

THE CHALET SCHOOL AND THE LINTONS



ELINOR M.
BRENT-DYER

Wm. K. Brewster

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THE CHALET SCHOOL AND THE LINTONS

By

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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DEDICATED TO

KATHLEEN AND VERA PARK

WITH LOVE AND VERY MANY THANKS

FROM

ELINOR

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CHAPTER I

THE DOCTOR'S VERDICT

There was a silence in the consulting-room. The great physician sat back in his chair, and sighed softly to himself. No doctor likes to give an unfavourable verdict, and he was no exception to the rule. The pale-faced woman in the chair opposite him sat thinking hard.

'Then you think, Doctor,' she said at length, 'that if I do as you suggest there may be—a chance?'

'Certainly I do, Mrs Linton. I wish you had come to me sooner, for then it would have been easier. As it is, I consider that if you will do as I have said, it is more than probable that you will be cured finally, even though it may take a long time. You have let things go very far, but if you will go to the Sanatorium at the Sonnalpe, and put yourself completely into the hands of the doctors there, I think you have a very good chance indeed of recovery.'

Mrs Linton nodded. She had the air of only half-listening to what he was saying, and he wondered what was passing through her mind.

Suddenly she looked up. 'You see, Doctor, I have more than myself to consider. I told you I am a widow. But I have two girls—Gillian is fifteen, and Joyce is fourteen. We have no relations in England to whom I could send them while I am away, so if I go, it means boarding-school.'

The doctor nodded thoughtfully. 'I see!' He got up, and took a turn or two up and down the room. Then he came to his desk again, and began hunting among the papers there, even while his patient was fastening her coat. He found what he wanted, and sat down again. 'Don't go yet, Mrs Linton. I rather think I may be able to help you.' He glanced at his tablet. 'Ah! I see you are the last patient this afternoon. That is good. Now I am going to ask you one or two questions. You say you have no one to whom you could entrust the girls?'

'No one,' said Mrs Linton with quiet decision.

'I see. Well, I wonder if you have ever heard that on the Tiernsee, the lake which lies at the foot of the Sonnalpe group, there is an excellent school for girls? One, moreover, that is run on English lines.'

She shook her head. 'No; I never heard of it. Indeed, I had never heard of the Sonnalpe till this afternoon.'

'Well, the school is there. My friend, Dr Russell, the head of the Sanatorium, married the head-mistress of it—she is a very charming woman, too—nearly three years ago. Mrs Russell has had to give up her work, of course; but she still retains a financial interest in it, and is also very much interested in the work. Her partner, Mademoiselle Lepâtre, is an excellent teacher; the school is very well staffed, and there is a large number of girls. The daughter of another friend of mine, Rosalie Dene, was there till she was seventeen, and was very happy. Mrs Russell's own young sister, Joey Bettany, is head-girl now, I believe.'

'Rosalie Dene? Is she the daughter of Canon Dene of St Aloysius' in Bakerfield?' asked Mrs Linton. 'I know them slightly. I have met Rosalie with Mrs Dene, and thought she seemed a charming girl.'

'Yes; you are quite right there. This school began with very small numbers, I believe. But it has grown and prospered. The Sanatorium has, of course, added to its numbers. Many of the girls there have parents undergoing treatment at the Sonnalpe, and the doctors at the Sonnalpe

keep a watchful eye on them always. Lately, they opened an annexe up on the alpe for specially delicate children. Do you know Charles Stevens, the author of *Glorious Prague*? His younger child is at the annexe, though I believe the elder girl is at the school itself. And Professor Benson—the great authority on Aeschylus—he died about a year ago, you may remember—his only child is there too. Now could you not send your girls to the Chalet School? I think you told me that you were fairly well off? The fees are not so very heavy. And there is this to be said for it that could not be said of any English school: it is directly under the eye of doctors who watch over the girls, and look for any symptoms of trouble, so that they may be checked at once. Girls like yours are particularly guarded, and the whole régime has been drawn up with an eye to strengthening the girls. Then again, should you want them at any time, they will be within easy distance of you. Besides, I expect they will be allowed to spend occasional week-ends at the Sonnalpe to see you.'

Mrs Linton looked at him with hope dawning in her eyes. His verdict—that she was suffering from the tuberculosis that is the white man's scourge—had been a terrible shock to her. His pronouncement that her only chance of life was to go to this Sanatorium had added to it. Her two girls were the dearest things in life to her, for her husband had died when Joyce, the younger girl, had been a baby of three. The thought of being separated from them like that, perhaps for months on end, had hurt her more than his verdict. But this sounded feasible.

'What about vacancies?' she asked. 'It is November now—early December. They may have no room for next term; and you say that I ought to go at once——'

'Indeed you must,' he said gently. 'You ought not to remain in England a day longer than is necessary. If you will listen to me, you will put all your affairs into the hands of your solicitor. He can close your house for you; or if you prefer it, he could place the furniture in storage, and let it—it is your own, I suppose?'

'Yes; it is my own,' she said.

'Then if I may advise, do the latter. It will be at least three years before you should come back to England. It may even be more. But,' he added, glancing out of the window, 'it is getting late, and the sun is setting. You ought not to be out now. So I must send you home. But here—here is the address. Write to-night, and when you have had a reply, come and see me again. We must get you out of England as quickly as possible. Now keep up your heart. I am sure they will be able to take your girls; and the men at the Sonnalpe will pull you through all right.'

Mrs Linton smiled faintly. 'I feel as though it might be possible now. I can't thank you, Doctor, for your kindness, but I *am* grateful. And I will ring you up as soon as I hear from the school, and then you will tell me what we have to do.'

'That is right. Have you a car?—No? Then my man will call a taxi for you. Remember; you must save yourself as much as possible. Now good-bye. I shall expect to see you next week.'

With a final grip of the hand, he resigned her to his butler, bidding him summon a taxi; and then, regardless of the fact that it was tea-time, he turned to his desk once more, and called up the exchange, bidding them put him through to Innsbruck in the Tyrol as soon as possible. Then he ran upstairs to his wife's drawing-room where he enlisted her sympathy for the widow and her two girls, getting her to promise to help with any shopping for the children that might be necessary. Later, in the evening, he managed to get Dr James Russell on the telephone, and had a brief and costly conversation with him.

Meanwhile, Mrs Linton made her journey homewards to the pretty suburb, an hour out of London, where she had come to live when Gillian and Joyce had outgrown the little private school in the village in which they had formerly made their home. Now the two went to a big high school where Gillian was doing well at lessons, and Joyce was the most popular girl in her own set, though at work she did not shine, being lazy in the extreme. It was after five when she reached the pretty villa where they lived, and Gillian was on the look-out for her. As the gate-latch clicked, the girl ran to open the hall-door and let a flood of light on to the dark path.

‘This is a nice time of day for a coldy person to be out!’ she exclaimed in tones of mock severity. ‘Wherever have you been, Mummy? Come along in to the fire at once!’

Mrs Linton went in, the girl’s strong young arm round her slight figure. She was tired out with her day in town and the shock the doctor had given her, and she panted slightly as she sank into the deep armchair which had been pulled up to the hearth. Joyce, who had been curled up on the rug, reading a school story and basking in the heat like a blissful salamander, scrambled to her feet, and went off to tell the maid to bring tea, while Gillian gently slipped off her mother’s outdoor things, and brought her slippers.

‘Don’t talk yet, darling,’ she said anxiously. ‘You’re rather breathless. Have you been hurrying? You shouldn’t have done it.’

Eva, the maid, brought in the dainty tray, and Gillian busied herself with pouring out tea, so the question was left unanswered. Mrs Linton sipped her tea, and nibbled a wafer of bread-and-butter, and even managed to swallow some sponge-cake, though it was an effort. But with those keen dark-blue eyes on her, she dared do no less, and already Gillian was looking at her anxiously.

‘You haven’t eaten *anything!*’ scolded the girl gently as her mother shook her head at the bread-and-butter. ‘Aren’t you well, Mummy?’

‘Just this horrid cough that won’t go,’ said Mrs Linton lightly. ‘Joyce, my pet, come here and tell me what you have been doing with yourself to-day. Did Miss Smythe excuse the Latin?’

‘No—horrid pig!’ said Joyce, as she dropped down at her mother’s feet and laid her fair head against her. ‘I had to take a deten, and I didn’t get home till nearly five. Mummy, *can’t* I give up Latin? I do hate it so, and I’m not a bit of good at it.’

Mrs Linton laughed. ‘Little dunce!’ she said, slipping a caressing hand over the silky golden waves against her knee. ‘No; of course you must go on with it! If you gave it up, you would have to take German instead, and I don’t think you would like that any better,’ she added.

‘I hate all lessons,’ grumbled Joyce. ‘I wish I didn’t have to do any. It’s all very well for Gill—she likes them!’

‘Well, unless you are prepared to take German, I’m afraid you must go on with the Latin,’ said her mother, a trace of weariness in her tones.

Gillian noted it at once. ‘Joyce, get up!’ she said peremptorily. ‘You make Mummy tired, lying against her like that.’

Joyce laughed, and kept her place. ‘Mummy likes it,’ she said saucily. ‘You do, don’t you, darling?’

Mrs Linton shook her head at her. ‘Is all the prep done to-night, my lazy-bones? What about yours, Gill?’

‘I’ve done everything but history,’ said Gillian. ‘Thursday is a free afternoon for me, you know.’

‘And my Joyce—what about you?’

‘Oh, I’m too comfy to move,’ said Joyce lazily.

‘I’m afraid you must, though. I can’t write you any more notes this week. Besides, I have a letter to see to that must go off with the seven o’clock clearance. So run along to the dining-room, pet, and do your best.—Gill, bring my writing-case, dear. And perhaps you’ll take the letter to the post afterwards.’

Joyce got up reluctantly. ‘I don’t see why you can’t give me a note,’ she grumbled. ‘And why on earth is there such a rush about your letter?’

‘It is business, and can’t wait. Run along to your work, Baby.’

Still grumbling, Joyce betook herself to the dining-room, where she gave her lessons a sketchy preparation which next day brought down on her head the wrath of four mistresses. Meanwhile, Mrs Linton wrote her letter to the address in the Tyrol which the doctor had given her, and then handed it to Gillian to post. The girl ran off, heedless of the change that very letter was to bring to them all, and when she came back, she sat down quietly with her history, while her mother rested in the big chair, half-dozing at times, and coughing every now and then the little hard cough which had forced her to pay that visit to the specialist.

The next few days passed as usual, except that Mrs Linton quietly made what preparations she could for the move while the girls were at school. On the Saturday, there was trouble with Joyce, who wanted her mother to take them to the local cinema to see a big picture. Mrs Linton was obliged to refuse, for all public assemblies had been forbidden her. Not yet could she bring herself to tell the girls what lay before them, so she could give no reason beyond her tiredness and cough, and Joyce sulked all the day over it. Then, just before bedtime, their mother had an attack of palpitation and breathlessness that alarmed poor Gillian horribly, and even made the younger girl ashamed of her bad behaviour. When it was over, poor Mrs Linton felt obliged to tell the girls that she had seen a doctor, and he had forbidden any expeditions. But she felt that she could tell them nothing further until she had heard from the Tyrol.

Fortunately, the expected letter arrived by the midday post, for that talk of the great specialist’s over the ’phone had resulted in an air-mail communication from the school, and Mrs Linton learnt that all was well and her girls would be accepted in the school for the Easter term. Mademoiselle Lepâtre explained that though they would be in the same house for the first term, Joyce would be moved to the new chalet they were building for the younger Middles after Easter, while Gillian would stay in the original building. She also said that the girls would be allowed to spend week-ends up at the Sonnalpe, where they would stay with one or other of the married doctors, visiting their mother from there. Naturally, these visits must be regulated by Mrs Linton’s own condition and the doctors’ wishes, but she would be permitted to see as much of them as possible. The rest of the letter was taken up with inventories of what they would require, and ended with a request for a cabled reply, as the Chalet School had few vacancies, and they already had a waiting-list.

Mrs Linton rang up her specialist, and telling him briefly what she had heard, made an appointment for that afternoon, and then went to lie down to recover herself a little. When she felt stronger, she wrapped up, and went out to send her cable. The next thing was to go to the High School, and she went after lunch, and explained matters to the head-mistress, who was very sympathetic, and agreed that the girls must go with their mother.

The next afternoon saw her in the consulting-room once more, and when the great physician had seen Mademoiselle's letter, he examined his patient thoroughly again.

'When do you start?' he asked when it was over.

'I suppose it must be as soon as possible, Doctor. I think I could manage next week, if that would suit.'

He looked at her keenly. 'It will suit the Sonnalpe people all right,' he said. 'But I hope you understand that you cannot take the journey at one stretch. It must be done very gradually, and will, I am afraid, occupy at least a week. I shall send a nurse with you, of course, and she will take complete charge of you all. You will stay or move on as she sees fit, and you must promise me to obey her implicitly. I want you to realise,' he added gravely, 'that I am still anxious to know that you are safely there. You will find it very fatiguing, I'm afraid, though Nurse Richards will do her best to make things easy for you. Don't permit your girls to make any demands on you at all. You need all your strength to get to the Sonnalpe.'

'I'm sure they won't worry us, Doctor,' said Mrs Linton. 'Joyce is only a baby, I know. But Gillian is a dear, good girl, and she will look after her sister. I will put myself right into Nurse's hands, and be as obedient as possible,' she added, with a little laugh that brought back the cough.

He frowned as he noted it, but said nothing. Instead, he left her, and presently came back with something to soothe it. When it was ended, and she was lying back in her chair, still panting, he spoke again. 'You see what I mean. This cough wears you out. Now I am going to take you upstairs to my wife, who will give you some tea. Then, as I shall not need my car till late to-night, I am going to tell my chauffeur to drive you straight home, and you must go to bed and stay there till noon to-morrow. Please don't trouble about anything. If you have no near friend to see to it, my wife will be delighted to get the girls' clothes.' Then he added a little shakily: 'Our girl left us when she was only a few months old—and we never had another. She would have been just the age of your eldest if she had lived.'

After that, Mrs Linton felt that she could trust both him and his wife in anything, and after she had had her tea, she gladly consented to letting Lady Talbot take the girls to get their outfits. Then she was taken downstairs in the lift, and carefully put into the car, and the chauffeur received orders to drive slowly. He was very careful, but by the time she got home, she had realised the truth of the doctor's dictum that any journey would wear her out, and was thankful to go to bed.

The girls were late in coming home from school, as Gillian's form had given a tea-party to the rest of the Seniors and the Middles, so that it was after nine when they got in. They were met by Eva, who told them that their mother had gone to bed as she was tired, and begged that they would not go in that night, because she felt so worn out, and might be asleep.

'Goodness! That's not like Mummy!' said Joyce. 'Are you sure she said that, Eva?'

'Certain, Miss Joyce.—I've got your suppers in the dining-room, Miss Gillian, and the cocoa's just ready. Cook was boiling it up when I came to answer the door. The mistress looks tired to death, Miss Gill. She does indeed.'

'Oh, all right, we won't disturb her,' said Gillian, but she looked rather blank.

Joyce was soon asleep that night, and slept her usual sound, healthy slumbers. But Gillian lay awake for a very long time, and a cold dread of what was to come seemed to lie on her heart like a lump of ice.

CHAPTER II

GOOD-BYE TO ENGLAND!

'Leave the horrid old High School and go to a school abroad! Oh, Mummy, what a gorgeous idea! How topping of that ripping doctor to suggest it!'

This was Joyce, of course. Her volatile mind quite overlooked the fact that it was their mother's illness which had brought about the new state of affairs, and she was merely thrilled at the thought of quitting the High School, where she was always at feud with one or other of the mistresses, and going to a new school where her reputation for laziness was unknown. 'Besides, in a foreign school they will give most of the time to dancing and manners and speaking French and things like that,' she thought complacently.

But Gillian swung round on her for once. 'Joyce, you are horrid!' Then she turned to her mother. 'Mummy darling, what exactly does the doctor say about you? What's really wrong with you?'

Mrs Linton hesitated a moment. 'He says that I am not strong, and must go to the mountains for the sake of the air, and have this new treatment to help me throw off this stupid cold,' she said finally. Not for worlds would she have alarmed her girls with the actual truth, and already Gillian was looking worried.

Joyce put on an injured expression. 'How am I horrid, pray? I never have pretended to be mad over the old High. And Skinny has been beastly to me lately—all this term, in fact. She makes favourites, and it isn't fair.'

'She doesn't scold the people who work decently, you mean,' said Gillian. Then she was silent, for her mother had thrown her an appealing glance, as if asking her not to quarrel. Besides, she knew Joyce's calm insouciance by this time. So she gave it up, and listened with a certain amount of interest to the answers Mrs Linton was giving to Joyce's questions.

'I have to be at this big hospital, you see, and it will take some time for the cure. I couldn't very well leave you two to look after yourselves in England; so when Dr Talbot told me of this school, it struck me as being the very thing for you. It lies beside the Tiernsee, which is the lake at the foot of the mountain. And it doesn't take so very long to reach the Sonnalpe from it, for at the far end they have built a broad carriage-road; and in summer, you can climb up by a path near the lake. I wonder how you will like it? It means, for one thing, that you must speak French and German as well as your own language. Mademoiselle Lepâtte—'

'Who's she?' interrupted Joyce.

'She is the acting-Head of the School. The other Head is Mrs Russell, wife of Dr Russell at the Sonnalpe. But she doesn't teach now. When Mademoiselle wrote to me, she said that the girls learnt to speak all three languages, and you would have to learn them, too.'

'Oh, well, I suppose we'll pick up a good deal by hearing the others,' said Joyce lightly. 'Go on, Mummy; tell us some more.'

'Haven't you got the prospectus?' asked Gillian.

'Yes, dear. It's on my dressing-table. Will you run and fetch it?'

Gillian went off, and presently came back with the prospectus, and the three spent a happy hour turning it over and examining the photographs with which it was illustrated.

'I like their winter-sports kit,' said Gillian. 'It's so sensible; there's nothing to get in the way. But what *huge* boots! And isn't *that* a pretty girl!'

'Where? Let me see!' demanded Joyce, pushing her aside to peer at the photograph which showed a group of girls clad in breeches and woolly sweaters, with shawls tied round them, and their hair, for the most part, tucked away in berets. They wore big, hob-nailed climbing-boots, and fingerless mittens, and looked very happy and jolly. Gillian pointed out the one whose face had taken her fancy—a slim, fair person, with a merry smile.

'I don't think she's so awfully pretty,' said Joyce when she had considered it. 'And I loathe the idea of those boots. They must make your feet look enormous!' And she glanced down at her own small feet in their pretty buckled slippers.

'They are very necessary in snowy weather, though, Miss Vanity,' said their mother, running her fingers through the golden curls Joyce always wore floating loosely about her shoulders at home.

'I like this one of the library,' said Gillian, turning to it. 'What piles of books!'

'The garden in summer looks ripping,' commented Joyce. 'Turn to that one again, Gill.'

Gillian turned to the picture which showed a flower-garden with the girls sitting about in deck-chairs or on the grass, while the house itself showed in the background.

'Then you think you can be happy there?' asked their mother wistfully, when at length they put the pamphlet away.

'*Rather!*' said Joyce with conviction. 'It looks a ripping place, and there are sure to be nice girls at a school like that. Won't it be funny, though, having lessons in French and German? I hope they'll make allowances for us at first. They ought to; they must know we can't be expected to know very much about it when we've never left England before.'

'I wonder what their standard is like?' said Gillian thoughtfully.

'A pretty high one from all I can hear,' said her mother. 'One of the present Seniors hopes to enter the Sorbonne—the Paris University—in September, and that means that she must be very well advanced indeed. And they have sent girls to the universities here, so Lady Talbot told me. I don't think you need trouble about their standard.'

But Joyce's face had lengthened at this. 'Oh, Mummy!'

'Well, my lazy baby, don't you like the prospect?' asked her mother, laughing. 'Oh, of course you'll have to work! You can't go through life shirking trouble all your days.'

'And there's one thing, Joyce,' added Gillian. 'You'll have regular hours there for prep and practice, and I believe you'll find it much easier to do your work that way than just messing about at home as you do.'

'It's all very well for you,' said Joyce petulantly. 'You like work; I don't!—Mummy! Write and tell them I'm not to be pushed, won't you? I'm sure it would be bad for me.'

Mrs Linton shook her head. 'They won't push you, Joyce. They are far too careful of the girls for that. But you'll have to do a certain amount of work, you know. Still, I don't think they'll ask too much of you.'

'Well, won't you write to the High and say I must stop Latin and maths?' pleaded Joyce.

'Didn't you understand, dear? You aren't going back there again.'

'Not going back? *Mummy!* How joyous!' And Joyce sprang up and began to dance about the room with delight.

'But, Mummy; what about our books?' asked Gillian, who was by no means so delighted at the prospect. She had always got on well with the mistresses, and she had one or two friends who lived outside the suburb, coming in to school every day. If she were not to go back, how could she say good-bye to them?

‘Oh, yes; you may go for your books and to say good-bye to your friends,’ replied Mrs Linton with a smile. ‘Joyce, stop dancing like that, you mad child. Aren’t you sorry to leave your friends?’

Joyce subsided. ‘Oh, yes. But then I expect I’ll make others in this new school. When do we go to the Tyrol? And where is it?’

‘Joyce! What shameful ignorance! It is the western part of Austria. Go and get your atlas and find it. As to when we go, it will be next week, I hope. And now, here comes Eva with supper.—Clear the table, Gill—and Joyce, go and brush your hair. It looks both wild and woolly after that war-dance of yours.’

It was a bright day in the middle of December that they set off for Dover to make the first stage of their journey.

‘You must take all the care of your mother that you can,’ said Dr Talbot to Gillian, with whom he had a chat before they left. ‘Of course, Nurse will be there to see to most things; but you can do much.’

Gillian turned wistful eyes of sapphire-blue on him. ‘She—she isn’t—really bad?—is she?’ she asked brokenly.

‘I hope she will be better soon,’ he said evasively. ‘But remember; she is not to be worried. A great deal depends on that.’

Gillian nodded. ‘I’ll do everything I can. And so will Joyce, I’m sure,’ she added.

The doctor was not so sure. He had already sized up the younger girl, and it seemed to him that most of the burden must fall on this anxious-looking elder child. ‘Well, be careful,’ he said gruffly. ‘Remember that it will take time for her to get back her strength, and don’t worry her by seeming impatient. *Your* cheerfulness will go a long way towards bringing her through.’

After that he said good-bye, and left them in charge of the excellent nurse who would take them out to the Sonnalpe, see Mrs Linton established at the Sanatorium, and then return. Nurse Richards had done this journey before, and she knew exactly what arrangements to make. They were to cross to Calais that day if it was smooth, and there spend the night, going on to Paris next morning. From Paris, they would journey as far as Basle, where another break would be made for the sake of the invalid. The next stage would be at Innsbruck; and the final one to the Sonnalpe itself. Altogether they would be at least a week on the way, and the chances were that it would be more. Very much depended on how Mrs Linton stood the travelling.

Joyce was the only really carefree member of the party. She knew that her mother was ill; but she had no idea how ill, for Mrs Linton had begged that her youth might not be overshadowed by it. Gillian, accustomed to shielding her sister from everything, acquiesced at once, and so it was not till they had reached Paris, and Mrs Linton was quietly resting in the pleasant room which had been taken for her at the Home established by an enterprising Scottish doctor for this very purpose, that the younger girl knew very much of what was happening. Then Nurse took matters into her own hands.

Joyce had been clamouring to go out and explore Paris, and Gillian, secretly terrified at the exhaustion she had seen in their mother’s face, refused with decision.

‘I think you’re horrid!’ cried Joyce. ‘It won’t help Mummy a bit if we sit and mope and grizzle; and you might think of *me* a little!’

Gillian flushed up, but before she could reply, Nurse struck in firmly. ‘Look here, young woman, I think it’s high time you knew just how things stand with you three.’

‘What do you mean?’ demanded Joyce, half-alarmed, half-angry.

‘Just this. Your mother is very ill—it’s going to be a business to get her to the Sonnalpe, and your sister knows it. It’s up to you to help in every way you can—and that won’t be by whingeing and whining because you can’t do everything as you like. You’ve got to keep bright and cheerful, and do all you can to cheer your mother up. And try to think a little more of other people, and less of yourself.’

Joyce listened to her in stunned silence. She had really had no idea that her mother was so ill. Nurse had given her a shrewd blow from which she would not recover swiftly. Gillian, with the old instinct for protecting her sister, slipped an arm round her; but Joyce shook herself free.

‘Is this true?’ she demanded.

‘Yes,’ said Nurse. ‘Now I must go to my patient. You two stay here quietly. Supper will be coming presently, and then you must go to bed.’

She left the room, and when she had gone, Joyce flung round on her sister. ‘How long have you known all this?’ she demanded imperiously.

‘I’ve only *known* it for the last two or three days,’ said Gillian quietly. ‘I *guessed* it when I first heard we were to go to the Tyrol so that Mummy could have mountain air.’

‘And you never told *me*!’

‘Mummy didn’t want you to know till you had to.’

Joyce stood still, her breath coming quickly. ‘Well, I think it’s abominable of you to have kept such a thing secret from me,’ she said stormily. ‘I’m going to my bedroom—don’t come with me; I want to be alone! Anyhow, I don’t want anyone with me who could behave like such a beast as you!’

She turned and fled from the room, banging the door behind her, and Gillian was left gasping at her sister’s fury. Up the stairs rushed the frightened child, and into the bedroom she was to share with her sister. Mercifully, it was on the floor below their mother’s and nowhere near her. Nor was there anyone else within hearing—which was as well, for once she had gained it, Joyce slammed the door, flung herself on the bed, and cried passionately and noisily. She loved her mother as dearly as she could love anyone but herself, and Nurse’s blunt statements had terrified her. Besides, there was a good deal of wounded vanity in her crying, for Nurse had not troubled to hide the contempt she felt.

