. Molly, still feeling very limp, terribly shy, and afflicted with a violent headache, remained silent and let Meg do the conversation.

"I see you're wearing my beads!" remarked Mrs. Norton, glancing at Meg's necklace. "I'm glad you like them."

Molly looked up quickly, but Meg replied:

"They just match my green dress, don't they?"

After supper they were taken into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Norton brought out an album of photos of India to show them, then suggesting that the girls must be tired she sent them to bed. They were not long in undressing and were glad to cuddle down on nice soft pillows.

Yet they were too excited to sleep. They still felt as if they were on the vibrating train. The clock on the stairs had struck ten some time ago when the door of their room was softly opened, and by the light that streamed through from the landing they saw Aunt Maggie come in on tiptoe. They shut their eyes tightly and pretended to be wrapt in slumber. She stood beside their beds for a moment or two, then went quietly away. They could hear her whispering to Miss Marsh outside the open door.

"Sound asleep, both of them! I'm *so* glad *Meg* is my niece. Isn't she a lovely girl? The other looks a plain, uninteresting little thing!"

"She has beautiful grey eyes," answered Miss Marsh. "She seemed very tired and shy."

"She's not nearly so attractive as *Meg*! I can't tell you how glad I am that——"

But here the door was gently closed, and the rest of the conversation was lost.

"*Meg*!" whispered Molly. "There's some mistake!"

"Sh'sh! We're supposed to be asleep," breathed *Meg*; "don't talk now."

Molly lay awake for an hour, thinking. She had a very sensitive nature, and she was bitterly hurt at what she had overheard. The error had easily arisen. Mrs. Norton knew little about the girls! if she had ever seen photos of them, they were probably bad snapshots. *Meg* had led the way into the house, her name was short for Margaret, she had worn the birthday necklace, and she had spoken of Mr. Campbell as "Dad". It had been natural to assume that she was the niece.

Molly shrank from the ordeal of telling Aunt Maggie that she, the "plain, uninteresting little thing", was the true relation. Aunt Maggie might try to hide her disappointment, but she would undoubtedly feel it. It was a difficult situation.

Next morning both girls woke fairly early, and Molly at once began to discuss the matter.

"Aunt Maggie's made a mistake between us. Isn't it tiresome? We shall have to tell her which is which."

"Why need we tell her?" asked *Meg*.

"Why? Well, because we can't let her go on thinking you're her niece when you aren't."

"It's her own mistake. If she likes to think so we'd better leave things as they are. What does it matter?"

"She might find out."

"If we say nothing she won't. Look here, Molly, keep this a secret. If you tell Aunt Maggie she's made a mistake, I declare I'll tell her about the lab and the quarrel with Monsieur Henrich."

"You can't, you daren't—you promised Dad!"

"I don't care—I shall, unless you keep this dark. It's a bargain."

Meg had been quick to realize the advantage to herself of Mrs. Norton's mistake. She liked to occupy the first place. Though Mr. and Mrs. Campbell had been extremely good to her, she felt instinctively that they must love their own daughter best. Here was a chance to turn things the other way. From the conversation on the landing she gathered that she would be the favourite. Fortune had been kind to her.

"Well! Do you agree?" she asked.

The words "plain, uninteresting little thing" were ringing in Molly's ears. No, she could not face Aunt Maggie and correct her. If she wanted to consider *Meg* her niece let her do so. People always made such a fuss of *Meg*, especially at first. Also, by bitter experience, Molly knew her cousin was quite capable of giving away Mr. Campbell's secret about his laboratory. If she were annoyed it would be her means of retaliation.

"I must keep Dad's secret at all costs," thought Molly. "He trusted me. *He* doesn't think me 'plain and uninteresting'. I'm his own girl and he loves me. Aunt Maggie doesn't matter."

Then aloud she said:

"All right, Meg. We'll just say nothing at all about it."

Molly went down to breakfast quieter than ever, but Aunt Maggie, noticing her shyness, spoke kindly and tried to put her at her ease and draw her into conversation. Miss Marsh was particularly nice to her. Perhaps she thought Meg was monopolizing too much of the attention. She helped the girls to arrange their drawers, and later on suggested she should take them for a walk.

"The College doesn't open till next week," she explained. "So you'll have time to settle down here before you begin school. I believe you have to attend for an entrance examination. I think Mrs. Norton said that would be on Monday."

"I rather like exams!" declared Meg.

"Do you, Molly?" asked Miss Marsh.

"It depends. When we first went to Montreux and knew hardly any French it was fearfully difficult. We just had to muddle along as best we could, and guess when we couldn't understand. Of course, when we were at Montreal exams were all right."

"Were you in the same form?"

"Yes, we always have been together."

Miss Marsh forbore to ask which had taken the higher place. It did not seem a fair question. She meant to form her estimate of the girls on her own observation.

They set out for their walk, going down a road planted with trees till they reached a pleasure park. Here the beds were gay with September flowers, there was a lake with water lilies and ducks, and also a river where people were rowing or punting. It was the girls' first experience of an English town, and it impressed them favourably. The park led out on to a handsome parade, with hanging baskets of geraniums fixed to the electric light standards, and a bandstand where an orchestra was playing. Miss Marsh engaged three chairs, and they sat for a time to listen to the music. Then they walked past shops full of interesting things, and finally up a side street and along a road to where a large red-brick building stood in a garden.

"That's the College," said Miss Marsh.

As it was going to be the centre of their activities for the next three months, Meg and Molly stared at it much thrilled.

"It'll gobble us up till Christmas!" whispered Meg.

"Hope it'll digest us, then!" returned Molly.

"What's that?" said Miss Marsh, who had sharp ears. "Oh, I'm sure you'll like it when you get settled there. I know several girls at the College and they all seem happy. There's always plenty going on, games and concerts and things, and sometimes they act plays. I went to a performance they gave of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and it was really very good. The fairies were charming, they danced so prettily, and Puck was capital. They acted it in the garden, against a background of bushes. Our Vicar's daughter from next door goes to the College. They're still away at the seaside, I believe. I haven't seen them in their garden."

"How old is she?"

"About eleven."

"Just a kid, then," murmured Meg.

"We had to be at school at eight o'clock at Montreux and we had simply tons of homework," volunteered Molly.

"School doesn't begin till nine at the College, but I believe there's plenty of homework."

"That's good news and bad," said Molly.

She was beginning to lose her shyness and to feel quite friendly towards Miss Marsh, who replied:

"Oh, you'll soon get used to things, no doubt."

In the afternoon Aunt Maggie took a rest, Miss Marsh disappeared on some errand, and the girls sat in the garden at the back of the house with books and magazines. They soon grew tired of reading, however, and began to explore. It was a fairly large garden, with shrubs and flowerbeds and a high brick wall, over the side of which hung a pear tree from an adjoining garden.

There were several pears on this branch, which looked ripe and almost ready to drop, but they were high above their heads and out of reach.

"If we could only climb up and give the bough a shake, I'm sure they'd fall!" said Meg. "Then we could have a pear."

"Would Aunt Maggie mind?"

"Windfalls belong to anybody. If these tumble from a tree in the next garden into ours, I should say Providence had sent them into our laps!"

"Well, I don't see how you're going to shake the tree."

"The wall's climbable if you'll give me a boost up. Nobody can see us from the house."

It was an old wall, with crevices in the mortar. Meg placed her fingers in these, and by the aid of a heave from Molly, scrambled without much difficulty to the top. Here she reached the branch and gave it a shake, with the result that several pears fell down at Molly's feet. She was picking them up, and Meg was giving a further energetic shake to the bough, when a voice from the other garden called:

"Hello! Hello! Hello! Who's sneaking our pears?"

Meg slid back down the wall far faster than she had gone up, grazing her knee as she did so. There was a scuffling and a scrambling on the farther side, and a boy of perhaps fourteen swung himself on to the top and sat astride on the coping.

"Hello! Who the Dickens are you?" he asked. "I thought it couldn't be Mrs. Norton climbing the wall! Rather too athletic a performance for *her*!"

The girls could not help laughing at the idea of Aunt Maggie engaged in such an exercise.

"She's our aunt," said Meg.

"Oh! So you're staying here, are you?"

"We are."

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" he continued, shouting into his own garden. "Come along up here and be introduced. Visitors next door, if you please."

There was more scrambling, and presently another boy and two girls were also seated on the coping, looking down with some curiosity at Meg and Molly.

The first comer, who seemed the eldest, waved a hand towards them.

"Nieces of Mrs. Norton!" he explained. "Your names, fair ladies?"

"Meg Campbell,"—"Molly Campbell," giggled the pair together.

"Charmed to meet you, I'm sure. Sisters?"

"Cousins."

"Well, I'll return the compliment. My name is Edward Wright, this is my brother Hugh, this my sister Bertha, and this my cousin Aileen. They can't get up and bow or they might fall, but they're smiling nicely, aren't they?"

They were in fact grinning with amusement.

"What about the pears?" asked Bertha.

"We haven't eaten any," replied Molly. "I'll hand them up to you if you like."

"Shall we be magnanimous and allow them to keep them?" asked Edward. "I knew you'd agree," as the others nodded assent. "Now, Molly and Meg, if I've got your names correctly, how long are you going to stay with your aunt? Till Christmas? That's a thundering big visit, isn't it?"

"We're going to school."

"Where?"

"At the College."

"I go to the College!" volunteered Bertha. "And Aileen's going too. She's come to live with us."

"Another happy family, you see!" remarked Edward facetiously. "We've just returned from the seaside. Where do *you* come from, by the by? Montreux? Isn't that in Switzerland? Hello! Hello! Hello! That's our tea bell. Come on, kids! I'm ravenous. See you again, Moll and Meggie—sorry—I mean Meg and Molly. Ta ta for the present."

The four dropped quickly to the other side of the wall and, to judge from the sound of footsteps, hurried away to the house and the tea table.

An Entrance Exam

Left alone, Molly and Meg devoured the pears with much appreciation. They were full of curiosity concerning their next-door neighbours. When Miss Marsh came presently into the garden they questioned her about them. They were the children, so she said, of the Vicar of St. John's Church. Edward and Hugh went to a boarding school, Bertha to the College. Aileen, who was their cousin, was thirteen, and the daughter of a missionary in China. She had spent some years with a grandmother in Somerset, but had now come to live with the Wrights in order that she might attend the College. They had been away at Eastbourne. They must only just have returned home. That was all the information she could give, but it aroused the girls' interest. They hoped they might see more of the Wright family. They decided that they seemed a jolly crew. They haunted the garden next day in the expectation of finding grinning faces peeping over the wall, but none appeared. Their neighbours were evidently otherwise occupied. They did not even hear the sound of their voices.

On Sunday they were conducted by Miss Marsh to St. John's Church, and caught a glimpse of the backs of the Vicarage party. There was no opportunity, however, even to smile at them on the way home. Further overtures of friendship would have to wait. On Monday morning the ever-useful Miss Marsh escorted them to the College for their entrance examination. They arrived shortly before nine o'clock and were delivered into the care of a teacher, who entered their names and ages and took them into a classroom, where six other girls, also newcomers, were already seated. Among these was Aileen Wright, who gave them a shy glance of recognition, then turned her eyes to her desk. Another mistress was in charge, and as all the candidates had now assembled, she dealt out papers for the first examination. Meg and Molly studied the questions with some trepidation. They had no previous experience of an English school, and they wondered how the standards would compare with those of Canada and Switzerland. There were to be six half-hourly papers during the morning to test their knowledge, with an interval for lunch at eleven o'clock. The first was mathematics, and as they had been well drilled in that subject at Montreux they both managed tolerably well. Geography also was not so difficult, and they were each able to draw a map and fill in names of places. History gave them a depressing half-hour; they had almost forgotten what they had learnt in Canada, and English history had not been taught in Switzerland. They found most of the questions impossible to answer, and sat staring ruefully at them.

At the French paper, however, they cheered up. With their practical knowledge of the language it was extremely easy. They accomplished the translation of French into English and English into French in record time, answered the grammatical questions, and had completed the whole paper before the clock struck eleven, while other candidates seemed still puzzling over it.

Miss Graham, the mistress, now announced that there would be an interval of twenty minutes. Pens were put down thankfully, papers collected, and the eight newcomers were conducted to another room, where milk and biscuits awaited them. As they ate their lunch they looked at one another over the edges of their tumblers, then Meg, who was never troubled with shyness, broke the ice of reserve and began to talk.

"Thank goodness I'm still alive!" she announced dramatically. "What an awful ordeal! Four papers one after the other! Well, how did the rest of you get on?"

A girl of about her own age, with two pigtails, shook her head and gave a dismal sigh.

"They were jolly stiff. I expect I've failed in most. I'm never any good at exams. I remember things afterwards, but I can't just think of them at the time."

"Same here," said an elder girl. "I'm afraid they'll place me low, though I've turned fourteen. I don't want to be put among the kids."

"Did we all have the same questions?" asked another.

"No, it was according to our ages. My sister here is only eleven, and of course they didn't give her the same papers as they gave me."

"What luck had you?" asked Meg, turning to Aileen Wright.

"Oh, moderate. I managed the history, but the French stumped me utterly."

"It was just the other way with us, wasn't it, Molly?"

"Yes, I'm sure I've failed in history, but the French was easy. You see, we've been at school in Switzerland, and all the lessons were in French there."

"Why, then, it must have been as simple as A B C to you."

"How many more exams are there?"

"Only two—Grammar and General Knowledge."

"And we're to remember that writing, correct spelling and general neatness will be taken into account."

"I'd forgotten that! My writing was a scribble, and I never *can* spell," exclaimed the girl of fourteen.

"Perhaps you'll be in *my* form, then!" perked her eleven-year-old sister.

"Oh no! They'd never put a girl of your age with her kid sister," said the one with the pigtails. "I know Miss Browne, and she's more sense of decency than to do that. My cousin has been at the Coll for years. She says clever ones from twelve to fourteen go into IV A and second grade into IV B. I expect I'm a second grade."

"Perhaps we most of us are," ventured Molly, finishing her milk.

"Well, it's only natural that a girl who's been here for years and come up from the prep should take a higher place than a new one. She knows the ropes."

"Rather! Though it's hard luck on us."

"Well, there's only one thing about it, if they put us in IV B we shan't have as much homework as if we were in IV A."

"That's one way of looking at it certainly."

"Have you been at a big school before, Aileen?" asked Molly.

"Not a very large one. That's why I've come to live at Rillington, so that I could go to the College."

"Shall you like living here?"

"Oh, I hope so. It's a change from Somerset at any rate."

"Is your home in Somerset?"

"Grannie lives there, but Dad and Mums are in China."

"And my daddy is in New York at present. He's coming home at Christmas though."

At that moment Miss Graham returned to collect the candidates, and marched them back to the examination room. Meg and Molly had been cheered by the French paper, but their faces fell when they were confronted by the one on General Knowledge. They did not know the surname of the Royal family, or the name of the Prime Minister, or the difference between a blue letterbox and a red one.

Fortunately their voyage from Canada had taught them which was starboard and which port on board ship; they knew the pyramids were in Egypt, and that Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Tennyson were poets, and that the Pope lived at The Vatican, but when it came to "what bank holidays are observed in England?" "In what year was it made compulsory for children to be sent to school?" and "How long does Lent last?" they were obliged to leave blanks. The following paper on Grammar they also found difficult, and they were very relieved indeed when at half-past twelve the bell was rung and the examination was finished. Feeling jaded and flustered, they filed from the room to retrieve their coats and hats.

"When shall we know the result?" asked Meg.

"By Thursday, I expect," said the girl with the pigtails, whose name was Pamela. "They'll send us each a notice to tell us our forms."

"And school begins next Tuesday?"

"Yes, at nine. We're to have our uniforms by then."

"Where do we get them?"

"Oh, don't you know? At the Stores—that big shop on the Parade. They supply all the uniforms for the College."

"I suppose Aunt Maggie knows?"

"She'll have had a notice about it. They send one to all the parents of new girls."

"Well, I expect we shall meet next Tuesday?"

"Yes, probably in IV B. I know *I* shan't be put higher."

"No more shall I, after most of my papers."

Meg and Molly walked home with Aileen Wright. She was pleasant, though not very conversational. Meg as usual did most of the talking, and asked many questions, to which Aileen replied briefly. She had been born in China, she had lived there till she was seven years old, and after that with her grandmother in Somerset. She had two brothers, younger than herself, who were at a prep school in Brighton. Her father and mother would not be coming home for two years. Yes, she thought she would like living with her uncle and aunt. Her cousins were quite jolly. Yes, she was fond of tennis, but there was no court at the Vicarage. Sometimes they played in the public courts at the park.

"I hope we shall see you on the wall again," said Meg, as they parted at their gate.

"I dare say I shall hear you in your garden, then I'll climb up and take a peep over."

"We won't shake down any more of your pears!" laughed Molly.

At lunch the girls related their experiences of the morning. Aunt Maggie was interested and sympathetic. She read the examination questions which they had brought home, and thought them very difficult, especially those on General Knowledge.

"Young people are expected to learn a great deal nowadays," she remarked, "far more than in my schooldays. I'm sure I couldn't answer those papers. Could you, Miss Marsh?"

"No, indeed! I should fail hopelessly, I'm afraid."

"I don't think we shall be put in IV A, Aunt Maggie!" said Molly.

"Never mind, my dears. Miss Browne will place you where she thinks best, and I shall be quite satisfied. I shouldn't like you to be overworked. Besides, there are other subjects at the College you may do well at, drawing and music for instance."

"Yes, we should like those."

"What about our uniforms?" asked Meg.

"I'll take you to the Stores this afternoon. Miss Browne sent me the list of what you'll need."

Mrs. Norton had her usual rest after lunch, and at about three o'clock she and Miss Marsh started with the girls for their shopping expedition. The Stores was a big shop on the Parade containing many departments. All the girls at the College were required to purchase their school outfits there, so that their clothes should be exactly alike. The uniform for the coming autumn and winter consisted of brown skirts, red woollen jerseys, brown coats with the College badge embroidered in red on the breast pockets, and red felt hats. It was a costume that suited Molly well enough, but did not entirely harmonize with Meg's auburn hair. She would much have preferred blue or green. She had no choice in the matter, however, and was obliged to wear the same as the rest of the school. Brown stockings and shoes followed in another department, and also regulation brown waterproofs.

"We shall all be as alike as peas," remarked Meg. "I wish we could wear our own clothes."

"It's a good rule," declared Aunt Maggie. "To begin with, it doesn't encourage any rivalry in dress, which certainly used to exist when I was at school, and some of the girls wore much better clothes than others could afford. It was humiliating for a girl to feel herself badly dressed compared with her companions, and was apt to give her what people now call an 'inferiority complex', but what was bluntly called 'envy' in those days. Then the distinctive uniform stamps those who wear it as College girls. Everyone recognizes the red hats, and if their owners don't behave they would very soon be reported. I believe there's a 'Watch Committee' of prefects for the purpose."

"Oh!" said Meg.

"Don't look so horrified. It's only to insure that girls don't run across the road in front of cars, and don't walk three or four abreast on the pavements. Manners have to be considered at the College as well as lessons, I'm glad to say."

"So they were at Montreux. Madame Séger was most particular."

"Yes, I notice you've been well trained in that respect."

It was the first compliment Aunt Maggie had paid them, so the girls were duly pleased. They had been wondering what she thought of them. When the shopping was concluded she took them to have tea at a large café, where an orchestra was playing, and little tables stood among groups of palms. It was a pleasant finish to the afternoon, and they enjoyed toasted scones and iced cakes. To Molly, however, it recalled vividly her birthday tea at the Casino. Could that possibly be only ten days ago? So much had happened in that short time—the quarrel with Monsieur Henrich, her father's hurried departure to America, and the removal of Meg and herself to Rillington. They had expected to have returned to their school in Montreux by now, and here they were entered at the College. She wondered if her father was settled at New York, and when he would write to her. A sudden longing for him seized her. Meg never mentioned him, and seemed entirely occupied with their new surroundings. Tears suddenly started to Molly's eyes. She hastily turned her head and winked them away. Perhaps Miss Marsh, who was very observant, noticed them, for she began to gather up their parcels and suggest that it was growing late.

"You'll need a rest before your bridge party to-night," she said to Mrs. Norton.

"Yes, so I shall. By the by, did you order me a taxi? It's too far to walk to Mrs. Hall's, besides which I don't like the roads in the dark. Let us go home now by all means. I can have half an hour or so on the sofa when we get in. Really, I'm more tired than I realized. Shopping is an exhausting business."

The College would not reopen till next Tuesday, and meanwhile Molly and Meg felt time hang heavy on their hands. On the following morning after breakfast they were wandering disconsolately in the garden; Aunt Maggie was not yet up, and Miss Marsh was occupied with household affairs.

"I wish we'd something to do," sighed Meg. "It's fearfully dull here, isn't it?"

"Yes, I've no sewing, and there don't seem to be any nice books. Not the sort we care for, anyhow."

"Perhaps Miss Marsh could find us some more magazines if we asked her."

"She's busy just now."

"Well, what *can* we do?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Just lounge about, I suppose."

"I wish——"

But Meg's wishes received a sudden interruption. Over the garden wall appeared the jolly face of Edward Wright.

"Hello! Hello!" he called. "How are you two getting on?"

"All right, thanks!" replied Meg.

"Doing anything in particular this morning?"

The girls shook their heads.

"Not that we know of," said Molly.

"Well, look here! We're all going out into the country to pick blackberries, and taking our lunch with us. Would you care to join on?"

"Oh! We'd love to! If Aunt Maggie'll let us."

"Go and ask her. We're starting at half-past ten, and catching the bus to Aston Priors—fare one and three return each—and we're taking sandwiches and lemon squash. Shan't be back till teatime. Tear inside and ask! Be quick! I'll wait here on the wall."

Meg and Molly vanished like the wind, and finding Miss Marsh in the kitchen, breathlessly repeated the invitation.

"I'll see Mrs. Norton. It would be a nice excursion for you, and you'd be quite all right with the children from next door."

"Edward's waiting on the wall!" urged Meg.

"I shan't be long," smiled Miss Marsh, and she hurried upstairs.

She returned in a few minutes with the necessary permission, and half a crown for the bus fares.

"I'll cut you some sandwiches, and you can have a bottle of milk," she said.

"Oh, thanks!" cried both girls, rushing back into the garden to tell the good news to Edward.

"Yes! We may come!" they shouted eagerly.

"Right-o! Be on your doorstep at 10.30 prompt, and be sure you bring baskets for blackberries," he called, as he disappeared from the wall.

This indeed put a different complexion on affairs. Molly and Meg were most excited at the prospect. Instead of a long dull day with elderly people, they would have four young companions, and promised themselves plenty of fun.

They were ready before the time, and waiting in the front garden when the Wrights appeared at their gate, and all started off, a hilarious little party, to catch a motor-bus at the corner of the road. It was a beautiful sunny September day, and, as soon as the town was left behind, they were driving along country roads bordered with trees, and through picturesque villages with gardens bright with late summer flowers. It was the girls' first acquaintance with rural England, and they were enchanted with the pretty black and white cottages, covered with clematis and Virginian creeper, the church tower, and the glimpses of a river among willowy banks. It was so different from Canada or Switzerland that they could not help exclaiming enthusiastically.

"Yes, England's not half a bad old place," agreed Edward. "We get off at this next corner. Got all your things, you kids? Bertha, don't leave the butterfly net behind! Hugh, where's that bottle? Here we are! Stop, please!"

The Wrights had been to Aston Priors before, and Edward led the way down a long lane and into a most interesting wood, interspersed with patches of open ground where brambles grew in plenty. Wood pigeons were cooing in the trees, and here and there they caught the flash of a jay's wing, or heard the yaffle of a green woodpecker. There were wild flowers such as Molly and Meg had not seen in Canada, and they began at once to gather bunches. A little stream flowed through the wood, widening out into a shallow pool.

"We always paddle here," said Bertha, sitting down and pulling off her shoes.

The others followed her example, and soon they were all enjoying the cool trickle of the brook, and hunting about for water beetles and other aquatic specimens, which the boys put carefully into the bottle that Hugh had brought.

"For our aquarium," he informed Molly. "We got tadpoles in the spring. Only three of them turned into frogs though. Bertha said she thought they ate each other up like cannibals."

"We had a newt," added Bertha, "and it got out of the aquarium and climbed right up the window curtains."

"Oh! I've trodden on something slippery!" yelled Aileen.

"Was it a fish? I believe there are trout here sometimes!" cried Edward, splashing towards the spot.

"Ted! There's a clouded yellow over there!" bawled Hugh.

"Half a sec while I put on my shoes. Where's the butterfly net? Bertha, you had it."

"It's here on this stone."

It was a most exciting morning. Hugh climbed a tree because he saw a squirrel with a nut in its mouth, but he failed to find its secret hoard, and crashed down again, grazing his shins. Molly made him bathe them in the stream as a precaution. She had taken ambulance lessons at Montreux. Aileen was collecting toadstools, and found some specimens of the "bird's-nest fungus" growing on a piece of dead wood, tiny brown cups each containing four seeds, like miniature eggs in a nest. She put them carefully into a small cardboard box.

"We haven't picked any blackberries yet," suggested Meg.

"We'll eat our prog first, and then the baskets will be empty," said Edward. "Who votes for lunch now?"

"Hungry as a hunter!" proclaimed Hugh.

"Same here," agreed Aileen.

So they made a circle on a patch of grass near the brook and spread out the refreshments. Miss Marsh had put six slices of plum cake into the girls' basket, and Mrs. Wright had provided eight apple turnovers, so they decided to pool the sweet-stuff when the sandwiches were finished, and divided them into six equal portions. The two extra turnovers had to be mathematically severed with Edward's penknife, but he insisted on Molly and Meg having their shares.

Then they sang sea-chanties and rounds, and had fun and jokes, till at last Aileen said:

"Look here, you slackers, what about the blackberries? We shan't make much jam at this rate if we don't get busy."

"Well, we've emptied the baskets now," said Bertha. "Come along, and don't eat half what you pick, you boys!"

Wandering about among the bramble bushes, gathering luscious blackberries, was a pleasant occupation, and if some of them went into their mouths they might well be forgiven, for there were plenty to go into the baskets. They picked and picked till their fingers were stained purple, and they felt like the babes in the wood.

"It's a grand place for berries here. I don't think many people know about it," said Bertha. "We found it by accident last year. It's well off the high road, you see."

"It's a gorgeous place," said Molly. "Do you often have these picnics?"

"Only in the hols. There isn't time when school begins. Last May Miss Rogers—that's our botany mistress—took some of us for a ramble one Saturday. It was quite jolly."

"Will she do it again?"

"Not this term."

"My basket's quite full," said Aileen. "And the boys have picked heaps too. Do you know it's after four o'clock? Listen! Edward's shouting to us. All right, Ted, we're coming!"

Edward was looking at his watch.

"We must be getting a move on now," he announced. "The bus passes the corner at 4.45, and there won't be another for an hour. We've got to go up the lane, remember. Where's that blighter Hugh? If you can't find him he must come home by himself. We can't wait to look for him."

"He's there! I'll fetch him. Hugh! Hugh!" shouted Molly, nearly upsetting her blackberries in her haste as she ran.

Collecting the family, and the baskets and the specimens and the butterfly net and the aquarium jar, needed a little generalship, but Edward rounded up his company and marched them off up the lane, where luckily they were just in time

to catch the bus as it passed along the road at the corner. It was rather full, and the boys had to stand, while the girls nursed the specimens, Molly, who was entrusted with the aquarium jar, receiving some of its water on her lap as the bus jolted. She only laughed, however. It had been such a jolly day, and she felt happy. The party separated at their respective gates on terms of friendship. They had got to know one another quite well.

"Bye bye! See you again some day!" said Edward.

"Rather!" answered Meg.

"And thanks ever so for taking us!" added Molly.

The College

The next day was pouring with rain, and according to the wireless the weather had set in for a wet spell. The girls were thankful it had been fine for their excursion. It was a happy event to remember. Also it had given them something to do. The wild flowers had revived in water, and with the aid of a botany book containing coloured illustrations, produced by Aunt Maggie, they hunted out the names of most of them, and set to work to paint them in the Nature Study Diaries which they had begun at Montreux in June. They also helped Miss Marsh to make their basket of blackberries into a few pots of jam. So in spite of being kept indoors they managed to pass the time.

On Friday came a report of their entrance examination at the College. They had passed fairly well in some subjects, but had done indifferently in others. They were both to be placed in IV B.

"Oh! I hoped it might be IV A," lamented Meg.

"It's just as well not to put you too high at first," said Aunt Maggie. "You may find the work very different from what you've been accustomed to. Better to get into it gradually."

"French will be easy, at any rate," said Molly.

"Yes, that will be a great help to you."

Bertha peered over the garden wall during an interval in the rain and informed the girls that Aileen was also placed in IV B. It was some consolation to feel they would know at least one member of their new form.

Their uniforms arrived from the Stores, and on the following Tuesday morning they put them on, and together with Bertha and Aileen, whom they met at the gate, they set out for the College. After they had changed their shoes and left hats and coats in the cloakroom, Bertha showed them along a corridor to IV B, where they were taken in charge, as newcomers, by a sub-prefect, who allotted them their desks and gave them each a pile of textbooks and exercise books.

"You have pencil boxes? That's all right," she remarked. "I've put you side by side and in the front, as you're new. Miss Nelson likes new girls under her eye."

"Is that to see we behave ourselves," whispered Meg to Molly.

The sub-prefect's sharp ears caught the remark.

"Not at all! But you may need help in your work. New girls are always put in the front row."

With a rather reproving glance at Meg she bustled away, presently returning to deal out blotting paper, then, having completed her duties, she retired to her own form.

Molly looked round the room, and among the various faces recognized Pamela, the girl with the pigtails, and the girl of fourteen who had also been at the entrance examination. So they too were in IV B. The rest were all strangers.

Miss Nelson entered almost immediately. She was tall and rosy-faced and cheerful, with an authoritative voice, and looked as if she could be jolly but could keep order. She took the roll-call, and evidently mentally registered the names of the new girls. Then work began. To Molly and Meg, after a year in a Swiss school, it was pleasant to have lessons in English, and not nearly so much of a mental strain as to do everything in French. They got along quite creditably, and answered any questions which fell to their share.

At eleven o'clock the form adjourned for a short interval, and, as the day was fine, they took their biscuits into the playground. Here the members of IV B collected in a circle, eyeing one another tentatively. Then one of them, a rather stout girl with brown hair, acted spokeswoman. Pointing to each of the newcomers in turn, she began:

"One, two, three, four, five,
Catching fishes all alive!"

"So there are five of you this term! Well, I suppose you'll wriggle down in course of time. Names, please! We have heard them read out, but we'll have them again so that we can know which is which. Now then, each in turn!"

"Meg Campbell."

"Molly Campbell."

"Aileen Wright."

"Pamela Taylor."

"Sadie Orton."

"That's all right. Now I'll name the rest of us and you'll know the 'Who's who' of the form."

"Are you going to give our nicknames, Doll?" giggled one of the group.

"Shall I?"

"Might as well."

"We all have nicknames—just for a bit of fun. You'd better learn them to begin with, and then you can't make mistakes. I'm Dorothy North, otherwise Doll for short, and these wretched girls have christened me 'Dotty', not, if you please, because I'm deficient in intellect, but because—well—because——"

"She's always saying dotty things to make us laugh," put in another.

"Better than making you cry, at any rate, isn't it? Well, that's *my* reputation. These two are Hetty and Tess Lewis. They walk two and a half miles to school every day and the same back, and say they like it. We call them 'Hiking Hetty' and 'Tramping Tess'. It's good exercise for them no doubt."

"You'd slim a little if you did it too!" volunteered Tess.

"Personal remarks are out of order!" retorted Dorothy. "Let me get on with the business! Now this one is Daphne Holmes, and we've nicknamed her Titters, because—well, can't you hear her tittering now? She always does."

Daphne, a pretty, fair girl was certainly giggling, as were some of the others.

"This is Mary Barnes," continued Dorothy. "'Contrary Mary' we call her, she's so fond of arguing.

"Caroline Johnstone—that one in the specs—*she* glories in sleeping in a tent all summer, so we call her 'Camping Carrie'. Florence Potter over there is known as Hot-Pot—she has a bit of a temper if you tread on her corns."

"What a shame! I haven't!"

"Oh, haven't you! Wait and see! Now the next two——"

"The next two will speak for themselves, thanks!" interrupted a taller girl. "You've had your innings. Our turn now. I'm Elizabeth Arnold and this is Maud Logan—named after Queen Elizabeth and Tennyson's Maud."

"Not a bit of it—'Bossy Bess' and 'Managing Maud'," shouted the others.

"Envy! That's all! But we ignore it. This is Winnie Harlow, commonly called 'Grinnie' because she's always smiling, and here's Rachel Garside, 'Rags' for short—she's continually playing rags on somebody, so look out! Now you know us all."

"These new girls ought to be given names," said Maud.

"So they ought."

"They won't belong properly to the form till we've christened them."

"Get on with it, then, quick!"

"Well, you two, Meg and Molly, did I hear you come from Switzerland?"

"Yes."

"Can you yodel?"

"A little."

"You shall do it at our next concert; it will be rather fun. We'll call you the 'Two Yodels'."

"Thanks!"

"And you—Aileen—there's a rumour you've lived in Persia. How about 'Otto of Roses'? That comes from Persia, and I thought I smelled some on your handkerchief. Did I?"

"Yes, I have a bottle of it, but I wasn't born in Persia. It was China."

"Never mind. Bring the bottle to school and give us each a drop."

"All right, I will."

"Pamela Taylor, I don't know what to call you."

"Pat," suggested a voice.

"Not bad. It will do as well as anything else."

"You haven't christened this one," said Mary, pushing forward Sadie Orton.

Sadie was not fond of the limelight; she seemed embarrassed and shy. Maud regarded her for a moment judicially.

"Call her 'Sunshine Sadie' to cheer her up. She looks gloomy enough at present," she decreed.

The loud clanging of the school bell broke up the circle, and all the girls ran indoors.

"What do you call Miss Nelson?" asked Molly, as they hurried to IV B.

"When she's in a good temper we call her 'Sweet Nell of Old Drury' (her name's Ellinor)," laughed Maud. "And when her eyes flash and she's on the warpath and seeming to say 'England expects every girl to do her duty' we call her 'Nelson of Trafalgar', and she looks it too!"

"Can she be cross?"

"Rather! I tell you she can, if she thinks anyone's shirking."

"What's Miss Browne like?"

"We don't see much of her in our form except at her lectures; unless we have to go and report, and then it's look out for squalls! Sh'sh, it's 'silence' in the corridor."

At the luncheon table Aunt Maggie was anxious to know how the girls had got on at the College. They gave prim little accounts of their morning's work, but did not mention the nicknames. They both felt that was a side of school better kept to themselves. She might think it was not consistent with the dignity of such an educational establishment.

"I'm glad there's a little fun going," said Meg afterwards in private.

"So am I. I shall like some of those girls. I hope we haven't forgotten how to yodel! We must practise it in the garden."

"And wake the neighbourhood? I'm glad they didn't give us worse names. I was terribly afraid they'd christen me 'Ginger' or 'Carrots' because of my hair."

"The names weren't unkind, only ragging one another a little, and nobody seemed to mind."

"No, 'Bossing Bess' and 'Managing Maud' looked rather proud of themselves, I thought."

"Well, we must hurry off again or we shall be late, and Miss Nelson might glare at us with her 'Trafalgar eyes!'."

"She couldn't be worse than Mademoiselle Bertier at Montreux."

"No, but she'd scold in English instead of in French, and we couldn't pretend we didn't understand her."

"You were very clever at that sometimes!"

"Oh, yes, I can look stupid when I like. It paid not to know the language too well, if one got into trouble."

This afternoon the members of IV B were to take Handicrafts. After reporting in their form room they filed into the studio. This was a large and pleasant room with a top light. The walls were hung with specimens of the pupils' own work—poster designs, lino blocks, water-colour sketches, paintings of flowers, and pen-and-ink drawings. All were very good, for only the best were honoured by inclusion in the exhibition. Molly, who was naturally artistic, looked round with much satisfaction. It was the kind of thing she would like. The teacher, Miss Rowe, began at once to give a demonstration of Stick Printing. She mixed water-colour paints, squeezed from tubes, with Gloy Paste instead of water, then taking a printing stick, the end of which was engraved with a pattern, she smeared the mixture on lightly with a brush and stamped the pattern on to paper. As she explained to the class, the process needed care: the paint must be of the right consistency, it must be put on thinly, and the stamp must be applied with a firm, even motion. They were all required to practise on pieces of paper until they could do it with success. When they became sufficiently expert they could then be allowed to print designs in black and various colours, and could make calendars, Christmas cards, book covers and other interesting things.

Everybody set to work with enthusiasm; it offered such a grand opportunity for Christmas presents. There were various designs, so that they could adapt the patterns in several ways according to their own ideas. A first lesson was also given in lettering, so that they could print mottoes and greetings and titles as well.

"You may like to make your own book-plates," suggested Miss Rowe, showing a beautiful specimen which she had done herself. "It's nice to have them pasted inside your books. If you want to give a Christmas or birthday gift, a dozen book-plates with your friend's name inscribed on them makes a welcome present. I find people are always so pleased to have them."

Molly was already planning Christmas offerings for her father, Aunt Maggie, Miss Marsh, and even for Madame Henrich, Greta, and friends at Montreux and in Canada. They would be so easy to send by post abroad. She smiled across the table at Meg, who nodded appreciation. No doubt she was thinking the same.

"And when you can print well on paper," continued Miss Rowe, "we will try printing patterns on pieces of sateen, so that you can make bags and blotters. Now I'm going to leave you to practise for a while, because I see the bookbinders are in difficulties and need me."

Half a dozen elder girls, who had learnt bookbinding the previous term, were at work in a corner of the studio, and had been making signals of distress. The teacher turned her attention to them, and also to two others who were making designs for posters.

There was no strict silence rule, and the girls talked quietly amongst themselves.

"This is a jolly class," said Molly to Dorothy, who was working next to her. "Have you done printing before?"

"No, but we did stencilling last year, and made some calendars. We all love Handicrafts."

"I'd like to try bookbinding."

"Perhaps we shall learn that next term."

"I could spend all my time here in the studio."

"I dare say. So could many of us. Then it would be a School of Art, not the College. What would Miss Browne say to that? She's keen on most of us taking the Matric."

"I don't think I care about the Matric, but I'd like to go to a School of Art. I love painting."

"Does your cousin?"

"Yes, but I think she likes music better."

"She'll have plenty of opportunities for that here. The Musical Society begins next week."

"What do you do at it?"

"Oh, we—bother! I've made a smudge. That comes of talking. Don't speak to me any more."

Miss Rowe came round again soon to inspect the work, and said they were getting on quite well. She promised that at next lesson she would have sheets of grey paper ready for them, and they could start calendars. She showed them how adequately to wash their brushes, which were sticky with Gloy Paste, and where to put all the materials tidily away. Then she dismissed the class.

"Well, how did you like your first day at the College?" asked Meg, as they walked home.

"The morning was better than I expected, and this afternoon was topping," answered Molly.

"Some homework though," said Meg, looking at her pile of books.

"Not as much as we had at Montreux."

"Perhaps not, but it's pretty stiff all the same."

"Oh, we'll get through it somehow."

"There's Aileen in front, with Bertha. Shall we run and catch them up?"

"Yes. Let us. Aileen! Bertha!"

Molly called as she ran, and the others waited for them. She did not get as good a welcome, though, as she expected. Bertha stared at her indignantly and burst out:

"Really, Molly, you ought to know better than to shout in the road! It's a good thing there isn't a prefect about, or you'd have your name taken. You'll never win your deportment badge at this rate. We're not supposed to tear along like that either, unless we've got to catch a bus. Don't let Miss Davis see you or you *would* get a lecture."

Somewhat crestfallen, Molly walked in more dignified fashion beside Aileen. She had an impression that Bertha was rather a "Little Miss" and enjoyed the opportunity of reproving her elders. Having been at College for two years, she knew the rules better than new girls and meant to show the fact.

Aileen gave a comprehensive smile. No doubt she was well acquainted with Bertha. The latter, though she was fairly fond of her cousin, was not too greatly pleased to have her come to live at the Vicarage, where she had valued her own position as only daughter. She did not mean to let Aileen assume the rôle of elder sister. Fortunately Aileen was tactful and managed to maintain peace.

Bertha chatted to Meg, giving her gratuitous information about the College, as she marched sedately by her side. The four girls parted at their respective gates.

"Don't care much for that kid!" said Meg as they went in.

"No; conceited little monkey!" agreed Molly.

A Musical Club

Molly and Meg had reason to appreciate some of Bertha's remarks on Thursday when they attended the class for Drill and Deportment held in the big hall by Miss Davis, the gymnastic mistress.

Special instruction was given in how to walk correctly—head erect, shoulders well back, and a graceful carriage. Any girl guilty of slouching or shuffling or swinging her arms was sharply reprimanded. "Safety first" and "order on the roads" was part of the lesson. The pupils were required to walk two and two along an imaginary pavement and to cross an imaginary street chalked by white lines across the hall. They were shown the best way to carry heavy satchels or cases of books, so as to avoid any danger of spinal curvature, and were also taught how to bow when passing anyone they knew, with shades of difference—respect for a teacher, head-prefect or a grownup acquaintance, and a more friendly greeting to a young companion. They were reminded of the rule that they must walk not more than three together when returning home, and must never allow the pavements to be crowded with groups of chattering college girls. A Watch Committee, consisting of prefects, were responsible for observing whether these rules were kept, and offenders would be reported when noticed.

Deportment badges for in-and-out-of-school carriage would be awarded at half term to those who had not already gained them, and those who held them from last term must maintain the standard or after two warnings forfeit their badges.

"I begin to see the reason for our bright scarlet hats," said Molly at the eleven o'clock interval.

"Yes, our hats are as conspicuous as poppies in a field of corn," said Maud. "Not much chance of escaping notice, is there?"

"Does anyone get reported?"

"Oh, rather! Tess and Hetty were warned last term."

"Is that your badge?"

"Yes. Want to look at it? Miss Rowe designed it."

The little brooch consisted of a gilt D on a background of scarlet enamel with a slight floral border. It was simple though quite pretty. Its value lay in the honour it conveyed. It was considered "the thing" at the College to be able to wear the deportment badge.

"Hope I shall win one at half term," said Molly, handing back the trophy.

"Oh, you're sure to. Why not?"

"Do the rules hold good in the playground?"

"Of course they don't. We must let off steam somewhere. We may make a noise here, and tear about as we like, and nobody takes any notice till the bell rings. Then it has to be 'walk quietly' and 'silence in the corridors' and all the rest of it."

"By the by," said Elizabeth, who came up just then with Meg and Aileen. "Are you three going to join the Musical Club?"

"What's that? We haven't heard about it," replied Molly.

"There's a first meeting this afternoon. Only those girls who are really musical are allowed to join. Miss Browne says it's waste of time for others. It's ever so jolly. We play instruments and have form competitions and get up concerts."

"We're both fond of music," said Meg.

"And so am I," said Aileen eagerly.

"Then put your names down after morning school. Miss Nelson will be making up the list."

"What do the others do who don't join?" asked Molly.

"They can take elocution or embroidery or cookery."

"Those all sound nice!"

"Well, you can't take everything, there isn't time. You have to make a choice."

"I vote for music then," said Meg. "You too, Molly?"

"Yes, on the whole I will. Though I'd like cookery and embroidery."

"You can switch over to those next term," suggested Maud, "but I expect you'll get so keen on the Musical Club you won't want to."

"Do you belong to it?"

"Rather, and so do Dorothy and Winnie and Caroline and Daphne. Dorothy plays the 'cello and Daphne the violin. Any instruments here?"

"Only the piano."

"I suppose you can sing?"

"Oh yes."

"They ought to be able to sing if we've christened them 'The Yodels'," laughed Maud. "We shall expect to hear some yodelling."

At the end of the morning Molly, Meg and Aileen gave in their names to Miss Nelson as desirous of becoming members of the Musical Club, and she added them to her list. The girls all assembled in IV B at 2.30 and had a half-hour's lesson in English literature, then at three o'clock the music students filed away to a large classroom where there was a piano. About thirty pupils from various forms were collected there, and several violins and two violoncellos had been brought.

The teacher, Miss Courtenay, gave a short lecture on general musical appreciation, and then began to take the life of Mozart, illustrating some of his works by gramophone records and by pieces on the piano. An elder girl played a violin solo, but the 'cellos did not venture. Miss Courtenay told the instrumentalists to stay after four o'clock and practise an arrangement for strings of a Mozart sonata under her superintendence.

"We should be glad of more violins for the school orchestra," she announced. "If any girls here can play, or would care to learn, let me know, and I will make arrangements for you to have lessons. Please mention it at home to your parents. Later on, when you've had time to practise, we'll have some form competitions."

Sight reading and part singing, in which all could join, followed, and the time seemed to pass very quickly. The girls were quite sorry to leave at four o'clock, and looked wistfully at those who were staying for string practice.

"I wish I could learn the violin," said Meg as they walked home.

"Oh, so do I! That big girl played beautifully. What's her name? I forget."

"Blanche Davidson," prompted Aileen, who was with them. "She's a sub-prefect."

"Well, I like the Musical Club. It would be grand to play in the orchestra."

"We shall have to be content with singing."

"Yes, I suppose so."

Aunt Maggie was at home that day when the girls returned. She was often out in the afternoons visiting friends, so it was quite a privilege to have tea with her. They recounted all their experiences at the Musical Club, and how Miss Courtenay wished for more recruits for the school orchestra.

"Has either of you learnt the violin?" asked Mrs. Norton.

They shook their heads regretfully.

"I used to play it ages ago. Miss Marsh, have you seen that old violin of mine? It's in a case somewhere, perhaps in the attic."

"I believe I saw it on a shelf in the big cupboard on the stairs. Shall I go and look?" replied Miss Marsh.

"Please do, and bring it downstairs."

Miss Marsh departed, and returned presently with a leather case in her hand. Mrs. Norton opened it and drew out a small violin.

"It's years since I touched it. The strings are all broken, but we can soon get some more at the Stores."

"Will you play it for us when it's re-strung, Aunt Maggie?" asked Molly.

"I'm afraid my hand will have lost its ancient cunning. I was wondering whether one of you girls would like to learn it."

"Oh!" burst simultaneously from Meg and Molly.

"It seems a pity to let it lie idle; it's quite a good instrument. How about *you*, Meg?"

"I'd adore to!"

"Well, I'll arrange for you to take some lessons at school."

"Oh, thank you!"

"I'm afraid they won't put you in the school orchestra at once, but in course of time no doubt they will, if you get on. You ought to be musical. Your mother was. I remember promising once to give her this violin, only then I got married, and my husband wanted me to play it, so I took it to India. I shall be glad for you to have it now."

She looked at Meg as she spoke, and Meg's pink cheeks flushed crimson. Molly said nothing, she only stared at Meg. This was the first occasion, since the night of their arrival, that Aunt Maggie had made a difference between them or alluded specially to the fact that she regarded Meg as her own niece. Now was certainly the opportunity to correct the mistake. Words rose to Molly's lips, but she could not utter them. She longed to say "*I am your niece*," but a warning glance from Meg checked her. Her cousin was examining the violin and rejoicing in the prospect of playing it. Mrs. Norton looked at her admiringly, thinking what a pretty picture she would make with the fiddle in her hand. Her hair shone like an aureole in the firelight. Meg was decidedly her favourite, and had been from the first. She did not notice Molly, who stood quietly near. Miss Marsh, thinking perhaps that Molly was jealous, laid a kind hand on her shoulder.

"You must practise the piano, dear," she said, "and then you and Meg can play duets together."

"Oh yes, Meg will need an accompanist," said Mrs. Norton casually. "My husband always played for me. He was quite musical!"

When the girls were alone together Molly burst out:

"I don't like this, Meg!"

"Like what? My violin?"

"No; I mean deceiving Aunt Maggie!"

"Well, we can't help it. I thought we'd settled that."

"It doesn't seem honest."

"It was her fault in the beginning, and we made a bargain, didn't we?"

"I know we did—but——"

"Well, we'll stick to it, while we stay here at any rate. We simply *can't* tell her now. Do you want her to begin questions

about Montreux and the lab, and Monsieur Henrich?"

"She's never asked so far."

"She may do, and if she does I'll say nothing so long as you keep our other secret. Remember, that's our bargain."

"I wonder when we shall hear from Daddy? Perhaps we shan't stay here longer than this term. He may come back and take us out to Canada."

"I'm quite happy at Rillington. I don't want to go back to Canada, or to Montreux either."

"I'm just longing to see Daddy again!"

It was a few days after this that a letter with a New York postmark arrived addressed to Miss Molly Campbell. Aunt Maggie herself took it out of the letterbox.

"For you, Molly," she remarked. "It's strange there isn't one for you too, Meg! I should have thought your father would have written to *you*! It's his writing on the envelope. Tell us what he says, Molly. Is he still in New York?"

Molly opened the letter, read it, but did not offer to show it.

"Yes, he's in New York and very busy. He's going on to Montreal next week."

"Scientific work?"

"I suppose so."

"What kind of scientific work exactly did he do?" asked Mrs. Norton, looking directly at Meg for information.

"I don't know. He never talked to us about it," murmured Meg.

Molly's warning eyes were upon her, and her colour heightened.

"Were he and Monsieur Henrich partners?"

"I believe so."

"Then why have they separated so suddenly?"

"I don't know."

"I hope there was no quarrel?"

"Daddy never talked about his affairs," interrupted Molly. "He sends you his kindest remembrances in his letter, and hopes we're being good girls and giving you no trouble and getting on well at school. He says it's very hot at New York and fearfully noisy."

The announcement of a visitor for Mrs. Norton mercifully put an end to a conversation which was embarrassing to the girls. They ran away to begin their homework.

"Does he say when he's coming back?" asked Meg.

"No, not a word. Only that he's going to Montreal and I can write to him care of the National Bank there."

"So that's that for the present, and I can begin my violin lessons," commented Meg.

It was arranged that Meg should learn from Miss Courtenay. She approved of the little fiddle, strung it, tuned it, and played a piece on it, then said it had a good tone and she hoped Meg would make a good pupil. At first some very weird noises issued from the room where the latter practised, but soon they improved and the notes came in tune. At the end of a week Meg played a simple air while Molly accompanied her on the piano. Aunt Maggie was delighted. Meg was becoming more and more her darling, and she was proud to think she had some musical talent.

"You've evidently a good ear. We shall have you in the school orchestra before long. How nice it is when a girl learns

an instrument, instead of only listening to the wireless. There's too much 'potted music' nowadays. Most people are too lazy to try for themselves."

Bicycles

Games were encouraged at the College but were not compulsory. Wednesday afternoons were reserved for sports. There were several hockey teams, into which only keen players secured admission, and the rest of the school had a choice of various other outdoor occupations. If wet, there were meetings in the big hall for practice in public speaking, community singing and form competitions.

Molly and Meg had suggested their names with some diffidence for hockey, and had been turned down rather scornfully by June Perkins, the games captain. They tried basket ball instead, and played for two Wednesdays, but without great enthusiasm. In their third week Meg looked at the notice which was always pinned up in the hall every Monday morning giving the programme for the following Wednesday. The girls could choose what they wished.

She read as follows:

"Basket Ball.

"Geography Ramble—leader, Miss Barlow.

"Cycle Ride—leader, Miss Carey."

"H'm!" she said to herself. "I'm tired of basket ball. Geography ramble sounds too much like lessons. I'd adore a bicycle ride if only I had a machine. I wonder now if I could possibly wangle it. No harm in trying at any rate. Nothing venture nothing win. That's my motto. I find it often comes off."

Meg did not mention the matter to Molly. She had her own ideas on the subject. She thought if Aunt Maggie had given her a violin she might possibly prove equally generous in providing a bicycle. She determined to angle skilfully for one. She chose an opportunity after tea that day, when Mrs. Norton was alone and Molly and Miss Marsh were safely upstairs. She introduced the subject of the Wednesday occupations at the College, and mentioned the forthcoming cycle ride.

"How I wish I had a bicycle!" she said pointedly.

"I'm very glad you haven't," declared Aunt Maggie. "The roads are so dangerous nowadays with cars and those immense motor-lorries I don't think it's at all safe for girls to ride. I'm always reading of accidents in the newspapers. Only last spring a little girl who lived in Beech Avenue was killed. It was a terribly sad thing! You never know what's coming round the corner, and drivers are so careless they don't always sound their horns, or they give one hoot and rush on. I shouldn't have an easy moment if I thought you were riding a bicycle."

To this most unexpected opinion on cycling Meg had nothing to reply. She dared not say she thought Aunt Maggie's views were unnecessarily alarming and over-careful. Her hopes of a machine faded away.

She was not, however, entirely discouraged. She had another bright idea in her mind. Next day she sought out Dorothy at school.

"What are you doing on Wednesday afternoon?" she asked.

"Well, I haven't broadcasted it on the Wireless yet, because I haven't quite decided."

"You're not playing hockey?"

"No; June calls me a rabbit at hockey."

"Going the cycle ride?"

"I might or I might not."

"If you're *not* going would you lend me your bike?"

"I couldn't promise that, because I may want it myself. Haven't you one of your own?"

"No; I wish I had."

"Why not hire one for the afternoon?"

"Oh, could I? Where from?"

"They let them out at that bicycle shop at the bottom of Fisher Street."

"What do they charge?"

"I don't really know, but not much. I believe you have to leave a deposit. Daphne hired one last term when we rode to Sevingford Abbey. You could call for the bike on your way to school on Wednesday afternoon, and take it back before you go home."

"What fun! It would be ever so much jollier than playing basket ball."

"I agree with you there. Perhaps I'll go too."

"Oh do! What about Elizabeth and Maud?"

"They're in the second hockey team, you know. June would slay them if they deserted."

"Well, I'll see if I can wangle it."

Meg kept her own counsel, and said nothing at home about her intentions. She was afraid to tell Molly, because she did not wish to mention that Aunt Maggie disapproved of cycling, and Molly might incautiously refer to the matter. Fortune, however, favoured her.

On Wednesday Mrs. Norton went for the whole day to Parkfield, a large city fifteen miles away, where she wished to do some shopping. She took Miss Marsh with her, to assist her in choosing a new dress. Miss Marsh had such excellent taste and always gave good advice. The girls had their dinner alone. As they ate beefsteak and cauliflower Meg proposed her idea.

"We'll start early, call at the shop in Fisher Street, and both hire bikes. We've plenty of money, because Dad gave us each a pound note, and we haven't spent any of it yet. Don't you call that fun?"

"Glorious," agreed Molly, with enthusiasm.

"Thought you'd like it. Who says we're not enterprising?"

"I suppose Aunt Maggie wouldn't mind?"

"Oh, dear me, no! It's easy enough to square Aunt Maggie. Besides, this cycle ride is part of school sports. Hiring a bike is only like borrowing a tennis racket."

"I wish we had our own bicycles. Pity we had to leave them in Canada."

"Yes, but I suppose there would have been some bother about paying duty on them, and Dad said it wasn't worth it."

"I hoped he'd buy us new ones at Montreux."

"So did I, but it never came off. Be quick over your pudding! We'll start as soon as possible. Don't forget to take your pound note with you."

"It's inside my Swiss box."

"And mine's in my pocket already. Oh, hurrah! I believe we're going to have a jolly spree this afternoon. Have you finished? Then shoot upstairs and fetch the money. Thank goodness it's a fine day. Here's the sun coming out. Rachel and Winnie and Dorothy are going from our form. I don't know who else."

In highest spirits the girls hurried from the house and made their way to the shop at the bottom of Fisher Street which Dorothy had recommended. Here they interviewed the manager, who agreed to lend them two bicycles on hire for the afternoon. He insisted on taking their names and address, which Meg gave rather unwillingly, and he also required a deposit.

"You understand that if you do any damage to the machines you're responsible for the amount of repairs?" he explained.

"We're good riders. Shall we each leave you a pound?" said Meg.

"That will be quite all right. Thank you. I hope you'll enjoy your ride."

Fisher Street was not far from the College. Meg and Molly put their machines in the cycle shed there and reported in IV B. When the afternoon roll-call was taken, the girls all separated in groups for their various occupations, some to hockey, some to basket ball, and the others for cycling. None had chosen the Geography ramble, which did not appear to find favour.

"Miss Barlow's a stick. We always avoid her when we can," vouchsafed Rachel.

"Who'll go with her?"

"Oh, some of her own form, I expect. They'll write it up afterwards in their school diaries."

Miss Carey, a junior teacher, was waiting in the playground, and when her party had retrieved their machines from the cycle shed they started off under her leadership. There were twenty of them altogether, from various forms, and they rode two and two, keeping carefully to the left of the street, and with a look-out for lorries. Soon they had left the town behind and were in country roads. The trees were ruddy with autumn foliage, and the hedgerows aglow with bright berries of hips, haws, and holly, purple elder leaves, and travellers' joy. In the woods the bracken had turned yellow and brown, and a few wild flowers lingered on banks of grass. The air was fresh and bracing, the sun shone, while little white clouds scudded across the sky. In the distance were ploughed fields, where flocks of starlings were feeding, and a range of low hills covered with gorse. They cycled through several villages of picturesque cottages, their twenty scarlet hats attracting some attention from passers-by, took a road across a common, and came out close to a deep brook bordered by willows. Here Miss Carey called a halt beside the gate of a farm.

"I'll ask if we may leave our bicycles in the foldyard," she explained, "then we can walk along the lane and across two fields to the old castle. It's only a ruin, but it's worth seeing. There's a man over there at the pump. I'll go and ask him."

She came back presently with the required permission, and the girls wheeled their machines through the gate and stacked them against some railings.

"The man says there are no bulls in the fields. I thought I'd better make sure, because of your red hats," said Miss Carey.

"Yes, we should be nice objects for a savage bull," laughed Dorothy. "The only thing would be that it wouldn't know which of us to toss first."

The lane led along the bank of a little river that rippled over stones with a pleasant gurgling sound. At one place Miss Carey, who was somewhat of a naturalist, stopped and, warning the girls to keep quiet, pointed across the stream to a small brown object on the opposite side.

"It's a water-vole; be very still, and we'll see what it's doing," she said.

So they stood and watched, and saw it swim along by the bank, pick a spray of succulent green leaf and carry it to a reed island, where it squatted down and slowly ate it, then, hearing one of the girls laugh, it plunged into the stream and disappeared.

"Oh, Anne! You've sent it away!"

"Why did you begin to giggle?"

"What an idiot you are!"

"Well, I couldn't help laughing; it looked so funny eating its supper."

"Will it come back?"

"I'm sure it won't."

"Girls! I've found something here!" called Miss Carey, who had walked on a little ahead. She was stooping over a patch of grass and examining a large dead bird that lay there.

"It's a brown owl! Look at its beak and its claws! No, I wouldn't touch it, if I were you. There might be insects on it. We'll leave it where it is. I wonder what killed it?"

"Old age!" suggested Winnie.

"Perhaps it died of grief!" tittered Rachel.

"Probably a keeper shot it; they don't like owls because of the pheasants."

"Owls eat the mice though."

"Well, if you've all seen it we must be getting on. Here's the stile into the field. Mind that long bramble; you'll tear your skirts."

There were no animals in the first meadow, but in the second some cows were grazing, much to the alarm of a few of the girls, though Miss Carey laughed at their fears.

"Don't be silly! Cows won't harm you!"

"They're looking at our red hats!" quaked Anne.

"Nonsense, come along. They're waiting for the man to drive them back to be milked."

"If you'd lived in Canada you'd be used to cattle, Anne!" remarked Meg condescendingly.

"Well, I haven't lived in Canada, so don't be so superior."

"Sorry to be on the earth!"

"Oh, I'll forgive you if you won't put on airs!"

"What are you two bargaining about?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all!"

By now they were across the field and had reached a small knoll on the top of which stood a broken keep and the remains of some walls. The castle had been shelled by Cromwell's cannon, and time had further reduced it to a ruin. The girls wandered about the courtyard, scaring jackdaws from the ivy and disturbing some sheep that were cropping the grass.

"Has the old place any history?" asked Betty Forbes of V B.

"Yes," answered Miss Carey. "I believe it was built in Norman times, and was held for centuries by a family called De Beverley, then it passed to the Spencers, and they kept it till the Civil War; they were Royalists, and the last of them was killed at Naseby. There are several stories about the castle."

"Oh, are there? Can you tell them to us?"

"I'll try, if I can remember. I read them in a guide book once. This one will amuse you.

"In Queen Elizabeth's reign Godfrey Spencer, the eldest son of the owners of the castle and somewhat of a favourite at court, fell in love with Margery, only child of the rich Sir Simon Crompton, Lord Mayor of London. Sir Simon did not encourage the match, and forbade Godfrey to enter his house or to see his daughter again. The lovers had their plans, however, very clever plans. One day Godfrey came to the house disguised as a baker, with an enormous basket of bread upon a cart. Sir Simon happened to see him as he was leaving, did not recognize him, but commended his industry at baking, gave him sixpence, and told him he was probably on the high road to fortune. So he was, though not in the way Sir Simon supposed. Inside the huge basket, hidden under the loaves of bread, was concealed the quaking Margery, who thus made her escape and married the man of her choice. Sir Simon was furious and refused to forgive them. But Queen Elizabeth came to the rescue. When the young couple's first son was born, her Majesty sent for Sir Simon and asked him

to stand godfather to an infant in whom she was much interested. It was unwise in those days to refuse a royal request, so all unsuspecting he agreed. What was his surprise when he arrived at the font to find he was acting sponsor to his own grandson. Of course he was obliged to forgive his daughter and her husband, at the Queen's command, and we suppose they all lived happily afterward, and that the Mayor left his fortune to the Spencers.

"The family came into money later, in the reign of James I, in another rather peculiar way. A very beautiful girl, daughter of a poor labourer in the village near the castle, was one day driving cows along the road when a rich merchant from London, travelling that way, saw her, made inquiries about her, and induced her to become a servant to his wife. So pretty Joan went to town, and when her mistress died her master married her, and dying himself soon afterwards, left her a large fortune. She was young and rich and beautiful, and she did not long remain a widow. She married an alderman of London, who in his turn died and left her another fortune. She was now considered a very attractive match, and who should meet her at a 'Lord Mayor's ball' but Sir Roger Spencer, who promptly paid court to her, won her and married her. So she came back as lady of the castle to the very village where in her early youth she had driven cows along the highroad."

"Quite romantic!" commented Dorothy.

"Any more stories, Miss Carey?"

"Just one more. You noticed a bridge over the brook, where the banks are high and the water is very deep. Once, while the family still lived at the castle, there was a terrible storm which swept away part of the bridge. That night a cousin, who had important political news to deliver, was making his way towards the castle along the highroad. It was pitch dark and the rain came down in torrents. He had a strong horse, however, and he urged it forward. Suddenly it stopped short, and when he applied whip and spur it gave an enormous leap and bounded on. He arrived at the castle, and when his relations inquired by what road he had come, and he had told them, they gasped, 'But the bridge is broken!'

"Then he realized that his horse had sensed the danger and had cleared the gap with a jump that only terror could have inspired. I believe in the neighbourhood it's still called Horse-leap Bridge."

"He'd treasure that horse!" said Anne.

"He would. And we must treasure our bicycles now. We ought to be going back. When I begin to spin yarns I'm apt to forget the time. Come along, girls!"

So they walked across the fields and down the lane to the farm, mounted their bicycles and set off on the return ride. They had gone about two miles and were on rather a narrow road when Meg spied a clump of yellow toadflax growing in the opposite hedge, and breaking rank crossed with the intention of picking it. At that moment a powerful car dashed round the corner facing her. Meg was on her wrong side, and the line of cyclists filled the other side, leaving no room for the driver to swerve. She had the presence of mind to leap off her machine into the hedge and cling to the stem of a holly tree. She heard a smash as the near front wing of the motor struck her bicycle. The car did not stop, but whirled on at a fast pace, one of its occupants peering through the back window, and it vanished round a curve of the road.

A white-faced teacher and nineteen scared girls dismounted from their machines.

"Are you hurt, Meg?" asked Miss Carey shakily.

Meg let go her grip of the holly tree and slid to the ground.

"No, not a bit! Only pricked. It was a near shave though."

"It was indeed. Thank heaven you're not killed."

The girls were crowding round, but Miss Carey ordered them back to the opposite side.

"We don't want another accident! Look at your bicycle, Meg!"

"Goodness, it's a wreck! What *am* I to do?"

"You certainly can't ride *that*."

"I shall have to hike home then."

"That car never stopped!" called Molly.

"Callous brutes!" shouted Rachel from across the road.

"They ought to have waited to see what damage was done," said Miss Carey indignantly.

"I expect that was just what they *didn't* want to do," snorted Meg, "the road-hogs!"

Hearing the hoot of a horn, they both drew back into the hedge. A car, proceeding more slowly from the direction in which the other motor had disappeared, came round the corner. Its driver, a lady, seeing the broken bicycle, stopped and got out.

"Anybody hurt?" she inquired.

"No, mercifully not," replied Miss Carey, explaining details of the accident.

"Did you take the number of the car?"

"We none of us saw it; it was gone in a flash."

"What a shame!"

"I'm rather thankful to be alive," said Meg tragically, enjoying the experience now it was safely over.