It was a good thing, as it turned out, that Nurse had spoken, for her patient was not fit to go on next day, and as the weather was bad, the two girls had to amuse themselves as best they could for the next two days. But at length there came a sunshiny morning when Mrs Linton was laid in an ambulance, and taken to the Gare de l’Est, where she was put into a compartment specially reserved for her, and they went on to Basle. But there again they had to make a break, and it was very slow work. Finally, when they arrived at the little station of Wiesing, they had been more than a fortnight on the way. Christmas had come and gone, and the new year had arrived.

Two attendants from the Sanatorium were in waiting at Wiesing, and they swiftly wrapped up the half-fainting patient, and carried her out to the motor ambulance which was waiting outside in the falling twilight of the winter afternoon. Nurse followed them, bidding Gillian and Joyce stay where they were till someone came for them. A third man went off to see about the luggage, and the two girls huddled together on the lamplit platform, cold, hungry, and

miserable, and very lonely and desolate. However, just as Gillian was summoning up the little German she knew to speak to the luggage attendant, things changed. There came the sound of light, swift steps, and a tall, very dark girl, with thick black hair cut in a 'page's' bob under her fur cap, and soft black eyes set in a pointed face, came whirling up to them with outstretched hands.

'You poor lambs!' she said. 'I'm sorry we left you so long, but your mother had to come first, of course. Now which is Gillian and which is Joyce? I'm Jo Bettany, by the way, head-girl of the Chalet School. My sister married Dr Russell who is head of the Sonnalpe, and Dr Maynard and I came down to welcome you to Tyrol and take you up there. You're coming to us at "Die Rosen"—my sister's home—till term begins, you know. Has Louis got all your luggage? Then come along, and we'll soon have you at home now. You must be sick of travelling.'

She slipped a hand through an arm of each girl, and chatting and laughing, drew them out of the station to a car which was driven by a big young man with a fair, clear-cut face under his ear-flapped fur cap. This was Dr Maynard, who gave them a cheery greeting, and helped Jo to tuck them in. Then he set off at once through the lighted streets of the little town to the foot of the broad carriage-road, where, far away in the distance, they could see the tail-lights of the ambulance twinkling.

'We go up here,' said Jo, turning to the pair. 'This leads right up to the Sonnalpe, though it's at the far end. The village is right round the shoulder of the mountain, as you'll find when we get there.'

'Where are they taking Mummy?' asked Gillian, finding her voice at last. 'We must go where she is, of course.'

Jo looked at her with eyes grown very soft and tender. 'You can't go yet, at any rate,' she said. 'They're taking her to the San. You must come with us to "Die Rosen." But you needn't be afraid. As soon as ever we get there, my sister will ring up the San and find out how your mother is, and you shall see her as soon as possible.'

Gillian nodded. Then she lay back under the great fur-lined rug that had been tucked round them. She could feel tired Joyce nodding against her; but she herself was very far from sleep. She had too much to think about.

CHAPTER III

AT THE SONNALPE

It was a slow journey up the broad driving-road. Snow lay thickly everywhere, and even the chains on the wheels would have been little safeguard against fast or careless driving. Luckily Dr Maynard was accustomed to the work, and by degrees they mounted to the top, always with the lights of the ambulance before them, and then Gillian felt that they were running along an even path.

‘This is the Sonnalpe itself,’ said Joey. ‘I do hope you’re quite warm and comfortable? Dr Jack daren’t go quickly, you see—not in this weather, anyhow. You’ve been a long time on the way, haven’t you? We all thought you’d have been here much sooner.’

Gillian roused herself with an effort. ‘Mummy was too poorly for us to come quicker.’

‘That’s a pity,’ said Joey quietly. ‘Still, she’s here now, and that’s the main thing. You know, don’t you, that her doctor wrote to my brother-in-law about her?’

‘No; I’d no idea. Oh, do you know what he said?’ Gillian turned with some eagerness at this, though hitherto her remarks had been mechanical.

Jo shook her head. ‘What do you take Jem for? Doctors aren’t in the habit of confiding to even their nearest and dearest, my child. I do know she’s very ill, of course. And my sister says that your doctor’s wife who wrote to her about you two said that this was her best chance. She’ll get the very newest treatment up here, you know. You mustn’t mind if they don’t let you see her to-night. She’ll be pretty well done with the journey, and they’re safe to want her to rest. You see, before they can begin any treatment they’ll have to build up her strength. I know! My little adopted sister, the Robin, is fearfully frail, and I know all the fussations we have over her.’

Gillian nodded. Then, as she saw that they were approaching houses, she leaned forward to look out of the window.

‘Yes; this is the village,’ said Joey. She pointed out of the window at her side. ‘There’s the San—that huge building looming up over there. You can see by the lights that the ambulance is turning in. We shall go on though, to my sister’s house.’

Gillian suddenly remembered her manners. ‘It’s ripping of Mrs Russell to take us in like this,’ she said. ‘I never expected it, you know. Quite thought we’d have to camp out in some hotel or other.’

‘Oh, Madge wouldn’t let people like you go to the hotel if it could be helped,’ said Jo cheerfully. ‘And even if we hadn’t been able to take you, there are the Mensches and the Di Bersettis. Both Frau Mensch and Signora di Bersetti are old girls of the Chalet School, and it isn’t likely they’d let new Chalet girls go to the “Goldener Apfel” unless we’d mumps or measles or something like that.’

At this point, they turned in at a wide gateway, and the car went slowly up the pathway which was bordered on either hand by bushes laden with snow. From the windows lights fell athwart the white garden in a welcoming golden glow, and as Dr Maynard sounded his horn, the big front door was flung wide open, and more lights streamed out to greet them. A slender figure appeared at the doorway, and a hand was waved from beneath the great shawl that wrapped the figure from throat to knee.

‘My sister!’ said Jo, wrenching at the handle of the car-door. ‘Come along; we’re here at last. Oh, is Joyce asleep?’

But Joyce had roused up with the stopping of the car, and was lifting her head with an air of bewilderment.

‘We’re here, Joyce,’ said Gillian, shaking her gently. ‘Get out, dear.’

Joyce stumbled out, blinking and yawning, and still too drowsy to assert herself. Joey seized her hand, and pulled her up the long, shallow steps to the door. ‘Here they are!’ she cried. ‘This is Joyce; and that’s Gillian coming behind!’

Warm hands were stretched to grasp theirs, and they were drawn into the well-lighted hall, which was summer-warm and sweet with the perfume of hothouse flowers. A sweet voice said, ‘At last! You poor children! You must be worn-out, and half-starved! Come along and take off your things, and get thawed out.’

They were taken to a little cloakroom where Joey gave them pegs, helped them to get rid of their wraps, and discarded her own. They had slippers in their little hand-case, and there was plenty of hot water, so they were able to freshen themselves considerably. Then she led them across the hall and into a wide, lofty room, where a great porcelain stove filled up one corner, and sent a rosy glow half-way across the floor; stands filled with flowering plants stood beside the walls, and bookcases, crammed with books, ran down one side. The electric lights were shaded with orange shades, and, best of all to the two tired travellers, a table arranged for a meal stood near the stove. Behind the table was a couch, on which sprawled a slight girl in the early twenties, while an invalid-chair holding a fair girl of about Gillian’s age, and a little stool on which sat a child of ten or eleven were set near the armchair occupied by Mrs Russell.

The grown-up girl got up as they came in, and came to greet them. ‘Welcome to “Die Rosen,”’ she said with a smile. ‘I’m Grizel Cochrane—an old girl of the Chalet School, and now music mistress at the Annexe up here. This is Stacie Benson, one of our girls, who is recovering from an accident. And here is our Robin.’ And she stretched out a slim, long-fingered hand to ruffle the black curls that clustered all over the Robin’s small head.

‘This is Joyce,’ said Gillian, guessing that Joyce was, for once in her life, shy, ‘and I’m Gillian.’

‘Come and sit down,’ said Mrs Russell, who had risen with Grizel and the Robin. ‘Robinette, run and ask Rosa to bring in Kaffee, mein Blümchen. Gillian and Joyce must be half-starved by this time.’

The little girl slipped out of the room, and the two strangers sat down, Joyce still very quiet, and Gillian beginning to realise how tired she was.

‘Did you come along all right, Jo?’ asked Grizel Cochrane, feeling that it would be kindest to leave them to recover themselves a little.

Jo nodded. ‘Very slow, of course. Couldn’t be anything else with such snow and frost.—By the way, Madge, Jack’s gone back to the San. He asked me to tell you. Are the babies all in bed?’

‘All in bed and asleep,’ replied her sister with a smile. ‘Robin must go very soon; it must be nearly nineteen now. I wish that clock hadn’t begun to gain like this. It’s most awkward with my watch out of action as well.’

‘Ah, you want Evvy and Co to put that clock right,’ said Jo, with a wicked grin at Stacie. ‘They’d soon have her going!’

‘Thanks! I’d rather be excused,’ retorted Mrs Russell decidedly. ‘Ah, here comes Rosa! Now you two shall have something to keep you going till Abendessen, which won’t occur for an hour and a half.’

Rosa, a dumpy, flaxen-haired Tyrolean, with broad, beaming face, came in, bearing the prettily arranged tray with its milky coffee and a basket full of twists of fancy-bread. A mug of rich milk was there also, for the Robin whose supper time this was. They all gathered round the table, for Jo announced herself as famished, and the others were not averse to an extra cup of coffee. Perhaps Gillian was the only one to be lacking in enthusiasm. She was too anxious for news of her mother to relish even the dainty meal spread for them. However, Joey, after exchanging a glance with her sister, murmured, ‘Excuse me, please,’ and vanished. She returned a few minutes later, beaming.

‘Well?’ asked her sister. ‘What news, Jo?’

‘Quite good,’ said Jo. She turned to Gillian and Joyce. ‘I’ve just rung up the San. The news is that your mother has been got comfortably to bed. She’s had some soup, and now she is settling off to sleep quite nicely. They say she is quite happy about you, and seems inclined to settle in at once, which is just what they want, of course.’

‘Who spoke?’ asked Stacie.

‘Gottfried did. Jem is still with Mrs Linton, and won’t leave her till she is asleep. But Gottfried had just left her, so he knew the latest, of course. You’ll feel quite happy about her now, won’t you?’ And she turned to Gillian again, who was biting her lips to keep back the sobs that were rising in her throat.

Joyce, however, was still rather vague about her mother’s illness, so was less affected. ‘That’s ripping news!’ she said. ‘I say, ta awfully for asking!’

The elders exchanged glances at this flow of slang, but they could scarcely pull her up for it at once.

‘Besides,’ said Jo when the younger girls had all gone to bed and they were alone, ‘it isn’t term-time yet.’

‘All the same, she must learn to speak purer English than that,’ said Mrs Russell. ‘I don’t want the Robin to pick up such expressions, you know.’

However, at the time, nothing was said, and Joyce was complacently ignorant of the sin she had committed. She began to forget her shyness, and turned to Stacie as being the most interesting person there, because the nearest to her own age. ‘I say, what sort of an accident did you have?’ she asked. ‘Won’t you ever be able to walk again?’

‘Of course she will!’ said Joey sharply. ‘It was a sprained muscle in her back, and we’ve had such hot weather here that it’s made her recovery slow. But she’s going ahead like a steam-engine now.’

Joyce glanced at her curiously. She was quite devoid of either tact or intuition, but she could see that what she had just said had upset Jo, so she dropped the subject and leaned back in her chair with a little air of languor. ‘I think the heat in here is making me sleepy. I can scarcely keep my eyes open.’

‘Perhaps you would like to go to bed when the Robin goes?’ suggested Mrs Russell kindly. ‘We can send in your Abendessen on a tray, you know.’

‘Oh, Joyce isn’t as tired as all that,’ said Gillian hastily, turning red as she spoke. How *awful* Joyce was! As if they could start giving trouble that way in a strange house!

And Joyce herself was by no means pleased with the idea. She wanted to see Dr Russell, and she was not minded to let Gillian have a better chance of making friends than herself.

‘Oh, I’m not so tired, really,’ she said. ‘It’s only the warmth after coming in from the cold.’

‘Just as you like, dear,’ said Madge Russell.

‘Oh, I can sit up quite easily. Gill was right about that,’ said Joyce graciously.

‘Gill—is that how you abbreviate your name?’ asked Mrs Russell. ‘It’s a very pretty one, and quite uncommon, Gillian, dear.’

‘Mummy read it in a book,’ Joyce informed the company. ‘She was so thrilled with it, that when Gill landed along a bit later, she shoved it on to her. Of course, *I* am christened after her. Daddy insisted on it.’

‘Yes; it’s a pretty name, too. But I should think you’ll get a dozen Joyces to one Gillian,’ said Jo bluntly.

Then the Robin created a diversion by jumping up and announcing that she must say good-night. She was hugged and kissed all round, Mrs Russell promising to come up presently to hear her prayers and tuck her in. Then she came across to the Lintons, her face lifted for the kiss she confidently expected from them. Gillian gave it at once. Joyce, after a wide-eyed stare, tossed her a careless nod, and said, ‘Oh, night-night, kid!’

The Robin trotted away serenely; but Joyce had scored herself a black mark from Joey Bettany. The Robin was everybody’s pet, and only her remarkably sweet nature could have saved her from being spoilt. In the short eleven years of her life she had met with nothing but petting and love, and Jo was inclined to take it as a personal insult if anyone showed any sign of giving the child anything else. But Miss Joyce was a spoilt baby herself, and she resented the adoration that was obviously showered on the younger child.

After all, the Lintons were fated not to meet Dr Russell that night, for he rang up shortly before Abendessen to say that he would not be home till much later. Mrs Russell said nothing much to the girls. She was too much occupied in hoping that it was not Mrs Linton’s condition which kept him at the Sanatorium. After the meal was over, Stacie and Joyce went off to bed, and Gillian, who owned to feeling very sleepy, followed not long after. Then Jo Bettany pulled up a little stool beside her sister’s chair, while Grizel Cochrane departed to her own room to write letters, for the postman would be up in the morning on his bi-weekly visit to collect all mail.

Madge Russell, coming back from a visit to her young guests to see that they had all they required, and having had a peep in at the night-nursery where her twin nephew and niece were sound asleep at one side of the room, while her own small son was curled up in his cot at the other, found her young sister in sole possession of the salon and awaiting her return eagerly.

‘Come along and pow-wow!’ she said as the mistress of the house entered.

‘Very well. But just remember, Jo, that it’s far too early to judge yet,’ said Mrs Russell, as she sat down and took up her sewing.

‘I know. But still, they’ve given themselves away quite a good deal, *I* think,’ said Jo with an omniscient wag of her black head. ‘What do *you* think of them, Madge?’

‘I like Gillian,’ said Madge decidedly. ‘She has any amount of character in her. Poor child! She’s obviously very anxious and distressed about her mother! We must try to keep her from thinking about it if we can.’

‘That won’t be very easy,’ said Jo with a frown. ‘She’s rather the kind that worries things to shreds, I should think. Isn’t she pretty, with her black hair and blue eyes, and that rose-leafy kind of skin? Just like the Irish heroines in books!’

‘Very pretty. Of course, Joyce is the family beauty, though.’

‘Yes; what price that Joyce-child?’

‘She’s only a baby, really. And she certainly is exceedingly pretty, Jo.’

‘*And* knows it! I should say myself that she’s chock-full of conceit!’ said Jo uncharitably.

‘I expect they have spoilt her at home,’ said Madge. ‘And she has rather charming manners, too.’

‘Can’t say I saw much of them myself. I thought she was a loathsome little wretch.’

‘Jo, you simply must get over this silly dislike of everyone who doesn’t instantly fall down before the Robin,’ said Madge severely.

‘Oh, it wasn’t only that. Didn’t you notice what she said to Stacie? Poor old Stacie doesn’t want things rubbed in any more than has happened already—and certainly not by a conceited little ape of fourteen!’

‘That was mere thoughtlessness,’ said Madge. ‘And you must remember, Jo, that we are accustomed to all this sort of thing. I imagine that Joyce Linton has been sheltered from all the unpleasant side of life in every possible way.’

‘She made Gillian jolly uncomfortable by saying she was tired like that,’ remarked Jo.

‘I know. But there, again, it was only thoughtlessness. In any case, Jo, do give the child a fair chance. If you had been travelling for days on end, I doubt if you would have shown up much better than Joyce. Give her two or three days with us after she’s rested and refreshed, and just see if she isn’t as nice as most girls are.’

Jo subsided with a grunt, but she was by no means satisfied. However, as her sister presently suggested that it was high time she went to bed, the conversation ended for the time being, and was not resumed for a considerable period; and then a good many things had happened.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHALET SCHOOL REOPENS

‘Joey—Joey! Mademoiselle wants you at once!’

Joey Bettany stopped half-way up the stairs, and turned round to look at the messenger, a slim, curly-headed girl of fifteen. ‘Where is she, Evvy?’

‘In the study. Guess you’re coming over a bit thick, aren’t you?’ retorted Evvy, with a faint accent that proclaimed her American.

Jo marched down the stairs again. ‘Don’t be rude, my child, even if this *is* only first day. Any idea what she wants?’

‘None at all. Guess you’ll find out when you get there.’

Jo heaved a sigh and went slowly along the passage and tapped at a door near the front-door. A pleasant voice said, ‘Entrez!’ and she went in to curtsy to Mademoiselle Lepâtre, the acting-Head of the school, and Mrs Russell’s co-partner.

‘Evadne says you wish to speak to me, Mademoiselle,’ said the head-girl as she closed the door behind her.

Mademoiselle looked up from the big plan on her desk. There was a slight frown on her plain, though pleasant face, and Jo promptly began to ransack her memory for any escapade of hers that might have brought it there. She could think of nothing, and Mademoiselle began to explain next moment.

‘Pray sit down, Joey. I wish to discuss something with you.’

Jo sat down, and composed her features into something resembling the dignity incumbent on a head-girl who is discussing matters with the head-mistress. ‘Yes, Mademoiselle?’ she said, using the French Mademoiselle had been speaking.

‘It is about those two new girls, Gillian and Joyce Linton,’ said Mademoiselle. ‘Have you been told that the ceiling of the Carnation dormitory has fallen down?’

Jo went scarlet, especially as the mistress went on, ‘I cannot think why this should have happened; but it has rendered the room useless for the present. Fortunately, as we have rearranged matters at Le Petit Chalet, we can do without it just now. I had intended placing Gillian and Joyce in it with Cornelia Flower as head. Cornelia, I am sending upstairs to the Violet dormitory, but I am not very sure what to do with the new girls.’

Jo was too well trained to make any comments, but she felt rather bewildered at all this. What on earth had *she* to do with dormitory arrangements? These were the concern of Mademoiselle and Matron.

‘You see,’ went on the Head, ‘there is another bed in the Violet dormitory, and also one in the Amber. What I cannot decide is whether to place Greta Macdonald in the Amber, and so leave Joyce and Gillian together in the Violet; or whether to separate them. We know why they are here, of course; and we know how very serious matters are likely to be for them. And you, Joey, know the two girls, whereas I have only met them now. Therefore I wish you to say which you think would be kinder—to let them be together, or to separate them.’

‘I see.’ Joey frowned horribly over the problem. She knew which she would have preferred. The week spent in the company of the Lintons had confirmed her in her opinion of both of them. She liked Gillian, and thought Joyce detestably conceited and selfish, even though she owned that the child had some reason for her conceit. It must be confessed that,

with the sole exceptions of the beloved little Robin, her own great friend Marie von Eschenau, and Marie's sister, now Wanda von Gluck, she had never seen a prettier girl. Joyce's perfect little face with its aureole of golden curls and big, azure-blue eyes, would have rejoiced the heart of any artist. But Joey didn't like her any the better for it.

'I'd separate them, I think, Mademoiselle,' she said at length. 'Joyce will be better with girls of her own age. And if Gillian is away from her, then the change may help her not to brood over things.'

Mademoiselle nodded. 'You consider, then, that Joyce will not fret if she is parted from her elder sister?'

'No; I don't think so,' said Jo, repressing the first emphatic disclaimer which had sprung to her lips.

'Very well. I will put Joyce with Cornelia and Greta and Violet; and Gillian shall go to the Amber dormitory with Cyrilla Maurús, Elsie Carr, and Amalie Hamel. It is strange,' she went on meditatively. 'I cannot account for that ceiling falling like this.'

If she had not been entering the names on the dormitories chart, she would have seen that once more Joey was scarlet. *She* could guess, all too accurately, at the cause for the collapse of that ceiling. On the last night of the previous term, when all rules were in abeyance, she had been moved to organise a circus among the Seniors; and the resultant bumps and bangs as they turned somersaults or tried to walk on their hands were quite sufficient to have brought down any ceiling. Luckily for her, Mademoiselle took no notice of her for a moment, and by the time the lady looked up, she was normal hue again.

'That will be all, then, Joey. But pray bid all in the Green dormitory to tread lightly. We do not desire any accidents.'

Joey got up at this dismissal. 'Yes, Mademoiselle,' she said dutifully. She went to the door, opened it, and before departing, turned to make her curtsy again. Then she backed out, and nearly fell over Joyce Linton, who had been watching her, open-mouthed.

'D'you mean to say we've got to bob like that?' demanded the younger girl when both had recovered their balance again.

'Certainly,' said Jo, suddenly becoming the complete head-girl.

'Holy smoke!' ejaculated Joyce somewhat vulgarly.

Joey was down on her like a flash. 'Look here, Joyce, I don't want to begin to find fault with you already, but slang of that kind isn't allowed here. If you think it over, you'll see why. We have a good many girls who aren't English, and their people won't thank us if they go home using slang—and vulgar slang at that!—and then say they learnt it here. If you use it, you'll soon find yourself minus your pocket-money. This is first day, when rules are relaxed a little, and I'm telling you now so that you'll have due warning.'

She moved away, and Joyce stared for a moment before she suddenly ran after her. 'I say! Just a sec! You surely don't mean all that rigmarole you got off your chest just now?'

'Every word of it,' said Jo solemnly. 'You'll get fined for every forbidden word you use.'

'Help!' Joyce's jaw dropped. 'At that rate, it strikes me I'd better come over dumb for the rest of the term!'

Jo laughed. 'Oh, it won't be as bad as all that. You'll remember when you've been penniless a week or two.'

'But they don't cabbage all your cash for just an odd word or two?' persisted Joyce, still incredulous.

‘Depends on the words. If it’s what the authorities call slang, then yes, they will. A groschen for every word; and out of two schillings, that soon leaves you minus any money.’

‘How simply ghastly!’

Jo nodded to her, and then went off to her own quarters, while Joyce, after thinking it over, went her way to the big common-room where several of the Middles were congregated, and sought out a certain bright-haired American, Cornelia Flower by name, to find out from her if such things could really be.

‘Guess that’s right, all right,’ said Cornelia when she had heard what the new girl had to say. ‘I ought to know!’

‘You certainly ought, Corney!’ laughed a pretty, dark-haired girl of fifteen. ‘You and Evvy have contributed a fair amount to the fines-box in your time.’

‘But how putrid!’ said Joyce. ‘What awful rot!’

Cornelia proceeded to jump on her—heavily, too. ‘It isn’t rot! It’s only common-sense.’

‘Hullo! Is Saul also among the prophets?’ demanded the dark girl teasingly. ‘Imagine such sentiments from you of all people!’

Cornelia blushed. ‘Oh, I know I’ve been awful,’ she confessed. ‘All the same it isn’t rot, and we don’t want any new girls coming here saying so.’

‘Oh, sorry!’ said Joyce after a long, cool stare. ‘I can see I shall have to be dumb, that’s all.’

‘Oh, you’ll soon remember,’ they chorused.

Joyce said no more, and presently they left her while they went to greet a fresh batch of arrivals. She didn’t like this, for at the High School she had always been surrounded by a mob of adoring followers. What was more, so far no one had shown any signs of wanting to follow her. She didn’t like it at all. She didn’t like these girls who were so friendly together, and who treated her with courtesy, it is true, but in such a way that she felt herself something of an outsider. As for Jo Bettany, she felt that she positively detested *her*. Jo was not a great deal more tactful than Joyce herself, and she had not troubled to hide the fact that she didn’t think much of the younger Linton.

At this moment, Gillian came into the room together with a sturdily-built girl of her own age, whose long brown hair hung in two thick pigtailed on either shoulder. Joyce wondered who she was, and felt half-envious of her sister, who was laughing and chatting with this stranger. The Middles to whom she had been speaking about the slang fines now returned, chased from the corridors by Matron, who had no desire to start the term with a batch of bad colds, and joined the pair. Joyce heard her sister’s companion addressed as ‘Lonny,’ and wondered idly what it stood for. Then there was a little stir, and a breaking-up of the groups as some newcomers came in. Gillian looked round, saw her sister by herself, and came over to speak to her.

‘Here you are,’ she said. ‘I wondered where you were. Isn’t this a top-hole place?’

‘You haven’t to use words like that,’ Joyce informed her.

‘Words like what?’

‘Oh, top-hole, and so on. They fine you if you do. Jo Bettany has just been telling me, and so have those girls!’ And she indicated a noisy group over by the stove.

‘Oh, my goodness!’ Gillian was almost as taken aback as her sister.

‘Yes; isn’t it the pink limit? I’ll have to be dumb if I want to have any cash, for I certainly can’t remember things like that.’

‘It will be frightfully difficult.’ Gillian looked worried. ‘I remember I tried to give it up for Lent one year, and it was simply awful.’

‘So you did!’ Joyce began to laugh. ‘I don’t see that it did much to improve you, old peach.’

‘Well, I suppose I must just have another shot. There’s one thing, I don’t believe it’ll be quite so difficult here.’

‘How d’you make that out?’

‘Well, no one else seems to use much. At the High, everyone did, and that was partly why it was so difficult.’

‘Don’t you believe it! I think this looks like being a horrid school. At least they didn’t expect you to talk like a prim Victorian ass at the High, and jump on you if you didn’t.’