"It was your own fault for swerving across the road," snapped Miss Carey, beginning to grow angry. "You knew you had to keep in line."

"Are you all from the College?" asked the lady, looking at the scarlet hats.

"Yes, and I don't know how I'm going to get this girl back. She can't ride a smashed machine."

"I'm on my way to Rillington. I'll take her home with pleasure. We can manage to put the bicycle in the back of the car."

"Oh, thanks! That would be very kind of you."

So the cycle with its buckled wheel was lifted and pushed into the motor, and Meg seated herself next to the driver in the front. She waved her hand gaily to her companions before starting.

"I'll get there before you! Meet me at the cycle shop, Molly!" she called.

Meg and the bicycle were deposited in Fisher Street by the good Samaritan who had befriended her, and who seemed in a hurry to get away.

"Thanks *ever* so!" said Meg gratefully.

"You'll be more careful another time, I expect, and keep to your own side of the road," said the lady, as she started her engine.

The manager of the shop surveyed the wreck of the machine with a rueful face, while listening to Meg's version of the accident.

"Did you take the number of the car?" he asked.

"No; it was gone too quickly."

"Then we can't claim damages. That's how they get off—those motorists! It'll cost a pretty penny to repair this."

"How much?"

"Well, say two-ten, and then there's the hire of the two bikes."

"The two pounds we left with you are all we've got."

"I suppose your Dad will settle for you?"

"He's in America."

"Shall I send the bill in to the College?"

"No, *please* don't!"

"Well, I reckon you're living with someone who can pay?"

"We are staying with an aunt, and—and—I particularly don't want her *or* the College to know about the accident. Can't you let our two pounds cover the whole thing, hire and all?"

The manager examined the buckled wheel again critically.

"Shall we say two pounds on account and you pay the rest at one and six a week till Christmas?"

"Those two pounds are the whole of our pocket-money for the term!" pleaded Meg desperately.

"It's robbing me to say less."

"*Please!*"

"Well, we'll call it squared then. Where's the other young lady? I hope *her* bike is all right?"

"She's cycling back with the rest of the party. They won't be long now, I dare say. Yes, her bike is quite all right. She'll bring it in when she arrives. I'll go outside and wait for her."

"Very well," agreed the man sulkily.

Meg was thankful to get out of the shop.

She had to wait about for some time before Molly arrived. She hastily explained matters, told her to wheel the cycle into the shop, give it to the manager, and then hurry away as fast as she could.

Molly obeyed her injunctions, and the two girls set off to walk home. They were late and tea would be ready.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to have to commandeer your pound," said Meg.

"Can't be helped," replied Molly philosophically. "I think you got very well out of a bad business."

"Look here, Moll, I vote we don't tell Aunt Maggie anything at all about this. She'd be in an awful state if she knew I'd nearly been killed. She's delicate, and it wouldn't be good for her heart. We've no need to say we've been cycling this afternoon."

"Yes, we'd better not tell," agreed Molly.

The girls arrived home actually before Mrs. Norton and Miss Marsh returned from Parkfield, and Aunt Maggie was so exhausted with her day's shopping that she never troubled to make any inquiries about her nieces' doings. They considered themselves in luck.

"A good thing Aileen wasn't with us," said Meg. "I hope she and Bertha won't hear about it at the Col and tell Mrs. Wright. She might tell Aunt Maggie."

"I don't think Aunt Maggie often sees Mrs. Wright. I believe she doesn't like her."

"We're pretty safe then."

"So far as we know."

"The only trouble now is that we're left without a penny of pocket-money till Christmas."

"I'll write to Daddy. Perhaps he'll send us some more."

"Oh, you mascot! What'll he think? Shall you explain?"

"Yes, because Daddy always understands."

Rags

Molly and Meg considered Handicrafts the most desirable lesson at the College. They were gaining skill at stick printing and lettering, and were making calendars and Christmas cards. On some of these they added drawings, or paintings of flowers. Miss Rowe professed herself pleased with their progress and gave them some words of encouragement. They hoped that specimens of their work might be included in the exhibition that would be held at the end of the term. It would make an extra credit for IV B, as well as distinction for themselves individually in their reports.

On the Tuesday following the bicycle ride Nell Goodwin, a sub-prefect, hailed them both.

"Hello, you two! You're due for medical exam this afternoon. Report yourselves at 3.15 prompt in the Kindergarten room. You're in the second batch."

"What's this about? We're not ill!" objected Meg.

"Don't suppose you are, but you've got to be examined all the same. Didn't you know?"

"We did not!"

"Well, you know now at any rate. The whole school goes through in relays. You're on to-day's list, and so is Nora Page and so is Aileen Wright. Where is she?"

"I saw her in the corridor a minute ago. Shall I tell her about it?"

"No; I must give her notice myself. Messages are sometimes forgotten, and we don't want to have to hunt up absentees at the last moment and keep Dr. Jean Murray waiting. There's an awful fuss if she has to wait. Now remember, 3.15 prompt in the Kindergarten room, and don't be late or I can tell you you'll hear about it and get into a jolly row."

"What a nuisance," grumbled Molly, "just when I want to get on with my calendars. Have you been examined, Rachel?"

"Not since last February. I suppose I shall come on later in term, or perhaps not till after Christmas. You and Meg and Aileen are new girls, so you're early on the list. Dr. Murray does ten of us in an afternoon, it doesn't really take long."

"Is it painful?"

"Painful! No!" tittered Rachel. "How scared you look! Silly! She doesn't hurt!"

"What's the use of it, anyhow?"

"Why, to see we're quite sound. If your heart's bad you mayn't play hockey, and if your eyes are bad you need spectacles."

"Hope she won't fit me with goggles."

"You just have to grin and abide what she says."

"I wouldn't wear them!"

"Oh, wouldn't you? She'd make you."

The girls went as usual to the Handicrafts class, but explained to Miss Rowe that they were due for the Medical examination, so she dismissed them at ten minutes past three. They made their way to the Kindergarten room, which was turned into a temporary surgery for the doctor's use. Miss Davis, the drill mistress, received them and told them to sit down and wait until their turns arrived. They spent some time studying the nature drawings of the Kindergarten children, crude paintings of flowers and animals that were pinned on the walls. Molly decided there was not much talent among the babes. She grew very impatient at her enforced idleness and wished herself back in the studio. It was so slow to sit there and do nothing.

At last she and Meg were summoned and ordered to remove some of their clothing. When this had been accomplished Miss Davis took their weights, heights and chest measurements and entered them in a book, then after another delay Molly was handed over to the lady doctor, who now stood ready. Dr. Jean Murray was capable and cheery and very

pleasant. She was professional without being alarming. She overhauled her patient in a most business-like fashion, but interspersed little jokes among her questions. She examined Molly's lungs, heart, glands, throat, nose, ears and teeth, tested her sight and hearing, felt her spine for signs of curvature, and inspected her feet in case of flat foot.

Miss Davis, who acted as secretary, entered the details in the register.

"Well, I think you're quite sound, and we shan't have to knock off games," commented Dr. Murray. "You're growing fast, and you're rather thin for your height. Do you take cod liver oil? Tell your mother I recommend it. If you can't take cod liver oil you must eat plenty of butter, which is the next best substitute. Next girl, please!"

Molly retired to resume her clothing, while Meg went forward for examination, also with satisfactory results. They were both glad when the business was over and they were told they might go. It was now nearly four o'clock, and there was only time to walk to the studio and put away their drawings and paints.

"Well, how did you get on?" asked Rachel, whom they met afterwards in the cloakroom.

"Oh, quite well. She says we're both fit."

"Able to enjoy three good meals a day?"

"I hope so," grinned Meg.

"Eyes all right? No squint?"

"Do I look as if I squint?" said Molly indignantly.

"No; but she might have said you'd get a cast in the eye if you didn't wear specs. Betty Jones has been ordered glasses. She told me so."

"Betty Jones squints abominably. I wonder she wasn't taken to an oculist. She ought to have gone years ago."

"Well—well! I'm glad you passed with credit. Be ready for the next ordeal."

"What's that?"

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," quoted Rachel. "Now I must run, for I'm due at the dentist's, worse luck. How I hate that horrible drill that whirls round and round in one's tooth!"

Next morning, at ten minutes to nine, when many of the girls were assembled in IV B, Rachel entered, and jauntily handed Molly a neat package.

"From the doctor," she announced.

"What is it?" asked Molly, opening the small parcel.

To her consternation she found it contained a pair of tortoiseshell rimmed spectacles. She gazed at them in utter dismay.

"You're ordered to wear them in class," said Rachel.

"But Dr. Murray said my eyes were quite all right!"

"Anyhow, here they are. Better try them on."

Molly did so most unwillingly.

"I don't understand! I certainly wasn't ordered spectacles!" she objected.

"To correct incipient eye-strain," declared Rachel.

"Oh, Molly, you do look awful in them!" said Meg.

"I won't wear them!"

"You must if they're ordered."

"I'll go and see Dr. Murray again."

"She isn't here to-day."

"Then I'll ask Miss Browne if I need."

A giggle from behind her back caused Molly to turn round. Rachel and several other girls were in convulsions.

"What's the matter" she asked impatiently.

Then a light suddenly dawning on her, she pulled off the glasses.

"Did Dr. Murray really and truly send them?"

A burst of laughter came from Maud, Tess and Hetty.

"Done you, old girl. Done you thoroughly!" shrieked Rachel.

"They're from Woolworth's! Sixpence!" spluttered Tess.

"The latest fashion!" said Maud.

"Did you think they suited you?" inquired Hetty.

"As worn in court circles!" tittered Tess.

"You wretches!"

"I didn't believe you'd be so easily taken in. We all know Rachel's rags. She's famous for them. *Do* wear them for half an hour, just to have fun with Miss Nelson."

"No, thanks! You may wear them yourself."

Still rather humiliated at being the victim of a practical joke, Molly threw the glasses into the wastepaper basket, whence they were rescued by Rachel, who put them on and made extraordinary grimaces, till the entrance of the mistress caused her to pull them off hastily, thrust them inside her desk, and compose her countenance to a degree of prim restraint as she rose to say a polite "Good morning, Miss Nelson."

"She may well be nicknamed Rags," thought Molly. "I wish I could play a trick on *her*. I declare I'll try and think of something. It would be ever such fun to take her in. She deserves it."

Molly was resourceful and possessed of imagination. Though she had the reputation at school of being rather quiet she was observant, and there was a great deal of fun behind her gentle exterior. In her own way she could be as humorous as her more popular and talkative cousin.

She consulted Meg on the matter, and they decided to take several of the other girls into their confidence. They would certainly require help. They had private confabulations with Dorothy, Maud and Elizabeth, and finally hatched a plot.

"Splendid!" cried Dorothy. "That ought to do it!"

"It's a glorious idea," said Maud.

"I thought it might work," said Molly.

"It ought to be prime fun," chuckled Meg.

"We all owe Rags a turn!" exulted Elizabeth.

"Sure you can wangle it, Dotty?" asked Maud.

"You can trust me!"

"Friday afternoon's the time, because Rags has her music lesson, and Miss Holt never lets her out till about five past four or later sometimes."

"I'll wait about in the corridor and catch her."

"Everyone else will have cleared away by then."

"And the Kindergarten room will be empty. The kids leave at half-past three."

"Ask Miss Jordan if you may leave the sewing class five minutes earlier, Molly."

"Would she let me?"

"Oh yes. I've often asked her myself, and she always says 'If it's important you may go'."

"It *will* be important!"

"Rather!"

"I shall be at bookbinding, so I'll make some excuse to Miss Rowe and get off at five to four," said Maud.

"I'll leave the suitcase in the cloakroom," said Elizabeth.

"Good! Meet me in the Kindergarten room, Molly. It will just give us time."

"Yes, but we shall have to be quick."

"Well, it won't take long. Bess can palaver a little in the corridor with Rags and delay things for a minute or two."

"Hope none of the teachers will be about?"

"Oh no; they all scuttle away on Friday afternoons as fast as they can."

The conspirators went off chuckling and full of joyful anticipations. It would be something to enliven the routine of ordinary school life.

On Friday afternoon the unsuspecting Rachel went to her piano lesson, and as usual her enthusiastic teacher kept her late. It was ten minutes past four when she emerged with her music case in her hand.

To her surprise she found several girls waiting in the corridor.

"Oh, here you are at last!" said Elizabeth. "Hurry up! You're on the list for an exam in Psycho-analysis!"

"For *what*?"

"Haven't you heard? The whole school's to be psycho-analysed in turns."

"That's a new stunt, isn't it?"

"Extremely new—the very latest thing out. We have physical examination with Dr. Murray, and now it's to be mental with a Dr. Bainbridge, another lady doc."

"What does she do exactly?"

"We don't know yet. Asks us questions, I believe, to see if we're mentally fit."

"Are some of us supposed to be dotty?"

"Oh no, not exactly that, of course. But we might have complexes—and—and—it might brighten up our wits—'help us with our homework, you know'."

"I wish it would knock off some of my prep!"

"Perhaps it might if you don't seem *too* intelligent. Come along! We're all due in the Kindergarten room, and we were

waiting for you. Here's the list—Elizabeth Arnold, Meg Campbell, Dorothy North, Rachel Garside."

"I wish they didn't keep us after four o'clock," grumbled Rachel. "It's not fair."

"Well, we can't help that. It's orders."

The four girls proceeded through the now empty college to the Kindergarten room. Dorothy knocked at the door, a voice said "Come in," and they entered. They found two ladies seated on chairs, with a vacant chair opposite to them.

One, in a long brown coat and hat, wore blue spectacles, and the other, attired in black, had large tortoiseshell rimmed glasses on the bridge of a rather red nose. They were not a particularly prepossessing-looking pair.

The one in the blue spectacles, who was presumably Dr. Bainbridge, motioned the girls to be seated, consulted a list, conferred for a moment or two with her secretary, who held a notebook, then announced in a deep voice:

"I will take Margaret Campbell first. Come here, please, and sit upon this chair."

Meg marched forward and took her place, which was arranged so that she faced the other girls, but the backs of the doctor and the secretary were turned to them. Possibly this was for privacy, though they could hear all that was going on, and listened with thrilled interest.

"Your name is Margaret Campbell, and you were born in Canada?"

"Yes."

"You have also been at school in Switzerland?"

"Yes."

"Now, I'm going to give you a mental test. I shall say a word, and you must as rapidly as possible say what it suggests to you. Don't pause to think. Are you ready? Canada!"

"Ice," replied Meg promptly.

"Ice!"

"Ice-cream."

"Parties!"

"Trifle."

"School!"

"Maths."

"Do you like maths?"

"No."

"Good at skating?"

"Yes."

"Music!"

"Violin."

"Fruit!"

"Apples."

Dr. Bainbridge turned to her secretary.

"I find Margaret Campbell with a nationality complex for her Canadian birthplace. She shows a marked craving for apples and ice-cream, and should guard against the pleasures of the table. Outdoor sports attract her more than mental pursuits, but any talent for music should be encouraged. Have you got that, Miss Biggs?"

The secretary, who was apparently taking notes in shorthand, nodded.

"You may go, Margaret Campbell. Now, Dorothy North, you're next on my list."

Meg returned, and Dorothy took her place on the chair of inquisition. The Psycho-analyst began her catechism, and she answered quickly.

"Ponds!"

"Frogs."

"Flowers!"

"Daisies."

"Insects!"

"Wasps."

"Games!"

"Hockey."

"Girls!"

"Boys."

"Parties!"

"Dancing."

"Ah!" observed Dr. Bainbridge. "Here we have a love of natural history and physical exercise. She shows a preference for male society. I observe no special complex, but should recommend attention to brain culture and concentration on homework."

"Next girl, please! Elizabeth Arnold."

With a stolid face Elizabeth marched to her ordeal, which was conducted on the same lines. The verdict in her case was:

"A decided superiority complex. This subject likes to arrange other people's affairs, and is of a managing disposition, though generally good-natured. Artistic efforts should be encouraged, and attention given to detail in class-work."

"Does that mean she's bossy, and slipshod over her lessons?" whispered Rachel.

"Sh'sh!" warned Meg.

"Next girl, please! Rachel Garside."

Rachel, beyond a brief glimpse on entering the room, had so far only contemplated the backs of the doctor and her secretary. Now, on taking her seat, she faced them. She stared hard at the Psycho-analyst. In spite of the blue spectacles, something in her visage seemed familiar. Dr. Bainbridge began her questions without delay. She seemed in a hurry.

"Tennis!"

"Racket."

"Riding!"

"Horse."

"Tree!"

"Leaves."

"Dramatist!"

"Shaks——" began Rachel, then suddenly stopped and stared harder.

"Molly! It's *you*!" she gasped.

The lady doctor and the secretary burst into shrieks of laughter, and Meg, Dorothy and Elizabeth clapped their hands.

"Well played!" they shouted.

"We took you in," said Molly, pulling off the blue spectacles and speaking in her natural voice.

"Thought you wouldn't recognize us," said Maud. "How do you like my goggles and red nose?"

"Where did you get the clothes from?" asked Rachel.

"I brought them in a suitcase," said Elizabeth. "I borrowed them from home. They dressed here and made each other up a little. Molly's got her eyebrows darkened and a touch of lipstick."

"Confess you were absolutely done, Rags," said Meg.

"I was amazed to think Miss Browne was going in for Psycho-analysis!"

"Don't you think we managed it rather cleverly?"

"I suppose you did, but I knew nothing about Psycho-analysis, so I can't say."

"No more do we, really."

"Elizabeth asked her aunt what they did, and we just made it up."

The door opened at that moment, and a servant with a broom in her hand looked in.

"What are you all doing here?" she asked.

"Oh—nothing particular!"

"It's time you were gone home!"

"We're just going now."

"Well, hurry up, please. I want to sweep the room."

Molly and Maud hastily pulled off their borrowed skirts, coats and hats and stowed them away in the suitcase.

"Play-acting?" inquired the maid, with a giggle.

"Something of the sort," murmured Meg.

"You've no need to say anything about it," added Elizabeth quickly.

"Oh, I won't report you, don't you fear. I suppose you were having a bit of fun?"

"We were."

"Come along!" said Dorothy to the others. "I promised to be home by five. Maud and Molly, you'd better wash your faces!"

"I certainly can't walk through the town with a red nose," laughed Maud.

"And Aunt Maggie would give me a lecture if she thought I was using lipstick," said Molly.

Fortunately they met no teachers on their way to the cloakroom, and the two actresses were able to remove their make-up before emerging from the college door.

"One of the best rags we've ever had," commented Elizabeth as they separated. "You two ought to be in the Dramatic Society."

"Perhaps we can get up some charades for a stunt later on," said Maud.

"Oh yes, that's a good idea. We'll think that over," said Dorothy as she waved good-bye.

A School Palaver

Next Wednesday was hopelessly wet. The rain poured down in torrents. Even the most ardent enthusiasts could not expect outdoor sports on such a day. The hockey fixtures had to be postponed, basket ball was off, and a natural history ramble posted up on the notice board was marked "deferred". Instead, however, there was a neatly written card affixed announcing:

"A School Palaver will be held in the hall at 2.35. Members of all forms are requested to attend."

It was signed by Jeanne Longworth, the head girl.

"What's a Palaver?" asked Aileen, who, with Molly and Meg, was studying the notice board.

"It's a general meeting of the school," explained Maud. "The prefects read reports, and we can make suggestions if we like about the societies, and talk things over. Then there are other stunts, public speaking and community singing. It depends upon what Jeanne arranges and how much time there is."

"I thought a palaver was something African," said Aileen doubtfully.

"So it is—a conference of native chiefs—but we've adopted the word, you see!"

"Will the teachers be there?"

"Not Miss Browne. Probably Miss Holt. We always have one mistress present, but she hardly ever interferes; she lets the prefects manage it all. It's their affair entirely."

"I'm sorry the natural history ramble is off," said Aileen.

"Well, we can't help the weather; you'll enjoy this. It's generally jolly fun."

"It's rather late in the year for natural history rambles," said Dorothy. "I got an awful cold when we went primrosing last March," said Carrie.

As the girls were assembling for afternoon school a sub-prefect came into IV B and handed a card to Caroline Johnstone, who was mistress for the week.

"Please announce this, and elect your speaker," she said. "And don't be late for the Palaver! Anyone arriving after 2.40 will find the door shut. We give you five minutes' grace and no more."

On the card was written:

PUBLIC SPEAKING

The opening of an Orphanage.

Welcome to Lady Bountiful by Mrs. Raisefunds, the President of the Committee (Jeanne Longworth); Opening speech by Lady Bountiful (Gwen Roberts).

Vote of Thanks to Lady Bountiful by Mrs. Lovebairns, the Mayoress (Member of IV B).

Seconded by Mrs. Happyholmes, wife of the Town Clerk (Member of IV A).

The girls crowded round to read it.

"Hello!" said Dorothy. "So we're let in for a vote of thanks, are we?"

"Yes, and to propose it too."

"IV A is only to second it."

"Well, it's our turn, you know. IV A did the pilots when we opened the new aerodrome last term. It's only fair IV B should have an innings. I'm glad Jeanne remembered that."

"Trust Jeanne!"

"What's it all about? I don't understand," said Molly.

"Oh, you're new, so of course you don't. One of our stunts is Public Speaking, to train us to be good citizens and all the rest of it. We have an imaginary ceremony, and we go through the whole performance in style. We've opened an aerodrome and a village hall, and we've received royalty and welcomed an Arctic explorer. We have to make the speeches up on the spur of the moment—that's supposed to be good practice for us."

"Jolly hard work though, unless you've 'the gift of the gab'," moaned Maud.

"Before the whole school too," said Dorothy.

"But rather fun, I dare say," said Meg.

"Fun? Yes, except for the one who's got to do it. You can try it yourself if you like."

"A good idea," said Elizabeth. "Meg always has heaps to say. Let *her* take it on. I'll propose her."

"What exactly has one got to do, please?" asked Meg anxiously.

"Stand on the platform and make a nice speech appropriate to the occasion," said Elizabeth.

"As glibly as you can," added Maud.

"That's a big order!"

"Oh, it can be done!"

"Well, it sounds difficult."

"Not for bright brains."

"Sh'sh! Here's Miss Nelson."

The mistress did no more than take the register, then departed to help Miss Browne with secretarial work, leaving the girls to dismiss themselves. They had just five minutes to discuss matters. Miss Caroline read aloud the announcement.

"We've got to elect somebody to propose this vote of thanks," she explained. "Someone who'll do it well. Hands up any who feel disposed to act Mrs. Lovebairns, the Mayoress!"

Perhaps each girl felt too modest to suggest herself. No hand was raised.

"Hurry up, please! We mustn't be late for the Palaver."

"I suggest Meg Campbell!" said Elizabeth.

"Oh, yes! Meg! She'd do it all right," agreed Dorothy. "She talks as if she's kissed the blarney stone."

"You can't call her shy," said Rachel.

"Hands up for Meg," asked Caroline.

The response was almost unanimous; only a few refrained from voting.

"That's settled then. Meg, we trust you to be a credit to the form!"

"I'll do my best," murmured Meg, with crimson cheeks.

"Do you think I can manage it, Moll?" murmured Meg, as she shut her desk.

"Of course you can," answered Molly with enthusiasm. "You're A1 at a stunt of that sort, where I'd be a duffer."

"Well, come along now, all of you, or we shall be late. We don't want to be locked out of the hall."

The girls departed along the corridor with what haste they could, mindful, however, of their department badges, and with a suspicion that a sub-prefect might be lurking about, ready to report them for undue scuffling. They took their places in the hall, where the rest of the school was already assembled. Miss Holt, Jeanne Longworth and the prefects were seated on the platform, and Jeanne, as head girl, occupied the chair. As the Palaver was an affair for the girls themselves, the mistress was only in the position of referee, and would not interfere unless appealed to, or in a matter of order.

Proceedings began with reports by the prefects. The subject of "Safety on the roads" was brought up, instructions given as to crossings, and certain girls were warned that they had not exercised sufficient care in the crowded High Street when catching their buses. Meg was horribly afraid that she might be reprimanded for her bicycle accident, but nothing was said about it. Possibly Miss Carey, for her own credit as leader of the cycling party, had not reported the matter. A few warnings were issued to holders of department badges, showing that sub-prefects had sharp eyes and noticed what went on both in and out of school.

Reports followed as to order in classrooms and cloakrooms, among which was read out:

"IV B, order good; but why does Rachel Garside keep sticky sweets among her exercise books? And why was a powder puff found in Florence Potter's desk?"

The delinquents in question tried to look unconscious, but their companions giggled.

"Nora must have been rooting about in our desks," whispered Maud. "Lucky we didn't leave love letters!"

"The second cloakroom might with advantage be kept tidier," continued Nora. "On inspection I found III B had been blowing bubbles, and there was a mess of soapy water all over the floor. This must not occur again, nor must flowers be left in the wash basins."

She fixed a stern eye on a row of eleven-year-olds who were looking guilty.

"I hope that Bertha will take that to heart," murmured Aileen. "She's a little sinner, in spite of her talk about rules. She took a pipe to school to blow bubbles. I saw her."

When Nora had finished her report, Jeanne stood up again.

"Now we'll have a talk about occupations, or 'occs' as we generally call them.

"For the benefit of new girls, I must explain that is the school name for leisure work done at home. At the end of the term we have an exhibition, judged by a committee, and award credits for the best specimens. Now I invite suggestions for some of the home 'occs' this term. Speak in turn, please!"

"Cake-making!"

"Home-made sweets!"

"Embroidery!"

"Pressed leaves!"

"Diaries!"

"Caricatures!"

"Parodies of poems!"

"Drawings!"

"Yes, those are all good. Let me write them down," said Jeanne. "Remember they must be things you do at home in your spare time, and not in the handicraft class or the sewing class at school. We shall expect some nice contributions for the exhibition."

"What about toys?"

"I'd forgotten that, and it's an important item. We generally send some things to a Christmas tree for poor children. If any

of you will dress dolls or make toys, it will be a great help. We'll call it a special section."

"How are we to learn to make toys?"

Jeanne turned to Miss Holt, as referee.

"Would it be possible to hold an instruction class?"

"I'll ask Miss Browne. Perhaps Miss Rowe would give some demonstrations after four o'clock to those who could stay," replied the teacher.

"Are there any other matters you'd like to talk about?" inquired Jeanne.

"The term outing!"

"Where shall we go?"

"Can we get up a party for a theatre?"

"Why not the ice-rink?"

"Yes, yes, the ice-rink!"

Jeanne held up her hand for silence.

"As the outing won't be held till after half term, we'd better leave it for the present. Nearer the time we'll make a list and take votes. Suppose we have some community singing now. Then we'll go on with our programme."

Judging that the school was inclined to get a little boisterous, and that they were all talking at once, with considerable noise, Jeanne considered a few songs would give them opportunity to let off their spirits, and that they would settle down afterwards and listen to the public speaking.

She did not want to spoil the Palaver by enforcing too strict discipline. After all, it was a school stunt, not a function.

So Jessie Cox opened the piano, prepared to play accompaniments, and the girls roared out sea-shanties and students' songs and negro melodies, in a volume of voices at which Miss Courtenay would have shuddered had she been present. It had the desired effect though, and after ten minutes or so, when they sat down again the atmosphere was calmer.

A prefect then rose as announcer.

"We're now going to take you over (as the Wireless says) to Bonnybabes Orphanage, a new institution which is to be opened this afternoon by Lady Bountiful of Cashbags Castle. Meg! (this in a loud whisper) come on the platform. You're wanted. The characters, in order of appearance, are Mrs. Raisefunds and the committee, Lady Bountiful, Mrs. Lovebairns, the Mayoress, and Mrs. Happyholmes, wife of the town clerk. The scene is laid in the big hall of the orphanage."

The audience looked and listened with attention as Jeanne, in the character of Mrs. Raisefunds, advanced with an ingratiating smile to greet Gwen Roberts, who, as Lady Bountiful, swept in dignified fashion along the platform and shook hands, bowing afterwards to the committee, who returned her salutation.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Mrs. Raisefunds, "I feel there is no need for me to introduce Lady Bountiful. She is well known in this neighbourhood for her many acts of kindness and generosity. I may mention that she is a large subscriber to this institution, and that it is chiefly owing to her untiring efforts that sufficient funds have been collected to build and endow this beautiful Home for Orphan Girls. I should like to announce that after the ceremony visitors will be conducted over the building, so that you will all have an opportunity of seeing the splendid arrangements made for the comfort of the children. I will now ask her ladyship to speak to you—Lady Bountiful!"

That important personage, with a very gracious smile, advanced to the front of the platform and surveyed her audience benignly. Her voice was clear and ringing.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot tell you the pleasure which it gives me to be present on this most happy occasion. The

foundation of this orphanage had been a project very near to my heart. For years I have felt it was a growing need in the district, and that it is now satisfactorily accomplished is a matter of congratulation not only to myself but to all of you who have so nobly helped. These little children, left without the care of loving parents, will owe you a debt of gratitude, and we trust that they will repay it by turning out well in after years. I should like to testify my acknowledgment of the splendid work done by Mrs. Raisefunds and by the rest of the committee; they have organized bazaars, garden fêtes, concerts and other means of making money, thus rendering our scheme possible. We shall all look forward to viewing the arrangements, which I can assure you are excellent. Ladies and gentlemen, I have now great pleasure in declaring the Bonnybabes Orphanage open. May it fulfil its destined purpose!"

Lady Bountiful sat down amidst applause.

Then Meg, at a nod from Jeanne, stood up in the character of Mrs. Lovebairns to make her speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I consider it a great honour to have the privilege of proposing a vote of thanks to Lady Bountiful for her kindness in coming here this afternoon. As Mayoress of this city I have had ample opportunity of gaining a knowledge of the many ways in which she has helped in our civic life, and I may say we count her as one of our most valued citizens. Most important of all her benefits I consider this institution. Ladies and gentlemen, look for yourselves at these little orphans! (Here Meg pointed dramatically at the front row of girls, who nearly had hysterics in consequence.) Some of them still infants on their nurses' knees, some of them tender toddlers, others in the happy age of early and innocent childhood! Here indeed is a collection of 'Bonnybabes', their rosy faces, their chubby cheeks appeal to us; as they suck their bottles or eat their porridge they will surely bless those who provided it, and the many shining and well-washed little faces which I see before me testify to the care that has already been bestowed upon them. (Here the tittering among the audience grew so marked and unrestrained that Meg hastily finished her oration.) Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure you will all be in agreement when I beg to propose a most hearty vote of thanks to Lady Bountiful for her presence here this afternoon."

The clapping was thunderous as "Mrs. Lovebairns" retired to her chair.

She was followed by Nell Pearson of IV A in the character of Mrs. Happyholmes, wife of the town clerk. Nell was palpably nervous. She made a prim little speech seconding the vote of thanks, after which Jeanne, in due order, put the motion to the meeting.

"All in favour kindly signify in the usual manner."

During the applause she beckoned to a little girl stationed in the front of the hall, who mounted the platform steps and presented a bouquet of chrysanthemums. Lady Bountiful received the offering graciously, thanked the donor, and bestowed a kiss upon her forehead.

That seemed to end the proceedings.

"Are we now switched off 'Bonnybabes Orphanage' and back at the College?" laughed Dorothy. "What are we going to do next? More stunts?"

There was not much time left, so Jeanne made a few business announcements in connexion with various societies, and they finished with community singing.

"You played up no end, Meg!" said Molly as they walked home. "I couldn't have done it to save my life. How did you think of it all?"

"Oh, I remembered some bazaars and things we've been to, and the speechifying. I thought Jeanne and Gwen were rather heavy, and I'd try a comic turn for a change."

"Well, you certainly made them laugh. There was no doubt about that."

An Adventure Party

Molly had written to her father telling him of the accident to the bicycle and the consequent forfeiture of the pound notes he had given them, but she had not yet received a reply. Possibly he had not gone straight to Montreal and her letter was waiting for him there, and in any case it would take some days for the post to arrive from Canada.

Meanwhile it was very awkward for the girls to be without pocket-money. There were several small subscriptions they owed at the College, which they were obliged to defer paying. They did not like to borrow from Aunt Maggie, because they had told her they were each supplied with a pound, and she would naturally ask what they had done with it. They could only beg the secretaries of the various school societies to wait till further reinforcements were sent to them, when they would hope to settle their debts.

They had reluctantly to refuse to join a party from IV B who were being conducted by Miss Nelson to see an educational film at the cinema, and when a collection was taken at school in aid of a fund for poor children they had nothing to contribute. Perhaps Mr. Campbell was too busy to write, or perhaps he thought it would do the girls no harm to be hard up for a time, and would teach them the value of money.