‘No; they didn’t. But Mummy didn’t like it much,’ said Gillian thoughtfully. ‘I remember she absolutely forbade us to say, “Oh, yeh!” and “Sez you!”’

‘Well, I’m beginning to wish we’d gone to a boarding-school in England. Then we wouldn’t have been bothered this way.’

‘But we’d have been so far from Mummy,’ said Gillian.

‘Mummy’s all right. She’ll soon be fit now. Look how blossoming she was when we went to say good-bye! I think there’s been an awful fuss made for very little!’

Gillian turned a look of bitter reproach on her sister. ‘Joyce! How can you be so heartless? Mummy’s jolly ill, let me tell you—heaps iller than she’s ever let us know. I think you’re a regular little pig to talk of her like that!’

‘Oh, don’t try and come the good elder sister over me!’ snapped Joyce. ‘If you’re going to preach, I’m off!’ And she turned and ran off, leaving Gillian staring after her.

It was at this point that she noticed a very tall, fair girl who had just come into the room as Joyce left it. She was greeted courteously but briefly, and there were none of the welcoming shouts that had greeted so many of the others. She held herself stiffly erect, and even when the ringing of a bell brought in maids in their pretty national costume, bearing great urns of milky coffee and baskets filled with bread-twists and cakes, most of the girls made for the basket-chairs, pulled into little groups about the room, without troubling about her particularly. Nor did she pay them much attention. She sat down near a group among which Gillian recognised the girl who had taken charge of her when they reached the school and who had been introduced as, ‘This is Lonny—I mean Ilonka Barkocz. She will look after you for the present.’

Feeling very new, Gillian stood by shyly till Ilonka suddenly looked up and saw her standing by the window. She jumped up at once and came to her. ‘I did not know you were alone,’ she said in the careful English which bespoke her continental origin. ‘I thought you were with your sister.’

‘Joyce left me very soon,’ said Gillian shyly.

‘Ah, I expect she has made friends of her own age,’ said Ilonka. ‘Will you come and sit with us while we have Kaffee und Kuchen?’

Gillian had already learned that this was the synonym for the meal which, in this land, took the place of afternoon tea. She warmed to Ilonka’s friendliness, and accompanied her to the group, where she was introduced all round.

‘Girls, I bring you a new friend. This is Gillian Linton who will be with us in the Fifth, Joey says.—Gillian, these are some of the girls in our form.’

‘Glad you’ve come, Gillian,’ said a girl of Gillian’s own age, with a bright, interesting face which told of great force of character. ‘I’m Margia Stevens; Lonny you know—this is Elsie Carr.’

‘In your form too,’ laughed the pretty dark girl who had been with Cornelia before. ‘Hope you aren’t *too* brilliant at work, Gillian—especially science.—This on my left hand is Evadne Lannis—known to the police as “Evvy.” *She* is really good, now!—treats us to explosions and fireworks and things of that kind!’

A chuckle went round the group, and Evadne flushed to the roots of her fair curls. ‘Don’t be such a mean, Elsie Carr!’ she cried. ‘I’d just despise to be all that catty!’

Elsie laughed. ‘Then you shouldn’t get up sensations, my child! But I’m introducing Gillian. Let me finish.—This is Cyrilla Maurús, Gillian, who is Hungarian like Lonny.—And these are Giovanna Donati and Hilda Bhaer.—and this Thekla von Stift,’ and she indicated the tall fair girl with a wave of her hand. ‘Now sit down, and Cyrilla and I will go and scrounge coffee for four.—Two of you folk come and help. Here come the prees.’

Gillian looked towards the door, and saw nine girls headed by Jo Bettany, coming into the room. She liked the looks of them at once. Jo she knew already and was beginning to admire with all her heart. The little dark girl with the black hair (which was obviously a ‘bob’ growing long) had already been introduced to her as Simone Lecoutier. She had no idea who the others were, but she decided that they compared very favourably with the prefects at the High School. Then Elsie came back with a cup of coffee for her, and Giovanna offered her a bread-twist, and they all sat laughing and chatting, even Thekla joining in now and then when they addressed her. In the opposite corner Gillian could see Joyce with one or two girls of her own age, and felt happy about her again. After all, Joyce was a dreadful baby for fourteen, and she would soon shake-down. So the elder girl thought in the intervals of listening to the school gossip and answering such questions as they addressed to her.

After Kaffee und Kuchen the girls hurried to clear the room and set the chairs in straight rows, for they always had Assembly there on the first night of term, when Mademoiselle came in to bid them formal welcome and to tell them any news. A good many were called off by Matron to unpack; but the Lintons and Jo had been among the earliest comers, and had finished long ago. So they were called to help Joey and her three friends, Simone Lecoutier, Marie von Eschenau, and Frieda Mensch, to make the room ready.

‘For goodness’ sake see that the lines are straight!’ said Jo as she tore off in answer to a summons from Margia Stevens.—‘All right! I’m coming!’

‘Do you think you shall like the school?’ asked Simone Lecoutier of Gillian as they worked.

‘I expect so,’ said Gillian cautiously.

Frieda Mensch smiled at her. ‘Oh, you will like it,’ she said in the soft, pretty voice Gillian had already noticed and admired in her. ‘Everyone does.’

‘Not Thekla,’ said Marie von Eschenau gloomily. ‘She has come back almost as bad as when she first came.’

Gillian looked curiously at Marie, whose loveliness seemed to her to exceed even Joyce’s. ‘Thekla is that tall girl who sat near us at tea-time—I mean Kaffee—isn’t she?’ she asked.

‘Yes; she is my cousin,’ Marie informed her, still gloomily.

‘Don’t you like her?’ asked Joyce inquisitively, as her work brought her up to them in time to hear Marie’s remark.

‘She is not like the rest of us,’ said Marie shortly. ‘Bring some more chairs, please.’

It was quite plain that she was going to say no more, and Joyce shrugged her shoulders and went to do as she was told. But her curiosity was aroused, and when Thekla had finished unpacking and returned to the room, she looked at her consideringly. She was rather impressed by the elder girl's supercilious airs, for Joyce was empty-headed enough, and Thekla's evident feeling of superiority made her think that here was someone who would be worth knowing. She looked at her again, and then turned to watch Marie as she set chairs for the Staff. Joyce had been the prettiest girl in her old school, and had thoroughly enjoyed queening it. She was by no means delighted to find on her arrival at this school that there was a girl who could certainly rival her in appearance. That it should be one older than herself made it no better. Joyce had had experience of the way in which younger girls run after older ones, and she was not content to be second.

Meanwhile, Marie, with no idea of the feeling she was arousing in the new girl's heart, finished her work, and then advised Joyce and Gillian to go and wash their hands. She showed them where to go, and vanished upstairs to rearrange her own flowing golden curls, which she wore tied back with a broad brown ribbon, the school colour. Jo was in the dormitory when she entered, finishing off odds and ends.

'All ready?' asked the head-girl.

'Quite,' said Marie. 'But I must brush my hair, Joey. The bell will go soon.'

It went two minutes later, and the girls streamed into the common-room from all quarters of the house. From Le Petit Chalet came the Juniors, escorted by their own mistresses, and the prefects hastened down from the prefects' room where they had been discussing various things. Cornelia Flower showed Joyce where to sit, and Cyrilla Maurus took Gillian under her wing. They were the only new girls this term, and the rest knew their places. Then the low-voiced chatter which had been going on was hushed as the door at the top of the room opened, and Mademoiselle came in, followed by the Staff.

She promised them only a short speech that evening. First, she bade them welcome, and reminded them that this was the term when they held their annual bazaar in aid of the free beds in the great Sanatorium at the Sonnalpe.

'We want to make our bazaar larger than ever this term,' she said, 'so I trust that all will work with a will. You will have your usual activities this term—Guides, Hobbies Club, and Pets. We hope that you will be able to arrange an entertainment to take place when we have our bazaar; and here and now the Staff invite you all to an evening's pleasure on an early Saturday in February.

'And now I wish to speak of something different. As some of you may remember, it was decided that we should add a Domestic Economy department to the school this term. That has been made possible through the generosity of Dr Russell and our dear Madame. Two of the big sheds at the back of this house have been turned into kitchen and laundry, and there we hope that you will learn the secrets of la cuisine, and will, if you should go into camp as Guides this summer, be able to launder your garments yourselves with great success. Many other things will be taught there besides; for while we wish you to become cultured women, we also desire that you shall be homemakers. So the Seniors and the Middles will take it in turns to spend a day each week in the kitchens, and there learn all that our new mistress, Frau Mieders, can teach you of these matters. At present we shall not begin until Monday, when the Sixth Form will go to Frau Mieders. The Upper Fifth will go on Tuesday, and the Lower Fifth on Wednesday. On Thursday, the Fourth Form will take their turn, and the Third will go on Friday. I hope you will all work well, and Miss Wilson tells me that she expects as many of

you as possible to qualify for Cook's and Laundress' badges this term.' Here she cast a laughing glance across at the tall, pleasant-faced mistress who sat at one end of the little dais.

Miss Wilson rose to the occasion. 'It's high time you all had those badges, girls,' she said. 'I know we have a few; but I want to see every Guide with them.'

'And finally,' went on Mademoiselle, when Miss Wilson had sat down, 'I wish to speak of Half-term. Those who wish to go home will do so, of course, and for the rest, we will provide as well as we can. But there will be no special occasion this term. Now that is all.' She turned to Matron. 'Matron, have all finished unpacking?'

'Not all, Mademoiselle,' replied Matron.

'Then you will require those who have not, I know. They may go with you at once.—The rest may dance until the bell rings for Abendessen, which will be at twenty o'clock to-night. After that we will have Prayers, and then bed, for you must all be fatigued with your travelling. Thank you, mes enfants.'

They stood while she and the Staff went out; and then Matron carried off her victims, and the rest took partners and began to dance the swift Viennese waltz to the accompaniment played by Anne Seymour, a pretty English girl of seventeen.

Gillian enjoyed it thoroughly, but she was glad when bedtime came for all that. She felt as if she had lived through so much since the morning. As for Joyce, she was inclined to rebel at the early bed, for at home Mrs Linton had given way on that point, so that often it was ten and later before the girls went off. However, there was no appealing against it here, so she departed with her head full of schemes for making herself queen among her contemporaries, at least as much as ever she had been at the High School.

CHAPTER V

AN EARLY REBELLION

The two Lintons settled down fairly quickly at the Chalet School. Gillian, placed in the Upper Fifth, soon made friends with the leaders of it. She was a keen worker, ready for most things, and, without having the personal charm which helped Joyce to queen it over most people, was very attractive. Joyce, on the other hand, was not having too easy a time. She made friends, for many of the girls fell under the thrall of her beauty and pretty manners. But the people she would have liked to acknowledge her were all too busy with their own concerns and too close friends already to welcome a new girl into their innermost circle. Such girls as Evadne Lannis and Cornelia Flower, for instance, took very little notice of her, and these two were decidedly leaders among their own set. She had to be content with the homage of lesser people such as Hilda Bhaer, Klara Melnarti, Kitty Burnett, Greta Macdonald, and Dorothy Brantham.

‘Those Middles are starting a second party,’ said Anne Seymour to the rest of the Sixth, one snowy day at the end of January.

‘If it’s anything that will help to squash the activities of Evvy and Co, good luck to it! That’s all I’ve got to say,’ yawned Jo Bettany as she opened her French grammar. ‘I never got a stroke of work done last night at prep. Really, considering that they are Fifth Form now, you’d think they’d try to develop a little sense. But that seems to be beyond them.’

‘What happened, my Jo?’ asked Simone Lecoutier.

Jo groaned. ‘What *didn’t* happen, you mean! To begin with, none of them had their geometry books. When I asked why, they blandly informed me that Charlie had them.’

‘But why?’ asked Frieda Mensch, opening her eyes widely.

‘I’ve no idea, and I didn’t try to find out—Carla von Flügen, I believe you know something about it.’

The Sixth with one accord turned to Carla von Flügen, who had been smiling in a way that certainly justified Jo’s exclamation. ‘Naturally they would not explain,’ she said. ‘Charlie found them lying about ages after they should have been taken to Miss Leslie, and she confiscated them, and told Miss Leslie why.’

‘Well!’ ejaculated Jo.

‘I believe they got into terrible trouble about it with Miss Leslie,’ went on Carla, ‘for she was enraged about it.’

‘So well she might be! I only wonder Charlie let them have them.’

‘But that was not all, my Jo,’ insisted Simone, who had been watching her idol closely. ‘What else did they do?’

‘Oh, go away and let me get some work done!’ groaned Jo.

‘Oh, nonsense!’ laughed Anne. ‘It’s a dull day, and, as head-girl, it’s your duty to entertain us. Besides, this is free time.’

‘Precious lot of free time I get when you folk are about,’ grumbled Jo, giving up her attempts at work with a bang as she closed her book.

‘Well, tell us what the Middles did,’ pleaded Sophie Hamel, a big Tyrolean, whose father was proprietor of a large drapery shop in Innsbruck.

Jo began to grin. ‘Oh, they began with the usual things—noughts-and-crosses; tilting their chairs; squeaking their pens. You know what they are like when they are bored.’

‘It is the not going out,’ said Simone seriously. ‘It is now three days since we promenaded, and elles s’ennuyent.’

‘Well, I wish the snow would stop and they could have a good run. As far as that goes, I wouldn’t mind one myself,’ acknowledged Jo.

‘But this is not telling us what they did last night,’ wailed Frieda. ‘Do tell us, Jo!’

Jo leaned back in her chair, crossed her knees, and prepared to tell the story in full. ‘Well, you know that silly trick of Evvy’s last term—balancing a full inkwell on the end of her ruler without upsetting it?’ They all nodded. There had been trouble over that until it had been forbidden by the authorities. ‘Well, Corney was moved to try to balance it on her head, if you please! I never noticed her, of course—I should jolly soon have put a stop to it if I had. But Maria Marani was in difficulties over her English parsing, and I was trying to find out for her—I was none too sure myself!—just what part of speech “on” was in the sentence, when there was a terrific crash on the floor, and Corney’s clarion tones announced, “Jumping Jehoshaphat! That’s done it!” I looked up, and I don’t mind owning that I was so floored for a moment I simply said nothing. Corney was sitting there, looking scared for once, and down her face trickled a long stream of school ink. It was running down her nose, and dropping off the end, and the silly little idiot wasn’t even *trying* to stop the mess! When I did recover my breath, I made a leap for her, of course, and mopped her up; but her frock was a sight, and it must have gone right through to her undies, for Matey was at me to-day.’

‘Oh, why?’ asked Frieda.

Jo flushed darkly. ‘Wanted to know what I was doing to let Corney make such a mess of herself during prep. If *she* had to try to keep that room in order and give them any help they needed with their work, she’d soon find it wasn’t such an easy matter!’

‘And what did the others do?’ asked Simone.

‘Well, they giggled, of course. I soon shut them up, though.’

‘And was *that* all?’ asked Carla.

‘No fear! Oh, it was all in the way of that sort of thing. But they whispered and giggled, and I’m almost positive some of them were passing notes, though I couldn’t catch them at it.’

The Sixth Form looked grave at this. Passing notes was ‘not done’ at the Chalet School. The girls fully recognised that it was thoroughly underhand and deceitful. If they felt they *must* communicate with each other they whispered, and risked being caught and punished. But notes were against the unwritten law.

‘We have had no trouble of that kind for more than four years,’ said Frieda at length. ‘I do trust it is not going to come now.’

‘We must all be on our guard when we take prep,’ said Simone soberly.

‘Who is it?’ asked Carla.

Joey shook her head. ‘I couldn’t tell you. I only suspect, and I haven’t any proof, so it wouldn’t be fair to say.’

‘I do not like it,’ said Simone. ‘This means not trusting them, and I do not like that.’

‘Have you any idea *why* they should write notes?’ asked Frieda.

‘No; none at all.’

The Sixth looked glum. They were quite prepared to deal with mischief; but underhand practices were something they rarely came up against.

They were still sitting thinking, when the door opened, and Marie von Eschenau came in. ‘Why, how grave you all look!’ she exclaimed. ‘What is wrong?’

‘Jo thinks the Middles are passing notes,’ said Anne Seymour.

‘Which Middles?’ demanded Marie.

‘Oh, some of the Lower Fifth, if it’s anyone,’ said Jo. ‘But I’ve nothing to go on really, Marie, so it’s no use giving names.’

Marie’s face registered horror. ‘Jo! You cannot mean Thekla?’

Jo grinned. ‘No; I don’t. So don’t get excited. Even if she did, *you* aren’t accountable for your cousin’s idiosyncrasies, my dear.’

‘You never know,’ said Marie despairingly. ‘Thekla is Prussian, and she is so strange. She does not at all seem to mind things *we* dislike!’

‘Oh, she’s better than she was last term,’ said Jo.

‘It is very little better. I wish Cousin Wolfram had never sent her here.’

Jo strolled over, and sat on the arm of the chair into which Marie had collapsed. ‘Marie, I’m going to say to you something my sister said to me when we had that awful Matron here—during Elisaveta’s first term. Do you remember?’

A gleam of mirth lit up Marie’s face. ‘Indeed I do! I remember climbing out of bed and over the verandah to attach snails to her window.’

Jo chuckled. ‘*And* she came bursting out of her room in the middle of the night, with her hair in curling-pins, and said her room was haunted! It must have been fairly ghastly when those snails got going,’ she added pensively.

Everyone present knew the story, those who had not been at school at the time having heard it from the others. Everyone laughed over the recollection. Jo sobered first.

‘I hated Matron, you know,’ she said casually. ‘I said so to my sister, and she said to me then that it was all very well being decent when things were smooth; but we often had rough times given us to show what we were. And she said that we’d had a fairly smooth time up till then, and she thought perhaps we needed that experience. Perhaps *we* need this one now to prove what sort of prefects we really are. Of course, I know we have had any amount of monkey-tricks to settle; but we’ve never had to meet anything you could call *nasty*. Perhaps we are to have it now. If we are, it’s up to us to show how we can deal with it. And we shan’t do that by wailing over it.’

‘Then what do you advise us to do?’ asked Frieda anxiously.

‘Just keep your eyes open. If you do catch anyone passing notes, report her to the prefects as a body at once, and we’ll deal with it.’

That was as far as they could get then, and they began to talk of other things. But every prefect there felt apprehensive about what was coming.

Nothing happened for a few days. Either the need for notes had gone; or else those concerned had taken alarm, and were waiting until the prefects should be lulled into security. The first alarm came from Simone Lecoutier, a full ten days after the prefects had had their conclave.

Joey Bettany, coming up to the prefects’ room from a coaching in mediaeval French with jolly little Mademoiselle Lachenais, was confronted by a very angry Simone, who looked, with her flashing eyes and pinched lips, as Jo had never seen Simone before.

‘Simone! What on earth is the matter?’ she demanded.

‘I have a report to make to you as head-girl,’ said Simone formally.

‘What is it?’ asked Jo, dropping her books on the table, and facing her chum steadily.

'It is that Kitty Burnett and the new girl, Joyce Linton, and Thekla von Stift have been passing notes,' replied Simone. 'When I spoke to them about it, they were impudent to me—at least Joyce and Thekla were. They told me to mind my own business; and Thekla added something rude about my countrymen.'

'Oh, *hang!*' said Jo aggrievedly. 'I do think Thekla might try to behave herself! After all, she *is* Marie's cousin, and it's hard lines on Marie.—Well; what did you do?'

'I told them that I should report them,' said Simone. 'And Joyce—'

'Well, what did she say?' demanded Joey.

'She said, "Report if you like—sneak!"' repeated Simone, going suddenly red.

'I hope you didn't rise?' said Jo anxiously. 'You didn't answer her, did you, Simone?'

She had reason for her anxiety. Simone was an emotional girl, and though her years at the Chalet School had taught her many lessons in self-control she could not always be trusted to guard her tongue.

'I simply repeated that I would report them,' said the French girl steadily. 'I think I was too angry to say anything more, my Jo.'

'Good for you!' Jo's face cleared. 'Did Kitty say anything?' she added.

'She giggled. I think she felt ashamed,' said Simone.

Jo nodded. 'Kit knows, of course, that we don't allow that sort of thing. And she knows what Mary would say about it,' she added, naming Kitty Burnett's elder sister, who had been head-girl the previous year at the Chalet School. 'All right, Simone. I'll call a meeting after Latin to-morrow afternoon, and we can discuss it then. We must have them up before us, of course. We can't allow this sort of thing. But I'd like to have our plans more or less settled before we deal with them.'

'What about Marie?' asked Simone anxiously. She was fond of Marie, and knew how upset she would be by her cousin's behaviour.

'She'll have to know; and she'll be upset, naturally. But it can't be helped. As I said before, no one holds her responsible for her cousin's idiotic behaviour, whatever she may think about it. Have you any idea who began it?'

Simone nodded. 'Yes; it is that new child. I do not like her, my Jo. She is not nice. Her sister Gillian I like; but Joyce is *enfant gâtée*, and she is not sincere.'

'Who cheeked you first?' asked Jo.

'Joyce did. But Thekla was not far behind.'

'Oh, *drat* the pair of them!' exclaimed Jo fervently—and thereby incurred a reprimand for using improper language from Miss Stewart, the history mistress, who came into the room at that moment in search of some exercise-books which should have been given to her before, and got the full beauty of Jo's invective.

The sharp rebuke for her language silenced Jo for the time being; but when the prefects met in solemn conclave the next day, she had recovered herself, and was able to discuss the affair to the fullest extent.

The prefects were rather nonplussed as to what to do. The impertinence would be dealt with in the usual way. But the dishonesty of note-passing was something fresh.

'We can easily settle Kitty,' said Jo shrewdly. 'But Thekla and Joyce are a very different matter. We must see that they never sit together again, of course. But I don't know what else we can do.'

'I'll tell you,' said Frieda Mensch. 'We will say that Joyce must do preparation with the Juniors, and Thekla shall do her work with the Upper Fifth and the Sixth.'

‘It will do for Thekla,’ said Jo. ‘I’m afraid we’ll have to call it off with Joyce and the Juniors. She couldn’t go across to Le Petit Chalet at night—not as long as this weather lasts, anyway.’ And she glanced out of the window at the snow that was dancing down in dizzying circles.

‘Then could we not say they must both work with the Seniors?’ suggested Carla. ‘They will find no one there who would help them to pass notes. And if we warn Anne, she will see that they sit far apart.’

‘Very well,’ said Jo. ‘And I shall make them understand that it is a disgrace, and that we don’t trust them. Meeting at half-past sixteen here, you people—Bianca,’ she turned to a quiet Italian girl, ‘will you see that they are here then?’

‘If I can,’ said Bianca cautiously. ‘But what if they refuse to come?’

‘Thekla may—Joyce won’t,’ said Jo. ‘She’ll be anxious to know what we’re going to do about it. And Kit won’t dare to do anything but come.’

So it was left, and at the appointed time the prefects sat in dignity round three sides of the table, the fourth being left for the three culprits, who presently came, escorted by Bianca. Kitty had been crying—that was quite plain to be seen. Her blue eyes were swollen, and her rosy cheeks all stained with tears. When she was set opposite a very judicial-looking Jo, she began again, despite a surreptitious kick on the ankle from Joyce, who stood erect, her head well back, her whole attitude showing defiance. Thekla was disdainful, her usual method of meeting any English customs she despised—and they were many.

Once the three were there, Jo began at once. ‘You three have been caught passing notes,’ she said in chilly tones. ‘What have you to say for yourselves?’

Kitty sobbed loudly at this, and Jo cast her such a look, that she shivered. ‘I’m not surprised you cry like that,’ said the head-girl. ‘Indeed, after *this*, I don’t think anything you do could surprise me!’

Joyce sprang to Kitty’s defence. ‘It’s all very well for you, Jo Bettany!’ she cried. ‘You can sit there and say horrid things. But if Kitty answers you, you’ll say it’s cheek and haul her over the coals for *that*! I don’t know why you’re making all this fuss about a silly little note or two, I’m sure. Everyone does it!’

‘Not here,’ Jo assured her grimly. ‘Here, we have always considered it utterly dishonourable. Of course, we aren’t responsible for the way they thought at your last school.’

Joyce flushed. ‘It was a jolly sight decenter school than this!’ she retorted.

‘That will do!’ said Jo sternly. ‘You aren’t here to be impertinent. Remember that.’

Conversation languished for a minute or two after that. Then Thekla spoke in her scornful voice. ‘I agree with Joyce that this is most unnecessary,’ she said. ‘After all, what is there in it that you should make so much fuss, and speak so of dishonour?’

‘Why didn’t you whisper your messages if they were so important?’ demanded Jo.

‘And have the mistresses catch us and stop us going to Saturday-night!’ said Joyce. ‘What do you take us for?’

‘Well, I *had* hoped you weren’t deceitful and underhand,’ replied Jo thoughtfully. ‘However, that seems to have been a little mistake on my part.’

Even Joyce winced at this, and Kitty sobbed again. Only Thekla was still. Jo proceeded to improve the occasion.

‘The fact that you were afraid of losing your Saturday-night if you were caught whispering, and so wrote notes to escape that, only shows us that you knew all the time how mean you were being,’ she said. ‘I don’t know if any of you realise that you were *stealing*

when you did it. Oh, yes you were!’—as Joyce opened her mouth to rebut this—‘You were stealing the confidence of the prefect in charge at the time. And you were trading on the fact that the School as a whole considers that sort of thing as dishonest as taking someone else’s pocket-money. There is some excuse for Thekla—she hasn’t been trained to look at things in the same light as we do. There may be some for Joyce—I don’t know about that. Though I must say,’ she added, ‘I never imagined that an English high school would have such a poor standard. But there isn’t the slightest excuse for Kitty.’

‘I’m s-s-sorry!’ sobbed Kitty. ‘I ne-never meant to b-be dishonest!’