Mrs. Norton was occupied with her own affairs and did not attempt to provide Molly and Meg with entertainments. She saw that they did their homework, and left them to amuse themselves in their leisure hours. They were beginning to feel a little dull, and to wish for some variety in the ordinary routine of school, preparation and practising. Then one day came an invitation from Maud Logan.

DEAR MEG AND MOLLY,

Can you both come to tea next Saturday at four o'clock? I am expecting a few friends, and I am asking everyone to tell an adventure which has happened to herself. So please come prepared! I am sure you must have had adventures, you have travelled so much.

The girls were delighted. They obtained permission from Mrs. Norton, and replied that they would have great pleasure in accepting.

"I shall tell the story about the puma," said Molly.

"Oh no! *I'm* going to tell that!" cried Meg.

"I spoke first!"

"Well, I'd thought of it, and I shall tell it, anyhow. You must think of something else."

"That was our only big adventure."

"Except the time when you got lost."

"Not nearly so exciting."

"It makes quite a good yarn, so *you* stick to that, and *I'll* have the puma."

As usual, Molly gave in for the sake of peace, and allowed Meg to have her own way.

They were looking forward very much to Saturday. It would make such a nice change to go out to tea.

When the afternoon arrived there was a thick fog, the first of the autumn. Aunt Maggie peered through the window at the dark pall outside.

"I hope you'll get there all right," she said uneasily.

"Oh yes, Auntie, it isn't far! Maud lives in Beech Avenue, and that's really only round the corner. We know where her house is."

"Well, put on your thick coats and your scarves. It feels very cold. You're not accustomed to English fogs, and I heard Meg cough just now."

Afraid lest Mrs. Norton's fears might prompt her to keep them at home, the girls hurried off. It was a short distance to

Beech Avenue, but the fog was certainly extremely dense. They could not see the houses from the road, and the gates looked all alike.

"Here we are," said Meg, halting at the entrance of a garden path.

"Are you sure? I thought there was a holly tree hanging over the wall. I remember its red berries."

"No, it was a hawthorn. I'm certain we're right."

They made their way to the front door and rang the bell.

The servant who answered seemed to expect visitors. She ushered them in and at once took them upstairs to remove hats and coats, then escorted them to a cheerful drawing-room, where a number of young people were assembled. A lady advanced and shook hands, making some remark about the terrible weather.

Meg and Molly looked round for Maud, but did not see her, or any of their friends from the College. All the company were strangers. A girl came up to them, began a little desultory conversation, then said in a hesitating manner:

"Let me see—you're—I forget your names."

"Meg and Molly Campbell."

"Oh! Did Helen bring you?"

"No; where's Maud?"

"Maud?"

A sudden doubt crossed Meg's mind.

"Isn't this Mrs. Logan's house?" she asked.

"No; the Logans live next door."

"Oh dear! Then we've come to the wrong party!"

The girl burst out laughing.

"Missed your way in the fog! How funny!"

"We're dreadfully sorry," apologized Molly.

"It doesn't matter. We're glad to see you. You'd better stay now you're here."

"Thanks very much, but the Logans are expecting us."

The girl turned to her mother.

"Isn't this a joke? These two have got to the wrong party! They mistook the house in the fog. I tell them they'd better stay."

"You'll be very welcome," said the hostess kindly.

But Meg and Molly were overcome with confusion and anxious to get away as speedily as possible. Maud would be wondering where they were.

They begged to be allowed to retrieve hats and coats, made further profuse apologies, and took their departure.

"Don't get lost again!" laughed the girl, conducting them to the steps. "The Logans' house is next door, to the left—that way. Hope you'll enjoy your party there. Sorry you won't stay to ours!"

"Quite an adventure," said Molly as they walked down the path.

"They must have thought us a pair of gate-crashers," said Meg.

"They were very nice about it, anyhow. The fog's not quite so thick. There's the holly tree, hanging over the wall."

They had found the right house this time, and were welcomed by Maud, who was in the drawing-room with Elizabeth, Dorothy, Aileen and Rachel.

"We were afraid you weren't coming," said Maud.

Meg and Molly explained the mistake they had made, and the company laughed in much amusement.

"I know that girl by sight," said Molly. "What's her name? She doesn't go to the College."

"It must have been Priscilla Parsons. She's delicate, and has a daily governess."

"Well, now you're all here, we'll have tea," said Mrs. Logan, leading the way to the dining-room.

It was a very joyful gathering. Thick curtains were drawn over the windows to shut out the fog, the table was prettily decorated with flowers, and the home-made cakes were delicious. Everyone was in good spirits and conversation and jokes circulated. They pulled crackers, though it was not Christmas time, and put on paper caps and read mottoes. A packet laid by each plate contained chocolates, and they finished up with vanilla ices.

Afterwards they returned to the drawing-room and made a circle round a blazing log fire, some sitting on chairs and some squatting on the hearthrug.

"Now for our stories!" said Maud. "I hope you've all come prepared with adventures."

"We've had one already this afternoon," said Molly.

"But you've told us that. We shall expect another, so don't shirk."

"Who's to begin?"

"I thought Mummie had better come first. It'll make a good start. Then nobody'll feel shy afterwards."

"Am I to break the ice?" said Mrs. Logan. "Well, I had a great adventure once, though I don't remember it. It happened in this way.

"I was born in South Africa, and when I was about a year old my father went prospecting in Rhodesia and my mother and I went with him. There was a large camp of natives, and we slept in tents. I used to be laid upon a little mattress by the side of my parents. One night my father was awakened by a cry from me, and to his horror he saw a lion disappearing through the flap of the tent with his baby in its jaws.

"He sprang up, seized his rifle, and shouted to his native boys to arouse the camp, then rushed after the lion. Fortunately the moon was full, and he saw the direction it had taken. The natives came with spears and torches, throwing burning brands from the camp fire, and shouting loudly, hoping to frighten the beast and make it drop the baby. They followed it for about a mile, and found it at last crouching behind some bushes with the child in its huge paws.

"My father was a good shot, but it must have needed nerve to aim in the moonlight, when to miss would be fatal. He fired, and the lion fell dead. I was rescued, screaming, literally from the lion's jaws, but beyond a few scratches I was not injured, and I seemed none the worse afterwards. I suppose I was too young to realize the danger or to feel shock. I have not the least remembrance of it, though my father and mother often told me about it, and we have the skin of the lion hanging in the hall. I'll show it to you afterwards."

When the girls had finished exclaiming and asking questions, Maud called them to order.

"I believe Aileen has a thriller for us," she said. "Now, Aileen!"

So Aileen began her tale.

"You know my father is a doctor, and in charge of a missionary hospital in China. I was born out there, and so was my brother Harold. When I was five years old and Harold was three, we had all been home to England, and we were returning to the hospital. We landed at Shanghai, and we had a long journey to go. First we went in the train, and then we

went by boat along a river, and that was easy enough, but the last stage was very difficult. The roads were much too bad for motors, so we had to travel in covered carts drawn by mules. There were Daddy and Mummie, Harold and myself, our 'amah'—that's the name for a Chinese nurse—and several Chinese men to drive and look after the mules.

"All our luggage was piled in one cart, and we sat in the other on bundles of rugs. The country was very beautiful, but the roads were dreadful, with great stones and ruts, and there were rickety little bridges across streams which no car could possibly have gone over. There were terrible hills, too, to climb up and down, so, as you can imagine, we got on very slowly. We spent the first night in a village where Daddy knew some of the people, and they lent us a room and boiled water for us. We had brought our own food. Before we started next morning Mummie said she hoped the road would be quite safe: the amah had heard from some of the villagers that there were bandits in the neighbourhood. Just as a precaution Mummie took some money and hid it in the middle of a loaf of bread. I remember Daddy laughed at her.

"Well, we had jogged along for a good many hours, and we were going up a pass between hills, when suddenly a number of wild-looking men came rushing down and surrounded us. They were armed, and they stopped the carts and made us come out. At first Daddy thought they were going to take us prisoners and carry us away into the mountains and hold us to ransom, and he still believes they had intended to do so. But he recognized one of the bandits as a patient he had operated on in the hospital and cured from a painful disease, so he spoke to him, and the man talked for a long time to the others.

"At last they said they would let us go, but they must have our money and anything else they wanted. So they turned out all our luggage, and took money and watches, and clothes and rugs and spoons, and presents that were intended for the hospital. Mummie was very clever; she distributed all the food we had amongst them, except the little loaf with the money inside, and that she gave to Harold, saying the baby must not go hungry.

"After a long time they went away, carrying our property with them. We jogged on to another village, where we bought food with the money Mummie had hidden, and next day we reached the hospital. That was eight years ago. I came to England when I was seven, and I haven't been in China since."

"I shouldn't think you'd want to go back!" commented Maud.

"Oh, I don't know! It's a beautiful country, and we had a garden full of flowers. Perhaps I'll go out again when I leave school, if Daddy hasn't given up the hospital and settled in England by then."

"Now, Meg, your turn!" said Maud.

"Please, may I come next?" begged Molly. "Meg's adventure is so much more exciting. Mine would seem very tame after it."

"All right. Bowl ahead!"

"When I was four years old we were spending the summer at a farm in Manitoba. The farmer had two little girls of his own, and Meg and I used to play with them. One day he took us four children out with him in his buggy to the town, and it was getting dark when we were driving back. We had to go up a very steep hill, and the horse was tired, so Mr. Harper turned us all out of the buggy and told us to walk to the top, where he would wait for us. Nellie Harper took Meg's hand and went on in front, and Laura followed with me. But it was difficult to get me along, so Laura ran on to join her sister, expecting I would soon come after them.

"There was a side road leading from the main road, and I heard the sound of wheels there, and thinking it must be Mr. Harper and the buggy, I turned in that direction, unseen by the others who were in front. I wandered on and on, and never caught up the trap. I must have gone miles when a farmer's wife, coming back from the town, found me wearily trudging along. She took me to her own home, and I told her my name, but couldn't tell where we were staying. So she put me to bed with her own children.

"Meantime, Mr. Harper and Daddy and men from the farm were scouring the countryside in search of me, and were up till after midnight with lanterns. Next morning a cyclist arrived with news that I had been found by Mrs. Warren and was safe at her house. Daddy came to fetch me later. I believe I was proud of myself! But I gave them all a terrible fright."

"I can remember the hue and cry there was after her, and how Nellie and Laura were scolded for leaving her behind," said Meg. "Now shall I tell you *my* story? It was a great adventure. When Molly and I were eight years old, we all went

to spend our summer holiday with some friends of Daddy's who lived on Vancouver Island. We had a grand time. There were two boys, of eleven and nine, named Willie and Fred, and we became great friends with them. They had four ponies, so we all went riding together, and we used to swim in a lake, and go out to pick berries and have all kinds of fun. Well, one morning we took our bridles and set out to catch our ponies. We hadn't gone far when we turned a corner, and what should we see crouching in the path but a puma. That's a creature rather like a leopard. They call it a cougar in Vancouver. The boys were in front, and it sprang at Fred and knocked him down with his face to the ground.

"Molly and I were terrified and shrieked, but Willie rushed at the beast and beat it with his bridle and his fists and drove it off from Fred. Then it turned upon Willie. Fred scrambled to his feet and rushed to the rescue, fighting it with his hands, and even putting his arm in its mouth to prevent it from biting Willie. It was an awful scrimmage for a moment or two. Our screams had attracted a man farther along the road though, and he came running up with a gun. That disturbed the puma, and it darted away under a log, where he shot it. It was seven feet long from its nose to the tip of its tail—a horrible brute, I can tell you!

"Willie and Fred were a good deal scratched and bitten, and had to have 'first aid' and be treated with iodine and bandaged up. Afterwards the King awarded each of them the Albert Medal for their great bravery. They deserved it! They were jolly boys. Molly and I felt they'd saved our lives. I never want to meet a puma again."

"Glad we don't have them in England," said Dorothy, with a shudder. "I certainly shouldn't like to see one."

"Now, Maud, it's your own turn," urged Elizabeth.

"I've not met bandits or wild beasts. You must be content with a mild story. Nothing very exciting has happened to *me*."

"Never mind, go on and tell."

"Well, last August I was staying with cousins in Dorset. They live near the sea, and one afternoon we went for a walk on the cliffs. We took their dog Bonzo with us, a wire-haired terrier, much too fond of fighting. The land there, a sort of common of gorse, belongs to a farmer who's strict about poaching, and he had just put up a notice board to say that no rabbiting was allowed and dogs must be kept under control. Bonzo was on his leash, but he was very tiresome and kept straining at it, and after a while Lillie, my cousin, let him go for a short run to work off his energy. He dashed about, poking among the gorse bushes, and presently we heard a scuffle, and he came running back with a young rabbit in his mouth and proudly laid it at Lillie's feet, wagging his tail and looking ever so pleased with himself.

"Oh, Bonzo! You naughty dog!" said Lillie.

"She put his leash on again and gave it to me to hold.

"Now, whatever are we to do with the rabbit?" asked Marjorie, my other cousin.

"We had a bag with us, so we put the rabbit inside and walked on. We hadn't gone more than fifty yards when we met Mr. Lowe, the farmer who owned the land, coming down the hillside. He must have seen us from above. He stopped us and said: 'What have you got in that bag?'

"Lillie had to show him, and she tried to explain that it was an accident and that we were not poaching. He was very angry.

"Didn't you see the notice?' he asked. 'Why didn't you keep your dog under control?'

"We only let him go for a run,' said Lillie.

"Well, you've been poaching; it's a clear case, and I mean to prosecute,' he said. 'I must protect my land, and I can't have people bringing their dogs and catching my rabbits. Give me your names!'

"He knew Lillie by sight quite well, but he pretended he didn't. He wrote down our names on an envelope, and he took the rabbit and put it in his coat pocket.

"You'll hear more about this,' he said.

"We went home in a terrible state of mind. You see, Uncle Herbert is a magistrate, and if we were prosecuted for

poaching he might have to try the case. We had visions of being hauled up before the bench, and, of course, Uncle couldn't show any leniency to his own relations; he'd be obliged to allow a conviction. Marjorie wondered if we should be put in prison.

"We told Aunt Edna about it, and she said she would go herself after tea and see Mr. Lowe. She managed to pacify him, and he consented to drop the matter and not to prosecute. But it gave us a fearful fright, and we never took Bonzo on the cliffs again, even with his leash on." It was Elizabeth's turn next. She declared she had no adventures to tell, but could give them another dog story if they cared to listen to it.

"We have a fox terrier named Spot, and one Sunday I found to my horror that he had followed me to church. I tried to send him home, but he dodged away from me and disappeared inside somewhere among the pews. The church was fairly full, and I didn't like to go up the aisle hunting for him, and I couldn't find the verger to warn him that Spot was wandering about, so I just went to my seat and trusted to luck. I was afraid he might come marching down the aisle, but nothing happened to disturb the service. Where do you think the wretch was all the time? Inside the pulpit!

"The Vicar found him there when he went up to preach, but took no notice of him, and he lay quite quietly on the floor during the whole of the sermon.

"Afterwards, when the Vicar had gone, Spot came trotting down to find me. I felt very ashamed of him. We shut him up on Sunday mornings now."

"That happened at St. John's," commented Aileen. "Uncle David told me about it. He said he found the dog lying on the floor of the pulpit, and thought it better not to disturb him."

"He must have felt very uneasy during the sermon," laughed Maud. "Suppose Spot had begun to worry his surplice? What would have happened then?"

"Spot was evidently on his best behaviour," said Mrs. Logan. "In the olden days north-country farmers used to take their sheep dogs to church with them, and, in case they fought, the clerk kept a pair of 'dog-tongs' to turn them out with. I saw some of those dog-tongs at a museum once; I think it was at Cartmel or at Grasmere."

"What an excitement for the congregation!"

"You next, Dorothy!"

"Mine was quite a different sort of adventure. I was to be bridesmaid to an aunt, when I was small, and to help to carry her train at the wedding. She lived in the country, and I went to stay with a married aunt, a few miles away, because there wasn't room to put me up at Grannie's house. On the wedding day I was dressed in pale pink chiffon, and a lace cap with a wreath of roses round, and I fancied myself no end!

"We all set off in the car, Uncle George and Aunt Muriel, and Uncle Dick, and a cousin of the bridegroom who was to act best man. Uncle George was driving, and he *would* take a short cut to the church, across a ford on the river, instead of going several miles round by the road. Aunt Muriel said 'Please don't,' but he declared it would be all right, and he was very obstinate about it. Well, it was all wrong! The car stuck in the middle of the stream, with the wheels sunk in the gravel. There we were, in our wedding array, marooned in the water, while the bridal party must be waiting for us at the church. The three men took off their coats and turned up their trousers and waded into the river, and after a great deal of hard work they managed to push the car out, while Aunt Muriel sat at the steering wheel to guide it.

"Of course we were late for the wedding, and they were waiting in a great state of agitation, wondering what had happened to us. However, the bridal procession was formed, and a little cousin and I held the train without any mishaps, and Aunt Peggie was married safely to Uncle Donald. Uncle George and Uncle Dick and the best man had got their feet very wet, and I believe they all caught bad colds. The District Council put up a notice board afterwards, warning the public that the ford was dangerous for traffic. I don't suppose Uncle George ever tried to take the car across again."

"Short cuts aren't always the quickest!" said Mrs. Logan. "It was a good thing it was not the bride who was in the car. I avoid a ford if possible; the water always makes such a splash."

"Now, Rachel, your turn, and you're the last."

"You said it must be an adventure of my own? I could tell you something thrilling that happened to my grandmother! Oh, well, if it has to be something of my very own, you must put up with this. It's quite true at any rate.

"I was rather a naughty little girl when I was small, and I used to get into terrible tempers now and then. I was staying once at Grannie's. She lived in a very old house in the country that dated back hundreds of years. One day I had one of my bad passionate fits, and I slapped Aunt Kathleen as hard as I could. As a punishment, and to calm me down, she shut me into what was called 'the powdering room', a very small room where ladies used to have their hair powdered in days of Queen Anne.

"I didn't much mind, because there was a window and it wasn't dark. The room was empty except for a few bits of lumber. I turned these over to try and find something to play with, but there was nothing interesting. Then I began to pull at the wallpaper, and as it was loose I tore large pieces of it from the wall. As one piece of it fell something else tumbled down on to the floor. I picked it up and found it was a coin. It looked like a bright penny. I rolled it round the floor to amuse myself, and when at last Aunt Kathleen came to release me I had quite forgotten my tantrums and I showed it to her. She was very excited. She said it was a golden spade guinea, and where had I found it?

"I showed her the place, and she pulled more of the paper off and discovered a tiny hole in the wall with nine other guineas inside it. It must have been somebody's secret hiding-place years and years ago.

"They stripped all the paper off the walls of the room, but they found nothing more. Aunt Kathleen gave me one of the guineas for a keepsake, and I have it still. It's quite a treasure. We often wonder whom it belonged to. I tell Aunt Kathie if it hadn't been for my katawampus ways we should never have found the little hoard! That's the end of my story."

"Well, we've had some jolly good yarns," said Maud. "Thank you all very much for telling them. Now I vote we have some games."

So they set to work to play "Subject and Object" and "Dumb Charades" and "Earth, Air and Water", finishing with a round at cards, till a tray of cakes and lemonade was brought in, after which the visitors, consulting the clock, decided reluctantly that it was time to return home.

"It's been ripping fun!" said Molly as they walked back.

"Yes; I wish we could persuade Aunt Maggie to let *us* give a party!" replied Meg.

Half Term

It was six o'clock on a wet autumn evening. The girls had come back from school in dripping mackintoshes; they had had tea alone, for Aunt Maggie and Miss Marsh were out at a Bridge Drive, and they were now making some effort to do their homework. Meg, sitting by the fire, was studying a history book, and Molly was practising the piano in a conscientious but tiresome fashion making bad shots again and again at a difficult passage, a great aggravation to Meg's more musical soul.

"Oh, *do* go on! You're like a salmon trying to leap up a cataract and missing every time!" grumbled Meg.

Molly stopped in the middle of a bar.

"It's that horrid run; I simply can't get it."

"I wish you'd practise my violin accompaniment instead."

"Well, I will when I've finished my half-hour at this."

"I can't learn my history while you're floundering at that piece. Do come and learn yours, and finish your practising afterwards."

"Aunt Maggie will be coming in soon, and she doesn't like to hear the piano going."

"She doesn't mind my violin."

"Well, because you practise upstairs."

A rap-tap at the front door was an interruption. It was the hour of the late post, and Meg got up and went to the letterbox in the hall. She returned holding something behind her back.

"What have I got here?" she asked.

"Not from Daddy?" cried Molly, jumping up from the piano.

Meg tantalized her for a moment or two, then handed her a letter with a Canadian postmark.

She tore it open eagerly and read it.

"Dad's in Montreal. He hopes we're getting on well at school. He sends a post office order for a pound, and says we're to take ten shillings each for pocket-money, and that must last till Christmas."

"Oh, good! Now we shall have something to spend at any rate. What else does he say?"

"Only that he's extremely busy, and that it's very cold in Canada, and he hopes we like England. Not a word of when he means to come back."

"We can cash that order at the post office."

"Yes; we'll do it to-morrow."

"Better not say anything about it to Aunt Maggie."

"No. We can pay our subscrips at the College now."

"Yes, Nora was dunning me for that shilling."

"Well, we can carry on now till Christmas, though it won't leave much for presents."

"We must give people calendars and things; the Handicrafts class is a great help."

"Rather!"

"Here's Aunt Maggie coming back; pop that letter inside my history book, quick!"

Mrs. Norton and Miss Marsh were already in the hall, so the girls went to greet them.

"Did you have a good time, Auntie?"

"Splendid! I won a second prize. There were twenty-five tables, so when expenses are paid we ought to have cleared at least ten pounds for St. Mary's Home. There's nothing like a Bridge Drive if you want to make money for a charity. People will come to that when they won't give a subscription. Where's my prize, Miss Marsh? You put it in your bag. Thanks! Look, girls! Isn't this a pretty little Japanese box? I shall keep sealing-wax and stamps in it on my writing table. Oh, it's cold! Let's come in and sit by the fire, Miss Marsh, before we go upstairs. What an evening! I'm glad we were able to find a taxi so easily."

"Did you get wet coming back from the College?" Miss Marsh asked the girls.

"No; we had our mackintoshes."

"And what have you been doing at school this afternoon?" inquired Mrs. Norton.

"Miss James gave a lecture on physics," replied Molly. "She says no matter is solid, it's all a mass of tiny whirling atoms, and didn't she say, Meg, that even the atoms are made up of whirling electrons?"

"She said so," replied Meg, "but I know if I hit my head against the marble mantelpiece it feels solid enough, and it's my head that does the whirling."

"Atoms and electrons are beyond me," laughed Aunt Maggie. "I'm afraid I didn't learn about them when I was at school."

It was very nearly half term now, and the College was looking forward to a short holiday, from Friday afternoon till Tuesday morning. It would make a pleasant break in the round of work. Mrs. Norton suddenly decided that she would like to go away from home. She was not feeling well and needed a change of air. She wished to go to Linkham-on-Sea, because a cousin was staying there at a very nice hotel, and it would be pleasant to join her. They had not met for some time. She must take Miss Marsh to look after the luggage and to rub her arm with liniment at nights, as she was suffering from a slight attack of neuritis. Miss Marsh was really indispensable. The trouble was what to do with the girls. She could not very well leave them alone with the maids. She decided to take them with her for the half-term holiday, then Miss Marsh could bring them back, and she could stay on at the hotel with her cousin and engage somebody to come in and massage her arm. On the whole, she thought she would like to have the girls at Linkham just for a few days. She had grown very fond of Meg, whose racy remarks kept her amused. She even admitted to Miss Marsh that she found Molly much more interesting than she had at first supposed.

"There's a great deal in Molly. She's a very solid character, and most dependable," said Miss Marsh.

"But she doesn't make me laugh like Meg does! That child has a fund of humour," replied Aunt Maggie.

Naturally the girls were excited at the prospect of a short visit to the seaside. Even in late autumn it would be delightful to have a peep at the waves and the sands. If only the weather would keep fine they promised themselves some walks on the beach.

"Isn't Linkham the place where Edward and Hugh go to school?" asked Molly.

"Why, of course, they're both at St. Kenelm's," answered Aunt Maggie.

"I wonder if we shall see them?" said Meg.

"We might ask them to tea on Sunday; boys always love to go to tea, unless perhaps they're coming home for half term."

"They're not. Aileen says they have a big football match on the Monday, and none of the school's going away."

"Then I'll ring up the Vicar and ask him to send a note to the headmaster for leave for Edward and Hugh on Sunday afternoon. They're nice boys. I like them better than the girl—Bertha."

"Oh, it will be jolly if they can come."

"Well, we'll give them the chance at any rate. I remember when my brother was at school we used to go over to see him

and ask him and two friends of his to tea. The cakes those boys ate! We thought they would never stop. They might have been starved at school, and I'm sure they weren't—the diet there was very good. But that's boys all over. I shan't forget the tuck-boxes we used to send, cakes and apples and oranges and toffee—I suppose they shared it round amongst them. It didn't seem to upset their digestions."

Shortly before half term Molly and Meg were awarded their department badges at the College. They were very pleased, and pinned them on with much satisfaction. Unlucky Rachel had lost hers through racing across a road without caution and being nearly knocked down by a car, a misdemeanour which was seen and reported by a sub-prefect. She would be on probation now until Christmas, as it was not her first offence. Several other girls had warnings, but on the whole IV B had a good record. Everybody was rejoicing at the prospect of the short holiday and discussing plans to enjoy it to the best advantage.

"I'm glad they give us Friday afternoon," said Dorothy. "I'm going to stay with cousins in the country."

"And we're going to the seaside," said Molly.

"Oh, you luckers! Where? Linkham! It's a jolly place. We spent Easter there last year. Well, I hope you'll enjoy yourselves."

"We're sure to, thanks, if the weather keeps fine."

"Yes, indeed! I shall listen very anxiously to the weather forecast on the Wireless."

On Friday afternoon Mrs. Norton, Miss Marsh, Molly and Meg, with an assortment of luggage, started off by train, and after an uneventful journey arrived at Linkham. Their hotel was on the promenade, and they had bedrooms facing the sea. They could hear the swish of the waves and the grinding of the pebbles, and the air felt fresh and soft. It was too dark to see anything, but it was nice to know that Father Ocean was so near.

Mrs. Norton's cousin, Mrs. Hall, was pleasant and chatty. She had brought her car, which she drove herself, and she promised to take them all out in it.

"It will do you good, Maggie," she said. "You get moped at Rillington. Oh yes, there'll be room. Miss Marsh and the girls can sit behind—they're none of them very big—and you can sit in front with me."

Meg and Molly got up at half-past seven next morning, and as Aunt Maggie had said "breakfast at nine", they put on hats and coats and went for a walk along the promenade. The tide was in, and there were beautiful big waves. Seagulls were flying about, and a steamer was making its way in towards the quay. A few early risers like themselves were exercising their dogs, letting them run unleashed. The girls sat down for a few minutes in one of the shelters, and were joined by an elderly lady and a fox terrier.

"I think Sandy deserves a scamper," she remarked, unfastening the dog's lead. "At this time of day he'll do no harm, poor darling!"

No sooner, however, was the fox terrier free than it bolted round the side of the shelter, there was a sound of furious barking and growling, and next moment it was engaged in a desperate fight with an Airedale. The owners of both dogs rushed to the spot, but it was impossible to separate the yelping, snarling combatants without being badly bitten.

"Oh dear, oh dear! It's that dreadful Pat!" moaned the mistress of Sandy. "He always attacks my poor little dog. I thought he wouldn't be out so early. What *am* I to do?"

The mistress of Pat was belabouring Sandy with her umbrella and trying to call off her own dog, who paid not the slightest attention but went on with the battle.

"They're old enemies," said the Airedale's owner. "They always fight if they meet. I came out early to give Pat a run, thinking there was no risk—Oh! This is terrible! Pat will be killed!"

"Call off your dog!" shrieked the mistress of Sandy.

"I can't! Call off yours!"

In the midst of this confusion there appeared a rescuer. A small elderly gentleman came hurrying along, pulled a little box from his pocket and sprinkled something upon the noses of the two dogs. The effect was magical. They stopped fighting and began to sneeze violently. Their owners secured them while there was the opportunity.

"Oh! Thank you! Thank you!" cried Sandy's mistress.

"How *did* you do it?" asked Pat's mistress.

"Snuff, ladies! It's a fortunate thing I take it and always carry my box with me. A few grains will stop any dog-fight. They can't stand it. Glad I was able to be of service to you. Good morning."

"That's well to know," said the owner of Pat. Then addressing Sandy's mistress, she continued: "As our dogs are such enemies, suppose we mutually agree to take them their early morning runs on alternate days? I'll go on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, if you'll go on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays."

"An excellent idea. Come along, Sandy! I'd better get him home at once; he pulls so strongly at his lead."

Very much amused at this canine encounter, the girls returned to the hotel, and gave a spirited description of it to Aunt Maggie at the breakfast table.

"I thought the old ladies were going to fight too!" said Molly. "They looked quite fierce, and each said it was the fault of the other dog."

"And I began to suspect a romance," said Meg. "The old gentleman was so polite and anxious to help. He'll be meeting them on the promenade again, I'm sure."

"Oh! But which?" exclaimed Molly.

"Why, the mistress of Pat, of course. She was by far the nicer looking."

"You silly children!" said Aunt Maggie, but she laughed all the same.

"What are we going to do to-day?" asked Mrs. Hall. "It's such a fine morning I think we'd better take advantage of the sunshine and have a run in the car. Then you can rest this afternoon, Maggie."

"That sounds a nice programme," agreed Mrs. Norton.

"Very well. Can you be ready by half-past ten? I'll go down to the garage and see about more petrol."

Mrs. Hall and the car were at the hotel door in good time. Mrs. Norton took her seat in front, and there was just room for Meg, Molly and Miss Marsh at the back, rather a tight fit indeed, especially for Molly, who was wedged in the middle, but the car was only a four seater, and it was better to be squashed than to be left behind at the hotel. Miss Marsh had indeed suggested that she should go for a walk instead, but nobody would hear of that, and Mrs. Hall insisted she must be one of the party.

They motored along a road between beautiful beech woods, russet and golden with autumn tints, catching here and there a peep of the sea between the tree trunks.

"You should see it in spring when the ground is yellow with primroses," said Mrs. Norton. "We stayed here once for Easter. Do you remember, Netta?"

"Yes—yes," grunted her cousin. "I can't talk much when I'm driving. I have to keep my eyes on the road."

That she had need of all her vigilance soon became evident. They had not gone much farther when they met a car, with another car behind, and the latter, in defiance of all motoring etiquette, suddenly shot out and tried to pass. A collision seemed imminent, but Mrs. Hall cleverly swerved up a bank to the left and avoided the danger.

"What are you doing?" she shouted angrily to the offender as she put on her brakes.

The driver did not halt to apologize but whisked on, though the first car stopped to see if all was right.

"Road-hogs!" exclaimed Meg.

"Yes, just like that car when you were on your——" began Molly, but a violent poke from Meg caused her to remember that the bicycle accident was a secret to be guarded from Aunt Maggie's ears.

"Oh dear! I'm always so nervous when I'm motoring!" quavered Miss Marsh.

"Well, there's no harm done," said Mrs. Hall. "It was fortunate there was a bank here and not a wall."

"You're a very good driver, Netta," said Mrs. Norton.

"You see, I've had some experience, and I keep my head. Here's a riddle for you, girls; what is better than presence of mind? You don't know? Absence of body!"

They all laughed, which seemed to relieve the tension. Mrs. Hall started her engine again, and they went on.

After five or six miles they came to a lovely little bay, and, parking the car on a patch of grassy common, they strolled along the beach. The tide was well out, and the sands were full of small pools among rocks, where sea anemones were waving red tentacles and seaweeds spread fern-like fronds in the water. The girls ran about with much enthusiasm, and wanted to take off shoes and stockings and paddle, but Aunt Maggie promptly forbade them, saying it was far too late in the year and too cold.

Miss Marsh produced a bag of buns, and in spite of a good breakfast they were quite ready to sit down on the motor rug, which she thoughtfully carried, and to eat an impromptu lunch. Sea birds, such as they had not seen before, were flying about. Mrs. Hall said they were sheldrakes, and she also pointed out some smaller birds, darting over the water, which she called sea-swallows. There were actually a few wild flowers blooming under the cliffside, rose-campion and horehound and ragwort and scabious and yarrow. Molly collected quite a bunch, and Meg filled her handkerchief with shells which she found on a smooth stretch of sand. Aunt Maggie said the sea breeze was doing her good, and that she felt much better already for the change of air.

"Linkham is always so bracing," she declared.

They were all quite sorry when Mrs. Hall reminded them of the time, and suggested that unless they started back at once they would be late for lunch at the hotel.