‘If you’d stopped to think for one second, you’d have *known* it was,’ said Jo relentlessly. ‘I’ve got nothing more to say to you. I’m too disgusted with your behaviour. You make me feel sick! Please go away, and don’t let us see anything more of you this week if it can be helped. You are a disgrace to the School, and the sooner you realise it the better for you. Now go!’

Crying as if her heart would break, Kitty crept from the room, and sought refuge in her cloakroom, where she cried herself nearly sick. Jo’s words had brought home to her just what she had done; and the knowledge that her own greatly admired elder sister would have been even sterner when she was head-girl made everything seem much worse. Kitty Burnett was heedless, but she was not dishonourable, and the head-girl’s sweeping condemnation of her behaviour gave her a check which made her less thoughtless for the rest of her life.

Kitty having been disposed of, Jo proceeded to deal with the other two.

‘Thekla, you are the oldest,’ she said. ‘However, as I said before, I don’t think you realise yet what we think about such things. Perhaps after another term or two you’ll have managed to take it in. As it is, you can miss the next two Saturdays. You can go to Matron about it, but I expect it will mean early bed.—As for you, Joyce, you seem to be somewhat above yourself, and the only thing I can suggest is that you should try to realise that you are only a Middle—and a very new Middle at that. It’s rather too early for you to have assimilated our ideals, I suppose, though your sister doesn’t seem to have had such trouble. Just get it into your head that all such things as passing notes are despised here, and the people who do them are considered despicable. And remember that you are really a very insignificant person, as well. You can take the same punishment as Thekla, and I hope it’ll teach you not to indulge in such practices. Now you may go—unless anyone else would like to say anything to either of you.’ She looked inquiringly round the ranks of the prefects, but they all shook their heads. They felt that Jo had handled the situation very thoroughly—too thoroughly, almost, one or two of them thought. Judging by the expression on Joyce’s face, it would be long before she forgave the head-girl all the hurts her pride had just received.

Seeing nothing else for it, Thekla led the way out of the room, and Joyce followed her, inwardly raging. That *she*, Joyce Linton, should be spoken to like that! It was outrageous! When they were outside, she swung round, and fled to her dormitory, where she shed tears almost as bitter as poor Kitty, until Matron, coming in for some reason, caught her there, and after scolding her sharply for breaking rules, sent her to the bathroom to wash her face before going downstairs to give in the order-mark she had just been awarded.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST

Jo's drastic treatment of the 'notes' episode put a stop to that particular form of ill-doing. But Joyce didn't forget, and she made up her mind to 'get square' somehow. For one thing, Gillian had heard of it, and she had reproached her young sister for her share in the matter, till Joyce suddenly flared up, and crying, 'Oh, mind your own business, and leave me to mind mine!' rushed off.

Naturally Jo had nothing to do with Gillian's share in the matter, but Joyce chose to blame her for it, and considered that she was a most ill-used person. The friends she had made were of little help to her, for they were, for the most part, heedless young persons, who were under the thrall of her prettiness and the charming manners she could show on occasion, and were not likely to attempt to restrain her in any way.

Joyce brooded over her wrongs for a whole week, at the end of which time she had thought of something to do. She had made cautious inquiries of the others, and found that though the Chalet Middles possessed a reputation for mischief that could certainly not have been bettered anywhere, they had never indulged in a midnight feast.

'Oh, why not?' cried Joyce when she heard this. 'I've always thought that would be one of the best things about boarding-school!'

'I suppose it is that we always have plenty, and it is so delicious,' said Hilda Bhaer, the person to whom she was speaking.

'Oh, but that hasn't anything to do with it!' said Joyce quickly. 'It's the fun of having it when everyone's in bed, and the risk of being caught, and all that sort of thing.'

But Hilda was not adventurous. 'I think it would be very cold,' she said with a slight shiver.

Joyce glanced out of the window where the snow was falling with a vim that seemed to say it would be many a long hour before it stopped. 'Of course we'd have to wrap up,' she agreed. 'If we all caught colds and started 'flu it wouldn't be much fun.'

'English, Joyce? Have you forgotten that this is German day?' asked Frieda Mensch, who came past in time to hear Joyce's last remark. 'A fine, please, and don't forget again.'

She went on, and Joyce stamped her foot. 'What a sickening nuisance those prees are!' she said fervently. 'I loathe the lot of them!'

'That is because you get into so much trouble with them,' said Hilda, who was not a tactful young person. 'Try to remember, Joyce, for it is the rule, and indeed we must keep it.'

'Oh, hang! Do stop talking like a goody-good book!' retorted Joyce.

As she still spoke in English, she fully deserved to be caught again, but for once Fate was kind to her; and gentle, phlegmatic Hilda rarely took offence.

Joyce went off to put her fine into the box, wishing as she went that they had never come here; and Hilda departed to seek Rosa van Buren, who had borrowed her Latin grammar and not returned it.

Whether it was Frieda's punishment, or whether it was her natural love of adventure, Joyce made up her mind to hold that 'midnight' by hook or crook. She selected with care those who were to participate, for already she knew that a good many of the girls would frown on it. This also meant that it could not be held in the dormitory. But Joyce had pitched on a

small room near the head of the stairs, which was used by Matron for a sewing-room. It was at the other end of the corridor from that lady's own bedroom, and that was an advantage. Matey was popularly reported to have the hearing of a lynx!

It was not so hard to get food, for a fine day came, and the girls were all bundled up, and escorted to Spärtz, the little market-town at the foot of the mountain, so that they might have a thorough change. They were allowed to divide up into parties, each party having a mistress or a prefect in charge, and they went to the shops to do the small errands they all had.

Joyce, after some thought, attached herself to Vanna di Ricci, one of the less prominent prefects, and taking advantage of the fact that Vanna went into the biggest shop in the little town on a quest for 'animal' biscuits for Jo Bettany to take up to the Sonnalpe for her nephews and niece the next time she went, contrived to invest in sardines, apricot jam, sugar-biscuits, and a tin of condensed milk. She was forced to borrow from Gillian to pay for them, most of her pocket-money having gone in fines, but Gillian was so glad to see her interested and happy, she would have willingly stripped herself of every penny.

The rest of the party also managed to add to the commissariat, and if their purchases were strikingly varied, that, as Joyce said later on, only added to the interest of the feast. They all had big pockets in their coats, and as they all wore their shawls crossed over and tied behind, it was easy to slip such contraband as sardines and condensed milk into the folds where they were less likely to be noticed.

The feast itself was to take place next day, which was Saturday. If it was a fine day, Jo Bettany and Frieda Mensch were to go up to the Sonnalpe to spend the week-end with their respective sisters, and Gillian would also go, to see her mother, and stay at 'Die Rosen' again, while Elsie Carr, a pretty, dark-haired girl of fifteen, with whom Gillian had struck up quite a friendship, would join them, for she had an elder sister in the Sanatorium, though, as the whole School knew, Lilius Carr was cured now, and was only remaining on in the Tyrol till the summer as an extra precaution.

With two of the principal prefects and her own elder sister away, Joyce felt that there might be some chance of carrying out her plan safely. The others agreed with her, and so it was arranged.

There was a little cupboard in the sewing-room, where oddments were kept, and here the girls contrived to deposit most of their stock before the evening. And a queer mixture it was, for every girl had satisfied her own taste in food. Joyce surveyed the packages happily when she contrived to slip in during the afternoon. At least they would have *enough!*

'I got sardines, so we'd better take up some bread to eat with them,' she informed her band just before Kaffee und Kuchen.

'We can't all do it,' protested Enid Sothern, a pickle of about twelve years old, and a devoted follower of the new girl.

'Oh, well, we older ones will, then,' said Joyce, rather too vaguely, as it turned out later.

It was left at that, and the party dispersed—just in time, too, for Marie von Eschenau came downstairs the next minute, and she would certainly have wondered what seven Middles were doing on the stairs just then. The snow, which had cleared off during the night, had begun falling again shortly after midday, so though they had had a jolly romp outside in the morning, there had been no hope of another, and after Mittagessen—or dinner—they had all settled down in the form-rooms and the common-room with books and table games.

Thekla von Stift had not been with them. She was indolent by nature, and preferred the warmth of the common-room and her comfortable basket-chair near the stove to parading up

to the sewing-room. She had given her contribution to Luise Rotheim, the only other member of the Lower Fifth, Hilda Bhaer, and Joyce, to be among the malcontents, and Luise had conveyed it to the cupboard when she had taken her own. The other members of the party were Klara Melnarti, a chum of Enid Sothern's, and second only to her in mischief; Margritta Ajockz, another member of the Fourth Form; and Mary Shaw from the Third, where she was ringleader. They had rather kicked against having Mary, but she had been with their shopping party, and had become curious when Klara bought a tin of spaghetti. She had worried Klara until that young lady had given away the secret, whereupon Mary insisted on being allowed to join. They had reluctantly agreed on her promising not to let the rest know, so she had trotted along with her contribution to the feast, and was hugging herself that she was 'in with the big girls.'

'How do we arrange?' asked Klara with a giggle when they were all safely in the Fifth form-room again, where there was nobody but themselves.

'Wait until you hear eleven o'clock strike,' began Joyce.

'Eleven—wie—I do not understand,' put in Margritta with a puzzled look.

'Oh—bother!' Joyce proceeded to count up hastily on her fingers. 'Twenty-three, then. When you do hear it, get up and put on your dressing-gown, and come along as quietly as you can. For goodness' sake don't wake up any of the others in your dormy, Margritta!'

'No, I will not,' promised Margritta.

'And don't undress properly, either. It'll be jolly cold if you do, and if we all have snuffles next day, Matey's sure to guess something's been up—she's got such a nasty, suspicious mind!'

Then the bell rang for Kaffee und Kuchen, and they all went back to the common-room, looking as though butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. If Jo had been about, she would certainly have suspected something. But Jo was at the Sonnalpe, having a good time with her nephews and niece and the Robin, and knew nothing about it. The rest of the prefects were not so ready to see things, though Simone Lecoutier did ask Marie if she thought any of that particular crowd could be ill, they were so little trouble.

'Oh, I expect they are tired with the snow-balling this morning,' said Marie happily. 'Do not worry, Simone. We dance to-night, so they can get into no mischief.'

With this, Simone was fain to be satisfied, and as Vanna di Ricci called her attention to something the next moment, she forgot all about it.

How the eight wished the evening would come to an end, I leave anyone interested in this story to guess. It seemed to them as if they had been dancing for hours when the bell rang for Prayers, and they parted—the Catholics to the Fourth form-room, and the Protestants to stay where they were. Then came bedtime, and Joyce, for one, began to wonder if lights-out would never sound. But at last Simone who was on duty rang the bell, and then Bianca di Ferrara, the prefect for their corridor, came to switch off the light, and bid them good-night.

After that, there was a long period, and then Joyce, lying wide awake in her bed, heard subdued voices on the stairs which told her that such of the Staff as lived in the Chalet were coming to bed too. She felt under her pillow for her watch and torch, and anxiously looked at the time. Half-past ten! How fearfully late the Staff were to-night! They ought to get to bed at *least* half an hour before this!

However, the Staff were evidently tired, for soon all sounds ceased, and when Joyce ventured to get up and steal down the aisle between the cubicles of her dormitory, she couldn't

hear a sound. Neither was there any light to be seen with the exception of the very dim light of the night-bulb which burned in every corridor all night.

She slipped quietly along to the sewing-room, and went in. It was in darkness, but she had her own torch, and she had 'borrowed' Gillian's as well, so that when Enid Sothern, the next to arrive, came in with *her* torch, there was a dim light in the room. Hilda Bhaer was the only one of the party who had not arrived, and Joyce was just debating whether she should risk going to wake her when Hilda came, very much ashamed of herself, for she had fallen asleep, and had awakened with a start at ten minutes past eleven—or twenty-three, as all the girls called it.

'We must have thought-transferred you,' said Joyce with a giggle as she shut the door softly after the late-comer. 'That's what woke you, I expect.'

'Or else the cold,' said Thekla with a shiver. 'If I had known how cold it is, I would never have left my warm bed.'

'Oh, rats!' said Joyce lightly. 'It's not too bad. After all, the place is centrally heated. You aren't half a sport, Thekla, if you're going to mind a little coolness. Now then, come on and get out the eats!'

The girls hastened to the cupboard, and while Joyce and Luise handed out the food, the rest set it out on the clean bureau-cover that Joyce had brought from her cubicle. It looked a fine selection when it was all there, though Joyce, Enid, and Mary were rather startled at some of the things. Most of the girls had bought sausages. There were one or two tins of fruit and Joyce's tins of sardines. Klara, who had had a hamper from home that morning, donated a huge cake that was black with richness; and Margritta had bought oranges and bananas. For drink, they would have chocolate made with hot water (from the thermos flasks of those that had them) and a cake of chocolate which Luise Rotheim produced. Joyce's tinned milk would have to sweeten it, as no one had thought of bringing sugar. Then Joyce, with rather the air of a conjuror, produced a tin-opener which she had procured from the kitchen earlier in the day—by what means, she alone knew—and they decided to begin with the sardines. Joyce opened them carefully, for they dared not spill any oil—that would have been a certain way to bring down discovery on themselves.

'Now then, hand out the bread and butter,' she said cheerfully when she had finished.

There was a silence. Everyone looked blankly at everyone else.

'Come on—hurry up!' said Joyce impatiently. Then she looked up. 'Do you mean to say none of you remembered it?' she demanded.

'But you said the elder ones would get it,' protested Mary. 'Guess I never thought of it again. *Say!* Have we to eat 'em in our fingers? What a mess we'll be in!' And she giggled infectiously.

Joyce looked disgusted. 'No; of course not! We'd make ourselves so oily and then the towels would show, and Matey would guess. Oh, I do think some of you might have remembered! I did tell you!'

Eventually, it was decided that the best way was to cut slices off Klara's cake, and lay the sardines on them. It was done, and they ate the queer mixture—Joyce not without some misgivings. She knew that she was rather easily upset.

The fruit was handed round, and they ate *that* in their fingers, taking it in turns to drink the syrup out of the tins. Their thermos flasks must be left for the chocolate which Luise compounded. It was hot, but it had a queer flavour, and one or two of them felt inclined to cavil at the lack of sugar. Still, they all declared they enjoyed it. The oranges and bananas

followed—they had eaten the sausages after the sardines—and they wound up with sweets, which were Mary Shaw’s donation. Finally, there was nothing left but a parcel Thekla had. She opened it, and displayed to view rashers of raw bacon!

‘*Thekla!*’ gasped Joyce when she had recovered from the shock. ‘Whatever possessed you to get *that*? We can’t possibly cook it! It would smell all over the place!’

‘But there is no need to cook it,’ said Thekla calmly. ‘It is smoked—see!’ And she held it so that they saw that the rind was a rich red-brown.

‘But you can’t eat it *raw!*’ exclaimed Enid.

‘Why not?’ demanded Thekla, raising brows of haughty query.

‘Eat raw bacon?’

‘Certainly! I have told you it is smoked.—Luise, will you have some?’

Luise shook her head and giggled. ‘I am so—what do you say?—so full, I could not hold one thing more.’

Joyce, Enid, and Mary all refused the delicacy; and Klara suddenly announced that *she* felt sick, and couldn’t touch it. It was left to Thekla to enjoy it alone, and she ate a whole rasher, though Joyce turned her eyes away, for, like Klara, she was feeling poorly, and she knew that if she saw Thekla eating the uncooked stuff, it would finish her. Finally, they gathered up the crumbs, and put them into the empty stove. The tins were pushed to the back of the cupboard, for they had no other means of disposing of them. Klara took up the remains of her cake; and Margritta tucked the orange and banana skins into the pocket of her dressing-gown. When everything looked as tidy as they could make it, they all whispered that they had had a delightful time, and had enjoyed themselves very much. Then they parted, and went off to their dormitories. For once, Fate was kind to delinquents, and they got back to bed in safety. Joyce, laying her weary head on her pillow, thought that they had managed very well. No one would find out, for it was unlikely that the tins would be discovered on the morrow, and some of them ought to be able to get them safely away before Monday.

Then she cuddled down under her plumeau, and tried to go to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

NEMESIS

Cornelia Flower, head of the Violet dormitory by right of age, was fast asleep, and dreaming wildly that she was crossing the Atlantic on a raft. It was a terribly rough passage, and the raft kept going up and down so violently that Cornelia made up her mind that she would shortly be seasick. 'There must be a *seaquake* going on,' she said to herself. 'Nothing else could make it as rough as all this. Guess the sooner I get across the better.'

At this point she came back to consciousness, and the realisation that someone was shaking her vehemently, and crying, 'Corney—*Corney!* Oh, do wake up! Joyce is ever so ill, and I don't know what to do!'

With a gasp, Cornelia sat up in bed and opened her eyes—only to close them again for a moment, for a brilliant light was glaring straight into them. At the same time, she heard little, heart-rending moans coming from somewhere close at hand. She opened her eyes cautiously again, and found that Violet Allison and Greta Macdonald, two of the girls in the dormitory, were standing by her bedside. Violet had been doing the shaking, and it was Greta who was holding the light which had dazzled her.

'Hello!' she said. 'What's wrong?'

'It's Joyce,' said Violet with a little shiver, for the night was cold, and she had forgotten to put on either dressing-gown or bedroom slippers. 'She's dreadfully ill, Corney. What shall we do?'

'Go back and put on your dressing-gown, you—idiot,' said Corney, restraining her tongue in time. She possessed a wide vocabulary of epithets mostly forbidden at school, and it was not always easy to remember what she might use and what she mightn't.

By this time, she had fully awakened, and the sounds that were coming from Joyce's corner of the room rather frightened her. But Cornelia was fifteen now, and the other children were only thirteen, so she knew she must keep her head. She got up, and flung on her own dressing-gown, and stuck her feet into her slippers. Then she paddled across the room to Joyce's cubicle, and pulled back the curtains. 'Go and switch on the light, Greta,' she said, as she bent over the younger girl. 'You can't see a mite with that torch.'

Greta did as she was asked, and then she, and Violet, now properly arrayed, came back to the cubicle where Cornelia was asking Joyce what was wrong.

'Are you sick?' asked the American girl, using the term in the American sense.

Joyce moaned. '*Sick!* I never felt so awful in my life!'

'Here, Vi! You scoot and fetch Matey,' ordered Cornelia. She felt rather alarmed, for Joyce was a queer whitish-green in hue, and her hands felt so cold and clammy when the elder girl touched them. 'And Greta, you'd better hop back to bed. There'll only be a fuss if we're all here when Matey comes.'

'Can't I help at all?' asked Greta. 'Shall I bring my bottle?'

'Yes; and mine, too,' said Cornelia. 'She's like a lump of ice!'

The two hot-water bottles were brought, and one was tucked in at Joyce's feet, and the other shoved down behind her back. Then Cornelia, clutching at her sick-nurse training, sent Greta to the bathroom to see if the water in the taps was hot, and if so, to bring a glassful. The

water proved to be fairly hot, and Greta brought the glass. Cornelia slipped an arm under Joyce's head, and held the glass to her lips.

'No—no!' moaned the patient.

'Guess you'd better,' said Cornelia persuasively. 'Come on, Joycie! Just a sip! It's only hot water, and it'll maybe warm you a mite.'

Thus urged, Joyce tried to sit up, and thereby wrought her own undoing. By the time Matron came from the upper dormitory, whither Violet had had to follow her, Joyce was thoroughly and completely sick. Cornelia had kept her head, and sent Greta for a basin from the bathroom, but she was unfeignedly thankful to have someone in authority to take charge. She felt that things were getting beyond her.

Matron had a stiff time of it. Joyce was really ill, as the result of the appalling mixture she had swallowed, and it was a good hour before they were able to roll her in blankets and carry her along to San. Matron had sent Cornelia for Miss Annersley, the senior mistress, and Miss Annersley in her turn roused Moida, one of the maids, to light the kitchen stove and heat water for bottles.

'I can't understand it!' said Matron anxiously, as she mixed sal-volatile for Joyce. 'She's had nothing that could have upset her like this, and yet she is really ill.'

'A chill, perhaps?' suggested Miss Annersley, who was holding the half-fainting child up in her arms. 'There, Joyce! You'll be all right soon.'

After another violent spasm of sickness, Matron dosed her with the sal-volatile, and then settled down to watch its effects. 'If this doesn't check it, I must try brandy,' she said. 'I don't like giving it to children, but we must stop this sickness somehow.'

'Shall I ring up Dr Erckhardt?' asked Miss Annersley. 'It would be easier for him to get up than for the Sonnalpe people to get down. Besides, they are all very busy up there, I know. Mrs Russell told me that they have some very bad cases, and they are all working to the limit.'

Matron shook her head. 'Not yet, I think. I don't believe it's anything more than an extra-violent bilious attack. She was certainly all right when she went to bed, and no illness could develop with quite such rapidity.'

Luckily, her remedies began to take effect shortly after, and by six o'clock in the morning Joyce was lying, very limp and pallid, but feeling more like herself.

And then Sophie Hamel, the prefect who was head of the Green dormitory, came along to report that Mary Shaw had been sick, and complained of pain.

'*What?*' Matron was galvanised into an upright position, though a moment before she had been bending over Joyce, who seemed inclined to doze a little.

'She has been very sick, Matron,' said Sophie. 'I gave her hot water to drink, and rolled her in a blanket, but she cries very much, and says she has pain.'

'I'll come.—Miss Annersley, will you stay with Joyce till I return?' And Matron stalked out of the room after Sophie, resolved in her own mind to find out what was at the bottom of all this. When Violet had been hunting for her, she had been with Thekla von Stift, who had roused her whole dormitory by wild nightmare from which they were unable to wake her. Matron had wakened her, needless to state, and she had meant to go back later on to see how the girl was sleeping. But Joyce's attack had seemed so serious, that she had had no time. And now, here was Mary Shaw also bilious, judging by Sophie's account. There was something behind it all, for Matron knew that the food they had had the day before would not account for all this.

She found Mary very poorly and inclined to be desperately sorry for herself, but not nearly so ill as Joyce. She had wakened very sick, and she had the pain her orgy merited; but already the effects were passing off. Matron bundled her up in a blanket, and took her to the school Sanatorium, where she tucked her into bed with a couple of hot bottles, gave her some sal-volatile, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her drop off to sleep.

But Joyce roused up, complaining of fresh sickness, and from then until midday she had recurring bouts, till Matron was thankful to see Dr Erckhardt from Spärtz, when he strode into the room. Mary was better, and was back in her own dormitory, feeling very sorry for herself, and very hollow. But Joyce was completely exhausted by the sickness, and she lay limply on her pillows, every scrap of her pretty colour gone; her very curls dank and straight on her brows.

‘They have eaten something to disagree with them,’ was the doctor’s verdict when he had heard Matron’s account and examined his patients. ‘That is it without a doubt. The little one has not been seized so badly; but this one has had a severe attack.’

‘Then it’s something they’ve had apart from the school meals,’ said Matron with decision. ‘I shall have to find out what it is later on. An older girl disturbed another dormitory through having nightmare last night, and I feel pretty sure that it is all from the one cause.’

The doctor nodded. ‘Perhaps they have been eating too many sweets and cakes. However, castor-oil will soon put them all right again, and, doubtless be a lesson to them not to be greedy another time.’

He departed after that, and Matron set to work and mixed three jorums of castor-oil. Then she went to the Green dormitory where Mary was lying, feeling somewhat ashamed now that she was better, and wishing that she might get up, for it was very dull lying in bed with nothing to do.

‘Now, then,’ said Matron briskly, ‘sit up and take this. Then, if you are all right, you may, perhaps, get up for an hour or so this afternoon. There isn’t much wrong with you now.’

Mary sat up obediently; but when she took the cup and saw what it contained, her face lengthened woefully. ‘Oh, Matron! It’s such a lot!’ she protested.

‘And girls who disturb everyone else during the night because they have been greedy require a good dose,’ retorted Matron grimly. ‘Down with it, and don’t keep me standing here when I’m nearly run off my feet as it is!’

With Matron looking and sounding like that, Mary saw no help for it. She shut her eyes, swallowed the nauseous draught as best she could, and then collapsed shuddering on her pillows. ‘Oooh! What *horrid* stuff it is!’

Matron produced a piece of dry bread. ‘Eat that, and the taste will go,’ she ordered.

Mary obeyed meekly, and then lay down again, resolving in her own mind never to have anything to do with a midnight feast again. Matron covered her up, after feeling her hot bottle to be sure that it was still comfortably warm, and then departed to dose Joyce.

Joyce was still too limp and weak to rebel. She took the oil without a word, and Matron, after settling her, sent Violet Allison, who was passing at the time, to tell Thekla von Stift to come to her room.

Thekla, who had already had a fierce battle with Luise Rotheim that morning over whether they should confess or not, started guiltily when she heard Violet’s message. She would have liked to refuse, but ‘Matey’ was not a person you could disobey with impunity, so she went upstairs reluctantly.

‘Violet says you wish to see me, Matron,’ she said stiffly in her own tongue.

‘So I do,’ said Matron vigorously. ‘You had nightmare last night, so you must have been eating something to disagree with you. Can’t have that sort of thing going on, so you’ll have to have some medicine to set you right. Here you are—drink it up.’

Thekla took the cup and looked at its contents. Then she set it down on the table. ‘I am quite well, and I do not need this,’ she said.

‘Nonsense! You don’t get nightmare for nothing!’ said Matron brusquely. ‘Take it at once, Thekla, and let me have no more nonsense!’

Thekla set her lips. ‘I will not drink this,’ she said. ‘I am quite well and do not need it. Besides, I dislike it.’

‘So do most folk,’ said Matron. ‘That doesn’t alter the case, however. Either you drink this without any trouble; or I’ll treat you as if you were one of the Juniors, and hold your nose. But drink it you shall.’

Matron was not tall, but she was very wiry, and there was no doubt that she was perfectly capable of doing as she said. Thekla hated castor-oil, but she had no mind to be treated like a baby. She took the cup again, and after one or two efforts, contrived to down its contents.