"I almost wish we'd brought lunch with us in the car," she said, "but then you wouldn't have had your afternoon rest, Maggie, and you need that. I hope you're not too tired?"

"Oh no; I feel marvellously refreshed."

During the afternoon, while Mrs. Norton was lying down in her room, Miss Marsh took the girls on to the promenade and into the town to look at the shops. They met Aunt Maggie and Mrs. Hall later at the Casino, where they had tea and listened to a very good concert. It was all most enjoyable.

"I wish half term came oftener," said Meg.

"We're so lucky to have it fine," said Molly.

On Sunday afternoon Edward and Hugh were expected to tea. Their father had written to their headmaster, who gave them leave of absence. They were both at a large college on the outskirts of Linkham. The pupils were in church in the morning and occupied a whole side aisle. Meg and Molly recognized their friends as the school marched out after service, and the two boys each gave a sheepish and rather surreptitious grin, as if they did not wish their companions to see them nodding to a pair of girls.

They were more expansive, however, when they arrived for tea. They talked about their football matches and how some of them went swimming, and Edward said he was learning to box.

"Do you have Handicrafts at St. Kenelm's?" asked Molly.

"Oh yes; I'm making a boat and going to rig her with sails," replied Hugh. "Tell them what you're making, Edward."

"A model engine. It'll really work quite well when I've finished it. I thought of fixing some rails in the garden at home. It would be jolly to see it whizzing along. You'll have to come and look at it."

"Rather!"

"We do carpentry too. I'm making a workbox for the mater, for a Christmas present."

"And I'm doing a pipe-rack for Dad," added Hugh.

Tea was served in the lounge. Aunt Maggie had risen nobly to the occasion and had provided a handsome number of cakes, to which Edward and Hugh did ample justice, with the schoolboy appetites that she had anticipated. They seemed very excited about a football match which was to take place on Monday.

"Couldn't you all come and watch?" said Edward. "The head invites visitors. He told us to ask you."

"I'm afraid it's hardly in our line," smiled Mrs. Norton. "Besides, Mrs. Hall is taking us out in her car again on Monday."

"Oh, what a pity! We'd have liked you to come."

At half-past five the guests reluctantly took their departure, each having been presented with a packet of toffee.

"Thanks awfully! Sorry you can't come to the footer match. It'll be worth seeing," said Edward.

"Yes, you'll miss something!" endorsed Hugh as he shook hands.

"Amusing creatures—boys! They think of nothing but football," laughed Mrs. Norton when the pair had gone. "Well, I've had brothers myself and I know their funny ways. One wouldn't have them otherwise at their age. Edward will have to exhibit his engine at Christmas, *if* it works!"

Monday was again fine. Really the weather was very kind, in spite of warnings on the Wireless.

They started for another motor excursion, and this time they took a lunch basket from the hotel with them. They went much farther afield, and visited an old abbey and a castle, had a picnic by the roadside, and an early tea later on at a café beside a river. They met with no more adventures with motorists, much to Miss Marsh's relief. She was manifestly fearful in the car, though Aunt Maggie, who was supposed to have a weak heart, never showed any symptoms of nervousness. Perhaps she trusted her cousin's driving. They arrived back in Linkham just in time to retrieve suitcases from the hotel and go to the station, where Miss Marsh and the girls were to catch the five o'clock train to Rillington. Mrs. Hall saw them off.

"It's been a glorious day, thanks to your kindness!" said Miss Marsh.

"I *have* enjoyed it!" said Meg.

"It was a simply gorgeous half-term holiday!" said Molly.

Trouble in IV B

Aunt Maggie had arranged to stay for another ten days at Linkham, as her cousin would be there for that time and the sea air would do her good. Miss Marsh was in charge during her absence. The girls liked her. She was kind and friendly, and sometimes played games with them in the evenings, when they had finished their homework and practising.

The half-term holiday had been a refreshing break to all members of IV B, and they had much to talk about when they met again.

"I had a ripping time in the country," said Dorothy. "We went to a meet and saw all the hounds, and afterwards we ran across some fields and caught a glimpse of the fox. It got away, and I was rather glad."

"We went to the theatre and saw *The Scarlet Pimpernel*," said Winnie.

"And we went a long run in the car," said Daphne. "We went to see my uncle at Cambridge, and he took us through some of the Colleges. Coming back we burst a tyre, and we had to stop ever so long by the roadside before Dad could get the spare wheel fixed on."

Hetty and Tess had been hiking with their brothers, and Maud had spent the week-end with her grandmother.

It was perhaps a little difficult to settle down again after so many excitements, and things did not jog along too easily in IV B. Though its members as a rule got on well together there were sometimes differences. Arriving rather early on Wednesday afternoon, Molly found a tremendous altercation going on between Mary Barnes and Carrie Johnstone, who both looked very excited.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Matter? Why, Mary says I've taken her penknife!"

"So you have!"

"I haven't!"

"You know you have!"

"And I know I haven't!"

"Look here," said Molly. "Let's thrash the whole thing out. We'll hold a court of justice, with a judge and jury, and you shall each state your case. Come along now! Meg, Hetty, Florence, Tess! Come here and join the jury. We must elect a judge."

"You'd better be judge yourself."

"I will if you like."

The few girls who were assembled in the room collected together, and Molly, sitting on the top of a desk, opened the court.

"Mary first, because she's the 'plaintiff' (isn't that what you call it?), and then Carrie, because she's the 'defendent'."

"Where did you get such legal terms?" giggled Tess.

"Never mind. To business, please! Now Mary, state your case—the truth—the whole truth—and nothing but the truth!"

"I've a new penknife with a pearl handle," began Mary in an injured voice. "I left it on my desk this morning, and when I got here this afternoon it was gone. Then I saw Carrie sharpening her pencil with it!"

"You didn't!" broke out Carrie.

"One at time—don't interrupt. This is Mary's case for the prosecution. How did you know the penknife belonged to you, Mary?"

"Because it was new and had a pearl handle. Carrie's penknife is an old white one."

"Witnesses, please! Tess, can you describe Mary's knife. Your desk is next to hers."

"A nice pearl-handled one."

"And Carrie's?"

"An old white-handled one. I've borrowed it many a time, and it's very blunt. Mary would never lend me hers."

Carrie, during this evidence, was so absolutely bursting with indignation that she could be restrained no longer, and again interrupted the court.

"But I've got a *new* penknife now!"

"We'll take the defendant's case," said Molly hastily. "What have you to say, Carrie?"

"A great deal. It's my birthday, and I had a new knife given me this morning."

"Produce the knife in question," said Molly judicially.

Carrie laid it upon the desk with the air of the mother who laid her baby before Solomon.

"Can you identify this knife, Mary?"

"Yes; it's mine!"

"Oh, you fibber, it isn't!" shrieked Carrie.

"Hello! Hello! What's all this about?" said a voice from the door as Dorothy entered.

Molly rapidly explained the details of the argument.

"What you want is a modern Portia," said Dorothy. "I think I'd better take on the case. Mary, have you looked inside your desk?"

"No."

"Well, look now, down in that corner."

Mary searched, and to the surprise of herself and everybody drew out a pearl-handled penknife.

"You left it on your desk this morning, and I saw it and slipped it inside!" said Dorothy.

"A Daniel come to judgment!" cried Tess.

Molly took the two penknives in her hand and compared them. They were identical.

"Well, this is satisfactory. We may consider the case dismissed. I don't quite know which side ought to apologize, but I think both might. What do you say, gentlemen of the jury?"

"Tell them to shake hands."

"And not to be such idiots again."

"And not to leave their knives lying about."

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary, where does your penknife stay?"

"In your desk you may lock it, or else in your pocket."

"But be sure you put it away," laughed Dorothy, making up an impromptu rhyme.

"Well, my hearties, this will be in all the newspapers to-morrow—'Difficult Case at Girls' College—Problem solved by Schoolfellow'—it might even be on the Wireless if you listen to Weather and News. May I remind you that it is now

2.29, and in another minute our august teacher will present herself, and that if she catches you perched on the tops of your desks she may raise some question on the subject of deportment badges. Sorry to disturb you, but it's well to be warned!"

The girls slid down quickly and seated themselves.

If Miss Nelson noticed anything unusual in the atmosphere, she made no comment, but opened the register and ticked off the names in her customary calm manner.

Next Monday afternoon, just as Miss Nelson had finished a lesson in botany and was about to dismiss the form, a sub-prefect knocked at the door of IV B, and entering placed a typewriter upon the teacher's desk.

"Oh, thank you! I wanted that," said Miss Nelson. "I was wondering where it was."

"Miss Browne told me to bring it," replied Minnie.

"Yes, she said I might borrow it. Have you brought the paper too? That's all right."

"Miss Browne said will you come to tea in her study before you begin your work? It's ready now."

"Yes, tell her I'll come at once. You may go girls."

The mistress rose, gathered up her botanical specimens and put them in a vasculum, then when her class had collected their books and filed from the room she departed to the headmistress's study. In the cloakroom the girls lost no time in putting on coats and hats and changing shoes. They were anxious to get home.

"Bother! I believe I've left my atlas in my desk," said Meg. "What a nuisance! I shall have to go and fetch it."

"Shall I wait for you?" asked Molly, pausing as she collected her books.

"No; you go on with Aileen. I'll catch you up. I shan't be long."

Molly and Aileen walked back together and separated at the gate of Heath House. Molly went in, and, as tea would not be ready till half-past five, she decided to begin her practising at once. She wrestled with a difficult piece for the allotted time, and when at last she rose from the piano she heard the strains of Meg's violin sounding from upstairs.

"So she's practising too," thought Molly. "I didn't hear her come in. I wish Miss Marsh would hurry up. She's a long time at that sewing meeting at the Vicarage. I want my tea!"

The welcome bang of the front door followed shortly. Miss Marsh had returned, and very soon the gong rang its summons in the hall. At the tea table they talked about careers.

Miss Marsh asked them what they would like to be when they left school.

"A private detective!" said Meg promptly.

"My dear!" exclaimed the astonished Miss Marsh, looking rather horrified.

"Yes, I should. It would be ever such fun—a sort of lady Sherlock Holmes, you know. Molly and I often play a kind of game. We watch people who are passing, and we each write down what we think they are and then compare notes. We say that man's a doctor, and that one a lawyer, and that lady is on the stage, or that a teacher."

"But we hardly ever think the same about them," added Molly, "and, of course, we can't find out which of us is right."

"Oh, we did about the tall man at Montreux. He *was* a doctor. I said he was."

"It would be a queer career for a girl. I hope you'll choose something nicer," said Miss Marsh. "What plans have you, Molly?"

"I really don't know. I'd like to go to a School of Art. I love painting."

"How about your violin, Meg?"

"No, you have to be very clever nowadays to make anything out of music, Miss Courtenay says."

"So many girls learn shorthand and typing and become secretaries."

"Not for me, thank you! I should hate tapping those horrid little dials with letters on them. I'd never learn to do it properly; they're so muddling."

"You've never tried, so you can't tell," said Molly.

"Well, there's time enough for you both to decide. No doubt Mr. Campbell will have some ideas later on."

"I'd love to help Daddy!"

"If I don't become a lady detective, I think I'll go on the films," said Meg. "We saw a cinema play being acted on the mountain above Blonay. The people were all dressed in Swiss costumes. It looked ever so jolly. Suppose I became a star at Hollywood?"

"You're very ambitious!"

"Well, nothing venture nothing win."

IV B assembled as usual next morning. When Miss Nelson entered the whole form realized instantly that her mental barometer stood at stormy. They knew the symptoms only too well. What was the matter? they wondered. They sat up very straight and did not fidget with pens or pencil boxes. Each felt it would be unwise to attract attention.

The mistress took the register first, then when all eyes were fixed on her she began.

"Girls, a very unpleasant thing has happened. You remember that yesterday afternoon Minnie Bruce brought me a typewriter and left it on my desk. I wished to type some examination questions, and thought I could do them quietly here after four o'clock. I went to have tea with Miss Browne in her study, and when I returned to begin my work I found somebody had been tampering with the typewriter and had put it out of order. I at once made inquiries as to whether anyone had been in the room during my absence. One of the maids told me she had been in the next room soon after four o'clock and had heard the click of the typewriter in IV B, and that presently a girl had come out and run downstairs. She only caught a glimpse of her as she passed the door, and could not identify her. I inquired from another maid whether anyone was seen late in the cloakroom. She said a coat and hat were hanging up on one of the hooks in the portion reserved for IV B when she looked in about a quarter-past four, but were gone when she came back at half-past four. She saw nobody.

"Now, from this evidence, I gather that a girl from this form must have returned here and had been trying to work the typewriter. I ask you, does anyone know anything about this?"

Nobody replied. The form all sat thrilled but silent.

"Then I shall ask you each in turn, and I shall expect a strictly truthful answer."

The question was put to sixteen girls, and met with sixteen emphatic denials.

The mistress glared at the form with what they called her "Nelson of Trafalgar" expression.

"I am perfectly certain that one of you is responsible. If that girl will have the moral courage to confess I will promise to forgive her."

Still nobody answered.

"Then I shall be obliged to punish the whole form! You will each draw a map of England and fill in fifty places, and bring it to me to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. Whoever is guilty will feel that all the rest will suffer for her sake, and I hope her conscience will trouble her. Now open your algebra books!"

Lessons went on as usual, but at the eleven o'clock interval the disconsolate members of IV B held an indignation meeting.

"We never touched her typewriter."

"She accuses us of fibs."

"She was perfectly hateful."

"It's not fair to punish the whole form."

"We've got enough prep to-night without having to draw a wretched map."

"I shall be sitting up till ten o'clock over it."

"How can she tell it was one of us?"

"It might have been someone from IV A."

"Well, I think it's an abominable business altogether."

"Just like her though."

"Yes, she has a temper."

"She was fearfully angry. Did you see her eyes flash?"

"Well, I suppose there's no help for it."

"No; we shall have to sit and peg away at our maps this evening."

"And Dad promised to take me to the cinema!"

"You can't go, then."

"Isn't it a shame!"

"Dare we have a deputation to Miss Browne?"

"No, no! She'd be sure to side with Miss Nelson."

"We should only get into a worse row!"

As there seemed no remedy, the girls grumbled but accepted the inevitable. Teachers were teachers, and if they issued an order it had to be carried out.

Molly began her preparation immediately after tea. She decided to do the map first and get it finished, because she and Meg shared an atlas, and they could not both use it at once. Meg was upstairs, practising her violin, so it was a good opportunity. She found the atlas after a hunt. Meg had brought it home the afternoon before and had left it on the top of the piano among the music. She opened it and began to turn over the pages. As she did so something fluttered out. It was a sheet of typist's paper, and on it was some very peculiar typing, with letters not in line and capitals out of place, as if some beginner had been making a first trial.

Molly stared at it contemplatively and shook her head. She thought for a moment, then crumpling the sheet in her hand she threw it into the fire.

She did not mention the incident to Meg. There were some things better left unsaid.

Speech Day

Aunt Maggie returned home feeling much better for the holiday. She had had massage for her arm at Linkham, she had enjoyed several more motor drives, and the company of her cousin had cheered her up. She found an invitation card awaiting her.

RILLINGTON COLLEGE

The Governors and Headmistress request the pleasure
of the Company of
Mrs. Norton and Friend
at the
DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES AND CERTIFICATES
by
DR. PAMELA PARKES, M.A. D.Sc., LL.D.
on Thursday, 15th Nov., at 3 p.m.
at the Town Hall

The Chair will be taken by His Worship the Mayor

TEA R.S.V.P.

"What's all this?" she said. "I've never been asked to a College function before. I suppose it's on account of you girls. Are you going to receive prizes?"

"No, indeed," answered Meg. "We've only been at the Coll part of a term. They count prizes from September a year ago to the end of last July. It'll be exciting enough for those who are getting them, but boring for us."

"It says 'tea' on the card," ventured Molly.

"Don't you flatter yourself! *We* shan't get any! Dorothy says it's only for visitors, and the school has to file away hungry and feed at home!" declared Meg.

"Are you going, Aunt Maggie?"

"Well, I think I must accept, and as the invitation says 'and friend', Miss Marsh had better come too. It's an opportunity to see the whole school together. I wish it had been in the College."

"There isn't room enough in the hall there. It only just holds all of us girls."

"Why don't they have it at the end of the summer term?"

"Oh, because they wouldn't have got the results of the matric. They always hold it in November, so Dorothy says. It's a great affair."

"Are any of your form to receive prizes?"

"Yes, Elizabeth for 'general proficiency', and Maud for 'verse speaking'. IV B had won the Junior Tennis Cup too."

"Meg and I are quite out of it!" sighed Molly. "We might have had a chance for a French prize if we'd been at the Coll a whole year. It's the one thing we do really well at."

"Yes, but if we'd been a year at the Coll, we shouldn't have had a year at Montreux and learnt to speak French," objected Meg.

"Well, you can't all win prizes. I think your father will be quite satisfied with the progress you've made in this short time."

Speech Day was certainly a very important event for the pupils of Rillington College. They had been practising songs for

the occasion, and Miss Courtenay had been drilling the school orchestra to play some selections. Meg, to her disappointment, was not yet considered sufficiently advanced for her violin to be included, but she and Molly were placed in the special choir. They both had good clear voices and sang in tune.

On the afternoon of 15th November the whole school marched in order from the College to the town hall.

They left hats and coats in the cloakroom, and took their places in pre-arranged order in the centre aisle of the hall, prize winners being seated in front. They arrived very early, so there was a long time to wait before the function began. They amused themselves by watching the various parents and visitors come in. Their conversation had to be conducted in whispers, for they had been specially warned not to indulge in loud talking or laughing. Miss Browne had said the reputation of the College was at stake, and she would be most ashamed if guests heard a noisy hum in the hall. Any girl reported for thus forgetting herself would lose her deportment badge till the end of the term.

So in very subdued voices the members of IV B made their comments.

"That's Dorothy's mother!"

"Who's the tall girl with her?"

"Her sister. She used to go to the Coll."

"I like her hat!"

"She must be glad not to have to wear uniform now."

"Who's the man over there?"

"Daphne's father, I believe."

"He looks lost among so many females!"

"Yes, it's a very feminine audience, isn't it?"

"Well, most men can't get off in the afternoon."

"The Mayor does."

"He has to. It's his business as Mayor."

"I should think he gets tired of being present at everything that goes on."

"I don't know. Perhaps he likes it."

"Miss Browne's always in her element."

"Yes, she loves a platform."

"Well, you wouldn't have her look shy, would you?"

"Oh no, a headmistress ought to be dignified!"

"The orchestra's tuning up."

"That violin's very out of tune."

"Is Miss Courtenay playing herself?"

"Rather! She'll swamp the others if they get nervous or make mistakes."

"Sh'sh! They're all coming in now. Look, that's the Mayor! Do you see his chain?"

The platform was prettily decorated with pots of plants. In the middle stood a table spread with prizes and certificates, and behind that was a row of chairs. The procession which now entered comprised the Mayor, the Mayoress, two

Aldermen, the Director of Education, a clergyman, Miss Browne, Dr. Pamela Parkes, and a few distinguished visitors. The audience clapped a welcome and they took their seats. There was a great rustling of programmes, and the orchestra struck up, playing a waltz by Brahms, quite creditably and well in tune. Songs followed, and then the Mayor rose, as chairman, and said many very nice things about the general efficiency of the College and the value of education. The headmistress read her report of the year's work, which she considered had been satisfactory, and urged parents to give co-operation.

Then came what was the most important part of the proceedings—the prize giving. Dr. Pamela Parkes, in spite of the letters attached to her name, was not the formidable person the girls had expected, but decidedly nice-looking and charming, and wore a very pretty dress and hat. She distributed a large number of certificates first, and then turned to the prize table. Girl after girl came on to the platform to receive books, and they were applauded with clapping till the hands of the school must have been quite sore. The Hockey Shield, the Net Ball Cup, and the Senior and Junior Tennis Cups were presented, also a picture for an Art prize, and a volume of Beethoven's sonatas for "Musical Appreciation". At the end of it all Miss Browne made a special announcement which came as a complete surprise to the whole College.

"I should like to tell you that Mary Barnes, aged thirteen, of IV B, has just been awarded the Bronze Medal of the Royal Humane Society for saving two lives. While bathing this summer on the Welsh coast, she noticed a girl who was in difficulties and was being swept away by a current. She went to her assistance and started to tow her back. A man then swam out with a life-line, and Mary and the girl were dragged ashore. But the man was left behind and in great danger of being caught in the current. Mary swam out again and helped him, holding him up when he was nearly exhausted.

"I think her brave deed deserves inclusion in our list of school successes, and I feel sure you would like to give her a clap."

The applause was thunderous, especially from IV B. That Mary Barnes of all people—Contrary Mary as they had nicknamed her—should have proved herself a heroine was an immense astonishment. She had given no hint of the matter at school, and had never mentioned any exciting event at the seaside. They respected her silence. Many girls would have advertised themselves and have given highly coloured accounts of the occurrence.

Mary blushed scarlet and kept her head down. Perhaps Miss Browne's announcement was as much a surprise to her as to everyone else.

Next on the programme was an address by Dr. Pamela Parkes. She spoke about modern education, changes in the curriculum, new subjects, organization, school equipment and careers for girls. She was animated and interesting, but her speech was very long, and her listeners, cramped with sitting still, found it difficult not to fidget before she had finally concluded her remarks.

After that came votes of thanks from various important people on the platform, also rather lengthy, then the school sang "Jerusalem" and finished with the National Anthem.

Speech Day was over, and the audience filed out of the hall, the visitors to be regaled with tea in the Mayor's parlour, and the girls to find hats and coats in the cloakroom and wend their way homewards.

As Meg and Molly were going down the steps into the road Elizabeth ran after them.

"I want to speak to you two! Can you both come to tea on Saturday afternoon? It's my small brother's birthday. He was in bed with a bad cold on the fifth of November, so we kept the fireworks and bonfire till now. He's having some of his school friends—it'll be quite a kids' party—but I'm having a few of mine too. I expect we shall have some fun."

"We'd love to come!" said Molly and Meg together.

"Well, ask your aunt, and let me know to-morrow morning. It's at four o'clock, and we'll have the bonfire after tea."

"Thanks ever so!"

Feeling that their friends were very hospitable, the girls received the required permission from Aunt Maggie, and accepted the invitation with joy when they arrived in IV B next day.

"That's all right," said Elizabeth. "Maud's coming too, and Dorothy and Rachel."

"It'll be something new for us," said Molly. "We didn't have a Guy Fawkes day in Canada, and of course not in Montreux."

"We heard fireworks going off on the fifth, and we looked out of the top windows, but we couldn't see much. It was a drizzly evening too," said Meg.

"Yes, it was. I do hope it will be fine on Saturday. Tony'll break his heart if it's wet. Do you remember the fog when we went to Maud's party?"

"I shall never forget it. And we got to the wrong house!"

"Well, don't go gate-crashing anywhere else!"

"We'll try not."

Saturday, fortunately, was wonderfully fine and mild for a November afternoon, and four o'clock was light enough to distinguish the names on the gates, so the girls had no difficulty in finding the Arnold's house, which was not very far away, though in a different road from the Logans', across the park.

Elizabeth introduced them to her family—her mother, Tony, who was celebrating his eighth birthday, and Janet, who was between five and six years old.

"John, my other brother, is away at his prep school," she explained. "I expect he wishes he could be here to-day."

"Would you like to see my engine?" said Tony, escorting them to the side-table, where his presents were laid out. "It really works. Daddy's promised to make it go after tea."

There were six other little boys assembled as guests, so with Elizabeth's friends they were a large party gathered for tea in the dining-room. There was a beautiful iced birthday cake, with a sixpence and two threepenny bits inside, and there were other delicacies and crackers. Molly, noticing what looked like the edge of a coin protruding from the slice of cake handed to her, hastily passed the plate on to a small boy seated next to her. His rapture when he drew out the sixpence was supreme.

When tea was over Mr. Arnold laid the rails of Tony's toy train on the drawing-room floor, and the guests stood round in a circle while he started the little engine, which made several journeys with great success. Tony would have liked to work it himself, but the other boys were anxious to go outside to the bonfire, and kept asking when it would be time for the fireworks.

As it was now quite dark, it was decided to adjourn to the garden. Mrs. Arnold and Elizabeth saw that all the children were well wrapped up, and they ran off, an excited little crew, in the wake of Mr. Arnold and a young uncle who had come to help, and who carried a motor lamp to light the way. At the bottom of the garden, on a patch of gravel, a large bonfire had been built. Uncle Chris emptied some paraffin over the wood and struck a match. It soon began to burn, and in a few minutes there was a grand blaze. Then the fun began. The boys danced round like Red Indians, shouting as the sparks flew about. Mrs. Arnold placed chestnuts and potatoes to roast in the ashes that were collecting at the edges. Squibs and crackers were let off with much noise, to the delight of the boys, but the terror of the fox terrier which had followed them.

"Take that dog into the house!" shouted Mr. Arnold. "I told you to shut him up!"

Elizabeth rescued their frightened pet and led him indoors. On returning she reported that the cat was also in a state of panic, and she had had to soothe them both.

"The poor animals don't like fireworks," said Mrs. Arnold. "It's as bad as a thunderstorm for them."

Uncle Chris was setting off Catherine-wheels, which whizzed round splendidly, and afterwards some rockets soared into the air and sent out showers of coloured stars. Elizabeth was handing toffee to everybody, and the boys kept feeling the chestnuts to see if they were cooked, and burning their fingers in the process.

The fireworks were all strictly in charge of Mr. Arnold and Uncle Chris, and nobody else was supposed to touch them. Boy-like, however, one of the young guests managed to purloin a squib, and lighting it with a brand from the bonfire he

flung it at random. A spark flew on the dress of little Janet and began to burn. She turned with a scream, and was just running away when Molly, who was standing by, caught her, threw her on the ground and smothered the flame with her own coat. It was all over in an instant or two, and the child was not hurt. It made a great hubbub. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold and Elizabeth rushed to see what was the matter, Janet was picked up and consoled, Peter, the offender, was scolded, and all the boys warned to keep hands off the box of fireworks. As a precaution Elizabeth and Rachel mounted guard over it, and there were no more accidents.

"I must thank *you*, Molly!" said Mrs. Arnold. "You showed great presence of mind. If Janet had run, her dress would have flared into a flame, and she might have been very badly burnt."

"I learnt what to do in our Ambulance class."

"Well, you've applied it. I'm very grateful to you."

The rest of the fireworks were soon let off, and the bonfire was burning down. Chestnuts and potatoes, some mealy and some only half cooked, were picked from the hot ashes and eaten. The big plate of toffee was empty. The sound of the door-bell from the house proclaimed that the younger guests were being called for. They went after much persuasion. They were not anxious to return home to baths and beds and leave the remains of the bonfire. Elizabeth brought her girl friends indoors, and they stayed for an hour to play games. Uncle Chris took them home afterwards in a party, leaving each safely at her own gate, Molly and Meg being the last on the list.

The Jokers

Dark November days made everybody forget the summer and even the autumn. A high wind had swept the leaves from the trees, and the last late chrysanthemums had been picked from the gardens, the park looked sodden and dreary, and the evenings were foggy. Meg and Molly could not help contrasting the British climate with that of Switzerland or Canada, not at all in favour of the former. They preferred cold sunshine to mild mists and rain. At school the girls, accustomed to mackintoshes at this season of the year, took the weather as a matter of course, and began to talk about Christmas. The College had promised to send their usual gifts to the Christmas tree for poor children. The suggestion given at the Palaver had been taken up, and Miss Rowe arranged to give a demonstration of toy making one Wednesday afternoon. Most of the members of IV B decided to attend, including Molly and Meg, who brought their workbags and some suitable materials begged from Aunt Maggie. Soft rag dolls and various animals were cut out by the teacher, and sewn together and stuffed with cotton wool by the girls. Molly made a beautiful little brown bear out of a piece of astrakan cloth, with beads for eyes and a red flannel tongue; Meg achieved an elephant with a trunk and flapping ears, all from grey sateen; Dorothy dressed a doll as Red Riding Hood; and Rachel produced a camel with two humps from a square of fawn woolly material. They were very pleased with the results and hoped the children who received them would appreciate their efforts. It was quite fun sitting sewing and talking.

"Bother! I've broken my needle," exclaimed Meg. "I haven't another either. Lend me one of yours, Molly, that's a trump."

Molly handed her the blue silk case which Greta had given her on her birthday, and, as Rachel also wanted to borrow a longer needle, she passed it farther on down the table. The animals were not too easy to make, and had to be nicely stitched.

When the sewing meeting was finished and everyone was leaving, Molly collected her bits of material and put them with her thimble and scissors into her workbag.

"Where's my needlebook, Meg?" she asked. "I lent it to you."

"It's not here. I passed it on to Rachel. I'm nearly sure I did!"

"Didn't she give it you back?"

"I don't think so."

A hasty hunt on the table and on the floor below proved fruitless. Rachel had left early, and though Molly ran into the cloakroom she found she had gone home.

"She must have slipped it into her workbag. I'll ask her for it to-morrow," said Meg. "Anyhow, it isn't of much value."

"I'd like to keep it. Greta made it for me."

"With rather large stitches!" laughed Meg. "Don't worry. I'll make you a nicer one for Christmas, only that will be a secret."

When asked next morning Rachel denied any remembrance of the lost needlebook and declared she had not taken it away.

"She must have done, all the same," said Molly. "She's so careless, she never returns anything she borrows. She's had three pencils of mine lately, and Dorothy's penknife was in her desk for weeks, although Doll was hunting for it."

"Well, you can't help it. It isn't worth troubling about," said Meg, "it was an untidy looking thing in my opinion."

"Moral—never lend anything to Rags, if you want to have it back!"

Rachel was an inveterate practical joker. She played endless small tricks on the members of IV B, which they sometimes returned with interest. On Monday afternoon, when Meg and Molly opened their desks, what should they each find inside but several garden snails crawling across their exercise books and leaving slimy tracks. They exclaimed in much horror and indignation.

"Oh! Look here!"

"What's this in my desk?"

"How disgusting!"

"Who's done this?"

A subdued chuckle gave them a clue at once, and they turned upon Rachel.

"Rags! It's you of course!"

"You wretch!"

"How could you be so mean?"

"What an abominable trick to play!"

"Well, you both said you were fond of natural history and were making collections of shells!" giggled Rachel.

"But not with the snails *inside*—ugh!"

"I suppose they have to be inside sometime. I found a nice little nest of these in our garden, tucked away in a hole in the wall for the winter, so I thought I'd disturb a few of them and bring them for your collection."

"Take the horrid things out!"

"No, no; they're yours to keep. A nice little present from a friend!"

"I can't touch them," declared Meg.

"Here, I'll do it," said Molly, and, emptying her pencil box temporarily on to the floor, she picked up the snails gingerly out of the two desks and put them in this temporary receptacle.

"There's another here!" squealed Meg. "Oh, how I hate them!"

"Take out all your books, and mine too, please," commanded Molly.

It was not till the whole contents of their desks were deposited on the floor that the girls felt satisfied they had cleared away the unwelcome objects. Dorothy, Hetty and Tess came to help, Daphne ran to open the bottom of the window, and Molly threw the "collection" out on to the gravel walk below.

"Nice for the garden, I must say! Rags, if you keep up your name like this you'll get spiflicated!" commented Daphne.

Dorothy, Hetty and Tess were hastily putting the books back into the two desks, and Molly was wiping away the slimy traces with the chalky duster from the blackboard. They had only just restored some semblance of order before half-past two.

It was a point of honour not to complain to Miss Nelson. In spite of her tricks Rachel was a favourite in the form, and nobody wished to get her into trouble at headquarters. Such things as these were private and must be settled among themselves. Every girl who entered the room saw the fuss and asked "What's the matter?" and was told "Rags put snails in the Campbells' desks," so that the whole form knew. The mistress, however, arrived in entire innocence of the affair. The first lesson that afternoon was on Shakespeare, and Tess was asked to give the quotation in which he pictured the schoolboy of his own and every other time.

So she recited the lines:

"The whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school."

It was too much for the form. There was a general titter all round. Miss Nelson looked at them in dignified amazement.

"Really, girls, I see nothing to laugh at!"

This made it worse. Rachel was choking in suppressed convulsions, Daphne, always liable to fits of the giggles, could not command herself, the rest were shaking in various degrees of stifled mirth.

"Girls! Girls!" came the teacher's indignant voice.

A fearful sound something like a crow came from Daphne; Rachel was wiping her eyes and stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth. Laughing, like yawning, is very infectious, and it was difficult for the form to stop.

"Come, come, girls! You're growing hysterical! Control yourselves at once!" cried Miss Nelson, rapping loudly on her desk.