‘Now you may go,’ said the tyrant of the San. ‘I’ll see you this evening before Abendessen, and then you can explain to me just why you three have been upset like this.’

Dreadfully uncomfortable in her mind, Thekla left the room. She didn’t want to say anything about the night before, for she guessed that there would be trouble over it. She was the oldest girl who had been present, though Luise was only a few months younger. She had the feeling that she would receive a good share of the blame, and she felt that she didn’t deserve it. If Joyce Linton hadn’t suggested it, she would never have thought of doing such a thing.

As it happened, there was no need for Matron to see Thekla. Luise Rotheim, urged thereto by a most uneasy conscience, had sought out Miss Annersley at the time that the castor-oil controversy was going on in Matron’s room, and was confessing everything to her, as Mademoiselle Lepâttré was up at the Sonnalpe for the week-end on business concerns.

To say that Miss Annersley was startled, is to express it mildly.

‘You mean to say that eight of you went to the little sewing-room and had a feast?’ she exclaimed. ‘*When* did you go?’

‘At half-past twenty-three,’ faltered Luise.

‘Where did you get the food?’

Luise told her, and Miss Annersley’s expression became more and more grim as the girl stumbled on.

‘I suppose you were not alone—you, and Joyce, and Mary, and Thekla—Oh, but you said eight of you. Go and tell the others to come to me here at once, and come back yourself. Not Joyce or Mary, of course. They are still in bed, and Joyce has been very ill indeed. But the rest.’

Luise went, now thoroughly miserable, and presently returned with the others. She and Thekla looked flushed, and Thekla was plainly angry. She had been furious when Luise owned that she had confessed, and if she had dared, she would have refused to come. But there it was. In this wretched place you didn’t dare refuse—or at any rate, not for long. As for Hilda, Margritta, Enid, and Klara, they were, in their secret souls, not sorry that it had all come out. They had heard wildly-exaggerated rumours about Joyce Linton’s illness, and they knew the cause of it very well. Cornelia Flower had embellished her account of the night’s happenings, and Violet and Greta had assured them that they thought Joyce was going to die,

she was so ill! So far, Sunday had been a thoroughly miserable day to them, and, as Enid said later on, if they got their share of trouble, it would make them feel better in their minds, anyhow.

Having got the five together, Miss Annersley catechised them severely, till she had got most of the story out of them. Inwardly, she was consumed with admiration for their digestive powers. Outwardly, she was all that convention demanded she should be. She told them that she was bitterly ashamed to think that Chalet girls could be so greedy and thoughtless. She impressed on them the seriousness of Joyce's illness. She added that this meant that they were not to be trusted—which reduced Luise, Hilda, and Margritta to tears at once—and then she issued sentence. For a whole week they would have no cakes, no jam, no sweets, and no fancy-bread. They would be allowed only the simplest and plainest of food. Also, as they obviously did not know how to spend their money wisely, all they had would be confiscated, and it would be doled out to them only for necessary expenses until Half-term, by which time she hoped they would have learned a little more sense. The same punishments would apply to Joyce and Mary when they were better.

'But why should we have no less punishment than Joyce?' cried Thekla. 'It was her idea!'

Miss Annersley took no notice of this. As she said later on, if you once listen to tales, you are lost. Besides, she had no great fondness for Thekla von Stift, who had been a tiresome pupil all the previous term, and seemed little improved this. So she merely told the girls they might go, and then went back to her book which had been laid aside when Luise came with her story. Presently she laid it down, and began to laugh. She laughed till the tears ran down her face as she thought of the shock some of the feasters must have got when Thekla insisted on eating her raw bacon.

'But it's just as well Matron gave her a stiff dose of castor-oil,' she thought when she was calm once more. 'Otherwise, we might have fresh trouble later on. As for Joyce, it strikes me she will bear watching.'

And so said the rest of the Staff when they heard what had caused the upset which had worried them all so much.

CHAPTER VIII

STAFF-EVENING

The people who had been spending the week-end at the Sonnalpe came down on Monday morning to find Joyce still in bed and Mary out of school, as a result of their Saturday-night orgy. The rest of the party were very subdued, even Thekla wearing a depressed air very unlike her. Naturally, the latest was poured into the ears of the four, and they promptly expressed themselves on the subject with point.

'I'm not surprised at *anything* those Middles do!' said Jo. 'But I must say I didn't think they could be quite such pigs! As for Hilda and Luise, they ought to be ashamed of themselves. They've been here longer than any of the others, and they know quite well that that sort of thing isn't done.'

'Oh, how *could* Joyce?' cried Gillian. 'She's awfully easily upset, and what Mummy would think if she knew, I don't know. She'd be horribly worried.'

'I expect Joyce did not think about that,' put in gentle Frieda, always ready to live up to the meaning of her name and to make peace. 'Perhaps it was the excitement that attracted her.'

'And perhaps it wasn't,' said Elsie Carr. 'She's your sister, Gill, but I must say I think her behaviour's the limit!—Who else was in it, did you say, Evvy?'

Evadne Lannis, their informant, obliged at once. 'Thekla, and Margritta and Enid, and Mary Shaw. Mary was pretty sick yesterday, but she's most fit now, though Matey won't let her come into school till to-morrow. Thekla had nightmare and woke us all up by screeching in the night. We couldn't rouse her, though we sure shook up her brains. The rest don't seem to have hurt any.'

'They've got a nice punishment, anyhow,' said Anne Seymour, balancing on the back of a chair. 'No cakes or sweets for a week; and no pocket-money except for absolute necessities!'

'They jolly well deserve it,' said Jo, 'and I hope it's taught them a lesson.'

However, the Staff-evening, which had been postponed unavoidably till that week, was to take place on the Saturday, so after Monday no one troubled much about the latest affair. It is true that Joyce was furious when she found that it had all been found out, and did not spare her words when she met Luise. But that young lady had been brought to her senses with a sharp jerk, and she refused to regret anything she had done. Finding it no use, Joyce desisted; but she by no means forgot, and she vowed she would 'get square' with the Austrian girl before they were much older.

The work that had to be crammed into the last two days of the school week gave her no chance for it then, and Saturday brought with it such a feeling of excitement that she shelved the matter for the time being.

'What do they do with us?' asked Gillian of Evadne Lannis during the mending-hour that morning.

'No idea,' said Evadne, who hated sewing of any kind, and was in trouble over a huge hole in her stocking-heel.

'They gave a fancy-dress dance one year,' said Carla von Flügen, who happened to be sitting near them. 'And another year they left it till the summer term, and we had a picnic up on the Mondscheinspitze.'

‘And the year before that they had it in the Christmas term, and they dressed up as pierrots and gave us a concert,’ put in Sophie Hamel.—‘Scissors, please, Evvy.’

‘I can tell you what it *won't* be this year,’ said Jo, stitching at the finger-ends of her gloves with great rapidity, and more heed for strength than beauty in her sewing. ‘They haven’t had any floors waxed, so it’s not going to be a dance.’

‘Hasn’t anyone any idea?’ asked Gillian plaintively. ‘I rather like to know what’s coming so that I can be prepared.’

‘No; but it will be something very pleasant, I know,’ Marie von Eschenau assured her.—‘There! That is the last of my mending! Now I must write to Mamma, for I have not answered her last letter.’

‘And I must write to Bernhilda,’ said Frieda, rolling up her last pair of stockings.

‘Give her my love,’ mumbled Jo, who was biting off the end of her thread as she spoke.

‘And mine!’—‘And mine, too!’ The chorus ran quickly round. Frieda’s sister had been very popular when she was at the school, and she still held her place in the affections of those girls who had known her.

‘There’s the bell; and I haven’t finished these stockings yet!’ groaned Evadne. ‘I just despise sewing!’

‘Give them to me. I will finish them for you,’ said Marie, stretching out her hand for them.

Evadne shook her head. ‘Guess I’ll do my own dirty work—thanks, all the same. But I sure wish someone would invent stockings that *never* went holey!’

‘There’s a fortune waiting for the man that *does*!’ said Jo feelingly. ‘To say nothing of the blessings of millions! Come on! We shall be late for Guides if we don’t buck up.’

They put their sewing away, and then scurried off to Guide meeting which was always held at this hour on Saturdays. Both Gillian and Joyce had been Guides in England, and it had been an easy matter to arrange for their transfers. Matron said she was thankful. Such girls as were not Guides came to her for extra needlework, and one of the Staff took them for a walk at noon if it were fine. Matron was always busy, and she was inclined to resent this taking up of her time.

After Guides, they raced upstairs to change from uniform to the brown velveteen frocks they always wore when not in uniform. No one was going up to the Sonnalpe to-day, for no one wanted to miss the Staff-evening.

‘What shall we do this afternoon?’ asked Gillian as she came downstairs again behind Elsie Carr.

‘Walk, of course. It’s a jolly day,’ said Elsie appreciatively. ‘Just look at the sun! I expect the snow will begin to go presently, so that means an early spring.’

‘It will be awfully messy when it *does* thaw—all that snow!’ said Gillian.

Margia Stevens who was with them laughed. ‘You haven’t been here before or you’d know that it goes like a flash,’ she said. ‘We don’t have the awful days and days of mud you get in England. We generally have high winds, and they dry it off in half no time.’

‘Wonder if we’ll have a flood this year?’ said Cornelia Flower pensively. ‘Remember last year?’

‘I should think I do! That was when poor old Stacie got hurt,’ replied Elsie.

Gillian had been told the tale of Stacie’s accident. She also knew that when the girl had run away, after making herself thoroughly miserable at school by her priggish, silly ways, she had doomed herself to a far worse punishment than anyone had foreseen at the time. But that accident had helped to peel off the veneer which had hidden the real girl from view, and Stacie

herself said that in some ways it had been worth it after nearly a whole year of being chained to her couch.

The walk was quite a jolly one, for the day was mild, and the girls had had so much confinement to the house owing to the storms which had come after Christmas, that they were somewhat out of walking trim. They went round the lake to Seehof, far down on the bank opposite to Briesau where the school was situated. Here there was a big hotel which, however, was closed at this season of the year. When they reached it, Miss Wilson, who was in charge, gave the word, and they turned back, for the more open weather had made it dangerous to attempt to cross the lake on the ice. It was quite half an hour past their usual time when they got back for Kaffee und Kuchen, and they ate in considerable excitement.

Just as they were finishing, the door of the common-room opened, and Miss Leslie, the mathematics mistress, appeared. 'I've just come to tell you people not to change to-night,' she announced briskly. 'We aren't going to dance, and Mademoiselle thinks you will be warmer in your velveteens.'

'Miss Leslie, be a gem and tell us what you are going to do,' coaxed Anne Seymour.

Miss Leslie laughed. 'What cool impudence! If I did, I should deserve to be—turned out of it altogether! No; you may hold your horses till nineteen this evening, Anne. It's not so very long now.' Then she whisked away, and the girls were left to their speculations.

At Abendessen, which came at half-past eighteen that night, a message was brought to Jo to say that the Staff were having their meal by themselves, and the prefects were to take charge in the Speisesaal. When the girls had finished, they were to go to the hall which had been built for such affairs, and take their seats.

'Then it's a play or something like that, and they're all dressed and made up, and don't want us to see them,' decided Jo aloud. 'What fun! Hurry on, everyone. The sooner we're finished, the sooner to have the fun!'

After that, everyone ate at a rate which would have drawn remonstrances at least from Matron, had she been there to see them. When the meal was over, Jo said grace and then rapped on the table with a fork.

'Anyone who wants to wash fall out and stand by the windows,' she ordered. 'The rest of you lead on into Hall. Juniors have cushions on the floor, and the rest sit as you like; only no scrums! Marie and Frieda will take charge. Simone and I will look after the folk who want to go to the Splasheries.'

They formed into line, and while the majority went into Hall, Jo and Simone led the rest off to the Splasheries to see that people merely washed their hands, and indulged in no wild pranks. Then they, too, went on, and presently the big room was full of girls, all laughing and chattering, and speculating as to what was to come. Some of the girls were in favour of scenes from Shakespeare or Molière. Others thought it must be a modern comedy. Cornelia Flower nearly brought down the house by suggesting that the staff would do 'Charley's Aunt'!

'As if they *could!*' scoffed Jo. 'Do talk sense, Corney!'

'I know,' said Frieda, with a wicked look at one or two people near at hand. 'They are going to perform some of the Ku Klux Klan scenes out of those "Elsie" books of Jo's.'

The persons hit at went red and wriggled. They themselves had tried to utilise those scenes for their own nefarious purposes. But how mean of Frieda to drag it up after more than a year!

However, the curtains draped across the platform at the top end of the room were being drawn apart, so Evadne, Margia, Cornelia, Cyrilla, and the rest of that coterie held their

tongues, and stared eagerly. The next moment the stage was in full view, and the excited girls saw a strange sight.

At one side was a lady who was nearly as broad as she was long. She wore an ample skirt of black, with a huge, Paisley-patterned shawl, a bonnet of the coal-scuttle shape adorned with a perfect flower-garden of artificial flowers. A coal-black corkscrew curl peeped out at either side of a rubicund face. She had heavy black eyebrows—later on, Miss Wilson spent nearly an hour trying to remove those eyebrows—and her full, red lips parted to show a middle tooth or so missing. The girls stared in bewilderment, for they simply couldn't recognise her. Behind her stood a motley throng, all as rigid as possible. A tall slim figure in kilts, with hair powdered and tied back in a queue, and topped by a tam-o'-shanter, was plainly recognisable as Prince Charlie *and* Miss Stewart. Matron, wearing mid-Victorian garb with a cap on her smoothly-banded hair, and bearing a lamp, the English girls knew to be Florence Nightingale. Queen Victoria, too, clad in the flowing white gown portrayed in the picture which shows her at her first council, was quite unmistakable. Little Miss Nalder was, perhaps, rather more tanned than the queen had ever been, but she looked very well for all that.

Then Jo Bettany suddenly cried out, 'Oh, Napoleon!' at the figure on the far side, and the girls got a shock as they realised that even the Visiting Staff had been pressed into service, for 'Napoleon' was no other than Herr Helfen who came up once a fortnight to give 'cello lessons. But some of the others were not so easily recognised, and a good many of the Continental girls had no idea what it all meant.

It was left to Marie von Eschenau to enlighten them. 'Why, it is Mrs Jarley and the Waxworks we read of in literature two terms ago!' she exclaimed. 'But what a clever idea! Only what is going to happen?'

'And who on earth is playing Mrs Jarley?' demanded Jo perplexedly.

Her clear tones reached the actors, and one or two of them forgot they were waxworks, and grinned involuntarily.

'There is La France,' murmured Simone sentimentally. 'Ah, la belle France!'

'Don't be soppy!' said Jo austerely. 'But doesn't Mademoiselle look jolly!' she added.

At this point, Mrs Jarley thought it well to open the show, for La France was blushing wildly, and Struwwelpeter was shaking with suppressed laughter. Raising her long wand, she opened her mouth, and gave the original Mrs Jarley's speech in a deep bass voice, the result of trying to keep down her own giggles.

'*Miss Wilson!*' gasped Frieda. 'But I should never have known her!'

'*Bill!*' supplemented Jo. 'I say! What a splendid get-up!'

But Mrs Jarley had finished, and was now bustling round with her wand and a duster, pretending to oil the waxworks, and incidentally seizing the chance to hiss at Aladdin and Struwwelpeter who were rapidly becoming hysterical, 'Stop giggling, you two!' in her most ferocious whisper.

Then the show began, and the girls rocked as the show-woman pointed out the awful consequences of not attending properly to one's toilet as evinced by Shock-Headed Peter. Miss Edwards really looked awful; and normally she was the terror of all untidy Juniors! Aladdin was introduced as 'a lad of daring and courage, who fears neither man nor beast!' and Cornelia and Co, with vivid recollections of Miss Norman's shrieks when a mouse had been introduced into prep one night, held their sides.

Chopin (the school's eccentric singing-master, Mr Denny) was, according to Mrs Jarley, an admirer of sweet, pretty tunes, and Carla and Margia clung together at the description, for

if there *was* anything ‘Plato’ hated, it was airs of just that particular type.

Florence Nightingale, so the lady assured the audience, was an excellent nurse, capable of attending to any illness, however bad, and a great believer in the efficacy of *castor-oil*—whereat Joyce, Thekla, and Mary all went scarlet, and Joyce muttered angrily.

They all had a turn, and Miss Wilson showed herself so clever at hitting off weaknesses as well as making sly, topical allusions, that the girls were nearly weeping with laughter before she had got very far. Herr Anserl, the old and hair-trigger-tempered piano-master, who had only the pick of the pupils, received a cheer when he was introduced as the Tyrol’s great national hero, Andreas Hofer. Miss Annersley, as Maria-Theresa, Austria’s warrior-queen, got another, and remained rigid, for she had an awful feeling that her hair, which had been pinned into ringlets, was gradually escaping its pins, and before long would be lying in its usual straight lengths about her shoulders.

Then a sensation—quite unrehearsed!—occurred. Bonny Prince Charlie, Charlotte Corday, and Garibaldi had been accommodated with seats on a bench that had been set rather near the edge of the platform. Mrs Jarley bumped against it—she was not accustomed to wearing a train—and it tipped off backwards, bearing with it its occupants who, from the very way they had fallen, were unable to help themselves. So they remembered they were waxworks, and stayed as they were, with only the soles of their feet showing down the side—the bench had been set at the side—whereupon Mrs Jarley promptly seized the opportunity to read her audience a lecture on how to preserve presence of mind even when one’s position suddenly became inverted.

Finally, the entertainment wound up with a song which contained solo and chorus, and was the work of the united Staff. It was in English, of course, as the whole show had been, and was accompanied by Chopin, who forgot that he was a dummy, and, as Jo said afterwards, ‘Spread himself lavishly over the keyboard, just as usual.’

Mrs Jarley opened the ball.

‘If some fine or rainy day you find trouble on the way—
Say an unexpected dose of castor-oil—
Or, say, trouble you’ve been rigging, and you’re due to get a wiggling,
Don’t allow yourself to fall into turmoil.
Just pull yourself together, and never mind the weather,
And remember you should never trouble trouble.
Trot out both bright and *e-arly*, and visit Mrs Jarley,
And she’ll provide you with your very double.

Now then, chorus, waxworks!’

The waxworks took it up with a fine vigour.

‘So go to Mrs Jarley on the spot
If your work is wrong or if you’ve made a blot.
She will straight provide your double
And that little bit of trouble
Disappears; for what *you’d* have, your dummy’s got!’

Florence Nightingale opened the next verse in her usual crisp manner:

‘If in a moment’s passion, you should join the ruling fashion,
And should bob your hair alone and all unaided,’

Maria-Theresa took it up, while Simone Lecoutier, to whose address this was, went darkly red, and stared straight in front of her:

‘Then you suddenly regret, and your family’s upset,
And you have no wish your folly be paraded,’

then—

‘This needs no peroration. Just call in consultation
Mrs Jarley; she’ll assist you in a trice,’

announced Joan of Arc melodiously; Aladdin following on with—

‘And while friends are talking rudely, there’s no need to go subduedly.
For a dummy ne’er minds chaff, which is so nice!’

‘Chorus!’ shouted Mrs Jarley, conducting wildly with her pointer, while Queen Victoria ducked violently to avoid having an eye put out.

‘Then go to Mrs Jarley on the spot
If you’ve bobbed and later wish that you had not.
Till your hair is grown once more
Keep your dummy to the fore
To take for you the chaff you should have got!’

The last verse was even more strung out in a laudable desire to see that everyone did his or her share towards the gaiety of the evening.

Queen Victoria carolled as a beginning:

‘When you’ve floured your neighbour’s hair—’

‘When you’ve tried to prove a chair-
Back is wider than your friend declares it is—’

chimed in Andreas Hofer with a most unwaxworklike twinkle.

‘If you’ve giv’n the school a shock by the boiling of the clock’

came in muffled tones from the overturned bench where Garibaldi was nearly suffocated between laughter and dust.

‘If you’ve made bath-water rise up with a fizz,’

declaimed Chopin in his sweetest tenor notes.

‘If at Indians you’ve been playing—’

was La France’s contribution.

‘If in short you’ve been a-straying
From the paths of good and well-conducted youth,’

bellowed Prince Charlie, evidently afraid that he would never be heard unless he yelled at the top of his voice.

Maria von Lichtenstein and Rembrandt took up the tale:

‘And you know you’re in for trouble, then there’s nothing like a double
Made by Mrs J., and that’s the golden truth!’

Finally, the whole party gave the chorus, fortissimo, and con amore:

‘Then go to Mrs Jarley on the spot,
When you know the water’s certain to be hot.
You’ll be saved recrimination
By a wax rep-re-sentation
And you’ll find that this advice is worth a *lot!*’

Chopin wound up with some striking chords, and the show was at an end. The girls shouted, though more people than one looked very sheepish during the song, and Joey Bettany, as soon as the curtains were drawn together, remarked, ‘Well, no one can say they’ve let any of us off, can they?’

‘Simone’s hair—’ began Frieda.

‘To say nothing of the time you and Marie and Jo floured other folk’s hair,’ added Cyrilla.

‘And what price the clock last term?’ asked Jo with a grin.

‘It was all good,’ said Simone with finality in her tones.—‘Oh, what is going to happen now?’

‘Refreshments,’ said Mrs Jarley, suddenly emerging from the curtains, her train held well out of the way, and her bonnet slung by its ribbons over one arm. ‘Come along to the Speisesaal, all of you!’

She led the way, escorting La France, to the Speisesaal where a gorgeous meal was spread. Jellies, creams, fruit, sweets, chocolates, cakes, and sandwiches of all kinds covered the table; and there were frothing chocolate with whipped cream, and iced lemonade to drink. The waxworks waited assiduously on their guests, and saw that they had a good time.

‘Any castor-oil going, Florence?’ demanded saucy Jo of Florence Nightingale as she held out her glass for a fresh libation of lemonade.

‘Plenty in the medicine-cupboard if you’d prefer it to this,’ retorted the lady.

‘No, thanks; I bar luxuries!’ And Jo sipped her lemonade rapturously.

‘Mrs Jarley, how have you taken out your tooth?’ asked Marie.

‘Black court-plaster. You surely didn’t think I would sacrifice a perfectly good tooth to your amusement?’ demanded the lady.

‘Oh, *no!* But I wondered how you managed, for, of course, I knew that your teeth were what you had grown,’ explained Marie, becoming rather confused.

‘What *I* should like to know,’ said Frieda, ‘is how you are so wide? For if it is cushions, you must be melting.’

‘It is! And you’re quite right, Frieda, I feel suffocated!’

‘That’s what I felt like, lying upside down like that,’ sighed Garibaldi—Mr Denny’s sister, who taught Italian and Spanish and advanced German. ‘I never knew before that dust could be so overpowering.’

‘Well,’ said Jo, rising to her feet, her tumbler in her hand, ‘I think the whole School agrees with me that it’s been the best Staff-evening we’ve ever had. Ladies, I propose the health of Mrs Jarley and her Waxworks! May *all* their shadows never grow any less! Come along, everyone!’

The girls jumped to their feet, cups and glasses held high. With one voice they shouted out the German toast: 'Prosit!'

Then they all drained their cups and glasses, and Marie called on La France to reply.

The lady with the Cap of Liberty perched at a rakish angle on her grey locks rose to her feet. 'My dear children, we are so pleased to have pleased you,' she said in her own language. 'We have enjoyed it as well as you, and we feel that your pleasure has more than repaid us for our work.'

'And now,' interrupted the Lady with the Lamp, 'as it is two hours after the Juniors' bedtime, I'm going to send them off. Some of them are nearly asleep already.' She turned to Portia—her colleague who had charge of domestic affairs at Le Petit Chalet—'Matron, will you come?'

Portia nodded. 'I quite agree. Come along, little ones; say good-night, and we'll go.'

The little ones went obediently. They were all accustomed to rendering the most absolute and cheerful obedience, and on the rare occasions when anyone did rebel, she soon felt herself to be a perfect outcast until she had given in, and all was well again. Florence Nightingale saw them over to their own abode, Struwelpeter and Aladdin following as soon as they had collected their belongings, and then she came back, and packed off the Middles and the Seniors. It was nearly half-past twenty-two o'clock when the last prefect departed bedwards, and by that time those of the Staff who were not resident had gone too. Finally, Miss Wilson dropped into a chair in the Staff-room, and proceeded to unpack her stuffing while the rest, in various attitudes of weariness, watched her.

'It's been quite a good show,' she said as she tossed the last cushion at her great friend, Miss Stewart.—'There you are, Con! And never again, not even for a Staff-evening, will I consent to be padded like this. I should think I must have lost pounds of flesh!'

'You look pounds slimmer,' yawned Miss Leslie, getting up from her stool. 'Well, I'm for bed. Good-night, everyone! Thank goodness, to-morrow is Sunday, and breakfast is an hour later!'

And as the weary Staff retired to their well-earned rest, they fully agreed with her. Mrs Jarley had been great fun, but it was a tiring affair.

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE COOKERY

The Sunday following the Staff-evening went by in peace and quiet. The girls had plenty to discuss in 'Mrs Jarley,' and even Thekla the firebrand was quite bland for her. On the Monday, Joyce Linton returned to school, having been kept apart from the others all the previous week until the Saturday. She had had a sharp attack, and, like a good many other highly-strung children, she had complicated matters by running a temperature for the first day or two. Taking into consideration her mother's illness, Dr Erckhardt thought it better to keep her quiet, and when Dr Russell—Dr Jem to the School—came down from the Sonnalpe on the Thursday with a message for his young sister-in-law and heard the whole story, he agreed.

On the Wednesday following, the Lower Fifth took their turn in the Domestic Economy class. This was the fourth since the beginning of term, and they were especially thrilled about it, for they were to start cooking to-day. On the first day they had been instructed in the art of sweeping and dusting. On the second, they had learned how to wash sundry articles, and Frau Mieders, their mistress, had shown them how to starch and iron. This had been a thrilling lesson, for Evadne Lannis used her iron too hot, and the resultant well-toasted camisole had brought shrieks of protest from the mistress. Joyce, on the other hand, had used hers too cold, and *her* garments had looked as if they were rough-dried.

On the previous Wednesday, they had been taught how to clean silver and fine brass, and here Evadne had shone for once, for she owned silver toilet articles and had to keep them clean herself. So she needed little teaching, and the spoons and rose-bowls entrusted to her positively glittered when she had finished with them. They had also learned how to apply blacklead and polishes of that nature, and when Matron saw them afterwards, she ordered them all off to hot baths at once.

But to-day was to come the most exciting thing of all, and the one they had looked forward to with most interest. They were to cook Mittagessen for the entire School. Afterwards, they would be allowed to make cakes for tea; and, of course, they would be shown the most scientific ways of laying tables and washing up. Cooking had been the job of the Sixth Form on the Monday, and the fried fish they had produced had appeared at table in varying stages—from perfectly done fillets to a queer-looking mush which had been Joey's effort.

'Guten Morgen!' said Frau Mieders as they all trooped into the big kitchen. 'To-day we cook. Have you then your aprons?'

They had; Matron had seen to that. The girls solemnly arrayed themselves in the big holland overalls, drew on their cooking-sleeves, and tucked their hair away into the close-fitting caps they had brought. Then, after Frau Mieders had inspected their hands, they were told they might begin.

There were fourteen of them, so she set four to peeling potatoes, and four to paring apples, with warnings as to the necessity for taking off only the thinnest paring.

'The best of any fruit lies just beneath the skin,' she told them. 'Let us see which of you can make the most wafer-like peel.'

'What are *we* to do?' asked Cornelia Flower plaintively.

‘Three of you—you, Cornelia, and Ilonka Barkocz and Mercy Barbour, will slice up this cold meat, and again I must ask for wafers,’ said the mistress. ‘Come to this table and do it. And Maria, and Frölich, and Olga will peel these onions. Be careful not to hold them too near to your faces or you will weep, for they are very good, strong onions.’

‘Thank goodness that isn’t *our* job!’ whispered Evadne to Joyce who was next her. ‘I *loathe* peeling onions!’

The luckless trio set to work, but before long they were all weeping copiously, and only the awe in which they held the new mistress kept the rest of the form from jeering at them.

‘What are we making, Frau Mieders?’ asked Lysbet Brandt, a Dutch girl who was more or less possessed of a character, and so dared to draw notice on herself.

‘It is a *réchauffé*,’ explained Frau Mieders. ‘Many people think that such must be unpleasant—what you call dull. But if they are carefully prepared and spiced, they may be as savoury as any other dish. And they are also economical.’

The girls listened respectfully as they went on with their work, and presently the potato-peelers brought their results to her. She demanded to see the peelings, and Evadne, with great presence of mind, swept the whole lot into one bucket before she could be stopped. She had more than a few qualms as to how Frau Mieders would regard her own work. She was scolded, of course, but the deed was done, and could not be undone. Besides, Frau Mieders did not yet know her Evadne, and it *might* have been the result of enthusiasm. She contented herself by remarking that some of them appeared to be deaf; otherwise, why were some of the peelings of such a thickness?

No one answered her, but two or three people looked at each other guiltily. Frau Mieders nodded, and then turned to the next work. ‘For our sweet to-day we will make the English apple-pie,’ she announced.

‘Guess it’s just as much American as English,’ murmured Cornelia.

‘That’s only because the Pilgrim Fathers took the idea over to America with them,’ said Joyce. ‘That makes it English all the time.’

A withering retort was on the tip of Cornelia’s tongue, but Frau Mieders’ steel-blue eyes were suddenly fixed on her, and she was obliged to swallow her wrath.

‘We must make our pastry presently,’ she announced when she considered that the rebel was sufficiently subdued. ‘First of all we will quarter the apples and remove the cores, with as little waste as possible, each girl taking four apples. Are they yet peeled? Then do not mix the peelings, but leave them, and I will come and inspect them.’

Thanks to this caution, she was able to commend all except Thekla, who considered domestic work of all kinds beneath her, and whose apple-parings would not have compared unfavourably with Evadne’s efforts with the potatoes. Thekla went red and looked sulky under the rebuke she received, but rather more than a term at school had at least taught her to receive such things in silence.

‘Are the onions finished?’ asked Frau Mieders, turning to the three martyrs who were still mopping their streaming eyes.

‘This is the last,’ said Maria Marani.

‘Then put them into that saucepan of boiling water, and we will parboil them before we mince them.’

The trio thankfully tossed in their onions, and then, by the mistress’s orders, retired to rub lemon essence on their hands to remove the smell before they washed them. When they returned, she set them to helping with the apples, and they were all very busy, cutting them

into quarters and removing the cores. Some of them did it neatly and efficiently; others who were quite unaccustomed to the work soon had a mangled heap of apple on their chopping-boards. However, it was done at last, and all the apples were put into another saucepan with a little water at the bottom. The lid was put on, and the pan set where it would get only a gentle heat.

‘Why do we do that, meine Frau?’ asked Maria.

‘So that the apples may be pulped. Otherwise we might have to bake the pies too long for the crust to be light,’ explained Frau Mieders. ‘If we considered the crust only then the fruit might not be well cooked. But by stewing them slowly thus, they are pulped before they are put into the dishes, and so we avoid either mistake.’

The next thing was to scrub the chopping-boards and set them aside. Then the pastry slabs, all of marble, were produced, and each girl was directed to take a mixing-bowl from the towering pile on the cupboard shelf. When they were ready, Frau Mieders proceeded to give her directions. They weighed out their flour, three girls to each pair of scales. Then they sifted it, adding baking-powder and salt, and then they rubbed in the kneading—half lard and half butter—till it was fine and crumbly.

‘Now for the water,’ said Frau Mieders. ‘Each of you has a knife for mixing. Add the water little by little till you have a stiff paste that you can roll out readily on your boards. Be careful not to make your paste sticky, or you will spoil it.’

They set to work. Some of them followed her instructions with care, and produced pastry of the right consistency. Others added too much, and had to put more flour. Then came the fun of rolling it carefully—‘Always *away* from you, else it may become heavy,’ warned Frau Mieders.

By the time this was all done, the apples were ready. Each girl went in turn and filled her dish with the pulp into which Lysbet had been told to stir brown sugar.—‘Brown sugar is best for sweetening purposes,’ explained Frau Mieders.—Then they went back to their places, ready to fit on their crust.

‘But we haven’t put any cloves in,’ protested Joyce at this juncture.

‘Cloves? You wish cloves in your English apple-pie?’ queried Frau Mieders amiably.

‘Oh yes, meine Frau. Or you can use cinnamon,’ Evadne told her eagerly. ‘It makes the flavour ever so much nicer!’

‘Well, there is no reason why you should not use both.—Cornelia, go to the store cupboard. On the second shelf at the right-hand side you will find the tins. The names are on them—in English, of course.’

Cornelia trotted off, and presently returned. By this time, Frau Mieders was at the stove, testing the onions, so she told Cornelia to give two cloves each to half of the girls, and the rest might take half a teaspoonful of the powdered cinnamon to mix with their apple-pulp, so that they should have the two flavours.

‘Aren’t they big before they’re cooked?’ said Joyce in surprise as she dropped in her two cloves, and stirred them well among the apples. She lifted her pastry, and laid it over the top, smoothing it down round the greased edges of the pie-dish. ‘Funny how cooking seems to shrink things, isn’t it?’

Cornelia finished her work and took the tins back to the storeroom, that being Frau Mieders’ inflexible rule. Otherwise, as she said, the kitchen would soon have been filled up with unnecessary things.

‘What a queer, oniony smell there is,’ commented Maria Marani.

‘Frau Mieders has tipped the onions into a strainer,’ said Lysbet, glancing round. ‘There! Now I will chop him round in a pattern!’ And she proceeded to adorn her pie with neat little strokes.

Frau Mieders left the onions to drain, and came back to the big table to see what her young cooks were doing. ‘Yes; that is very neat,’ she said. ‘Those of you who have not ornamented may do so, and do not forget to make two small holes, one at each side, for the steam to escape.’

This was a joyful occupation, and some of those pies were lined and adorned within an inch of their lives. Then they were bidden brush them over with milk so that the pastry would glaze nicely. After that the pies were set on one side till it was time to bake them.

‘And now we will proceed with our *réchauffé*,’ said Frau Mieders. ‘Bring the chopping-boards, each take a little of the onions, and mince them finely.’

The girls did so, and when the onions were minced, they were put into the pan together with the sliced meat, potatoes (also sliced), herbs chopped to a crumblike fineness, nutmeg, pounded mace, and a sauce compounded of many things. Tomatoes, grown in the garden and preserved the summer before, were added, and then the whole was set in a huge cauldron on the stove to stew slowly.

‘Now you may clear everything away,’ said the mistress, smiling. ‘We will make our cocoa, and have our Break now.’

They turned to with a will, and half an hour later were sipping cocoa that tasted almost like chocolate, and eating crisp little honey-wafers that Frau Mieders had made for them herself. She left them with instructions to see that the stew did not burn, and not to play games, but to talk quietly till she returned. Then she went off to seek her own refreshment.

‘I like cooking,’ said Joyce thoughtfully as she stirred her cocoa. ‘It will be fun eating the things we’ve made ourselves. I’m sure those pies will be just as good as the Sixth Form’s Apfeltorten!’ And she eyed her own particular production proudly.

‘What shall we make next?’ asked Maria Marani.

‘Cakes for Kaffee,’ said Lysbet.

‘I wonder what they will be?’ murmured Ilonka Barkocz. ‘I have helped mamma make our Easter cake, and last Easter she let me try by myself.’

‘I can make Kappjes,’ said Lilli van Goeschen, a pretty compatriot of Lysbet’s. ‘Koekjes also.’

‘Your cakes have such weird names,’ objected Evadne, who was sitting on the table munching her wafers as if she had had nothing to eat for days.

Lilli laughed. ‘Not at all. “Koekjes” are the same as your “cookies” that I have heard you talk about. Our men who founded New Amsterdam—what you call New York nowadays—took with them their wives, and they made Koekjes for their families. Then when the English came, the word became—became—’ she stopped.

‘Englished, I suppose you mean,’ said Evadne calmly. ‘I see! But if you come to that, I’ve made cookies too—at least,’ she added honestly, ‘I’ve had a shot at them.’

‘How many died?’ asked Cornelia.

‘Don’t worry. Jo and Stacie and I ate the lot. Madame wouldn’t let the Robin and the babies have any. They weren’t bad, but they *spread* so. They had rather a funny taste, too; but that was because Jo would use the wrong eggs, and some of them were—queer!’

Here the conversation came to an end, for Fräulein entered the room, and the girls had to hurry to clear away their cocoa-mugs, and tidy up generally before they got their mixing-

bowls again, and were set to work on their cakes.

Frau Mieders wisely refused to allow them to try anything very elaborate. She insisted on prolonged beating of eggs and butter, though some people complained that their arms ached long before she was satisfied with the results. Finally, fourteen large cakes were put into one of the ovens, while the apple-pies were popped into the other, which had been raked out thoroughly to ensure a good, quick heat so that the pastry would rise.

After that, they had to wash once more, and then go and lay the tables in the Speisesaal. It took some time, for the housemaids were inexperienced, but they contrived to get everything on at last, and then they scampered off to make themselves tidy—and not before time, either. Evadne had to go to Matron with a scorched finger, the result of her own carelessness when opening the oven-door to see how the cakes were getting on, and when Thekla, Joyce, Ilonka, and Maria were dishing up their stew, Thekla contrived to splash some of the boiling gravy over Maria. However, there was no real harm done, and when the School sat down to Mittagessen, the fourteen cooks looked very proudly at the people serving the réchauffé at the heads of the tables.

‘I only hope it’s safe. I’m not insured, you know,’ said Jo plaintively as she filled her own plate last, and then tasted gingerly, while Moida, with a suppressed grin, carried off the dish.

‘It’s as safe as your fish-mess was last week!’ cried Evadne indignantly, and Jo subsided as she remembered the horrid mess she had had to dish up.

The réchauffé was voted a complete success, however, and the girls only complained that there hadn’t been enough of it.

‘Don’t be greedy!’ said Ilonka severely to Elsie Carr at her table. ‘There are pies to follow.’

‘Pies? What kind of pies? Have they provided coal-hammers to chop up the pastry?’ demanded Elsie teasingly.

Ilonka’s face flamed, but she held her tongue, for at that moment the maids, who had been clearing away the first course, came in, bearing the nicely-browned pies, and proceeded to distribute them.

‘How those onions do reek!’ said Gillian. ‘Whatever kind were they, Lonny? I can smell them yet!’

‘Frau Mieders said they were very good, strong ones,’ said Ilonka haughtily.

‘They must have been,’ agreed Marie von Eschenau who headed the table, ‘only it is not quite an onion smell. It is more—penetrating.’

‘It’s even got into the pies,’ observed Mary Shaw who was quite recovered now. ‘Sniff! I don’t think I like it!’

There was no doubt about it. The pies—or some of them—*did* smell with a queer, strong scent that was far nearer onions than apples. The mystery was solved when Cornelia, who liked delicacies, took a heaped spoonful, choked precipitately, and hid her face in her napkin. Then she jumped up, and without bothering to ask leave of anyone, tore from the room.

‘Cornelia!’ cried Mademoiselle from her place at the Staff table. But Cornelia was gone.

‘She must have burnt herself,’ said Miss Wilson, spreading the steaming apple about her plate. ‘Corney is always in such a hurry. This is flavoured with cinnamon, I can smell, and very nice, too!’

But she got no further, for this was just where a chorus of groans and protests rose.

‘Poison! They’ve been trying to poison us!’ proclaimed Jo dramatically.

‘Schrecklich!’—‘Oh, mais c’est effroyable!’—‘Ghastly!’ These and other exclamations sounded from all sides. Frau Mieders got up quickly, and went to one of the tables, her face full of distress.

‘Jo, let me taste your pie, if you please. Both of ours are flavoured with cinnamon, and, save that the crust is not so light as it might be, are excellent, and I cannot account for this strange odour of—’

She stopped there, and having found a clean spoon, tasted the contents of Jo’s plate. The next moment she cast the spoon from her with a shudder. ‘Garlic! Girls! You have flavoured these pies with garlic!’

‘But we could not!’ cried Maria protestingly. ‘There was no garlic—we only used cloves and cinna—’

‘*Cloves!*’ The mistress swung round on Cornelia, who had returned just then, looking very much ashamed of herself. ‘Cornelia, did you take *cloves* or *garlic-cloves*?’

Cornelia looked nonplussed. ‘Guess I just took what there was. It had *Cloves* on the tin, for I saw it when I got it.’

‘Go then, and bring me the tin here. Here are the keys.’

Cornelia went off meekly, and presently returned with a scarlet face and a large tin which she handed over with the humble statement, ‘Guess I was in a mite too much of a hurry that time. The cloves were further back on the shelf, and I saw *Cloves* on this one, and didn’t bother to look further.’

‘Then, girls,’ said Frau Mieders, her face clearing, ‘it is all explained. Cornelia has given you *garlic-cloves* for flavouring instead of plain cloves.’

And so it proved. When one of the ‘cloves’ had been rescued from its bed of apple, it turned out to be a clove, or pod, of garlic, and this meant that seven pies were so much waste. Luckily, there was enough of those flavoured with cinnamon for everyone to have a small helping, and Mademoiselle had Pflaumetorten brought from the storeroom to make up for deficiencies.

But never, to the end of her school career, did Cornelia hear the last of her ‘cloves’!

CHAPTER X

A REGULAR SHOCK

‘If it goes on like this, I can see us having to *swim* up to the Sonnalpe instead of going the usual way. What a downpour! D’you think it’s going to be a second Flood?’ Joey Bettany turned from the window and looked at the half-dozen people who were with her in the library.

‘Oh, I hope not,’ said Frieda, looking up from the book she had taken from the shelves. ‘And do tell me, Jo, if *Wintersmoon* is interesting.’

‘Haven’t read it, so don’t know. Who wrote it?’

‘John Buchan,’ replied her friend, giving the name a German pronunciation. ‘I have read one of his before, and liked it. I think I will take this.’

‘If it’s John Buchan’s—and I’d advise you to learn to pronounce his name correctly—it’s sure to be all right. Will that be enough for the week-end?’

‘Oh, quite. I expect I shall spend a great deal of time with Bernhilda, for I have to see their home, and she is not likely to be much with us,’ said Frieda. ‘She is keeping very quiet these days.’

‘I only hope she doesn’t mess up your week-end,’ said her friend. ‘I remember when David arrived—in the middle of Marie and André’s wedding—Dr Jack came to fetch me because Madge wanted me. It was a pretty trying top-off to the wedding festivities.’

‘I do not think it at all likely,’ said Frieda with a smile as she watched Jo enter the name of the book in the register.

‘Well, you never know. Hello, Gillian; got yours chosen?’

‘Yes. I think I’ll try *Le Chat de Madame Michel*. I’ve never read it, and Mademoiselle Lachenais says my vocab is far too limited even now, and I must read more French. This doesn’t look too difficult, so I’ll have a shot at it. And may I take *The First Violin* as well? I can’t spend the whole Half-term reading French.’

‘Yes, if you like. Everyone is allowed two books for Half-term if they want them,’ said Jo. She entered the books, and then went to the window again to look out at the rain streaming down. It had begun on the Tuesday of that week, and had never stopped for more than an hour. The snow was all washed away except in sheltered nooks and hollows, and the ground was being churned to a thick mud of pea-soup consistency. So heavy was the downpour that they were unable to see the lake from the windows, and even the mountains opposite only loomed up as vague shadows.

‘It will be difficult getting down to Spärtz,’ said Frieda pensively.

‘Won’t it just! The road will be like a morass. Indeed, I shouldn’t wonder if you have to take the far side. It’s quite likely the stream is out with these floods, to say nothing of the melted snow. Herr Braun was along last night, and he said the stream down yonder was barely a foot below the top of the bank then. I shouldn’t be surprised if it flooded before to-night. Thank goodness we moved the library up here at the beginning of term!’

‘Well, if it does flood, we shall all be away by evening,’ said Marie von Eschenau comfortably. ‘Only another two hours before we go!—I will take these, Joey, though I do not expect to do much reading, for Wanda wrote in her last letter that there is a good opera company at Salzburg, and Friedel will engage seats for us for to-morrow night and also on Monday.’

Jo returned to her register, and scribbled the names of the books Marie held out to her. Evadne Lannis turned from the shelves at the same moment, and brought hers, though she, like Marie, expected to attend the opera, for her people were now living in Salzburg, not far from where the von Glucks had their home. The other two people, Thekla von Stift and Joyce Linton, chose their volumes, and when Thekla's had been entered, she departed. The rest stayed to talk. Mademoiselle had said that as the weather was so bad, there would be no lessons that morning, but they would start from the school at noon instead, and she advised the girls to take library-books with them in case the rain continued. Everyone was going away this Half-term, and the school would be deserted. She and the Staff and most of the Seniors were busily clearing all books and furniture out of the ground-floor rooms in case of accidents. During its first year, the Chalet School had been badly flooded, and though the bed of the stream which ran into the lake from the mountains had been deepened, and the banks artificially raised, while a deep ditch had been dug all round the Chalet School estate to carry off any water, still, the torrents of rain they had been having made it not at all unlikely that there would be a second edition of that experience. The valley folk were becoming uneasy, and some of those who lived near the banks of the stream had already taken their valuables to the houses of friends who lived further off.

'What a lark it would be if we got down on Tuesday and found the whole place flooded out!' said Joyce, who was perched on the arm of her sister's chair.

'Don't suppose for a moment they'd allow us to come down if that had happened,' said Jo amiably. 'In that case, my child, we'd get a day or two extra, for they'd never bring us into a damp house.'

'But how could we know?' demanded Gillian.

'Oh, they'd 'phone us, of course,' said Jo. 'No one is going frightfully far away. Even Thekla is only going to Innsbruck to visit her old aunt. And of course, the people from other countries are all off to Kufstein if they aren't going home with friends, and Herr Braun would let them know. He'd ring us up at the Sonnalpe, too.'

'A lot of use that would be if the wires are still down,' Gillian reminded her. 'Mademoiselle was at it again when I came up to change my book, and nothing had been done then. I rather think she wants to get through to your sister.'

'I know—to ask her advice in case of flooding,' said Jo cheerfully. 'It *is* a nuisance the wires going just this minute. I wanted to let them know they could expect me earlier than usual, but we couldn't do a thing. I don't suppose they'll bother about it either, while this weather lasts. It's only a private line, you know. The public one goes the other way.'

'Can't they put you through on that?'

'Only from Spärtz. Oh, well, it doesn't really matter.'

'How many of us *are* going to the Sonnalpe?' asked Gillian.

Jo considered. 'Let me see. You two and myself—three. Elsie Carr and Maria Marani—five. Ruth Wynyard, Vi Allison, Corney, and Bidy O'Ryan—nine. That's all, I think. I wish you'd been coming, Frieda.'

'Oh, I must see Bernhilda,' laughed Frieda. 'And Gisela has Maria and Gillian and Joyce staying with her, so I am sure she will not miss me for once.'

'Only Bidy and me going to "Die Rosen,"' said Jo. 'My sister wouldn't let me ask anyone else, though I rather wanted Corney. But she said she'd rather not when I was up and asked her. She said she wanted to be quiet for once. Can't think what's happening to her—it's not like her to be stodgy.'

‘Where’s Corney going, then?’ demanded Joyce.

‘The Carrs asked her to go to them. The other babes will be with their people at the hotel. Oh, well, there’ll be plenty to do. All the nursery folk will keep me busy; and I expect we’ll have a tamasha of some kind at “Die Rosen” before the hol’s over.’

‘I hope it’s not raining like this up there,’ said Gillian with an involuntary shiver. ‘It’ll be so cold and miserable for invalids.’

‘Don’t worry about that. They may be right above the clouds—they often are. Remember they are nearly four thousand feet higher than we are, and often have the most glorious sunshine when we’re going round with maes and brollies,’ said Jo comfortingly. ‘Well, I wonder if you folk are the last for library.—Joyce, you might go and see if anyone else is coming, will you? If not, I want to shut up.’

Joyce went off, and presently returned to say that everyone who wanted books had got them, and Mademoiselle said Jo was to go and help move the things from the ‘chemmy lab,’ and Gillian, Frieda, and Marie were to go with her.

Jo nodded her thanks; put the odd books away; closed and locked the doors of the cupboards, and then, having seen them out of the room, shut that door too, and went off downstairs, whistling like a blackbird.

From then until noon, when the last of the girls and Staff to leave the school assembled at the gate, life was too full for much chattering. By that time, however, the downstairs rooms had all been stripped, and everything was in order as far as possible. The fires in the stoves had all been raked out, and all doors locked. Mademoiselle Lepâtre, who was to spend the holiday at the Annexe, fastened the gate, and then marshalled her party into line, and led them along the lake-path. At Seespitz, the tiny hamlet at the foot of the lake, they were to be met by a motor-bus; but just here the path was too narrow, even for a small car, so the girls, well wrapped up, with wellingtons, oilskins, and sou’-westers, had to tramp through the liquid mud, which they did with many a groan.

‘I do think it might have cleared up till we got away,’ said Jo. ‘This weather is disgraceful! I’ve never known it like this before—not in all the years I’ve lived here!’

‘How long is that?’ asked Gillian, who was with her.

‘Five or thereabouts. I was twelve when we came—not thirteen till the November—and I’m seventeen now. What fun it was! I’ve always been happy here; but sometimes I think that first term was the best of all!’ And Jo wagged her head with a grandmotherly air. ‘We were all new together, you see, and Bernie—that’s Frieda’s sister, you know—and Grizel (who is music-mistress at the Annexe now), and Juliet (who is Head there), and Gisela (whom you’re going to stay with) were all with us. Gisela was head-girl, and in some ways the best we’ve ever had. Simone and Frieda and I were Middles, and Maria was a Junior—the only one we had at first. Remind me sometime, Gill, and I’ll tell you about it.’

‘I will,’ said Gillian. ‘But it’s a top—I mean a jolly nice school now, Joey. If it weren’t for Mummy, I’d be awfully glad to be here.’

‘But your mother is getting on,’ urged Joey. ‘You said yourself the last time you were up that she seemed stronger.’

‘Yes; I know. But oh, Joey, you don’t know what it’s like to know she’s so terribly ill!’

‘Perhaps not. But I know what I felt last summer when they thought the Robin was going to be bad.’ Jo’s face clouded at the remembrance. ‘And I remember what a blue funk I was in when David was born. Madge was pretty ill then, you know.’

‘I suppose she—Mrs Russell, I mean—is almost like your mother,’ said Gillian thoughtfully.

‘The only mother I’ve ever known. Mine died when I was born, and father before that,’ said Jo. ‘Madge and Dick—that’s her twin brother, and Rix and Peggy’s father—brought me up between them.’

‘Then she must have been just like a mother,’ decided Gillian. ‘Still, she’s all right now; and Mummy was ever so much better when I was last up.’

‘Hello! So you’ve got here safely after all? We wondered if you’d all be washed away,’ said a cheery voice at this juncture, and the two girls jumped, for they had not seen Dr Russell bearing down on them.

‘Jem!’ cried his sister-in-law, ‘how on earth did you know we were coming early?’

‘Mademoiselle rang up Herr Anserl, and he rang *us* up,’ replied the doctor.

‘Oh! I see. Isn’t this *awful* weather? Don’t tell us you’ve got it too.’