As her eyes were beginning to glare with their "Trafalgar" aspect and her voice was sharp with authority, the form sobered down, straightened their faces, sat up and folded their arms. Miss Nelson at once continued the lesson, and there were no further interruptions. That she did not cause them to lose order marks, which might endanger their department badges, was a point in her favour. She did not often resort to punishments, though she upheld discipline. It was on this account that IV B on the whole liked her.

At four o'clock Rachel disappeared rather hurriedly. The others, changing their shoes in the cloakroom, chatted leisurely.

"Where's Rags gone?" asked Molly.

"To the dentists," answered Maud. "She said she had an appointment at ten-past four, so she rushed off in a hurry."

"We've a score to wipe out against her!" declared Meg.

"Yes, I mean to get even this time," agreed Molly.

"What could we do?"

"I don't know. She deserves something bad."

"She does, the wretch!"

"I'll tell you," suggested Maud. "She's gone to the dentist's on her bicycle. She'll leave it just outside his door. Suppose you go and hide it somewhere, so that she'll think it's lost when she comes out."

"Oh, splendid!" exclaimed Molly.

"But where *is* her dentist's?" asked Meg.

"In Hartland Terrace. You go up Fisher Street and along Queen's Road. It's Mr. Vickers. Look here, I'll go with you if you like."

"Oh do!"

"Right-o. We'll trot along now. Probably you wouldn't find the place by yourselves."

"We don't know Rillington very well, and I'm sure we couldn't find Hartland Terrace."

So the girls set out and, led by Maud, arrived at the dentist's. His house was the end one in a terrace which had a broad gravel drive running along in front of all the eight houses, the doors of which opened directly on to it, and a garden, in common to the whole row, separating the drive from the road.

There was an entrance at each end, and evergreen shrubs and holly bushes made it retired and private. J. D. Vickers, Dental Surgeon, was on the brass plate affixed to the front door.

"This is the place!" said Maud.

"And this must be Rachel's bike," said Molly, seizing it by the handles.

"Over there, under those laurels, would be a good place, I should think."

"No, a little farther along would be better."

"She'll have a grand hunt for it."

"Serve her right!"

Molly wheeled the bicycle along and placed it well behind some bushes, leaning against a tree.

"We must stop and see the fun!"

"Rather!"

"We'll watch her hunting about, and then when she's getting desperate we'll go and tell her."

"She mustn't see us at first."

"Oh no, we won't show ourselves, of course."

It was rather slow work waiting in the drive. It was rapidly growing dusk and the evening was chilly. There was a lamp near Mr. Vicker's door, but the rest of the terrace looked gloomy.

"I wonder how long she'll be?"

"She must be having two teeth filled."

"Perhaps there was another patient first."

"Yes, I expect she's had to wait."

"One generally does at the dentist's."

"Don't you get tired of reading his papers?"

"I'm tired of crouching behind this bush."

"I say, it's cold, isn't it?"

"Look here, let's take a quick run down the drive to warm ourselves."

"Suppose she comes out in the meantime?"

"Well, she'd be hunting for her bike."

"Oh yes, and then we could just stroll casually up and say, 'What are you looking for?'"

"That would take a rise out of her."

A nasty cold mist was creeping up and they were shivering. They were glad to emerge from their retreat under the laurel bushes, and to walk briskly to the far end of the drive. At the other entrance they delayed a little as they heard the loud hooting of a fire engine approaching, and stood to watch it go past. Then they returned along the terrace. As they approached the dentist's house they saw a lady standing by the steps in earnest conversation with a policeman. They were just going to step behind the laurels again when she noticed them.

"Hello there!" she called.

It was impossible to hide, so they stood still.

"These girls may know something," they heard her say.

"It's just possible," replied the policeman.

The lady, followed by the officer of the law, came hurrying up, evidently very flustered.

"I've lost my bicycle! It's been stolen! I left it here, leaning against the steps, while I was inside at Mr. Vickers, and when I came out it was gone! Have you seen anybody go past wheeling a lady's bicycle?"

"What sort of a bicycle?" faltered Molly.

"Oh, just an ordinary black enamelled one. I thought it would be quite safe to leave it outside. No one's ever touched it before."

"Have you young ladies noticed anyone passing down the terrace?" inquired the policeman.

"No!" quavered Meg.

"Then it must have been somebody from the road."

"Have you looked among the bushes?" ventured Maud.

"The bushes! No! I never thought of that," cried the lady.

"We'll help you!" said all three girls with enthusiasm.

They had the wit to hunt in the wrong places, but after some apparent searching among the dark cover of the laurels and rhododendrons, Molly gave an exclamation of astonished joy and hauled out the lost bicycle.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed its owner. "I suppose whoever stole it hid it there, intending to come at night and take it away. Don't you think so, constable?"

"It may be, madam," replied the policeman, fixing a suspicious eye on the girls. "Anyhow, you've got it back now. You're sure it's yours?"

"Oh yes, it's mine all right. I shall never dare to leave it outside the dentist's again. Well, thank you, constable! I needn't trouble you any further now I've found it. I'd better go home."

Still very agitated, she mounted her machine and rode away.

The policeman stared contemplatively at the three girls.

"If I didn't recognize you young ladies by your hats as belonging to the College, I might think you'd been up to some tricks," he remarked. "All I'll say is, best go home now, as quick as you can, and *don't do it again!*"

Meg, Molly and Maud took his advice promptly and hurried away. Their rag had turned out so very differently from what they had expected.

"I thought he was going to take us up for stealing!" said Molly.

"What became of Rachel?" asked Maud.

"She must have gone before we got there."

"And it wasn't *her* bicycle!"

"No, but it looked like hers."

"What a jolly sell!"

"We shall be frightfully late home."

"You don't think that policeman's likely to report us at the Coll?"

"No, but he guessed we'd hidden it."

"That lady'll have a great tale to tell when she gets home."

"I vote we don't say anything about it."

"Rather not! If it was whispered round the school one of the prefects might hear of it."

"And we should probably lose our department badges."

Next morning, however, with studied nonchalance, the girls asked Rachel how she had got on at the dentist's.

"Oh, he didn't do anything. I needn't have been scared about going. He only pulled the cotton wool out of my tooth and poked some more in. He said it wasn't ready to be filled. I wasn't two minutes in the chair. I can tell you I was glad. I rushed out and jumped on my bike and raced home. I didn't want to waste time at the dentist's, because we have a cousin staying with us and I knew they'd all be playing ping-pong. I got a grand game before tea. 'Thanks for kind inquiries' all the same. You're not often so anxious about me!"

Feeling that their joke on Rachel had been a complete fiasco, Molly, Meg and Maud discussed it disconsolately.

"We haven't paid off our scores yet. The joke's still on us!"

"No, we can't let her off entirely."

"What can we do?"

"I can't think of anything."

"We mustn't meet a policeman again."

"Rather not! Or a prefect either."

"I know!" said Maud. "I have an idea."

"What?"

"I think I won't tell you. You'll enjoy it all the more when it comes off. I can manage it better alone. Just trust me. But look out for a little amusement in the studio this afternoon."

"Oh, what are you going to do? I'm terribly thrilled! *Do* tell!"

"No, it shall be a surprise. I shall have to watch for my opportunity."

Tuesday was the Handicrafts afternoon and the members of IV B filed up to the studio and were soon busy with their work.

Meg was stamping an elaborate blotter, and Molly was finishing some book-plates. Rachel was doing a large calendar, and Maud, engaged on some Christmas cards, took the next place to her. All four girls were seated close together. After about half an hour Miss Rowe, finding some more paper was wanted for the bookbinders, went downstairs to see if the parcel had arrived and was waiting in the study. Directly she had left the room Maud gave a meaning look at Meg and Molly, then asked Rachel to fetch another tube of paint from the desk.

Rachel rose rather unwillingly, but as she was mistress for the week it was her business to give out the paints. When she returned, what was her horror to see a huge blot of ink on her beautiful calendar.

"O-o-h!" she gasped, going quite pale. "Who's done this?"

Even Molly and Meg were staring in utter consternation. They had not contemplated such an unkind rag. This was quite beyond a joke. It seemed too bad to spoil Rachel's work.

"My lovely calendar! I was making it for a Christmas present," mourned Rachel.

The other girls were looking up and saw the extent of the damage.

"What a shame!"

"How did it happen?"

"Her calendar's spoilt!"

"No, it isn't," said Maud calmly, "that's where you're wrong," and to the astonishment of everybody she picked up the blot intact.

It was a very clever representation in black sealing-wax, which, when placed on a piece of paper, looked exactly as if ink had been spilt. She passed it round for the enlightenment of her friends.

"I bought it at a bazaar, and knew it would come in useful now and then," she chuckled. "It's a good trick, isn't it? I put it on the tablecloth at home, just before dinner, and our parlourmaid nearly had a fit. Your calendar's all right, Rags!"

Rachel's relief was so great that she joined in the general laugh. She was always sporting enough to take a joke well.

"You've scored this time," she said.

"Yes, I've paid off a few old debts, and high time I did too. Stop giggling, can't you? I hear Miss Rowe coming, and we don't want her to start asking questions. Meg, give me that blot back quick."

'Special Merits'

Meg was getting on very well with her violin. She had a good ear for music and could keep in tune. Miss Courtenay was pleased with her progress, and gave her as much encouragement as she considered judicious. It did not do to praise a pupil too highly or she might grow conceited and careless. Aunt Maggie was delighted that her favourite was making such excellent use of her instrument, and often asked her to play in the evenings. Molly, who was a fairly good reader, patiently practised the accompaniments, and together the result sounded quite creditable to them both. At the end of the term "special merits" would be awarded to those girls who had shown most proficiency and improvement in any particular subject, and Meg was hoping that she might have a chance to win this honour on account of her violin. She really enjoyed her lessons, and appreciated Miss Courtenay as a clever teacher who spared no pains in helping her with her difficulties.

One afternoon IV B had assembled and had taken out their algebra books in readiness for the first lesson. But instead of beginning problems Miss Nelson made an announcement: "The Rillington Musical Society are giving a concert this afternoon, and a celebrated violinist, Miss Linda Petrie, who is visiting here, has promised to play several solos. The secretary has sent a number of complimentary tickets for the use of the College. Miss Browne decided that as the Sixth went last week to a lecture on 'Great Composers', she would give the preference this time to the Fifth and Fourth Forms. Will any girls who would like to go hold up their hands? Those not interested in music can take embroidery instead. The concert is at the Town Hall at three o'clock."

Twelve hands were uplifted eagerly. Sadie and Winnie were absent with colds, and Tess and Hetty, who were not musical, were ready to seize the opportunity to go on with their embroidery.

"Very well, Meg, you are mistress; will you go down to the study and ask Miss Browne for twelve tickets, and bring them back. Miss Courtenay and Miss Holt are to take you. You must all be ready by a quarter to three."

Meg jumped up with great delight and started off on her errand. In her excitement she forgot to put down her algebra book, and walked along the passage holding it in her hand. Noticing it suddenly, she exclaimed, "Hateful old algebra! Thank goodness I shan't have to struggle with *you* this afternoon!" and she flung the book into the air intending to catch it.

Unfortunately, she missed it, and it fell over the banisters right down into the hall, landing plump on the head of Annie Cowley, one of the prefects, who was coming along carrying a pile of bookbinding materials. She dropped them all on to the floor, and looked up in great wrath, to see Meg descending the stairs.

"Meg Campbell! What are you doing? You've given me a fearful bump on my head, and upset all these things!"

Meg ran to the rescue, helped to pick up the scattered materials, and began to apologize.

But Annie was angry. She did not like Meg, and the bump had been hard.

"I shall report you," she said. "I shall report you at once. It was inexcusable. I must just take these things up to the studio, and then I shall go straight to Miss Browne. What are you doing here, by the by?"

"Miss Nelson sent me to fetch tickets for the concert at the Town Hall."

"*You* don't deserve to go!"

"Well, anyhow, I must hurry and fetch them."

Annie turned away and walked upstairs, carrying her pile. Meg stood and watched her and did some rapid thinking. If Annie came back and reported her it was possible Miss Browne might forbid her to go to the concert. At all costs that must be prevented. She remembered that a few days ago the studio door had stuck, owing to one of the hinges becoming loose, and that it had been exceedingly difficult to open from the inside, also that on the outside of the door there was a sliding bolt.

"If I could lock her in there she wouldn't have time to report me before we start for the concert," reasoned Meg. "Somebody would be sure to come along later and undo the bolt."

She followed quietly up the stairs and saw Annie enter the studio, then, looking round to make sure that she was

unobserved, she slipped the bolt into its socket and fled. She returned to the hall, tapped at Miss Browne's study door, entered and received the twelve tickets, then hurried as fast as she could to IV B.

Miss Nelson distributed the tickets, and the girls made haste to the cloakroom, for there was no time to waste if they were to start at a quarter to three. It would be a delightful change, and they were all looking forward to the afternoon's entertainment with much enthusiasm.

They set off in orderly file, two and two, escorted by Miss Holt and Miss Courtenay. Meg and Molly were walking together. When they had reached the end of the road and were turning into the Parade, Meg noticed Blanche and Minnie at the head of the line.

"Hello!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know any prefects were going. I thought it was only the Fifth and Fourth."

"Oh, didn't you hear?" said Molly. "Miss Browne found there were enough tickets for the Sixth as well, and she rounded them up at the last minute, those who cared to go."

"Great Scott! And I've locked Annie, and goodness knows how many others, up in the studio!"

"What?"

Meg explained the whole incident, and Molly listened in utter consternation.

"You'll have to go back and let them out. You'll get into the most frightful mess if you don't."

"How can I go back? I can't break rank now. Miss Holt would see me."

"You might slip away as we're going into the Town Hall."

"I can't. I should be missed. Miss Courtenay spoke to me before we started and said I was to sit next to her, because she wanted to show me points in Miss Petrie's playing. She has a very special kind of bowing on her violin, and Miss Courtenay said it was what she's trying to teach me, and I must watch very carefully and it would help me."

"What's to be done, then?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I *must* go to the concert—I wouldn't miss it for worlds—and I must just abide the consequences afterwards."

"Oh, Meg! You'd get into an awful row, and it might stop you winning a 'special merit' for your violin. That would be dreadful."

"Well, it can't be helped. I must chance it."

"It *can* be helped, and it *shall*! Look here, *I'll* go back and unlock the door."

"Could you manage it?"

"Yes. We shall break rank when we're crossing to go to the Town Hall, and I'll vanish round the corner and tear back to the Coll. If I let them out at once they'd have time to go to the concert, though they'd be rather late. I shouldn't be missed in the crowd. You can hang on to Miss Courtenay and talk to her. She won't think about me."

"You'll be seen walking in late."

"I shan't come back. I shall stay in the studio and work at my calendars. It's a good excuse for going there, then perhaps they won't suspect."

"And miss the concert?"

"I don't mind."

"You really are a white angel," said Meg gratefully.

"Well, I'll try and wangle it successfully without getting you into trouble. I think it can be managed somehow. I shall run

back by Harlow Street, instead of the Parade, then nobody'll notice my red hat."

"You white angel!" repeated Meg.

They were approaching the Town Hall, and as there were many people on the Parade, and cars drawn up near the crossing, the school was obliged to break rank. Molly seized her opportunity, withdrew behind Meg, and bolted round the corner into a side street which led into Harlow Street, a road that ran parallel with the Parade. Here nobody from the College would be likely to see her, and she tore along at a tremendous rate, threaded another small side street and took a short cut back to school. She arrived panting but triumphant. She quickly whisked off hat and coat and, not waiting to change her shoes, hurried up the stairs to the studio door. She could hear voices inside the room. Very softly she slipped back the bolt, then giving a tremendous smack and push to the door, she flung it open and entered. Six relieved faces greeted her.

"Why, Molly Campbell!"

"So you've opened the door!"

"It had stuck fast."

"We tried again and again and it wouldn't budge!"

"It did that a few days ago."

"The hinge is loose and throws it crooked."

"It simply *must* be attended to."

"What are you doing here? I thought all IV B were at the Town Hall."

"I wanted to finish my calendars," replied Molly calmly. "Aren't you going to the concert? Miss Browne has enough tickets for you, I believe. You'd be late, but you'd only miss a few things. I saw some of the Sixth starting with the others."

"Will you excuse us, Miss Rowe?" asked Annie. "We should just have time. We want so much to hear Linda Petrie play."

"Certainly, girls; it would be a pity for you to miss it. You can leave your things if you like. I'll put them away for you."

"Oh, thanks!"

"And don't shut the door! Leave it a little open. I don't want to be boxed up here again. I shall tell Miss Browne that hinge must be repaired to-morrow."

Annie, June, Grace, Ruth and Joyce vanished without further delay. They ran along the passage and down the stairs with a speed and noise that would have caused them to reprove any juniors guilty of such lack of deportment and to imperil their badges, but as sub-prefects perhaps they thought they might take liberties on this important occasion. Through the open door Molly could hear them clatter into the hall, and she suppressed a smile. She helped Miss Rowe to clear away the materials they had left lying about, then got out her own work.

"So you didn't go to the concert, Molly?" said the art mistress.

"No; it's Meg who's the musical one. She was very keen on hearing Miss Linda Petrie play. Miss Courtenay particularly wanted her to watch the bowing. Meg learns the violin, you know."

"Didn't you care about the concert?"

"I wanted to finish my calendars."

"Well, you and I have the studio to ourselves this afternoon. I shall go on with a book I'm binding. I'm glad to have time for it. Why not begin something else?"

"I've done a dozen book-plates."

"Then try a poster. We shall want one for the *Merrie England* performance at the end of the term."

"Oh, may I?"

"Why not? It will be good practice for you. Here's a large sheet of paper, and there are the poster colours. Do any design you like. Get the big scrapbook and you'll find all sorts of pictures that will help you. Of course you mustn't copy anything, but you may take a figure for a general idea of proportions, poise, &c., and adapt it, and add any costume you please. You've seen how June and Grace did theirs? Well, I shall leave you to work it out for yourself."

Miss Rowe turned away to the bookbinding press, evidently relieved to have leisure from her pupils for a short time and attend to some affairs of her own. Molly reviewed the pages of the scrapbook carefully. The scenes of *Merrie England*, which were to be represented at the end of the term, would offer good scope for a poster. She felt it was wise not to attempt anything too elaborate, and rejected such subjects as Queen Elizabeth or a Maypole dance. At length she found, in an advertisement, a small figure of a girl dancing on tiptoes. She enlarged this, and put her in a carnival cap and wide ballet skirts, one over the other in mauve, green and yellow. In her outstretched hand she placed ribbons from which floated coloured balloons, and underneath she printed in old English characters "Merrie England". The figure was so transformed from the small one in the scrapbook that it was not in any sense a copy, though it had given her the right proportions and the general poise, which would have been difficult to draw entirely from her imagination and without a model to stand for her. She put it in sketchily, with strong outlines in brown ink, the poster colours being laid on in flat washes, with no shading. She was so absorbed in her work that she completely forgot the time, and was very amazed when Miss Rowe said:

"Why, Molly! Do you know it's a quarter to five? We've both been too busy to look at our watches. Let me see what you have been doing all the afternoon. This is very good—very good indeed! It's really most artistic. I like the balloons, and the three-colour scheme in mauve, green and yellow. You've made a nice, sweeping curve in the ribbons, and you've kept the whole thing simple, which is what is wanted for a poster. Don't do any more to it. It's just right as it is."

"Is the lettering straight?"

"Yes, if you bring the tail of that 'g' a little farther down. That's better! Now, don't touch it again. Leave it on the board to dry. I'll put it in my cupboard, and then it will be quite safe and nobody will knock it over."

"I've enjoyed this afternoon!" said Molly.

"So have I. We've each worked hard and to some advantage. Well, we must be going home now. Everybody else will have left the school long ago. I wonder the housemaid hasn't been in here to sweep the floor and remind us of the time."

While Molly was making artistic efforts in the studio the other girls were thoroughly enjoying the concert at the Town Hall. The Ladies' Choral Society had joined with the Rillington Orchestral Society to give a recital, and their combined programme was very good. It opened with Mendelssohn's "Hebrides" overture, then followed some madrigals and part songs, and a pianoforte solo "Fantaisie in F minor" by Chopin. After that Miss Linda Petrie, the star of the afternoon, walked on to the platform and was greeted with loud applause. Meg, seated next to Miss Courtenay, watched her with admiration as she gave a last tuning to her violin and nodded to the accompanist to begin. She was tall and good-looking and fair haired, and her beautiful white arms and long slender fingers seemed made to play a stringed instrument. But Meg soon forgot the musician in her music, and sat rapt, listening to a "Symphonie Espagnole" by Lalo, which seemed to bring all the glamour of the south into the hall and turn the bleak November day into a brilliant starlit Spanish night.

The audience clapped and clapped again, and Miss Petrie bowed repeatedly and finally consented to give as an encore a charming "Tambourin" by Kreisler, which, Miss Courtenay whispered, she had learnt herself and might possibly teach to Meg later on. Then came a Keltic suite by the orchestra, and more part songs, and a solo by a soprano, and after the interval Miss Petrie and the pianist played Brahms' "Sonata in D minor", with a "Melodie" by Schubert for an encore. An overture from one of the operas and a rather noisy choral "Fantasia" finished the programme, which ended appropriately with the National Anthem. It was striking five as the audience filed out of the Town Hall. The College girls were obliged to return to school to fetch their homework, though a few who had to catch buses had providently taken their books to the concert with them.

Miss Courtenay walked back with Meg on one side of her and Annie on the other, all three discussing the programme and the artists with much animation. Annie's elder sister was studying at the Royal College of Music in London, and had

heard Linda Petrie play there and had spoken to her afterwards, and said she was charming. Meg described how a celebrated Hungarian violinist had played at the Casino at Montreux, and Miss Courtenay gave reminiscences of her student life in Paris at the Conservatoire. They grew quite friendly as they chatted, and just as they parted Annie said to Meg:

"I won't report you this time for dropping that book on my head. I expect it was an accident. Of course you shouldn't throw books up in the air—but—well—with the prospect of such a concert as *this* perhaps it was really rather excusable, and I'll forgive you."

Molly and Meg talked things over as they went to bed that night.

"Sorry you missed that lovely concert," said Meg, "but you got me out of an awful hole."

"I felt a terrible fraud when I banged the studio door open. I was afraid they'd ask me questions and I'd have to confess."

"Well, the door *did* stick sometimes and it's high time it was mended. Your poster sounds jolly good. What a joke if you won a 'special merit' for it!"

"No such luck, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I don't know, you might. Of course I haven't seen it yet, but if Miss Rowe liked it that's a tremendous point. She's not given to praising things as a rule. I begin to think you're rather a pet of hers."

"Nonsense!"

"Of course it remains to be seen, but if you could win a 'special merit' for Art, and I could get one for Music, we should have something to show in our reports, shouldn't we?"

A Good Stunt

The Musical Club had continued to meet on Thursday afternoons, and now, spurred on by the concert, which most of its members had attended, the committee decided that the time was ripe for them to give an exhibition of their talents to the world at large. At the end of next meeting they begged everybody to stay and discuss the matter.

"Miss Browne would let us have a stunt in the large hall," said Jeanne. "Any day after four o'clock. I asked her, and she said 'Certainly, my dear!' She was most gracious about it, in a most amiable kind of mood."

"Are we going to invite the whole school?"

"No, I shouldn't do that. There's no special privilege about a general invitation. We want those who come to feel they're lucky. I propose we each have two 'visitors' tickets', and give them away to any chums we like."

"There are thirty of us, so that would make sixty visitors."

"Quite enough too."

"Shall you ask the staff?" said Dorothy (the question was quite safe, for Miss Courtenay was not present).

"Oh, I don't think so! It would make everything so stiff. We want to have a stunt, not a formal concert."

"But you'd have Miss Courtenay?"

"Of course. We couldn't do without *her*."

"She's jolly, and wouldn't spoil the fun."

"If it's to be a real stunt couldn't we start it with some tea? They'd all enjoy it far more if they'd had something to eat first."

"Yes, that would warm up the proceedings no end."

"I don't see how it can be managed, unless Miss Browne would let a café cater for us and send things in," mused Jeanne.

"And that would cost sixpence a head at least. Ninety sixpences would be forty-five shillings. Where's the money to come from? That's what I want to know!"

"Could we all bring thermos flasks and buns?"

"A good idea! And ask each visitor to do the same."

"Provide her own prog?"

"Why not?"

"It doesn't sound very hospitable somehow, in my opinion!"

"Oh, but if we sent them each a funny invitation they wouldn't mind," urged Molly. "We used to give parties like that in Canada, and we all brought our own provisions; it was quite a custom out there, everyone did it."

"Well, if you can think of anything funny to say we might try."

"Half a second; give me a piece of paper and pencil. Thanks!"

Molly scribbled rapidly while the others waited. Then she read out what she had written.

"The Poor but Hospitable members of the Musical Club present their compliments and hope you will do them the honour of partaking of a dish of tea and listening to a Musical stunt in the school hall at four of the clock till five or thereabouts on the afternoon of..."

"All guests are requested to bring own thermos flask, mug and bun, as the finances of the Club are inadequate to provide refreshments for so large a company."

"To avoid gate-crashing please show your visitor's ticket at the door.

"Don't come empty-handed. Any sweets will be welcomed and shared round."

"How will that do?"

"Good! Just the thing."

"We've a typewriter at home, and I'll duplicate sixty copies and sixty tickets. I can get my sister to help me," volunteered Blanche. "She's very good-natured and won't mind."

"And I'll ask Miss Browne if she minds us picnicking in the hall. I'm sure she won't, but we must have permission," said Jeanne.

"Tea will make a good beginning. Now for the programme. The orchestra must perform, and we must have solos and songs. Meg and Molly, you haven't yodelled yet. I shall put you down. You promised to yodel."

"Oh, that isn't classical!"

"Never mind! As I said before, it's a stunt, not a concert, and we want some fun."

"We haven't done it for ages."

"Then practise it. I shan't let you off."

"Will Miss Courtenay read a paper?"

"I expect so. We'd better ask her to. That will be the more solid and serious part. We can begin with that, I should say."

"Well, I think we've fixed matters up now."

"Yes, and as soon as we've asked leave from Miss Browne, Blanche can start typing, and we'll give out our invitations."

The headmistress was quite ready to allow the use of the hall, and made no objection to the picnic tea, so long as the guests did not leave paper bags or litter strewn about. As Miss Courtenay would be present and several of the prefects, she felt she could trust the meeting not to be disorderly.

The members distributed their invitations to favoured friends, and nearly all were accepted.

On the afternoon chosen the guests arrived, showed their tickets to a prefect stationed at the door, and were allowed to enter the hall. They had all brought buns or cakes, some ostentatiously exhibited actual mugs, and some had been content to bring cups. Nearly everyone contributed a packet of sweets. They were welcomed by their hostesses, who had arranged forms for tables, and they sat down to an impromptu tea.

"You've left a lot of grumbling girls outside," said Rachel.

"Well, we couldn't ask everybody."

"It would be no fun if you did."

"That's what we thought. And there wouldn't have been room to have tea either."

"They'll go home and forget their troubles, and have their own tea."

Aileen had brought Bertha as a visitor. That self-important young person announced that she was hungry. She ate her own two buns and one of Aileen's and a chocolate biscuit of Dorothy's, and any sweets that were offered her, and appeared well content with the hospitality.

"Why didn't you ask the mistresses?" she inquired presently.

"Oh, we thought it would be better fun without them," replied Meg.

"They ought to have been asked!"

"That's the business of the committee."

"I told Mother, and she said you certainly *ought* to have invited them, and they'd feel very hurt at having been left out."

"I hope not," said Molly uneasily, beginning to have doubts whether the staff would take offence at the omission.

"It's not too late now."

"Bertha Wright, do mind your own business. You're not on the committee of this club," snapped Meg.

Bertha ignored the snub and helped herself to another peppermint cream from a packet near, her fourth in the last few minutes.

"I suppose even a Musical Club is open to good advice," she remarked.

"Not from kids like you!"

As tea was now finished the girls put away their thermos flasks and cups and paper bags, and rearranged the forms for the concert. Molly was walking towards the platform when she noticed Bertha talking earnestly and emphatically to Jeanne, who seemed to hesitate, but finally nodded. Bertha snatched up a small pile of visitors' tickets which lay on a form and hastened out of the room.

"Where's that child going?" whispered Molly, watching her suspiciously.

"Home, I hope!" replied Meg.

"Not she!"

"Then I'm sure I don't know. I'm tired of her. I don't know why Aileen invited her."

They were to know before long. No sooner had the performers settled themselves on the platform than they saw a sight that caused them to feel temporarily paralysed. The door opened, and in came Miss Browne, Miss Holt, Miss Carey and Miss Rowe, escorted obsequiously by Bertha. They were received by Jeanne, and seated themselves at the back.

"Great Scott! Who's responsible for this?" murmured Meg.

"It must be that little imp Bertha," whispered Molly.

"She ought to be spiflicated!"

"It's too bad!"

Perhaps the headmistress noticed the consternation her entrance had occasioned. She tore a leaf out of her pocket-book, rapidly scribbled a few lines, and sent it up to the platform by Bertha, who was on the watch to perform errands. She had written: "It is very kind of the Musical Club to let us come. Please carry on with your stunt exactly the same. We shall be much entertained with everything."

The note was handed round and read, greatly to the relief of the girls, who had been afraid they might have to suppress some of their choicest items.

If the teachers were prepared to be sports, they would try and forget their official capacity, and just include them in the audience.

The first part of the programme was to be strictly classical. Miss Courtenay gave a short talk on "Beethoven", and Ethel Masterman, one of the Sixth and the school's star pianist, played the "Moonlight Sonata". Then it was the turn of the orchestra, who gave some selections from *The Mikado* and a "Gipsy Serenade". Meg had been promoted to take her part in these among the second violins, and was very pleased to be included. A violoncello solo followed by Blanche Davidson, and Miss Courtenay herself played a "Spanish Dance". The chorus provided a change with an Elizabethan Madrigal and one of Elgar's Part Songs, interspersed between the instrumental items.

So far all had been an exhibition of the good work of the Musical Club. Now, however, the stunt was to follow and the fun to begin.

They sang sea-chanties and students' songs and negro melodies, the audience joining in the choruses, and one or two of the orchestra accompanying them, with Ethel at the piano. Betty Norwood of V A gave a croon song, which was much clapped.

Then came the turn of Meg and Molly, who had promised to yodel. They had been practising it in the attic at Aunt Maggie's, and though it might not be strictly up to the standard of genuine Swiss yodellers it nevertheless went off with great success, and would have gained an encore had encores been allowed. As time was short and the programme long, Miss Courtenay had decided they must go straight on and refuse all invitations to repeat any item. She held up her hand to stop the applause.

While a coon song was in progress some of the girls were making hasty preparations behind a screen on the platform. They were to give "Mrs. Buggins' Tea Party", culled from the Wireless, with impromptu conversation in character with Broadcast reminiscences of that famous family. It was impossible to dress up much, but they did their best. Molly, who was to impersonate "Grandma", had made a cap of white crêpe paper and had borrowed a knitted shawl from Miss Marsh; Dorothy, as Mr. Buggins, implied male attire by wearing a mackintosh and her brother's cap; Meg, as Mrs. Buggins, slipped on an overall; and Elsie Reade and Doris Carr, who were to be the children, had brought pinafores, also made of crêpe paper.

When they were ready and the coon song was finished, Elizabeth and Caroline who acted as scene-shifters placed a table and chairs on the platform, and arranged some cups and buns, the relics of their feast. Then the Buggins family emerged from behind the screen and began their tea party. They really did it very well. Grandma's hoarse voice and acid remarks, Mr. Buggins' arguments, Mrs. Buggins' attempts at reconciliation, and the children's whining questions were capitally reproduced, and kept the audience highly amused. Miss Browne was laughing and clapped heartily, as did the other teachers.

But the headmistress glanced at her watch and gave a meaningful look at Miss Courtenay, who, remembering the time, omitted another selection by the orchestra, and wound up the proceedings with a rollicking sea-chantey and "God Save the King". It was growing late and the girls would have preparation to do at home. They must not stay any longer, or classes would suffer next day.

In the cloakroom many voices discussed the entertainment.

"How did the mistresses butt in? I thought they weren't asked!" said Rachel.

"Bertha told Jeanne they were offended, and Jeanne let her go and fetch them."

"Cheeky kid!"

"Well, they enjoyed it, and perhaps they *would* have been offended to be left out," said Aileen. "It really was just as well."

"Still, it wasn't Bertha's business; she's far too managing and pushing."

"I think she was right in this case," replied Aileen, standing up for her cousin. "She's very clever and had good judgment. I shouldn't wonder if she becomes head of the school some day."

"Heaven help the College if she does! Thank goodness I shall have left by that time! I couldn't stand being bossed by Bertha."