Jem Russell shook his head. ‘You’ve got a hope, haven’t you? It’s been pouring on and off for the last three days. The garden is a bog, and no one has been able to put a nose out of doors except Humphries and my noble self. We even had to take the car to bring the Robin to ‘Die Rosen’ this morning—daren’t let her risk the ten minutes’ walk in this.’ Then he turned to slim, blue-eyed Gillian, who was looking at him very wistfully. ‘Well, Gillian, I expect you want to hear how your mother is. She’s very well, all things considered. Of course, we’ve had to keep her indoors the last few days, but she’s sleeping well, and eating well, and she’s gained steadily since last you were up.’

‘Oh, Dr Jem!’ Gillian’s face was flushed like a rose, and stars shone in her eyes.

He laughed, and then turned aside to greet Mademoiselle and the others. Jo stared after him, a puzzled look on her face. ‘There’s something up,’ she said aloud.

Gillian roused from her rapture of joy to look at her. ‘How do you mean?’ she asked. ‘What could possibly have happened?’

‘Jem looks as if he’d come into an unexpected fortune,’ returned Jo. ‘I wonder what’s happened?’

‘I heard nothing when I was up a fortnight ago,’ began Gillian.

But Jo was not listening. She had darted back to drag her brother-in-law to one side and ask imperiously, ‘Jem! What’s happened?’

He glanced round. The rest were climbing into the big bus, and they were quite unnoticed at the moment.

‘You’ve got a new niece, Joey,’ he said quietly.

‘*What?*’ gasped Jo incredulously. ‘Do you mean—Madge?’

‘Well, who else should I mean, you goat?’

‘But nobody said anything when I was up at the Annexe last month.’

‘Well, the lady wasn’t expected yet, and Madge didn’t want you told too soon beforehand. She did try to hint at it, but you didn’t take it in. Anyhow, the infant arrived quite unexpectedly last night—kept me out of bed the whole blessed night into the bargain. Madge is all right, and the baby is a jolly mite—though I think you’ll get quite a surprise when you see her.’ He paused to grin, and Jo opened her lips to ask a question, but he went on quickly, ‘You’ll all have to think up some sort of name for her. The second is to be Margaret, of course; but we’ve got a Madge and a Peggy already, so we thought we’d like to have a change. I propose we have a name-party before the week-end is over, and then you can all say what you would like.’

‘But I can’t think how—’ began Jo.

‘My dear, do try to realise that we haven’t really seen you since Christmas. It’s a month since you were up, and then you were at the Annexe, and only came over on the Sunday afternoon. Besides, as I’ve told you before, she wasn’t expected till the end of April. You’re late with Half-term, by the way, aren’t you?’

‘Yes; I know. It’s partly with Easter being so late, and partly because we are only going to have a week then, and finish summer term at the end of June. Mademoiselle thinks it will be better if we have long holidays in the hot weather. You know what it was like last summer.’

‘I agree with her. Well, suppose you get into the bus, now? The rest are all in, and we seem to be keeping them waiting. By the way, we’ve told no one yet—not even the Robin; so keep it to yourself for the present.’

Jo nodded, and climbed meekly into the bus, and took her seat. He followed her, and then the door was shut, and the driver set off along the wide road that had been levelled at this part till the road joined the broad coach-road that ran from Wiesing. All this time, Joey remained in a brown study, and not even Cornelia could get her to talk. Finally, they left her to herself, and chattered among themselves like so many magpies. Gillian alone wondered what had happened to silence the head-girl, for Jo was a talkative young woman as a rule.

‘When can we see Mummy, Dr Jem?’ demanded Joyce as the great motor swung into the Wiesing road, and turned upwards to the alm.

‘This afternoon, I hope,’ he said. ‘She rests till half-past three, and then, if she is all right, you are to go and have tea with her. Frau Mensch will look after you till then.’

‘What?’ exclaimed Joey, roused from her brooding by this. ‘Is Tante Gretchen up *here*?’

‘Tante Gretchen up here?’ repeated the doctor. ‘Of course she isn’t! She’s in Innsbruck. What on earth makes you ask such a stupid question?’

‘Well, you said—Oh! I see! I always forget that Gisela is Frau Mensch, too. Oh, dear! How fearfully elderly it does make her seem!’

The doctor chuckled. ‘Not got over your aversion to growing up *yet*? It’s time, isn’t it? You’re getting on for eighteen, and will leave school at the end of next term.’

‘I’m not eighteen till November, and this is only March,’ said Jo shortly. ‘Besides, I didn’t mean that, exactly, either. Only, Gisela seems so *young* to be called just the same as Tante Gretchen.’

‘Mamma was no older when she was born,’ remarked Maria Marani, sister of the aforementioned Gisela. ‘After all, Joey, Gisela is twenty-two next month, and Baby Natalie is a year old then, too.’

‘And Davie is two in May, and now—’ Jo suddenly stopped short. If there had not been a little excitement just then, she would certainly have been teased to finish her sentence; but just at that moment the bus skidded half-way across the road, and in the resultant panic her remark was forgotten. When they got straight again, and were once more climbing steadily up the hill, the girls were eagerly discussing how they would spend their holiday, and Jo, thinking she had better try to forget what was waiting for her at home, joined in.

They were nearly at the top of the road now, and it was still raining, though the girls from the valley declared that it was not coming down nearly so heavily as in the Tierntal.

‘I believe it *is* looking a little better,’ conceded the doctor, ‘so perhaps it may stop presently. But you won’t be able to get out very much—unless we get blazing sunshine and a good high wind to dry up the mud.’

‘Well, we might,’ said Jo optimistically. ‘You never can tell.’

‘Is Bette coming to see us?’ demanded Cornelia of the doctor.

‘I don’t doubt she would if she could,’ he said. ‘Unfortunately, Bette was hanging up fresh curtains two days ago, and the steps slipped, and she fell, so that she is laid up with a sprained ankle.’

‘Who is she?’ asked Joyce in a whisper of Violet Allison who was sitting next her.

‘Signora di Bersetti,’ returned Violet. ‘She was at school—oh, before I came. She was Bette Rincini then. She’s cousin to Anita and Giovanna, and was one of the first girls, like Gisela Mensch and Frieda’s sister Bernhilda. She married Dr Bersetti last summer, and he is one of the doctors at the Sanatorium.’

‘What is she like?’

‘Oh, ever so nice! Didn’t you see her when you were here before the term began?’

Joyce shook her head. ‘No; Joey said we should, but if it’s Signora di What’s-her-name, she got a wire the day we arrived to say that her father was very ill and she must go at once, and she didn’t come back all the time we were at “Die Rosen.”’

‘I see. Well, she’s ever so nice, and so pretty, too,’ said Violet. ‘She talks English as well as we do. You’ll like her, Joyce.’

‘Oh, I don’t suppose I’ll see much of anyone,’ said Joyce. ‘Gill and I will be at the San most of the time.’

‘Will you?’ said Dr Russell, overhearing this. ‘I’m afraid not, Joyce. Your mother is much better, but she can’t bear very much yet. You and Gillian shall visit her every afternoon for a short while, but that’s all we can permit, I’m afraid.’

Joyce’s lips drooped, and the tears came to her eyes. ‘Oh! And I was so looking forward to telling her everything!’

‘I must have a chat with you two,’ he said gently. ‘However, there will be plenty of time for that. Here we are at the top, and it won’t be very long before we are at home.—We’ll go straight to “Das Pferd,” I think, Maria, and hand you three over to Gisela.—Elsie, we can drop you as we pass—and you hotel people, as well. Then Jo and I will go back to “Die Rosen.”’

‘Oh, drop me at the gate,’ implored Jo.

He shook his head. ‘No fear! I’m not going to have you rushing in and raising the place, as you will do if I’m not there to restrain you. It won’t make ten minutes’ difference, because Gisela will be on the outlook for her visitors, and Elsie and Co we’ll just dump.’

‘Thank you!’ retorted Elsie, who was an old friend of his. ‘All the same,’ she added, ‘it’s jolly nice to think we’re in our own house. I’m ever so glad Dad and Mother decided to build up here. It makes such a topping holiday for Dad when he gets leave—much better than England at present.’

‘Well, it’s giving Lilius more time here,’ agreed the doctor. ‘She really is a credit to us, Elsie.’

By this time they were running along a narrow path which led round a small spur of the mountain. Then the roadway widened, till they reached a broad shelf at the entrance to which stood the two churches, one Catholic, the other Anglican, with the tiny presbyteries belonging to each facing each other. Mr Eastly and Vater Ambrosius were great friends, and it was necessary to have some form of Protestant worship up there, as many of the patients and their friends belonged to one branch or another of the Protestants. A kind of straggling street followed, lined on either side with chalets and one or two small shops. Each chalet had its own garden, which, in the season, was a blaze of colour, though at present they had nothing to

show. At the end of the street was the big hotel, the 'Goldener Apfel,' where the friends and relatives of patients lived.

Further up the road, on the opposite side, stood the large bungalow Elsie's parents had built, and here Elsie and Cornelia were dropped. The girls for the hotel had already been met by Mrs Allison, a slim, anxious-faced woman, whose husband was an inmate of the Sanatorium. Further on, Joey pointed out to Gillian and Joyce the pretty chalet where the Di Bersettis had their home. Then they came to a place where the road divided, and turned off to the right, and round a spur of the mountain, and so reached 'Das Pferd,' the home of Dr Mensch and his pretty wife and their precious small daughter.

Here Maria and the Lintons were decanted, and their luggage handed over to the sturdy Tyrolean girl who came to get it. Then the bus was carefully backed and turned, and in five minutes Joey was leaping out of it and flying up the path at 'Die Rosen,' regardless of the streaming rain, her umbrella left behind her, and her case dropped on the ground into all the mud.

She was met at the door by a big, jolly-faced woman in nurse's uniform.

'Well, Jo,' said this person, 'how are you?'

'Oh, let me go to Madge!' pleaded Jo.

Nurse refused to budge an inch, however. 'Mrs Russell is asleep, and I'm not going to have you waking her up. Besides, look at the mess you are in! And all wet with rain, too! No, my dear; you can go quietly to your bedroom and change into something dry—shoes and stockings, too, mind—and then go to the nursery till I call you.'

Jo pulled a face. 'Can't I just peep at her through the door? I'll be as quiet as a mouse—honour bright, I will.'

'No; certainly not. Now do as I tell you, Jo, and don't argue. Besides, if your sister sees you like that, she'll begin to worry in case you catch cold, and that will be very bad for her,' she added, thus clinching the matter.

Jo scowled, but she went off to her room, where she changed rapidly into the things she always kept at the Sonnalpe, and then she went along to the nursery, where she was greeted with cries of rapture from her little adopted sister, Robin Humphries, and her small nephew and niece, Peggy and Rix Bettany, and also from Madge's small son, David. A quieter welcome came from Stacie Benson, who was now sitting upright in her invalid chair. Stacie at once proceeded to announce that she was able to walk a few steps already and hoped soon to be done with the chair altogether.

'No!' Jo was suitably impressed. 'I say, how perfectly splendid! And when can you come back to school?'

Eustacia turned questioning eyes on the doctor, who had followed his sister-in-law into the room in time to hear her question.

'This is March,' he said thoughtfully. 'When does the summer term start, Jo?'

'On the fifth of May,' said Jo promptly.

'The fifth of May? H'm! That makes—let's see—just about eight weeks ahead. Well, if you continue to go on as well as you're doing, Stacie, I see no reason why you should not go down for the summer term—how long will *that* be, Jo?'

'Begins on the fifth of May; ends on the ninth of July,' said Jo. 'Just about nine weeks, isn't it?'

'About that, I think. Well, Stacie, I don't think there ought to be any reason why you can't go down and see what you can do, at any rate. You'll have to go slowly at first, and, of course,

there must be no running about. But you can get into working order, and then the long summer holiday will probably leave you almost as fit as ever.'

'Oh, *good!*' said Jo enthusiastically. 'And now, Jem, *can't* I go and see Madge?'

'Auntie is ill,' said Peggy, slipping a hand into her young aunt's. 'Nursie is wif her.'

'She's better now,' said Jem Russell. 'Yes, Joey; she was rousing up when I looked in a moment ago, so if you will be very good and quiet, you may go in for five minutes.'

'Me too,' pleaded the Robin, lifting her lovely little face coaxingly to his. 'I do want to see Tantie Guito.'

'Not this time, mein Vögelein. Tante Guito must be quiet and not have too much chattering. So we will let Joey have first turn, and you shall go next.'

'An' ven us?' pleaded Peggy.

'Yes; one at a time, though.—Run along, Joey, and when you come back, you can tell the others all the news,' he added with a twinkle in his eye.

Jo needed no second bidding. She raced off, and was presently tapping at a door at the far end of the corridor of the opposite wing of the house. Nurse opened it, and nodded with a smile. 'Yes; come in—but only for five minutes; and I'll show you the baby.'

'Indeed, I'll show her Baby myself,' said a dear voice from the bed near the window. 'As if anyone but myself should show Joey my daughter!'

Jo went quietly across the room, and dropped on her knees by the side of the low bed, her black eyes, deep love glowing in them, searching the pale face on the pillows. 'Madge, darling! This is the shock of my life!'

'Well, I did try to hint the last time I saw you,' said her sister, 'but you were most unaccountably *thick*, Joey! And, besides, we didn't expect her Babyship for another seven weeks or so. It was quite a shock to *me* when she arrived. Kiss me, darling, and then Nurse shall bring Babs here and I'll show her to you.'

The sisters kissed tenderly, and then Nurse came across the room with a bundle carefully rolled in flannel in her arms, and laid it down beside Mrs Russell. 'There you are,' she said. 'There's your precious daughter!'

Eagerly Jo bent over the bundle and scanned the tiny, puckered-up face. The next moment, all caution forgotten, she had jumped to her feet.

'Madge Russell!' she cried in tones of deepest outrage. 'That kid of yours has *red hair!*'

'Yes; won't she make a lovely contrast with Davie?' said the baby's mother contentedly. 'He is so dark, and she is obviously going to be so fair.'

'But carrots!' protested Jo.

Madge Russell flung her sister a look of indignation. 'It *isn't* carrots—it's beautiful Titian red! You don't deserve to have a niece!'

'That's quite enough excitement,' said Nurse, taking command. 'Off you go, Jo. There's the gong for Mittagessen, anyway. You can break the news to the rest, and be thinking up a name for your new niece.'

Stunned, Jo left the room, to go and announce to the expectant party she had left, 'I've got a new niece—Davie has a sister! And her hair is plain *ginger!*'

CHAPTER XI

THE BABY'S NAME-PARTY

During that Friday night the wind rose and drove the clouds away with a mighty gale that blew so strongly all Saturday that no one was able to go out. The Lintons had been able to take tea with their mother the previous afternoon, but on Saturday they were obliged to ring up the Sanatorium to say that they couldn't get there. Dr Gottfried, as they were told to call Dr Mensch, assured them that it was all he could do to keep his feet, and they would have been blown over before they had gone a dozen yards away from the door. Up there on the alm they caught the full force of it, and he was going to spend the day at the Sanatorium to avoid going and coming.

Towards evening the gale fell, and when Sunday came it came with bright sunshine and sabbath peace. The girls all went to church, and Jo enjoyed herself enormously by expatiating on the redness of her new niece's hair. In the afternoon, the Lintons were able to spend the whole time with their mother, who was more and more charmed with the effect the Chalet School seemed to be having on them both. Gillian was beginning to find herself, and not be content to remain so much in the background. Joyce appeared to have a little thought for other people. Both had lost a good deal of their slang—she had no idea that it was the result of finding themselves penniless week after week that had done it—and both seemed very happy where they were.

On the Monday, they were all invited to 'Die Rosen' to Kaffee und Kuchen, where they made the acquaintance of Miss Russell, and admired the beautiful mop of thick, coppery curls that adorned her little head, and cried out with delight at the deep blue of her eyes.

'They may change, though,' said Joey, who was holding her. 'David's eyes were blue when he first came, but they soon turned brown. So Baby's may, though I hope they won't. Jem has blue eyes, so let's hope she inherits them from him.'

'What a contrast she makes with David!' said Stacie Benson from her chair. 'Bring her here, Jo, and let me hold her.'

Joey gave her the baby with a warning to be careful, and Joyce slipped down on her knees before the chair to examine the tiny feet beneath the white draperies.

'Oh, *aren't* they darling!' she said adoringly.

'Yes; aren't they?' said Jo. 'Give her to me now, Stacie. We mustn't keep her here any longer. Nurse said only ten minutes.'

She took the baby, carefully wrapping the soft shawl round her, and drawing the little house-cap closer round the tiny face. Gillian helped her to adjust the veil which shielded the baby's eyes from the light, and then the young aunt bore off her precious burden to the big bedroom where Madge Russell was awaiting the return of her daughter.

'We're to find a first name for her,' said the young aunt when she got back to the nursery where they were all assembled. 'The second is to be Margaret after her mother, of course. But we don't want to use it; so all put your brains in steep, and see what you can hunt up. It must be something pretty.'

'But why not Josephine for you?' suggested Maria.

Jo shook her head. 'No fear! One in the family is quite enough, thank you! Besides, what could you call her? Josephine is miles too long for such a babe, and I hate Josie. No; try again,

Maria.'

'What about your mother's name?' suggested Gillian.

'Same as my sister's. And so was Jem's mother. They were both Margaret. And his only sister is Margot, and though we've never seen her—she lives in Australia—we can't use that. And *her* little girl is Daisy. So that about settles any abbreviations for Margaret.'

'Guess you'd better call her after the saint of the lake,' suggested Cornelia cheerfully.

'No *fear!*' cried Jo. 'Scholastika, indeed! Poor lamb! It's as well *you* haven't the final choice if *that's* your idea of names!'

'Why not Evangeline?' asked Elsie Carr.

'Make it Vaseline and have done with it!' retorted Jo. 'Besides, it always makes me think of that sickening Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. No; we'll bar luxuries, I think.'

'I know—call her after Elisaveta, and ask Veta to be her godmother. Then if ever Veta is queen of Belsornia, she'll have a queen for her godmother, and that would be so nice.' This was Violet Allison's bright idea.

But once more Jo put a damper on it. 'My dear Vi! Have you forgotten that Veta is a Catholic and we aren't? Catholics can't godma Protestants.'

'I didn't know that,' said Violet, who was a great admirer of the little Crown Princess of Belsornia, who, two years or so before this, had spent two happy terms as a schoolgirl at the Chalet School, and who had shared in the Guide Camp which had taken place in the summer.

'Well, it is so. So that idea's no good. Think again!'

'What are you being so scathing about?' demanded Dr Russell, coming in on them at this moment.

'We're trying to choose a name for Babs,' explained Jo. 'Unfortunately, no one seems able to do anything but make the maddest suggestions.'

'Well, what's your own idea?' he asked as he sat down and lifted his small son to his knee.

'We-ell, I rather think I should like Malvina. It's not common, and Malvina Russell makes quite a pretty combination.'

'And what price Malvina Margaret Russell?' demanded the doctor, pulling one of his son's curls.

'Well, it's not too bad.'

'It's as bad as Evangeline would ever have been,' put in Elsie as a slight recompense for Jo's snub.

'Good Heavens! You weren't proposing to give my daughter such a name as that?' he asked. 'Here, Davie, what shall we call sister?'

'Wufie,' said David, wriggling to get down.

'Ruth? That's not a bad idea.'

'Not Wufe—Wufus,' returned the cherub, now on the floor once more and sidling over to his cousin Rix, who regarded him with a lofty air of contempt.

'Oh, my only aunt! He means Rufus!' gasped Jo.

'We'll see what the rest of the babies have to say,' chuckled her brother-in-law. 'Here, Peggy, what would you like to call your new cousin?'

'Florentina,' said Peggy rapturously. 'Jus' like my new dollie!'

The girls went into fits of laughter, and the doctor called up the manly Rix and asked what name he would like to bestow on his small cousin.

'She's only a girl,' quoth Master Rix, who was passing through a period of great scorn for most of the gentler sex. 'I don't care!'

‘Rude little brute!’ commented his aunt.

‘Nonsense, Jo! It’s just the result of being with so many girls. David is too young to be much of a companion to him yet. Now, Rix,’ went on Jem, turning to his nephew, ‘I want you to choose a name, so be quick and do it.’

Rix knew that his uncle always meant what he said, so he cocked his head on one side and thought. Finally, ‘Call it Tibby,’ he announced.

In the middle of the shrieks of laughter this brought, Rosa, the nurse, appeared with the little ones’ Kaffee—in their case, hot milk—and the gong sounded to bring the elders down to the salon for theirs.

When they were all settled, Dr Jem began again. ‘I told Joey we’d have a name-party. This is it, so each of you can choose a name, and we’ll discuss them all.’

‘The youngest begin,’ said Jo, waving her jug of milk wildly in the air. ‘What do *you* choose, Robinette?’

The Robin considered. ‘Me, I like Marya because it was Mamma’s name,’ she said at last.

But the doctor refused to consider it. ‘No, Robin. We aren’t going to have two M’s before the surname. So think again, pet.’

The Robin thought hard, a piece of cake half-way to her mouth, while the rest sipped their coffee and enjoyed the little cakes which had come from Innsbruck that morning.

‘I think Angel would be very pretty,’ said the small girl at last.

‘Too much strain on the poor babe!’ said Joey decisively. ‘Fancy having to live up to a name of that kind!’

A good deal of this was Greek to the Robin, so she sat placidly, nibbling at her cake, and the doctor turned to the next youngest member of the party, Biddy O’Ryan.

Biddy was a wild, Irish scamp. The daughter of a sergeant who had died when she was small, she had been brought to the Tyrol by her mother, who had gone back to her former mistress as lady’s-maid, and when the lady had died, the maid had married the Italian chauffeur. Both of them had died, leaving ten-year-old Bridget, an orphan in a strange land, with only the prospect of the Cecilia Home before her. She had run away from Hall where she had been living, and had wandered up to the Tiernsee, where seven naughty Middles of the Chalet School—among them Elsie Carr and Cornelia Flower—had adopted her. Luckily for all concerned, the plan was discovered, and Biddy was legally adopted by the Guides. She was sent first of all to the village school at St Scholastika’s at the head of the lake; but she soon proved that she would require more education than she would get there. So, after much consultation, it was agreed that she should come to the school, and already she was showing progress. She could speak French and German fluently now; and her English, once rich with a Kerry brogue, was becoming more standardised, thanks to example, lectures, and fines.

‘Sure, after Mary, there isn’t a name to beat Honor—like Miss Honora me mother was maid to,’ she said now.

‘It’s such a stiff sort of name,’ protested Joey. ‘Still, you could always shorten it to Honor, I suppose.’

‘That was the way with Miss Honora,’ agreed Biddy cheerfully.

‘Then stick it down as Honor, Jem,’ ordered his sister-in-law.

Dr Russell meekly did as he was told, and then looked at Ruth, the next in age. Now Ruth Wynyard was, to outward view, merely a jolly tomboy, and as matter-of-fact a child as you could find anywhere. So it came as a distinct shock to those who thought they knew her when

she said wistfully, 'Do you know, I've always wanted to know someone called Esmeralda. I think it's such a lovely name!'

'Esmeralda Margaret—help!' said Joey when she had got her breath again. 'You don't want to burden the poor mite at all, do you?'

'Well, Dr Jem asked for our favourite names,' argued Ruth. 'That's mine, and I don't see that it's any worse than that awful Malvina of yours.'

'Dry up!' ordered the doctor. 'If you two want to scrap, you can go elsewhere to do it. All right, Ruth, I've put it down.—Violet, you're next—and don't suggest either Victoria or Alexandra, as you seem keen on queens' names!'

Shy Violet coloured, but she stood to her guns. 'It was only because of Veta,' she said sturdily. 'But if you want to know, my *favouritest* name is Rosalind, 'cos of Rosalind in *As You Like It*. I think it's a lovely name.'

'Well, it's passable, anyhow,' said Jo the exigent. 'Who's next?'

'Maria,' said the doctor. 'Come along, Maria; out with it!'

'I like Otilie best,' said Maria calmly.

Jo pretended to swoon. 'The trouble with you people is that you're coming over all romantic,' she declared as she sat up in response to a jerk from Jem. 'Joyce, it's you next, and do, for goodness' sake, see if you can tone things down a little.'

'It's no use giving my favourite name,' said Joyce dejectedly, 'because Dr Jem said he didn't want any more M-names. My second favourite is Anstice.'

'What's the first?' asked Cornelia curiously.

'It's Marigold. I do think it's the prettiest name there is.'

'Well, I guess it's just as well Dr Jem put a stopper on *that!* Marigold Margaret! Gee, what an awful mix-up!'

'Well, is yours any better?' demanded Joyce.

'It's not my turn yet. Gillian comes before me. You'll hear it all in good time. Anyway, it isn't a sickly sentimental name; I'll tell you that much! Malvina—Otilie—Esmeralda! Huh!' Cornelia finished up with an indescribable sound.

'I only thought of Malvina because I've been reading about one, and I thought it would be rather uncommon,' protested Jo.

'Well, I've been reading about a Volumnia—I've been reviving my memories of Shakespeare—but I've no intention of calling my daughter that,' said the doctor. 'In any case, it sounds more like a steamer than a small girl. And Malvina is nearly as bad. However! Come along, Gillian. Let's hear the worst.'

'I rather like the old-fashioned names like Faith and Prudence,' replied Gillian. 'I know Jo will have a fit at that, but I do.'

'If you call the babe Faith, she'll turn out the most unbelieving creature in creation,' protested Jo. 'And Mercy is enough to make her the most pitiless wretch under the sun! Do give us a chance, Gill!'

'Well, then, what about Loveday? *That's* pretty, and uncommon, too.'

'All right,' said the doctor. 'I'll put that down.—Now, Corney—and let me warn you in advance, young woman, that the baby won't be christened either Nokomis or Minehaha to please you, so keep off Indian names.'

'Shouldn't give them, either,' returned Cornelia. 'I like plain names best, and so would you if you had a name like mine. Jane is my pick.'