Perhaps the Musical gathering gave Miss Browne an idea, and suggested that, like the old-fashioned lesson books of a hundred years ago, which professed to "combine amusement with instruction", something might be done to entertain her pupils and educate them at the same time. She hired a baby-cinema and some films, put a screen on the platform, assembled the whole school, and proceeded to demonstrate the cultural aspect of the cinema.

Several nature films came first: the opening of a bud, the growth of a seed, how a sundew catches flies and sucks their juices, and the habits of certain birds. She gave a description and explanation of all they saw, so that they might thoroughly understand and, she hoped, remember. Then she took a geographical film of China, showing rice fields, and coolies at work, and tea plants with girls gathering the leaves. She had much to say about the Chinese, and told them many of the customs of the country and the etiquette of the people.

"It is considered polite to praise other people's possessions and depreciate your own. For instance, if you wish to inquire about your neighbour's children you would ask, 'How are your honourable and beautiful children?' and it would be good manners for their mother to reply, 'My wretched little brats enjoy as good health as they deserve.' That is simply a matter of form and everybody understands."

When she had finished describing up-to-date China, with its modern High Schools, and its girls with unbound feet, bobbed hair and European outlook, she had something more to say:

"At this crisis of the world's history I consider that international friendships can be of the greatest value. How would some of you like to write a letter from the College to the pupils of a school at Shanghai, enclosing photos and telling them about your work here? Chinese girls study English and no doubt would be delighted to receive it and would send you a letter and photos in return. It would be most interesting. I suggest that each form should compose such a letter. If you submit them to me, I will decide which are most suitable to send."

The girls in IV B talked over Miss Browne's suggestion when they met on the following day. They were very intrigued with her description of Chinese polite etiquette and amused themselves with practising it.

"Excuse me, Dorothy," said Elizabeth, with a low bow. "Will you kindly remove your honourable and elegant lily-foot from my unworthy French grammar, which unluckily has trespassed upon the sacred floor beneath your desk?"

"Pardon me that my ugly hoof has dared to press upon your honoured book!" replied Dorothy with equally stately courtesy.

The rest giggled.

"Let's write a letter in that style to the girls at Shanghai," proposed Rachel. "It might be rather funny. Suggestions, please! You can each make up a sentence, and I'll write them down."

Just to amuse themselves they complied, and between them they evolved the following epistle.

"MOST HONOURABLE SCHOLARS,

"These poor and insignificant worms of Rillington College send you our humble and respectful greetings. We beg you to pardon the liberty we take in addressing your honourable selves, and enclose photos of our mean and miserable school for your exalted inspection, praying you will condescend to accept them. Should our poor doings interest you, we may mention that we have a contemptible knowledge of mathematics, a scant acquaintance with history, and are ignorantly pursuing art, music and gymnastics. We should be grateful to hear of your noble achievements in these subjects if you deign to reply."

"Hardly a good advertisement for the poor old Coll," laughed Molly.

"Miss Browne won't send *that*!" said Mary.

"She won't see it," said Rachel. "You don't imagine I'd be such an idiot as to show it to her, do you?"

"Well, no, of course not. I vote we don't bother to write a real letter. Let the Sixth try."

"Unless Aileen writes one in Chinese? Come along, Aileen! You can speak Chinese, can't you?"

"No; I've forgotten nearly every word of it, and I never knew how to write it."

"Then *you're* no help!"

"Too much trouble say I!"

"Yes, leave it to the Sixth. In any case Miss Browne would be sure to choose theirs."

As IV B had expected, the letter from the College was composed by the prefects and edited by Jeanne. It enclosed a New Year's card and a number of snapshots of the girls at their desks, playing tennis, and at drill. It was stamped and posted, and they supposed it would reach its destination, but they knew it would be a long time before they could hope to receive a reply. All the same it gave them a kind of interest in China and the Chinese, so perhaps Miss Browne's idea was of real international value and tended to the peace of the world.

The Ice Rink

It was an old-established custom at the College that on one afternoon in the autumn term there should take place what was described as "the school outing". The girls, escorted by teachers, went in parties to the cinema, to a matinée at the theatre, or to some other form of entertainment carefully chosen by Miss Browne as being suitable. The little holiday was late this time, as there had been nothing going on in Rillington of which the headmistress entirely approved. The arrival of a Shakespearean company, however, gave the right opportunity, and arrangements were made quickly. The film of *David Copperfield* was also to be shown that week, and pupils would be allowed a choice. Three alternatives were put up on the notice board:

A Winter's Tale at the Prince's Theatre.

David Copperfield at the Gaumont Cinema.

The Ice Rink at Parkfield.

The girls crowded round to look.

"What does it mean exactly?" asked Molly. "Are we to vote for one of them?"

"No; we can go to which we like," replied Dorothy. "There will be three separate parties. We've got to give in our names for the one we want to join."

"You see, the whole school doesn't always care for the same thing," explained Tess. "Some girls may be going with their own families to *A Winter's Tale* and would rather have *David Copperfield*, and others are keen on the skating."

"Skating!" cried Molly.

"Why, yes; didn't you see 'Ice Rink'?"

"Not a real one? I thought it meant something on the films!"

"Oh no; there's a real Ice Rink at Parkfield, and some of us will go and take our skates."

"Meg, did you hear that?" said Molly, eagerly beckoning to her cousin. "Ice Rink at Parkfield and a skating party!"

"Oh, good biz! That's the outing for me!"

"Can you two skate?" asked Tess.

"Skate! We've lived in Canada."

"We've skated since we could walk almost!"

"Then I suppose you'll put your names down for the rink. So will Hetty and I. What about you, Rags?"

"Oh, the rink certainly. We're going to the theatre on Monday evening. Dad's got tickets."

Many of the girls found it difficult to make a choice between the three attractions, but eight out of IV B decided for the Ice Rink.

Molly gave in her name and Meg's to Miss Holt, who was making up the lists.

"Meet at the station for the 2.15 train to Parkfield," said the teacher; "the fare is 2s. 5d. and the admission to the rink 2s. if you skate, but 1s. for watchers. Tea, 6d. to 1s. according to what you have."

"Thank you," said Molly, making a mental addition.

Somehow it had never occurred to her that they would be expected to pay for themselves. She had imagined that it was either an act of generosity on the part of the College, or that it would be entered on their accounts in the same way as books.

Certainly this was a difficulty. Allowing only sevenpence for tea, the outing would cost five shillings. She and Meg had each about two shillings left of their pocket-money—that was all. And they would have to buy stamps for their cards and parcels at Christmas. They discussed it as they walked home.

"It's so difficult with Daddy away in Canada."

"Perhaps Aunt Maggie would lend us the money."

"I hardly like to ask her."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know; she always makes me feel shy."

"I'm not shy, and I don't mind asking," said Meg. "I can generally wangle Aunt Maggie."

It was well to be a favourite, thought Molly, though she did not say so aloud. She never referred to the matter, but it still rankled that Meg held the first place in Mrs. Norton's affection, and that from the very beginning she herself had been of comparative non-importance. She sometimes wondered whether it would have made any difference if Aunt Maggie had known which was her real niece. Would she still have liked Meg the best? Meg was so attractive and could make her laugh. Aunt Maggie loved to be kept amused.

With Daddy, of course, the tie was different. He was her very own father—neither ever forgot that, kind though he was to Meg. How glorious it would be when she saw him again. The time had seemed long since they parted at Montreux. She was looking forward hopefully now to a letter from him, telling what arrangements he would make for their future and where they would spend Christmas.

Meg broached the subject of the Ice Rink at teatime, seizing a propitious moment of conversation, and also mentioned their lack of funds.

"Never mind, children, I'll pay for you," replied Aunt Maggie.

"Oh, thank you! Wouldn't you like to go yourself and watch us skate? It's only 1s. admission for visitors."

"Well, that's rather a good idea. Shall we, Miss Marsh?"

"If it wouldn't be too tiring for you, Mrs. Norton?"

"Not at all. I believe I should enjoy it. Perhaps I could persuade Mrs. Hirst to go too, and she might offer to run us both to Parkfield in her car."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Meg.

"You haven't seen us skate," ventured Molly.

"I suppose you're at home on the ice?"

"Rather!" said Meg. "We can waltz and do all kinds of stunts."

"Then I should very much like to watch you. I'll certainly try and arrange it. I suppose you brought your skates from Switzerland?"

"Oh yes, and our boots. Hooray! What fun! I'm dying to have a turn on the ice again. Did you ever skate, Aunt Maggie?"

"Only when I was very young. You must remember all the years I lived in India."

"Yes, no chance of ice there. Well, we shan't expect *you* to take a turn with us."

"Hardly at my age, or Miss Marsh either. We shall sit among the spectators, and you can come and have tea with us."

"That will be jolly. Oh, I *am* so looking forward to it!"

Mrs. Hirst proved accommodating, and promised to drive Mrs. Norton and Miss Marsh in her car to Parkfield. A niece

of hers would go too and would be pleased to join the skating party on the rink. She had been at a winter sports camp in Switzerland last year and was full of enthusiasm.

Molly and Meg took their skates to be ground and hunted out their tall leather boots. They promised themselves a very exciting afternoon.

"Much nicer than the theatre," said Meg.

"Or the cinema," agreed Molly.

The school party met at the station, twenty-one girls escorted by Miss Davis, the gym mistress. They packed themselves into various compartments on the 2.15 train and arrived at Parkfield. It was not far to their destination, so they walked there in double file. Meg and Molly, though thoroughly at home on the ice in Canada and Switzerland, had never been on a rink before, and were curious to see what it would be like. They halted at a large entrance, rather like a cinema, gave their money to Miss Davis, who bought tickets at a pay desk, then went down a broad flight of stairs to a series of dressing-rooms. Here they put on boots and skates and left coats and hats, wearing their scarlet jerseys and gym skirts.

The rink, of artificially frozen ice, was large. It had a barrier all round, with a rail to which skaters could hold. Above the barrier were chairs and little tea tables for spectators, and over that was a gallery. There were seats for an orchestra at one end. Already about twenty people were on the rink, some grown-ups and some children, at various stages of proficiency. Two instructors, a lady and a gentleman, were giving lessons and conducting beginners along.

"Oh, look! That's Aunt Maggie sitting over there!" said Meg, waving a hand.

"That must be Mrs. Hirst next to her," said Molly.

"And the niece, holding on to the rail and talking to them."

"I expect so."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes; come along."

Molly and Meg were so at home on their skates that they glided off easily, took a few turns and crossed the rink to speak to Mrs. Norton.

She introduced them to June Hirst, who was still clinging to the rail, looking rather wistfully at the other skaters.

"It's a year since I was at Kandersteg, and I feel a little wobbly," she explained.

"We'll each give you a hand and take you round," volunteered Molly. "You'll soon get your balance again."

Taking round an inexperienced skater is a form of philanthropy, as Meg and Molly found to their cost. June was older and taller than they were, and presently collapsed on to the ice. They pulled her up and towed her along till they got her to the steps, where she sat down to rest. Several of their own party were skating timorously near by, and gave hopeful glances in their direction.

"Look here, I'm not going to have everyone hanging on to me," whispered Meg. "Let's keep away from that crew. They must manage for themselves."

"I vote we do some stunts," said Molly.

At first they skated round to feel sure of their balance and to grow accustomed to the artificial ice, which was much harder than that provided by Jack Frost in the open air. Then they began to do wonderful things, for with their long practice in Canada and in Switzerland, skating to them was as easy as walking. They each slid along on one foot with the body at right angles and the other foot held high in the air, then they pirouetted round and round like ballet dancers, sometimes whizzing erect and sometimes in a crouching position. Occasionally they took a jump into the air and came down again on their skates without falling, a very difficult feat for most performers, and they ended up with waltzing together round the rink. Aunt Maggie was so delighted that she could not help clapping, and several other spectators followed her example. Miss Davis and the girls from the College watched in amazed admiration.

When they halted against the barrier one of the instructors skated up to them.

"Perhaps you would like to enter for the contest," he said.

"What contest?" asked Meg.

"Didn't you know? The Mayor and Mayoress are arriving presently and have offered prizes for the best exhibition of skating by competitors under fourteen and over fourteen. How old are you?"

"We're both thirteen."

"Then give me your names and I'll put you on the list. You'll have a very good chance."

"May we ask our aunt?" said Molly.

"Certainly. Go and ask her now."

The girls skated off in great excitement. This was indeed a surprise. No one at the College had known about the contest; it was sheer luck that they had chosen this afternoon to pay a visit to the Ice Rink. Mrs. Norton and Miss Davis agreed at once that they should join the competitors.

It seemed that several schools in Parkfield were entering their champions, and these boys and girls began to arrive, as did some older members of a skating club.

The two instructors now cleared the rink of all skaters and issued numbered cards to each competitor. These were fastened to their backs with safety-pins, so that identification would be easy while they were in movement. All others joined the audience behind the barriers. An orchestra now appeared and began to play music. Very soon the Mayor and Mayoress entered with a party of friends and took the seats reserved for them. Many other people had come in, so there were plenty of spectators to watch the contest. First of all came fancy skating, such as the two girls had already performed, others tried to do various stunts, but not one of them succeeded in pirouetting or leaping as Meg and Molly did. They excelled themselves now, and came through the ordeal without a tumble, though many of their rivals crashed on the ice. Presently the instructor, who was master-of-ceremonies, gave a signal for a brief rest. Then he motioned to the orchestra and they struck up a foxtrot. The competitors chose partners and danced on their skates, keeping time to the music. The foxtrot was followed by a tango, a ten step and two waltzes, through all of which Molly and Meg glided gracefully and in perfect time.

"I believe 22 and 23 will win!" remarked Miss Marsh as she watched.

"Aren't they perfect?" said Aunt Maggie, who sat in a state of immense delight.

"I'm so glad we came," said Mrs. Hirst.

"I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!" declared Aunt Maggie. "I'd no idea the children could skate like this. It's wonderful."

"They're certainly the best on the rink," agreed Mrs. Hirst.

At last the signal was given to stop, and the Mayor and several others who had come to judge conferred together. Then the Mayor stood up to speak.

"We had intended," he said, "to present a junior prize to any competitor under fourteen, and a senior prize for any competitor over that age. We have agreed unanimously, however, that far and away the best exhibition of skating has been given this afternoon by numbers 22 and 23, Miss Molly Campbell and Miss Meg Campbell, each aged thirteen, and from The College, Rillington. We have therefore decided to award them the two prizes, which we consider they thoroughly well deserve. Numbers 22 and 23, please come here!"

Urged forward by the instructor, Meg and Molly skated to the barrier where the Mayoress stood smiling.

"Accept my congratulations," she said, "and these prizes."

She handed Molly a camera and Meg a leather handbag, and they each made a skating curtsy as they thanked her.

The audience clapped, and the other competitors raised a cheer, just to show in a sporting fashion that they were not jealous. The instructress beamed, and patted them on the shoulders as she removed their numbers.

"You must come again," she said, "and Mr. Darcy and I will waltz with you. We'd enjoy it. It would be a treat to us after taking beginners round the rink."

Waitresses were now bringing trays of tea and cakes, so Meg and Molly joined Aunt Maggie at her table, being quite ready for some refreshment after the exercise. She was anxious to look at their prizes.

"I've been longing for a camera," said Molly.

"And I was just wanting a handbag," said Meg.

"They are appropriate presents," said Aunt Maggie; "but I'm wondering what would have happened if a boy had won the junior prize! He couldn't have received a handbag."

"I expect the Mayoress brought several things on approval and gave them at her discretion," suggested Mrs. Hirst. "You girls have been lucky. How fortunate you came this afternoon."

Miss Davis and the rest of the College girls were having tea close by and signalled their congratulations. It was an honour for the College which they appreciated.

"Well, we must be going home now," said Mrs. Hirst, when tea was finished. "I wish I could offer you girls seats in the car, but there isn't room."

"We have return tickets, and Miss Davis looks as if she's coming to collect us," said Meg, as the gym mistress rose and walked towards their table.

"I'd have liked a waltz with Mr. Darcy," said Molly.

"There isn't time. We have to take off our skates and get to the station."

They were a jolly party in the train returning home. Everybody said Rillington ought to have an ice rink, and that the College ought to send a petition to the Mayor and ask for one.

"I'm afraid we shouldn't get it. I suppose they cost a fearful lot," said Tess.

"We must go to Parkfield again," said Hetty. "I wish you could teach *me* some of your stunts, Meg."

"You'd do them in time, but of course they need practice."

"I shall tease Daddy to take me to Switzerland for winter sports," said Rachel.

"I shall go to the Ice Rinks during the hols," said Maud. "It's a grand idea. We'd get up a party and go. What fun!"

"Well, we shall have something to boast of in IV B," said Tess. "We didn't know we possessed two skating champions. Salaam to you both!"

"Thanks for a kind word!" chuckled Molly.

"Ditto!" laughed Meg.

An Exhibition

It was growing very near the end of the term now. Everybody was beginning to talk about Christmas and the holidays, which were fast approaching. Molly and Meg were still in uncertainty about the arrangements for their future. They had only been entered at the College for the one term, and they were waiting to hear what Mr. Campbell would decide for them in the New Year. Mrs. Norton had written to him to say that if he were returning to England she hoped that he and the girls would spend Christmas at her house, and that she would be glad for Meg and Molly to continue to stay with her and attend the College, where they were making good progress. So far there had been no reply. One afternoon, however, when they had returned from school and were waiting for tea, Molly was sitting in the little breakfast room, and had taken out her books and begun her homework. Meg, who could never settle till she had had tea, was wandering restlessly about the house and wishing Aunt Maggie and Miss Marsh, who were both at a committee meeting at the Vicarage next door, would be quick and return. Presently she called from the hall.

"Molly! I want you!"

As there was no answer she called again:

"Molly! Come here!"

Through the open door a sepulchral voice replied:

"Gladly would I come a-maying with thee or encircle the mulberry bush, but alack-a-day, poor Jenny sits a-weeping, a-weeping, a-weeping over a particularly tough and nasty problem. At the moment I love nobody—no not I!"

"Do leave your prep till after tea!"

"Alas! The waters of Babylon overflow me!"

"You goose! Well, if the mountain won't go to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain. What have I got here? I give you three guesses!"

Meg entered holding something behind her back. Molly sprang up, abandoning her books.

"Not a letter?" she exclaimed eagerly.

"Will you have right hand or left?"

"Whichever it's in! Be quick! I can't wait!"

Meg tantalized her for a few moments teasingly, then produced an envelope with a Canadian postmark.

"From Daddy!" cried Molly as she tore it open. "Oh, I wonder what he says?"

Perhaps Meg was equally excited, but she was obliged to curb her impatience while Molly read the letter.

"Well?" she asked. "What luck?"

"Dad's coming to England. He's taking rooms in London, because he has a lot of business to do there. He can't spend Christmas at Rillington, but he wants you and me to join him in London on 23rd December, and he promises to give us a good time and take us to the theatre and to see some of the sights. He'll decide about school when we meet. He says just at present his plans are uncertain, and our arrangements will depend on his. He's writing to Aunt Maggie, and sends love to us both."

"Oh!" said Meg. "Yes, there's a letter for Aunt Maggie on the hall table."

Molly's eyes were sparkling and her cheeks flushed.

"Isn't it glorious!" she purred. "Think of Christmas with Daddy in London!"

"Aunt Maggie will be very disappointed we're not to spend it here."

"Well, of course it was kind of her to ask us, but this is ever so much nicer. Hooray! I'm so excited I hardly know what to do. I shall count the days."

"I wonder what he means to decide about the College?"

"I don't care. I only hope he'll arrange to have us somewhere near him. Perhaps he'll take us back to Canada. Oh, I *am* glad!"

Meg did not look nearly so pleased. She had settled down very comfortably at Rillington, and the prospect of a change was distasteful.

"We shall miss the Christmas parties here. Maud and Dorothy and Elizabeth meant to ask us."

"Never mind. Think of all the things we shall see in London."

Molly began dancing about the room, singing:

"Off and away—off and away—
To London town at the break of day."

She only sobered down when Aunt Maggie and Miss Marsh entered the hall, feeling it would be hardly courteous to show such immoderate pleasure at the prospect of leaving Heath House.

Mrs. Norton was certainly disappointed that Mr. Campbell had refused her invitation for Christmas. She had counted upon having the girls with her. It would not be nearly so festive an occasion without them. She hoped they might be sent back to her in January, to continue attending the College, but future plans were evidently on the lap of the gods. However much she might like other people's children, they were not her own; she had no share in the disposal of their lives and could not interfere.

The difference between the two girls was marked. Meg seemed somewhat unusually quiet, but Molly ran about the house with sparkling eyes and kept humming songs to herself. Miss Marsh, who was very observant, could not help noticing the change in both, though she did not mention it to Mrs. Norton. The latter was reserved, and kept her thoughts to herself.

Meanwhile, in the short portion of the term still left, there was much to be done at the College. An exhibition of Handicrafts and other activities was to be held in the studio, and all were busy preparing for it. Miss Browne announced a competition for a "Peace Calendar" containing some good quotation on the subject of international peace, which might either be original, if possible, or gleaned from a book. It was to consist of one sheet only, and need not be too elaborate. Molly was anxious to try, and spent Tuesday afternoon in the studio and Saturday morning at home completing an artistic effort.

She stamped a border and drew a symbolical figure of "peace", crowned with flowers and with a dove hovering over her head. Underneath she printed the following lines, which with much cogitation she had managed to compose.

"Give a hand where'er you can
To every man;
A kind hand—a strong hand—a warm hand—
Yes, that's the plan
To raise the ban,
And help, the world to understand."

She pasted a penny calendar on to the bottom, and fastened a piece of pink ribbon to the top to hang it up by. The girls of IV B admired it very much when she showed it to them.

"Have you done one, Meg?" asked Dorothy.

"No; I hadn't finished all my Christmas cards, so I'd no time in the Handicrafts class, and I was too busy at home practising my violin. Miss Courtenay wants me to play in the orchestra on *Merrie England* night."

"Well, of course you can't do everything."

"I couldn't think of anything original, but I've printed a quotation from Adelaide Proctor's poems," said Mary.

"I've made up something quite original," declared Rachel. "Would you like to hear it? Well, listen!"

"If you wish to save war
And keep nations quiet,
Be sure it is often
A question of diet.
When food disagrees
All folks are in riot,
And nations get cross
And want something to shy at.
So half the world's quarrels
And most of its ills
Would cease if folks only would
Take Liver Pills."

"There! What do you think of that? You didn't know you had a poetess in the form did you? Miss Rachel Barrett Browning Shakespeare is my pseudonym."

"You're hardly going to send *that* in to Miss Browne, are you?"

"Well, she asked for something original, and I flatter myself this *is* a very original and unique idea for world peace, quite a suggestion for the League of Nations. I could draw a pill-box at the bottom."

"Rags, you're the limit!"

"Am I? You need some one to cheer you up in this form. I'm not appreciated as I ought to be. Nobody loves me!"

"You mad hatter!"

"I'd rather provide you with a giggle than be a creator of tear-drops. Never mind, some day you'll hear me broadcasting on the Wireless: 'Racy Rachel and her Random Ravings'."

"Or 'Rags and her Rantings'! Keep it to the Children's Hour, please!"

"What about occs?" asked Elizabeth.

"Occs", short for occupations, were the things which the girls had done in their leisure hours at home, and which would have places in the exhibition. The toys and dolls for the Christmas tree were to be included, collections of pressed leaves, cakes, sweets and embroidery.

"We haven't kept a form diary this term," said Hetty. "IV A has made quite a jolly one."

"Well, we haven't time now."

"I suppose not, but it seems a pity. Couldn't we wangle up a short one, somehow, just a record of some of our doings?"

"We're allowed to be comic, aren't we?" asked Rachel.

"Yes, within limits, but not like your pills calendar, so don't think we'll let *you* compose it."

"I know!" suggested Molly. "Suppose we write a short 'form diary' in the style of Samuel Pepys. There's his diary in the library to get ideas from. We could all help at it."

"A jolly good idea. Will you be editor, then?"

"I will if you like."

"Mary, you're monitress; go and fetch *Pepys Diary* out of the library, and don't tell why we want it, in case any other form tries to do the same thing. Just keep it dark. We'll guard the book up here so that no one else can get hold of it."

"Suppose it's out?" asked Mary.

"Then we're done."

"Well, I'll go at once."

Mary came back presently waving the book in triumph, and put it safely away inside her desk. Later a committee of six was elected to compose the diary—Molly, Meg, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Maud and Daphne. Rachel was rejected on the grounds that she would consider it too much of a rag and be likely to spoil its effect. By special permission they were allowed to stay after four o'clock that afternoon to evolve their literary effort. In view of the exhibition some licence was allowed to girls who wished to work overtime. The studio would be open to those who cared to stop till five, and Miss Nelson suggested they should go there, but they implored to be allowed to remain in IV B, and after consulting Miss Browne she gave them leave.

"She's a sport," said Maud. "We couldn't have done the diary in the studio, with everyone listening. Now let's get to business, quick! Molly, you write it, and we'll suggest good bits. Here's a sharp pencil and some paper out of my exercise book."

The girls worked away steadily, each making suggestions and corrections, and by the end of the hour they had produced most of the following effort:

PAGES FROM THE DIARY OF MARIA PEPYS

December 2nd. Waked by loud raps at my door from that wench Anne, and rose unwillingly, being desirous to sleep and in some anger at her disturbing me thus betimes. Dressed me in the palterly clothes which custom at the College obligeth me to wear; though much vexed I cannot put richer sort upon my back. So to breakfast, but a sorry meal, for the cook-mayde had served the porridge burnt, at which I fell in great anger and chided her sorely, but she, saucy wench, turned and said it was good enough, for she will not bear being told of any faulte but from her mistresse, who takes mighty pleasure in her. To spite her I left the porridge cold on the plate, but drank a cup of good tea and got me a piece of bread and of butter.

And so to the College, through horrible foule weather, and arrived bespattered with mud from the cars which passed, they giving no thought to those that walked but driving by mighty haughtily. At the College did see my friends Besse, Kate and Susan. They are three pretty maydes, and we had a merry time together till it being near nine of the clock Mistresse Palmer made entrance, and seeing Besse with a small mirror in her hand and about to rub white powder on her nose, did read us a lecture on the dangers of vanity in women. The morning spent in discourse of books to cultivate the art of memory, a tedious business and one which pleases me not. Mistresse Palmer, though a proper woman, and has been handsome, has a tongue not to be borne with, and chided us sorely, whereat Susan did weep, but Kate took scant notice of her anger, which argues a high and noble spirit in her.

So home to dinner—a lovely chine of beef and other good things complete.

December 3rd. Up betimes and to the College, having resolved to correct my faults and avoid contention, blaming myself for neglect of my bookes, though how long this resolution will last dear knows. Kate told me she is bidden to a merry party at the house of her aunt, and is to wear a mighty pretty gown of blue silk with short sleeves, as the fashion is. Though tis foolery to take too much notice of such things, this vexed me much. Resolved to entreat my mother for a blue silk gown with short sleeves, though perchance she beat me.

December 10th. Kate, poor wretch, is in bed and attended by a chirurgeon who gives her vile potions to drink. She will be unable to go to her merry party in her blue gown, which Mistresse Palmer says is a judgment on her for vanity, and a warning to those of us who think more of fine raiment than their bookes.

December 11th. To the great halle of the town, in company with many other maydes from the College, and heard musique on the viols, and saw the simple motion there is of a man with a rod in his hand, keeping time while it plays, a new notion methinks, but it pleased us well. Many gallants were there, the finest I ever did see, and myself not hindering to look at them was reproved by Mistresse Palmer as unseemly in a mayde of my years.

December 12th. To the College, where a very genteel woman did come to teach us arithmetique, Mistresse Palmer being sick in bed with a cold, and taking treacle posset to ease it.

December 23rd. Up early and to the College, where we were a-preparing for a merry dance to make a fine finish to end our studies before in great content we part to take holyday at the festival of Christmas. No gallants being allowed present we maydes led one another out to dance, to the sound of fiddles, and sported ourselves right heartily, I dancing with that merry jade Kate, now recovered from her rheum. And so home, mighty pleased with our outing, which did surpass all that ever I did see at the College.

The girls were so long in evolving the diary that they had not finished by five o'clock, so Molly took it home, together with Samuel Pepys' volume, and completed it in the evening. She brought it to school next morning, and they decided that Elizabeth, whose handwriting was the neatest, should make a fair copy of it.

They were pluming themselves on their achievement when in marched Rachel, looking very pleased with herself.

"Still worrying over your old diary?" she said. "You pushed *me* out of it, but I've scored one over you all the same."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," replied Rachel, with the air of a successful novelist informing amateur writers, "I wasn't going to be done. They had parodies last year, so I thought I might as well try my hand. I made up one, and I took it to Miss Browne first thing—found her in her study at a quarter to nine—and asked her if it would do. She read it, and she laughed and said yes I might have it in the exhibition. Now what do you think of *that*?"

"We'll tell you when we've seen it," conceded Elizabeth cautiously.

"I've got it here. Shall I read it? There's just time before nine o'clock."

Without waiting for further encouragement Rachel unfolded her manuscript, evidently anxious to impress them.

"I'd better read you the original first, or you mightn't appreciate it properly:

RONDEAU

By LEIGH HUNT

'Jenny kissed me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kissed me.'

Now this is my parody:

RONDEAU

(With apologies to Leigh Hunt)

'Jenny kissed me when we met,
Sneezing from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Ills into your list, put that in!
Now I'm coughing, now I'm sad,
For the present health has missed me,
Now I have a horrid cold, for
Jenny kissed me.'

"Sounds like an advertisement for Somebody's Cough Cure!" commented Daphne, with her usual titter.

"Or a heading for a Health Magazine," added Maud.

"Well, it's accepted, and your precious diary hasn't been looked at yet, so I've stolen a march on you anyway," declared Rachel, popping the manuscript in her desk and opening her French grammar in preparation for Mademoiselle, who would arrive soon.

"By the by," she continued, feeling in her pocket. "Didn't you make a great hue and cry, Molly, weeks ago, about some needlebook you said you'd lost? You thought I'd run off with it. Well, is this it? Found it last night in my workbag."

"Why, yes! Of course it's mine! Oh, I'm so glad! I didn't want to lose it."

"Rather a dilapidated specimen, isn't it? Don't say I never return things! Poor but honest!"

Molly slipped the needlebook into her desk, for Mademoiselle was entering the room. She was really pleased to recover it, shabby though it might be, as it reminded her of little Greta and the Villa Mon Désir. Her birthday seemed quite an old memory now. She wondered if she would ever see Montreux again.

"Attention, Mademoiselle!" came from the teacher's desk.

Molly sat up very straight and switched her mind back to the French lesson.

Before the excitement of the exhibition would come the examinations. Most of the form were trying hurriedly to make up arrears of work. Aunt Maggie would not allow Meg and Molly to sit up late over lessons, and sent them to bed at their usual time, so they had to do their best and trust to luck. The ordeal was less formidable than they had expected: the questions in most subjects were not too difficult, and the French paper was particularly easy for them. On the whole they thought they must have done tolerably well.

"How did you get on in the history exam?" asked Rachel cheerfully.

"Oh, quite fairly. It wasn't too hard. What about you?"

"My dates were a little hazy, but I liked some of the questions, especially that one 'Give your impressions of Queen Mary Tudor'. I tried to put something *quite* original. I said: 'Though Queen Mary is generally described as a bad character in history, there is some excuse for her because she had no less than five stepmothers, and that would be enough to sour any girl's temper and give her a nasty complex. Of course Elizabeth had four of them, but I suppose she was far better-looking than her sister Mary, which would give her a pull, and was much admired by the courtiers. We never hear that Mary was admired, and even her husband, Philip of Spain, seemed to neglect her, so not being pretty or popular perhaps made her feel spiteful, and she turned on the Protestants, who all liked her handsome sister Elizabeth, and called them heretics.'"

"You didn't get that from the history book!" chuckled Maud.

"Of course not exactly, but we were told to 'give our impressions', and putting two and two together that's what I make of it. If she'd been as beautiful as Mary Queen of Scots she might have had a different career. I'm sure I deserve an extra mark for originality."

"I doubt if you'll get it from Miss Nelson."

"Then it shows a great lack of appreciation on her part."

Once the exams were over the school turned joyfully to term-end festivities. Christmas Day was on a Friday, and they were to break up on the Tuesday. On Monday afternoon the exhibition was held in the studio, and, as space was limited there, each form was allowed to go in turn to inspect it.

IV B filed upstairs at three o'clock, escorted by Miss Nelson, and were received by Miss Rowe, who was in charge.

Some really beautiful work was on show. There were specimens of bookbinding by elder pupils, a large assortment of calendars, Christmas cards and book-plates, some posters, and some wood carvings. Then there was embroidery, and a few needlework pictures, and a collection of home-made toys to be sent to the Christmas tree. There were also several cakes, and tins of home-made sweets, which looked most tempting.

"Do you suppose Miss Browne sampled them when she judged?" said Rachel to Dorothy.

"I expect she tasted the sweets, but the cakes aren't cut. She must just have looked at them, and seen whether they'd risen well and didn't feel heavy."

"I think she ought to have eaten a slice from each, don't you?"

Molly, wandering round the exhibition, was very delighted to see her poster "Merrie England" pinned on the wall, with "Special Merit" on a ticket over it, and also her Peace Calendar with a similar award.

"Two distinctions! You *are* lucky!" said Meg.

"And you're to have one for 'progress in music'," replied Molly, "so we shall each have something good in our reports."

"Isn't the bookbinding jolly? I'd love to do some."

"So would I."

"Have you noticed my rag-doll?" asked Rachel. "I did it at home. He's a real golliwog. He's so nice I want to keep him but I suppose I must spare him for the Christmas tree. He'll look fine hanging on to a bough."

"Some kiddie will love him."

"Yes, I used to cuddle a golliwog in bed myself when I was small."

"Now, girls, I'm sorry to hurry you," said Miss Nelson, "but Miss Rowe tells me our time is up. It's been most interesting, and I call it a great credit to the Handicrafts classes. Come along, all of you! V B are waiting in the corridor."

'Merrie England'

The great event of the term was to be the breaking-up party on Tuesday evening, when the whole school was invited by Miss Browne to a fancy dress carnival from 6.30 to 9.30. There was to be a short play by the Sixth, other forms were to give tableaux, interludes, and old-fashioned dances, and there would be a parade of costumes, finishing with dancing, the idea being a "Pageant of Merrie England, Ancient and Modern".

There had been great consultations in IV B as to their part in the programme. They could only be allowed ten minutes, so must curtail their activities into that limited space of time. Most of their suggestions were so lengthy that they had to be turned down, but at last they decided upon two items. The first was a Tableau of the Seasons, which would not take long, and the other was a scene from the Adventures of Teddy Tail and his Companions, Kitty Puss, Dougie, Piggy, and Mrs. Whisker. The Whisker Pets were to be organized by Rachel, with the help of Maud and Carrie, and of Carrie's two little sisters from junior forms, who would represent Kitty Puss and Dougie the duckling. Rachel's mother had sent for the Teddy Tail fancy dress book and paper patterns, and together with Carrie's mother, who was a friend of hers, they had contrived to make the costumes.

"You see, I didn't want to go as 'Mary Queen of Scots' or a 'French Fisher Girl' or a 'Fairy Princess' or anything ordinary," said Rachel. "I wanted something modern and funny. I thought of Alice and the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, but we've done that already last term, and it would be too stale to have it again. It had to be something we could act, and Maud said 'Why not the Whisker Pets?' Of course costumes were a difficulty, but we talked it over at home, and Mums and Mrs. Johnstone said they could fix them up all right. Any of you were too big for Kitty Puss and Dougie, so it was a good idea to bring in Lucy and Hilda; they're just the right height, and it doesn't matter their not being in IV B. Several of the forms are having to mix up for their tableaux on account of sizes."

The parts of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter had been allotted respectively to Daphne, Elizabeth, Meg and Molly. The two latter had accepted with some diffidence, wondering how they could manage for costumes. But when they consulted Aunt Maggie she rose nobly to the occasion, and promised to provide the materials if Miss Marsh could make the dresses.

"Of course I will. I'm rather clever at sewing, and I'm sure I can turn out something pretty," said Miss Marsh.

"Miss Browne said nobody need have anything expensive or elaborate," volunteered Molly. "Some of the girls are only having costumes of crêpe paper."

"We'll go to the Stores and see what we can find," said Mrs. Norton, who seemed quite pleased at the prospect of robing her girls for their parts in the tableau. Perhaps it brought back her own youth, for she began to tell them reminiscences of parties she had attended when a girl, and of a wonderful ball at Government House in India, when she was still a bride.

Miss Marsh's dressmaking efforts were most successful. Meg, as Autumn, had a pale-yellow frock decorated with tinted leaves, a garland of moon-daisies round her auburn hair, and was to hold a small sheaf of corn mixed with chrysanthemums. A visit to Woolworth's provided the artificial flowers and leaves, and Mrs. Wright lent the corn from a bundle she had saved from last Harvest Festival, and had put away in a cupboard of the vestry at the church. Molly, as Winter, was to wear stiff white book-muslin, with little dabs of cotton wool for snowflakes, and trimmed with silver tinsel and frosted leaves, and on her head a wreath of frosted holly with scarlet berries, and a large silver star in the centre of it. They tried on the frocks, which fitted very well. Aunt Maggie was delighted with the result, and declared they both looked extremely nice.

As an afterthought Miss Marsh, who had a specially soft corner for Molly, had completed Winter's costume with a wand covered with silver paper, and surmounted by a large silver star, behind which was concealed a small electric torch. When this was switched on it shed a light on her face and headdress and made quite a good effect.

"You look like the Spirit of Winter!" said Aunt Maggie. "That wand is certainly the finishing touch. I'll lend Meg a chain of amber beads I have upstairs. She needs some ornament round her neck."

When the girls had taken off their costumes and they were all seated cosily round the fire in the drawing-room, Aunt Maggie told them an incident that had occurred in her girlhood and which she had never forgotten. As it was a Saturday evening there were no home lessons to be done, and they had time to listen at their leisure. "It happened very many years

ago, but I remember it all so well it seems as if it were only yesterday. I was just sixteen, and my sister and I were to go to our first fancy-dress party. At that time we lived in the country, and as it was before the days of motor-cars and people did not rush about as much as they do now, invitations were not so frequent, and were greatly appreciated when they came our way. This party was to be held at a large house in the neighbourhood, by friends whom we knew fairly well. Of course there were tremendous confabulations about what we must wear for so big an occasion. I chose to be 'The Moon', and had a dress of shiny silver material with a crescent of silver in my hair. My sister Marjorie decided to be an Italian Flower Seller, because she was dark and the costume would suit her. Our frocks were made by a dressmaker in Parkfield, and we were most excited when they came home in boxes, all nicely wrapped in sheets of tissue paper. We had three boy cousins who lived not far from us, Denis, Allan and Percy, and they were also invited to the party. We were very anxious to know what costumes they would wear, but they refused to tell us. They said they wanted to give us a complete surprise and we must wait and see. I remember that winter there had been several highway robberies in the neighbourhood, and people walking home from the station alone at night had been attacked and their watches and money stolen. It had made quite a scare. That did not trouble us, however, because we were to go to the party in the carriage.

"We were dressed in our costumes, and with Indian shawls round our shoulders to keep us warm, we took our seats and were driven away. It was a cold night, but the moon was shining faintly behind some clouds. Our friends' house was approached by a long entrance drive that was bordered by shrubberies. We were just half-way up, when suddenly from behind the laurels and rhododendrons sprang three figures in black masks, with shouts of 'Stop!' One of them seized the horse by the reins and brought the carriage to a standstill, and the other two opened the door, pointed pistols at us, and cried 'Stand and deliver!'.

"My sister and I were simply terrified and we screamed. Our coachman jumped from his box grasping at his whip. We all thought we were being held up by the robbers. One of them managed to wrench the whip away from poor old Rogers, who was as frightened as we were, and then to our utter astonishment the masked figures bowed politely and said: 'We really won't hurt you'—'We'll let you go to-night ladies'—'We respect the sex.' Then they all burst out laughing and pulled off their masks, and we saw they were only our naughty cousins Denis, Allan and Percy. 'Did we give you a surprise?' they asked. 'You never expected we were going as "Highwaymen", did you?"

"It was a horrid trick to play, but they made up for it by giving us extra dances and introducing nice partners to us, and we had a lovely evening. Well, I don't suppose you girls will have an experience like that at your school party."

"No chance at the prim old College—boys are excluded!" said Meg regretfully. "But it's the sort of trick Edward Wright would play, I believe!"

On Tuesday morning the results of the examinations were read out by Miss Browne to the assembled school. Molly and Meg had done quite well, and had not failed in any subject. Reports would follow later. The afternoon was a holiday in order to prepare the College for the great festivities of the evening. The Campbells were to share a taxi with the Wrights from next door. They were dressed and ready in good time, and drove away with Aileen, attired in a Chinese costume, and Bertha, who represented Bo-Peep.

They found the College *en fête*. Decorations had been put up in the big hall, and a very gay assembly was gathering there. Miss Browne, in a velvet dress of the Stuart period, looked dignified as she received her guests, and the other mistresses were also in fancy costumes—Miss Nelson as a nun, Miss Rowe in Victorian crinoline and bonnet, and the rest so transfigured that their pupils hardly recognized them.

It had been at first intended for the school orchestra to perform, but the difficulty of bringing their instruments and playing them in fancy dress would have been so great that Miss Courtenay had abandoned the project. The evening must be a carnival, not a concert, and the piano could supply enough music for the dancing.

There was an infinite variety of costumes, ancient and modern. Some of the girls were attired in the traditional fashion of old-world Merrie England, some in that of foreign nationalities, and some represented nursery rhymes or advertisements. Pamela Taylor had come as a "Paintbox", with large squares of colour dabbed on a white skirt, and a palette of cardboard and brushes on her head. Mary Barnes was a "Traffic Signal", wearing a tall black hat with red, yellow and green circles, a skirt in the same three colours, and a black bodice with "Stop" and "Go" on it in large letters. Sadie was a gipsy, Florence a Greek maiden, Hetty and Tess were Pierette and Folly, and Dorothy was a Russian peasant. There were Irish colleens, Dutch girls, fairies, Red Riding Hoods, Spanish ladies, Kate Greenaway girls, shepherdesses, and advertisements of Mazawattee Tea, Yardley's Lavender, Chivers' Marmalade, and Odol.

The Whisker Pets caused quite a little sensation when they marched together into the hall. Their costumes, which included masks, were excellent. Maud was Mrs. Whisker, Rachel was Teddy Tail, Carrie was Piggy, and Lucy and Hilda were Kitty Puss and Douglas the duck. As they strutted proudly along in a group the rest of the company gave them a clap.

Everybody seemed now to have arrived, and it was time for the programme to begin. Miss Courtenay played a march and there was a grand parade round the hall, which gave an opportunity for a display of costumes which had not been possible when the girls stood about in groups. Now they could see what all the others were wearing, and, though there were no prizes, could decide what they judged were the best. Chairs and forms were then moved into position, and the audience seated itself to watch the programme.

As the performers were already wearing their costumes, there was no need for a dressing-room, and scenery, with the exception of a few chairs, a table, cushions, and a shawl or two, were dispensed with. The actors of each item sat in the front rows and went on to the platform when their turns arrived, with Shakespearean simplicity, much as must have been done in the theatres of Elizabethan days.

First of all came a short play given by the Sixth. The school had expected a scene from *Hamlet* (which the Sixth were studying) or some historical or classical drama, but the prefects themselves had decided that as the occasion was a party they would have nothing too highbrow, and Jeanne and Minnie had written an Eastern drama in the style of the *Arabian Nights*. It solved the question of costumes, for baggy trousers, sashes and turbans were far easier to make than the male garments required for historical characters from Shakespeare.

The first scene was laid at the court of the Sultan of Bagdad, who received an embassy from the Shah of Persia, requesting the hand of his beautiful daughter, Princess Zobeide, in marriage with Prince Beder, the heir to the Persian throne. As diplomatic affairs between the two monarchs were of vital importance, the betrothal was at once agreed to and the wedding day fixed, the whole being conducted with Eastern ceremony and many salaams and prostrations. The next scene showed the Princess lamenting to her attendant slaves the cruel necessity of her marriage to a prince whom she had never yet seen, and a journey to a far and distant country away from her own home. At this point it was announced that a wandering minstrel had arrived at the palace and asked permission to give an exhibition of his musical talents. Glad of a diversion, the Princess ordered him to be brought in, and hastily veiled herself. Hassan, the minstrel, bearing a toy guitar, entered and sang a charming Eastern love song, which so enchanted Princess Zobeide that she flung aside her veil to listen. Hassan expressed his admiration in a further impromptu ditty, and the pair fell in love on the spot, with the rapidity of Romeo and Juliet. Dismissing her slaves, the Princess confided her misery at the prospect of her wedding to an unknown suitor, and begged Hassan to save her from such a fate, if within his power. The lovers agreed to meet in the palace garden at moonrise to discuss details of an elopement.

In Scene 3, Princess Zobeide, covered with a dark cloak, stole into an imaginary garden, and was received with enthusiasm by her minstrel. But alas! her slaves had betrayed her; the Grand Vizier and other court officials interrupted the love affair, arrested Hassan and carried him away to prison, and escorted the fainting Princess back to the Harem.

In Scene 4, Zobeide, learning that her lover was to be put to death for his presumption, determined to save him. She placed a file in a parcel with a letter, and sent a faithful slave with orders to bribe the gaoler, with a heavy bag of gold, to deliver it secretly to the prisoner. She further gave directions that all the palace guard were to be supplied with wine that night as a gift from her bounty, and arranged with another trusty slave that it should be heavily drugged.

Scene 5 revealed the result of her plot. Hassan, presumably walking along a lonely road, related, in a soliloquy, his wonderful escape from prison, how he had filed away the bars from the window, and had found the guard lying asleep and none to stop him. Hearing footsteps he exhibited alarm, but was greeted by a gallant company, who hailed him as their Prince, threw a gorgeous cloak over his minstrel's costume, and exchanged his turban for a crown.

Scene 6 wound up the whole story. The Sultan, seated on his throne with his daughter by his side, received the prospective bridegroom, and what was Princess Zobeide's joy and relief to find that Hassan, her devoted lover, was in reality Prince Beder, who had taken the disguise of a minstrel in order to meet his bride before their betrothal and marriage.

The audience clapped as the romantic pair advanced to the edge of the platform and bowed, while the rest of the performers lined up behind them, making a good show with their *Arabian Nights* costumes.

Each scene had been very short, so there was plenty of time left for the other items of the programme that followed. Four girls from V A did a Highland reel, dressed in Scotch tartans and tam-o'-shanters, and some colleens from III B performed an Irish jig. Then came the turn of IV B, and Daphne, Elizabeth, Meg and Molly mounted the platform and grouped themselves in a Tableau of the Seasons. Daphne, who was very fair, made a charming Spring, dressed in pale green with bunches of daffodils; Elizabeth, in palest pink with a wreath of wild roses and a basket of flowers, represented Summer; Meg was a handsome Autumn; and Molly, who had flashed on the torch of her wand, posed as Winter.

"I'd no idea Molly could look so pretty," whispered Dorothy, in the audience; "that wand with the light in it makes her eyes shine like stars."

"Yes, she has lovely eyes," agreed Tess, who sat next to Dorothy. "She looks as nice as Meg to-night."

"I believe she'll be really pretty when she grows up!"

"I shouldn't wonder."

The Seasons won its fair share of applause, and was followed by several other tableaux given by V B, IV A and III B, representing historical scenes. Then came a beautiful May Day dance by a section of the youngest children, dressed in old English costumes and holding garlands of paper roses, which they waved about in time to the music. They had been very busy making the roses with the help of their form mistress, and the result was certainly a great success, and gave a "Merrie England" effect to the proceedings.

The Whisker Pets had been waiting impatiently for their turn, and were now told to mount the platform. Their ridiculous costumes raised a laugh even before they began their performance. Little Dougie was an especial favourite. Mrs. Whisker, with basket in hand, announced that she was going out, and that Teddy Tail, Piggy, Kitty Puss and Dougie must be good pets and go to bed at once. She would expect to find them asleep when she returned. But the pets did not want to go to bed, and debated how they could evade the order. Kitty Puss suggested that they had not been told to undress and get into their own beds, so why should they not go to bed, as they were, in the sitting-room. They took cushions and shawls, therefore, and settled themselves on the floor. Mrs. Whisker came back to find them all snoring hard. She wakened them in much indignation and gave them a severe scolding, threatening that they should not have the eggs which she had brought in her basket for breakfast, but should eat plain porridge instead.

Although Rachel and her companions scored a great success as the Whisker Pets, they found their masks so uncomfortable that they were obliged to discard them and appear for the rest of the evening without them. Dressing-up has its trials as well as its triumphs, and the costume of a duck in particular was decidedly hot.

The next event was supper, a most welcome interval. There were sandwiches, and jellies, and cakes, and lemonade and other good things provided, after which refreshment forms and chairs were moved away, and the whole school gave itself up to dancing. It was altogether a very merry evening, and 9.30 seemed to come far too soon.

"Are you ready?" said Bertha, running up to Meg and Molly. "Our taxi is here, and Aileen is waiting. Do be quick!"

"I don't want to go," said Molly. "It's been a splendid finish to the term. Such fun!"

"Yes, well done the College! And may we come back here after Christmas!" said Meg.

Christmas

December 23rd had arrived and the girls were to start for London. Molly, in consideration for Aunt Maggie's feelings, was in a state of politely suppressed exhilaration at the prospect of seeing her father again. Meg was in a mixture of excitement and regret. Of course it would be delightful to have a holiday in town and see the sights, but she was apprehensive lest they should not return to Rillington.

It was decided they should take only suitcases with them. If needed, their other luggage could follow after. They had made up their parcels of little presents for Aunt Maggie and Miss Marsh, and left them labelled "Not to be opened till 25th December". Some packages, similarly inscribed, were placed in their suitcases, no doubt containing gifts for Christmas. They longed to look at them beforehand, but Miss Marsh, as she helped them to pack, said "Certainly not." Aunt Maggie herself came with Miss Marsh in the taxi to see them off at the station. Mr. Campbell was to meet them at Paddington. Perhaps it was as well they had to say good-bye among the crowd on the platform. It made the parting easier. Aunt Maggie was palpably blinking away a few tears as she kissed them both and consigned them to the care of the guard, who promised to keep an eye on them at Paddington till they were claimed by their father. The carriage was full, but the journey was quite uneventful, though cheered by farewell packets of chocolates and picture papers from the bookstall, handed through the window at the last moment by Aunt Maggie. Mr. Campbell was waiting on the platform when they arrived in London, and soon found them.

"You're looking very well!" he remarked as he kissed them both. "Oh, Daddy! It's so lovely to see you again!" said Molly, clinging to his arm.

He hailed a taxi, the porter brought their suitcases, and they drove to the rooms which he had taken in Cumberland Street. Here tea was ready, and they were able to talk and began to relate all their experiences during the term. They both had a great deal to tell him.

"I thought we'd have a quiet evening together," said Mr. Campbell. "It's so long since we met, and there's so much I want to hear. To-morrow I'll take you to see some of the big shops, and you can choose your Christmas presents, and then we might do a few of the sights. You don't know London yet."

"That will be gorgeous!" beamed the girls. "We'd love to see the shops."

They sat chatting happily after tea was cleared away. Mr. Campbell asked questions about Rillington, and told them news of Canada, and of various friends they knew there.

"I've felt quite an old bachelor without my girls. Nobody to sew on a button for me. The coat of my pyjamas is minus two at present. They repose on my dressing-table. I'd have put them on with safety-pins if I'd had any, but I hadn't!"

"Oh, you dear, untidy Daddy!" laughed Molly. "I'll stitch them on for you. Where are they? Do go and fetch them. I'll get my workbag. It's in the top of my suitcase. I can find it in a minute."

Molly ran to her bedroom and returned with her workbag. Meantime her father had produced the jacket and the two buttons and laid them on the table. She took out her thimble and scissors and her needlebook in preparation.

"You certainly need a new needlecase—but that's a Christmas secret——" said Meg, catching it up. "This one is most dilapidated. Look! It's all coming to pieces!"

As she spoke she pulled off the tattered remains of silk and drew out a folded card, on which were written some figures and hieroglyphics.

"What's this inside?" she said.

Mr. Campbell sprang up and snatched the card, staring at it as if he could scarcely believe his own eyes.

"Great heavens! My lost formula!" he gasped.

"What's the matter, Daddy?" asked Molly.

"Where did this come from? How did you get hold of it?" he urged.

Molly and Meg looked at one another.

"It's the important paper that was missing at Montreux! How did it come here?"

"What paper, Daddy?" faltered Molly.

"Why, the one I thought was stolen from the lab! Don't you remember all the trouble? Surely you can't have forgotten?"

"We knew you'd lost something, but you never told us what it was."

"Did one of you take it?"

"No."

"Then how did you get hold of it?"

Meg and Molly were staring at each other guiltily.

"It must have been Greta," murmured Meg.

"I'd better tell you all about it, Daddy," said Molly.

So she began her confession: how they had placed the ladder to the window at the villa and entered the laboratory, and how Greta had followed them. They had been sure nothing had been touched, but Greta must have taken the card, unobserved, and have used it as a foundation for the needlebook which she ran away to make that afternoon as a present for Molly's birthday.

"We're very, very sorry we never told you, Daddy. We didn't think Greta had taken anything out of the lab."

"If I'd only known! It would have saved so much!"

"I don't understand, Daddy!"

"I'll try and explain. Monsieur Henrich and I were working on a very great scientific discovery. It was necessary to keep it a dead secret, so that nobody else should get wind of it. It was extremely difficult and complicated; again and again we nearly had success, then were suddenly baffled. While Henrich was in Paris I had the luck to hit on the right formula. I wrote it down on that card. I was so excited that instead of putting the card safely away, as I ought to have done, I left it lying on the table, locked the door of the lab, and rushed to the telegraph office to send a wire to Henrich, telling him to return. Then I went on to Geneva to buy some more chemicals which were needed for our experiments.

"You can imagine my horror when I returned and found the formula gone. From Molly's account of the black-bearded man who had called at the house, I suspected that Henrich had given away some hint of our work, and that a rival of ours had taken his opportunity to open the laboratory door with a false key and had stolen our secret. Henrich, on the other hand, accused me of having sold it to a foreign government. In order to meet expenses we had been obliged to form a small company to float our projected discovery. Those who had advanced the money were furious when they were told of the loss of the formula. You remember they met me at the Casino on Molly's birthday and I had to tell you girls to go home?"

"I tried my utmost to remember the formula but I could not, neither was I able to hit upon it again. Owing to the violent quarrel with Henrich I felt obliged to leave Montreux at once. I continued experiments in Canada, with the help of a friend there, but got no satisfactory results. It seems like a fairy tale that the missing formula has actually turned up at last."

"A Christmas box for you, Daddy!"

"It is indeed! And our discovery, when it is perfected and patented, will be of the utmost importance. I must go out at once and send a wire to Henrich to say 'formula found—writing'. He'll be as glad as I am. I'll write a letter to-night explaining all. To think that his own daughter was the one who took it!"

"I hope he won't smack Greta! You haven't scolded *us*, Daddy!"

"I've been too relieved; but you see for yourselves what terrible trouble you made."

"We do indeed. Oh! I am sorry!"

"I nearly lost the needlebook. Rachel took it when we were making toys, and she only found it and gave it back to me at the end of term."

"It's had a charmed life. Well, sew on my buttons now while I go out to the telegraph office."

It was a most hilarious Christmas. Next morning Mr. Campbell took the girls on a tour through some of the big shops and allowed them to choose beautiful presents. Molly had a wristwatch and a writing-case, and Meg a bracelet and a book that she wanted.

"My fortune will be made when the discovery is patented," said Mr. Campbell enthusiastically. "I have no fear for the future now, though things were looking very black before, I don't mind telling you."

On Christmas Day they went to service at St. Paul's Cathedral, and on Sunday to Westminster Abbey. On Boxing Day they saw the circus at Olympia, and on Monday they went to a theatre. On Tuesday a letter arrived by air mail from Montreux.

Monsieur Henrich was delighted at the happy discovery of the formula, and suggested that they should resume their experiments without delay. He and Madame invited Mr. Campbell and the girls to return to the Villa Mon Désir for the New Year, which they could all celebrate together in true Swiss fashion, with a festal dinner.

"We'll go, of course," said Mr. Campbell, "though I don't think we can manage to get to Montreux by New Year's Day. I've several things to fix up here before I leave London. We must arrange to start later."

"Shall we stay at Montreux, Daddy? How about school?" asked Molly. "I want to be with you, but I don't want to go back to that French school. I didn't like it very much."

"There's a good English school there. I might send you both to that. Yes, it would be better for you to go on with your English lessons. You know French fairly well."

"What about the College and Aunt Maggie?" asked Meg anxiously.

"I'll write to Mrs. Norton and tell her you're not returning. You can each write and thank her for her kindness to you. It was a great convenience to send you there for the term. I hardly knew what to do with you just then."

"We've another confession to make, and I think she ought to be told," said Molly, who then explained how Aunt Maggie had supposed that Meg was her great-niece and Molly the cousin.

Mr. Campbell was so excited at the prospect of his return to Switzerland that he took this information very lightly and only laughed.

"You silly children! Why didn't you tell her at once? I'll set things straight for you. I'll say *she* made the mistake and that you were both too shy and too polite to correct her! How will that do? I don't suppose it matters which was which. As for the College, you were only entered for one term, so that's all right and finished. The rest of your luggage can be sent on here before we go away. I'll go and write the letter now."

Molly was very pleased with the new arrangements. She remembered seeing the English school at Montreux and thought she would like to go there. To be with her father was the main thing. She could tolerate any school if they could live together again, even a French one.

Meg was not at all enthusiastic. She had been most happy at Rillington and at the College. She did not want to leave and return to Montreux. She felt it would be giving up so much.

"We'd better write our letters now to Aunt Maggie," Molly was saying.

"Very well," she agreed.

Molly took out her new writing-case and sat down at the table. It was a difficult letter to compose, and she spent some

time over it. She read it through when she had finished:

DEAR AUNT MAGGIE,

I want to thank you for your great kindness while I was at Heath House. I enjoyed being at Rillington and I liked the College. You were very good to us. I am looking forward to being with my Daddy again, but I shall never forget my long visit to you, and I hope I shall see you again sometime, and Miss Marsh too. Thank you for my Christmas present. I like the book very much. I am writing to thank Miss Marsh for hers. We have been to the circus at Olympia and to the theatre to see *Antony and Cleopatra*.

With best love,
Your affectionate niece,
MOLLY.

"It sounds rather a stupid letter," she said to herself, "but it's the best I can do. I haven't put anything about her mistake between us. I've left that for Daddy to explain. Well, now I must write to Miss Marsh to say thank you for the handkerchiefs. She was a kind old dear to remember us. I can enclose it with Aunt Maggie's. I hope Daddy has a stamp to spare. Mine are all finished. I'll ask him when he comes in again. I suppose he's writing in his own bedroom, to be quiet. Meg and I certainly do chatter sometimes."

Meanwhile, Meg had also retired to the sanctuary of the girls' bedroom to compose her letter undisturbed. It was to be of a very particular and private nature, and she did not mean to show it to anybody. She wrote it impulsively, just putting her feelings on paper:

MY DEAR AUNT MAGGIE,

First of all, thanks ever so for the lovely book. I read some of it on Christmas Day, and I like it very much indeed. And please thank Miss Marsh for the hankies. They are very pretty, and I needed some more. Then I want to thank you ten thousand times for your kindness all this term, and for my violin and heaps and heaps of things. I don't at all want to go to Montreux. How I wish I could come back to the College and live with you. I do love you, dear Aunt Maggie, and I don't like to think of going away and not seeing you again. I was so happy at Heath House. I have never been happier anywhere in my life before.

My very best love and a kiss to you, and please give my love to Miss Marsh.

From yours affectionately,
MEG.

Meg directed the envelope, stamped it, and ran out and posted it herself in the pillar-box opposite. Then she knew it was safe.

"Where's your letter?" said Molly when she returned. "Dad's is finished, and I'm enclosing mine with his. Yours may as well go in too."

"I've written it and posted it, thanks!"

"You queer girl! You've wasted a stamp, anyhow."

"I don't care!"

A reply came by return from Mrs. Norton to Mr. Campbell. She said she was sorry she had made a mistake between the girls, and it had been foolish of them not to correct it. She wished him success in the scientific enterprise he mentioned he was about to undertake. She was sure he would appreciate having his daughter Molly with him at Montreux; she seemed much attached to her father.

"As regards Meg," the letter concluded, "she made such good progress at the College, and appeared so happy there, that I should be delighted to be responsible for her if you would leave her at Rillington with me. She is getting on well with her violin and other studies, and it seems a pity to interrupt her lessons and make her start afresh at another school. I am very fond of her and should like to have her here."

Mr. Campbell read aloud this last piece at the breakfast table.

"So she wants you back! What do you *say* about it, Meg?" he asked in much astonishment.

"May I?" exclaimed Meg eagerly, with her eyes shining.

"Do you really want to go back to Rillington?"

"Please! I'd love to!"

"Well, that settles it then!"

Mr. Campbell was certainly amazed and perhaps a trifle hurt at Meg's readiness to accept a new home, but the arrangement sounded sensible and he agreed to it. It was better for her education to remain at the College where she was getting on so well.

"I can't let you go too, Molly!" he said.

"No, Daddy, not for worlds! I'll stick to you wherever you are!"

At first Molly was rather upset at the prospect of parting from Meg, for the girls had grown up almost like twins, but when she thought it over she realized the separation might have its advantages. Meg had always been the dominating character; it might be nice to go to a new school alone, where her own personality would have a chance, and, best of all, she would have her father to herself. Meg could come to Montreux for holidays, and each of them would live her own life.

So before the holidays ended Meg was sent back to Rillington to return to the College and to take her former place as Aunt Maggie's favourite, and Molly, no longer overshadowed by her cousin, made a fresh start at the English school at Montreux. A month after she had been there she wrote the following letter:

MY DEAR MEG,

I am glad to hear all goes on well at the College, and that you have begun to do bookbinding this term and are in the school orchestra, and that you have been again to the Ice Rink at Parkfield.

I am very happy at school here. We have had a simply grand time with winter sports. One Saturday we went to Caux and skated all day, and another Saturday we took our luges to Les Avants and came down at a great pace, as the road was beautifully slippery. One tennis court here was flooded, and we skated on that too. Now the thaw has come, so skating and lugging are off, but we play badminton in the big hall, and we shall soon have tennis on the asphalt court.

The girls at this school are ever so jolly. I have made two chums already, Jean Burns and Priscilla Marlow. Jean is Scotch, and I think I like her best, but Pris comes from Canada, which gives us lots to talk about, as she knows Montreal and Ottawa. We do our work here partly in English and partly in French, and we have jolly dancing lessons. Daddy and Monsieur Henrich are firm friends again now, and busy in the lab. The discovery is to be patented soon, and they say it will make a very big sensation. Greta is still rather an imp. She doesn't dare to go near the lab. I fancy she must have got an awful scolding. It was a piece of luck that I didn't lose her needlebook!

Remember me to Maud and Elizabeth and Dorothy and Rachel and other friends in IV B.

Love to Aunt Maggie and Miss Marsh and yourself.

Your affectionate coz,
MOLLY.

P.S.—Dad sends love, and so do Madame Henrich and Greta.

Transcriber's Note:

1. page 7—corrected typo 'or' to 'our'
2. page 19—corrected typo 'unsual' to 'unusual'
3. page 22—corrected typo 'indigant' to 'indignant'
4. page 25—corrected typo repeated single quote to double quote after
'You're not going back to school here,
5. page 41—corrected typo 'knews' to 'knew'
6. page 62—corrected typo 'decidely' to 'decidedly'
7. page 73—corrected typo 'the' to 'they'

8. page 86—removed excess " at end of sentence '...emerging from the college door.'
9. page 90—added missing " at end of sentence '...where I'd be a duffer.'
10. page 97—corrected typo 'certinly' to 'certainly'
11. page 98—corrected typo 'Thy' to 'They'
12. page 118—corrected typo in heading 'IVb' to 'IV B'
13. page 120—corrected typo 'giggld' to 'giggled'
14. page 121—corrected typo in sentence '...where does you penknife stay?' to '...where does your penknife stay?' and added final "
15. page 121—following sentence corrected to final period + quote
16. page 121—added single quote after phrase 'Problem solved by Schoolfellow'
17. page 132—corrected typo 'sooth' to 'soothe'
18. page 144—corrected typo 'forget' to 'forgot'
19. page 145—corrected typo 'quitely' to 'quietly'
20. page 162—added final " to sentence '...are keen on the skating.'
21. page 162—removed ? from end of sentence '...Dad's got tickets.'
22. page 162—corrected single quote to double in sentence '...said the teacher; 'the fare is...'
23. page 163—corrected typo 'Montreaux' to 'Montreux'
24. page 165—corrected typo 'Switerland' to 'Switzerland'
25. page 173—corrected typo 'Miss Brown' to "Miss Browne"
26. page 174—corrected typo 'oclock' to 'o'clock'
27. page 174—corrected typo 'Miss Brown' to "Miss Browne"
28. page 178—corrected typo 'loose' to 'lose'

[End of *An Exciting Term* by Angela Brazil]