Down it went, though Jo pulled a face, and murmured, 'Jane Margaret! Well, that's about the limit!' Then the doctor turned to Stacie, who was sitting listening with many chuckles. 'Now, Stacie?'

'I like either Anne or Katharine, and either would go with Margaret, and they are plain, but not too plain,' she said.

'Quite right. It's Elsie's turn now.—Give me some coffee, Jo, while she is making up her mind.—Well, Elsie?'

'You know,' said Elsie conversationally, 'I always like girls' names that come from boys. Robin, for instance; she has a charming name. And then Joey's Josephine is so pretty, and it's from Joseph.'

'Well, you can't call the poor babe Jemima just because of that,' protested Joey.

'Haven't you any other name, Dr Jem?'' asked his guest.

'Yes; but if you think I'll agree to Wilhelmina any more easily than to Jemima, you'd better guess again,' he retorted.

'Oh, well, it was only a suggestion. However, I think I'll say Dorothea. It has a nice meaning, and it's not so ordinary as Dorothy. The worst of it is, they'll all call it Dorotea here, which spoils it.'

'Righto; I've got it down.—Now, Joey! You've been critical enough with other people, so we shall expect something outstandingly good from you,' declared the doctor. 'What's your choice?'

'I vote for Clare.—Not Clara, mind.—I hate that, and always did. We once had a maid called Clara in England when I was tiny, and she was a bad-tempered cat,' said Jo viciously. 'But I do like Clare, and it doesn't go too badly with Margaret, either.'

The doctor scribbled it down, and looked at his list. 'Well, I must say you've shown some ingenuity among the lot of you. Just listen to your selections!' And he read them out: 'Angel—Honor—Esmeralda—Rosalind—Otilie—Anstice—Loveday—Jane—Anne or Katharine—Dorothea—and Clare.'

'Which will you choose?' asked Gillian eagerly.

'Can't tell you yet. I must see what my wife says. After all, we've plenty of choice here, and I dare say we shall get something out of it. Personally,' he went on gravely, 'I'm in favour of christening her Esmeralda Margaret Honor Angel. It would be unique, anyhow—Joey, put that cushion down! Do you want to smash anything?'

'It's a good thing for you that we're having Kaffee und Kuchen,' retorted Jo as she laid down the cushion she had poised threateningly. 'As for the name, it's my belief you've been pulling our legs all this time.'

'I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing. My dear Jo, what a suggestion!' And he got up, and quitted the room somewhat hastily, leaving the girls looking at each other. He came back to say, 'If you've all finished, I think it would be as well to ring for Marie to clear.'

Jo stretched out her hand and rang the bell for Marie, once at the Chalet School, but installed at 'Die Rosen' on the marriage of her adored mistress. Marie was now the wife of the doctor's man, Andreas, and mother, herself, of a two-months-old daughter. Whilst she cleared the china away, they talked idly about various subjects.

'What a house this is for babies!' said Joyce suddenly when Marie had gone.

'It is, rather,' agreed Jo. 'And when my sister-in-law comes home in the summer as she thinks of doing, there'll be two more.'

'Two!' said Cornelia. 'I thought there was only Bridget?'

‘So there was. But Mollie had another baby at Christmas—a boy, so they’ve called him John Noel, to be known as Jack. Didn’t you hear? I thought I’d told everyone.’

‘Never heard a word of it,’ said Cornelia. Then she added, ‘I wonder what name they’ll choose for the baby really?’

‘I’ve no idea,’ said Joey. ‘I can tell you one thing, though. I’m certain it won’t be either Esmeralda or Otilie!—As for you, Ruth, what have you been reading lately? I’m sure you never heard the name Esmeralda out of a book.’

‘Well, it *was* in a book,’ admitted Ruth, ‘but I thought it was a lovely name, and *so* uncommon.’

‘Uncommon all right. Rather too much so, in my estimation.’

‘You could always shorten it to Esme, I suppose,’ said Cornelia. ‘But I bar toshy names like that all the time. Give me a good plain handle.’

‘Yes; what’s wrong with your own name that you’ve taken such a dislike to fancy ones?’ demanded Jo, suddenly sitting erect. ‘Cornelia isn’t as bad as all that comes to.’

Cornelia was in an expansive mood, and she now let slip the secret she had carefully preserved all her school-life. ‘It isn’t only that. I don’t mind that so much myself. It’s the rest that’s such a mess-up.’

‘The rest? I never knew you had any more. All your things are marked “C. F.” What else is there?’ asked Joyce.

‘That’s because I made Poppa agree to it. Momma chose the rest, and he always hated it, so he didn’t mind,’ explained Cornelia, whose mother had died when she was a few months old, so that she had no feeling for her, most of her life having been spent at one school or another.

‘Well, what is it?’

‘Swear you’ll tell nobody?’ said Cornelia cautiously.

‘Of course we will. Go on, Corney. It can’t be so awful as all that!’

‘Guess it’s the worst ever. I’m Cornelia Naida Anastasia Flower. Can you beat it?’ said Cornelia with a deep sigh.

‘Whew! whistled Jo. ‘What a signature for a cheque! You’re right, Corney. I’m not surprised you’ve sat on it all this time. I’d sit on a thing like that myself. Thank goodness, I’m plain Josephine Mary!’

However, when they were back at school again, they heard, to their vast indignation, that their labours of that afternoon had been in vain. Dr Jem, now at a safe distance from reprisals, calmly wrote to his sister-in-law that Madge had laughed till she nearly cried over the list, and then had refused to have anything to do with any of them. The baby was to be Sybil Margaret, Sybil being her own favourite name.

‘So all our work went for nothing,’ said the disgusted Jo. ‘I believe it was a put-up job on Jem’s part. Well, it’s the last time I’ll ever bother my head to choose a name for a kid—that’s certain!’

‘Oh, but you will have to choose for your own,’ said Marie von Eschenau, who, now that she was almost eighteen, was beginning to think seriously about such things.

‘Don’t mean to have any—don’t mean to marry,’ said Jo.

Marie laughed. ‘You may not now. But you do not know what the future may bring.’

‘I’m going to be an authoress. I’ll have enough to do finding names for my characters and bringing them safely through all their woes and trials without setting up a family on my own. Besides, every nice family should have a charming maiden aunt. I’m going to be the one in

ours. What with the Robin and David and Sybil, to say nothing of the twins and Bridget and Jack, my work will be cut out for me.'

'You may say so now,' said Marie, 'but time will show all things.'

'Oh, for goodness' sake don't talk in truisms! Be original, my child, whatever else you are. And *if* I ever do marry—and it's only *if*, remember—it won't be until I'm an aged dame, and wanting someone to trot me round in a bath-chair.'

With which appalling sentiment, Jo declared the discussion closed, and went off to seek Joyce and Cornelia, and tell them what the baby's name finally was to be.

CHAPTER XII

THE RAGGING OF MISS NORMAN

‘Hello, Joey! What’s gone wrong now?’

Jo Bettany, seated in the Sixth form-room, looked up with a start as Anne Seymour came and sat down on the lid of her desk. ‘You, Anne? What makes you think there’s anything wrong?’

‘Your expression, my dear. If I were asked, I should say that something really desperate had happened. I hope everything’s all right at the Sonnalpe?’ she added inquiringly.

‘Perfectly all right. I had a chat with my sister through the ’phone this morning—she’s downstairs again, you know—and Babs is to be christened next Sunday. I’ll have to remember to call her Sybil now, I suppose. The Robin was sent to bed early last night, and will have to go at eighteen for the whole week, by the way.’

‘Robin? What on earth has she been doing?’

A faint grin lightened Jo’s gloomy countenance for a moment as she replied, ‘Mixing powdered chalk with the ink in the Second form-room. *Isn’t* she coming on?’

‘Well, she’s got to the mischievous age,’ said Anne consideringly. ‘Eleven, isn’t she?’

‘Eleven last week. But Robin! I lost my breath when I heard.’

‘It’s a good sign,’ said Anne. ‘She’s evidently much stronger when she can be so much naughtier. I always think that very good children are generally too feeble to be anything else.’

‘Yes; there *is* that in it. But Robin’s not been an angel all her life till now, by any means. She’s been naughty on occasion.’

‘But what’s gone wrong if it isn’t the Sonnalpe?’ persisted Anne, suddenly returning to the first question.

‘Oh, just that little ass Joyce Linton has got into a row again.’

‘But what has it to do with you? And who is the row with, anyhow?’

‘Miss Norman. You know, I do think it’s a mistake to give her girls like Joyce and Thekla to deal with. Everyone agrees that she’s simply marvellous with the babies, and they all adore her. But she simply hasn’t an idea how to manage girls any older than ten.’

‘But why should she have anything to do with those two? They’re both Lower Fifth.’

‘They are; but neither of them knows much French, and Joyce has next to no German. Thekla, of course, despises French, and Joyce, apparently, did *not* bother with it at her last school—little idiot! It must have been good there, because Gill isn’t at all bad.’

‘I still don’t see what all this has to do with Miss Norman. I wish you’d cut the cackle and come to the ’osses, Jo!’

‘So I am if you’ll only give me time. You see, Miss Norman was educated in France, and as she has a certain amount of free time, Mademoiselle evolved the brilliant idea of turning her on to all those who need extra French—people like Mary Shaw, and Enid Sothern, and Biddy O’Ryan, and of course, Thekla and Joyce. Well, as far as I can gather, Thekla and Joyce, who haven’t relished being put with babes of ten and eleven, have done their best to brighten up the classes—from their own point of view. They’ve done precious little work themselves, and have taken good care that nobody else did any. Mary and Enid are imps, of course, and they and one or two of the others have followed the example set them by two Fifth Formers, and I can’t say I blame them very much.’

‘Nor I. But how do *you* come into all this?’

‘Well, they have one period when I’m free, and they work in that room at the end of the passage, next door to the library. This afternoon, I went along there to put in an hour on Spanish history. I hadn’t been there long before I found I wasn’t going to be allowed to do much work. There was the most awful noise coming from next door.’

‘What sort of a noise?’

‘Oh, the whole lot, whoever they were—I didn’t know then—were singing “God Save the King” at the tops of their voices.’

‘*What?*’ Anne looked startled at this. ‘But didn’t the silly little asses *know* they’d be heard?’

‘Who was there to hear them? The form-rooms are all at the other end of the house, and there are only the stock cupboards under that room. They couldn’t be expected to know that *I* was anywhere on the scene. The library isn’t in use at that hour as a rule.’

‘I’d forgotten that. Well; go on!’

‘Well, naturally I thought it must be some people who had no one with them, and I went in to tick them off thoroughly. I got a shock when I saw Miss Norman there, I can tell you.’

‘What was she doing?’ asked Anne curiously. ‘Rather a horrid position for her, wasn’t it?’

‘Disgusting! Oh, she was saying, “*Asseyez-vous—tenez-vous tranquilles!*” and looking awfully worried, poor thing.’

‘But—how feeble she must be!’ said downright Anne. ‘I’d like to see them treating *me* like that—I’d soon show them their mistake!’

‘Miss Norman is very jolly, but she’s too soft to deal with criminals like Joyce and Thekla. Any other of the Staff would have jumped on them so heavily that they wouldn’t have dared to say they were alive for the rest of the term. But she just doesn’t seem to be able to manage it with them.’

‘Then why on earth didn’t she report them to Mademoiselle? *She* would soon reduce them to flinders!’

Joey looked at Anne straightly. ‘Would *you* report them for behaviour like that if you could help—especially when you knew it would be tantamount to saying, “Sorry; but they are absolutely beyond me”—*would* you, now?’

‘I hadn’t thought of that,’ acknowledged Anne. ‘Well, what did you do after bouncing in on them like that? I know you *did* burst in, frothing with strange oaths—I know you, Joey!’

‘You’re quite right; I did. What did I do? Oh, said “I beg your pardon, Miss Norman. I didn’t know you were here.” What else could I say?’

‘Nothing, I suppose. What did *she* say?’

‘She said, “I’m not surprised at that,” and glared at them.’

‘On the weak side, rather,’ commented Anne.

‘Of course. And the worst of it was that as soon as they saw me, the little brutes shut up and became like funeral mutes. Joyce went on humming abstractedly, and Thekla did it with—

‘With a glare of defiance?’ suggested Anne. ‘The wonder to me is that she condescended to sing the English national anthem at all! I wonder it didn’t choke her!’

‘Me, too,’ agreed Jo.

‘Well, what happened next?’

‘Nothing much. I didn’t see how I could interfere—after all, she *is* a mistress!—so I just said that I was sorry again, but I heard them making rather a noise from the library where I

was working, and then left the room.'

'Any further efforts at a sing-song after that?'

'Not one. They might all have been dead next door for all the sound I heard. *And* I listened with all my ears!'

'Ah! They knew *you* wouldn't be soft with them,' said Anne shrewdly.

'The worst of it is, it looks so pointed. I've kept out of Miss Norman's way since then, but I can't go on doing it for ever, and I shall feel such a fool when I meet her. And I don't suppose she'll be fearfully comfortable either. She must *know* that I realise what was up. And I can't possibly take any notice of it, dearly as I should love to give them what they deserve. It's up to her to keep them in order, and I can't very well go showing my oar in. But this sort of thing can't go on, you know.'

'She ought to report them,' said Anne decidedly.

'I don't suppose she'll do that unless they drive her to it. As I said before, it's simply saying that she isn't capable of handling them, and I can't imagine that any mistress would like to own up to that. I should hate to do it myself!'

'Well, you're quite right saying you can't take any official notice as things stand. I should let it go at that for the present.'

'All very well; but you're not head-girl, and I am. If that sort of thing goes on we shall be having the Juniors thinking it funny or clever to play up the mistresses *and* the prefects. We've never had much of that sort of thing here—just an occasional odd sinner. But this is more or less organised. I don't mean to let it get any hold in the School if I can help it.'

'I don't see how you *can* help it. Head-girl or not, you can't go barging in on a lesson every time they misbehave. And you certainly can't report them over her head. So what are you going to do about it?'

'I wish I knew. It's most frightfully difficult to know *what* to do.'

'What is it that is so difficult?' asked a fresh voice; and Jo turned to see Frieda and Marie coming into the room together, followed by Simone Lecoutier and Vanna di Ricci.

'It's that little wretch, Joyce Linton, and the ever-sickening Thekla,' said Anne. 'Tell them, Joey.'

Thus urged, Joey repeated the story she had told Anne, and the four prefects listened attentively.

'But what a state of affairs!' exclaimed Vanna when the tale was at an end. 'And were they quiet after you had been in, Jo?'

'Deathly quiet,' said Jo. 'That's the sickening part of it.'

Marie flopped dejectedly into the nearest chair. 'It is all very well for you who have nothing of which to be ashamed. But Thekla is my cousin, and—'

'Third cousin about ten times removed!' put in Jo hastily.

'Still, she *is* a relation, and it is *not* nice that she should bring such disgrace on us all. I wish she had never come here!'

'But she does not bear your name, so it is not quite the same thing,' comforted Simone.

'Yes—that reminds me! I've always been going to ask you about that,' said Jo, changing the subject gladly. 'How is that, Marie? You told us that you had a mutual great-grandmother. How is it that Thekla's name is Von Stift and not Von Eschenau?'

'My great-uncle Wolfram changed his name to that of an uncle of his wife because the old man left him his estates if he would do so,' explained Marie. 'Also, he became a Protestant for the same reason. Of course he had been brought up Catholic like the rest of us.'

‘What a horrid thing to do!’ said Jo disgustedly. ‘I’m not Catholic myself, of course; but I do think to give up your religion just for money reasons is about the limit. Why, the Stuarts gave up the crown of England rather than change. You know what is said of them—that they gave up three crowns for a Mass.’

‘Uncle Wolfram thought nothing of it,’ said Marie. ‘Really, I suppose Thekla’s name should be “Von Eschenau und Von Stift,” but they do not use it.’

‘I’m not surprised; life’s too short for such a signature as that would be,’ said Jo with a grin.

‘I am only thankful they do *not* use it,’ said Marie. ‘But it makes no difference to the fact that Thekla is my cousin, and that her behaviour is abominable. I thought she was improving at the end of last term, but she is as bad this as when she first came.’

‘Oh, not quite,’ murmured Jo. ‘At least she has not tried to get exercise books by fair means or foul when she wants them. And she doesn’t fly out at people as she did. Also, she can walk a little, and she couldn’t do *that*.’

‘No; but she is rude and insubordinate,’ returned Marie, stumbling a little over the long word, fluent though five years at the Chalet School had rendered her English. ‘It is wrong that any girl of her age should behave so. She is sixteen now—nearly two years older than any of the others, and she ought to set them a better example.’

‘It would be much more to the point if *Joyce* set them a better example,’ said Jo. ‘After all, she has come from a decent school, and she must know what is done and what isn’t. Thekla, from her own account, only had a governess who daren’t say “Bo!” to a goose.’

‘But tell me, my Jo,’ said Simone, ‘what are you going to do about this affair? It cannot be permitted to continue.’

‘I know that as well as you. But if you can think of a solution to the problem, you’re cleverer than I am.’

‘Could not one of us always be in the library on Tuesday afternoons at that hour?’ suggested Frieda.

‘Who besides myself is free then?’ asked Jo blandly.

There was a blank silence. No one was, for it was the day when the Sixth had their drawing lesson with Herr Laubach. Jo had been exempted from drawing during the previous term, as she had no gift for it whatsoever. But even she could not always reckon on being free then. She had no set lesson for the period, but as a rule any mistress who was free at the time gave her a coaching in some subject. On this particular day, Miss Wilson should have taken her for geography, but had been obliged to retire to bed with neuralgia, and so the head-girl had been left to her own devices. But no one could be sure that that would happen again.

‘I suppose,’ said Frieda, ‘that we could not—but no; I see that we certainly could not.’

‘What were you going to suggest?’ asked Jo curiously.

But Frieda shook her head. ‘No; it is an impossibility.’

‘Couldn’t you deal with them for having disturbed you, Joey?’ asked Anne.

‘And practically tell them that the mistress in charge of them didn’t know enough to keep them in order? Oh no, thank you!’ said Jo.

‘Then we can do nothing?’ Simone sounded, dismayed.

‘Nothing; except keep an eye on them. If only Miss Norman would report them *once*, I believe it would settle them. But I’m afraid that’s just what she won’t do—unless, as I said before, they really drive her to it,’ said Jo.

In saying this, she was quite right. What none of the girls knew was that this was in the nature of extra coaching, for as it came out of Miss Norman's own free time, she received extra salary for it, and she was paying for the education of her youngest brother. There were four of them, of whom she was the eldest. The sister next to her was secretary to a bank manager, and was able to keep herself, but could help very little. The brother who came next was at Oxford, kept there by scholarships, and help from his godfather. The youngest of the family was a boy of fifteen, a clever fellow like his brother, and Ivy Norman had rejoiced when Mademoiselle Lepâtre had suggested that she should take over these extra classes, for the salary added to them meant that she could send Alec to the big public school where Geoffrey had been.

Their father had died two years before this, having succeeded in muddling away all his money, and Mrs Norman was a gentle, rather fragile woman, quite unfitted to cope with difficulties. When Ivy Norman had been appointed Head of the Junior School at the Chalet, with English as her teaching subject, at a very good salary indeed, the whole family rejoiced. This additional money had been a further cause for joy, and she felt that if she could possibly manage it, she must go on. With her own work among the Juniors, she did excellently. She understood the mind of the small girl, and kept her charges in hand easily. But when it came to older girls, she knew herself to be nervous and hesitating, and not very sure how to treat them. The chances are that no one would have discovered this if it had not been for Joyce Linton, for Thekla von Stift was no character-reader, and the twelve-year-olds who came for extra French had, up to the coming of Joyce, regarded Miss Norman with the awe that surrounds any mistress, even Enid Sothern and Mary Shaw behaving themselves well on the whole. But Joyce had been to a big school, and under all sorts and conditions of mistresses, and she had not been at the Chalet a fortnight before she had joyously grasped the mistress's weakness, and promptly began to play on it. People like Mary Shaw, Bidy O'Ryan, Emmie Linders, Enid Sothern, and even Sigrid Bjorneson, a small Swede, followed her lead, and those extra lessons had become a purgatory to poor Miss Norman.

It had been a nasty shock all round for them when Jo Bettany had marched in that afternoon. The people concerned with the sing-song wondered what she would do about it, for they felt fairly certain that Jo would never let such a thing pass. As for poor Miss Norman, she was bitterly ashamed when she thought how the very appearance of the head-girl had hushed the small sinners she herself had been incapable of silencing.

'What on earth did Jo want to be hanging about the library at that hour for?' grumbled Mary Shaw to Joyce after Kaffee und Kuchen.

'How on earth should I know?' snapped Joyce, whose conscience was uneasy. She had caught a glint in Jo's eyes when they rested on herself, a glint which she had not liked, and she felt very uncomfortable.

'Will Jo report us to Mademoiselle?' asked Sigrid with a slight shiver.

'Of course not! It isn't her business,' returned Joyce. 'Miss Norman was supposed to be looking after us.'

Sigrid was silenced, and Joyce brightened up a little. 'Anyhow, it's never happened before, and there's only a fortnight or so left of term now, so I don't suppose it'll happen again. We'll hope not, anyway, 'cos I've got a ripping plan for our next lesson.'

'What is it?' asked Emmie Linders, a very fair child of eleven, who always looked, so Jo declared, as if she had changed eyebrows and lashes with someone extra dark, for in her these

features were black, which made rather a startling contrast with her flaxen hair and pink-and-white skin.

‘Well, you know Miss Norman said this afternoon that we weren’t fit to be in a civilised community?’

‘Yes; but I did not know what she meant by that,’ complained Sigrid.

‘Well, she meant that we were behaving like savages,’ explained Joyce. ‘As she thinks that, I vote we give her some jolly good reason for thinking it.’

‘But how?’ demanded Mary Shaw.

‘Behave like savages, of course.’

‘But—how can we?’ Emmie Linders looked puzzled.

‘Oh, you goop! How *do* savages behave?’

‘They eat each other,’ said Enid Sothern unexpectedly. ‘You surely don’t expect us to do that? If so, bags me *not* to be the victim.’

‘Ass!’ said the exasperated Joyce. ‘I didn’t say *cannibals!*’

‘Well, but I do not know how savages behave,’ persisted Emmie, who was rather given to harping on one subject. ‘I have never seen any.’

‘Never read any stories about them either, I suppose?’

‘I have read *The Coral Island*,’ said Emmie doubtfully. ‘But we cannot worship snakes, or —’

‘Good gracious, I didn’t mean things like that, you ass! Do have a little common-sense!’ said Joyce rudely.

‘Then what *did* you mean?’ asked Sigrid, seeing that Emmie had taken refuge in offended silence at this.

‘Why, when she asks us questions, let’s pretend we don’t understand—’

‘But we did that before—three lessons ago,’ said Enid. ‘Don’t you remember how mad she got?’

‘I know. But we won’t say it like that, of course. Savages talk with grunts and clicks—it says so in the Second Form geography. *We’ll* talk like that!’

‘I see!’ Mary Shaw was nothing if not bright. ‘And we could squat on the floor like the Australians do at Correeborees!’

‘I suppose you mean Corroborees,’ said Joyce, with a superior air.

But here, no less a person than Thekla took a hand. Hitherto she had been silent; but this was rather too much for her sixteen years. ‘I shall not sit on the floor. It is childish and undignified.’

‘Very well, then; don’t! *You* can do a war-dance if you prefer it.’

‘What else could we do?’ asked Emmie, forgetting her sulks at this brilliant idea.

‘Why, we can *all* dance war-dances if it comes to that. And savages always go to sleep anywhere and at any time,’ said Joyce, who might be truly described as a ‘snapper-up of unconsidered trifles’ when it came to general information, though she was bottom of her form in arithmetic, and never by any chance remembered a single date in history.

‘What—go to sleep in the lesson? She’ll be awfully mad if we do!’

‘Who cares? She can’t *do* anything, and she won’t report us, for she never does,’ said Joyce optimistically. ‘And let’s go with our hair all over the place.’

‘Oh, yes! And we can paint our faces, too,’ added Mary enthusiastically.

‘But how paint our faces?’ asked Sigrid.

‘With our paint-boxes, of course. We’ve all got them.’

‘You may do as you like,’ announced Thekla briefly at this. ‘I find it childish and undignified, and I shall not do it.’

‘I wonder you condescend to come to the lesson at all!’ retorted Joyce.

‘I am not coming.’

‘What? Don’t be a goat, Thekla! Of course you’ll have to come. She’ll only send for you if you don’t, and if you don’t come, then she’s safe to report you to Mademoiselle. No Staff worth her salt would do anything else. Then you’ll get into a fearful row without having had any fun, and that isn’t worth while.’

But Thekla was not to be persuaded. After all, she *was* sixteen in years, and in some ways she was a good three or four years older than that. This ‘rag’ which Joyce and Co were so joyously arranging had no appeal whatever for her. Moreover, she objected to having to take any lessons with children as young as Mary and Sigrid and Emmie, and she felt that this would be a good opportunity to make a stand.

The result of all this was that the disgusted younger girls finally sheered off, leaving her to her own devices, and gathered together in a corner to plan further torments for poor Miss Norman, who looked forward to these extra lessons with real dread nowadays.

It was Thursday before the extra-French people had a chance to put their plans into action, for the Wednesday lesson took place next door to the room in which Miss Annersley was teaching literature in the Upper Fifth, and they dared not bring *her* wrath on their heads, even Joyce preferring to keep in her good books. Miss Annersley was one of the gentlest people on the Staff of the Chalet School, but when she was roused, her tongue cut like a knife, and she was famed for such punishments as she did give. But on Thursday, they were once more at work in the little room next the library, and they had the additional satisfaction of knowing that none of the Sixth could interfere with them this time, for they had seen the entire band progressing to the laboratory for a lesson with Miss Wilson.

Accordingly, when Miss Norman, inwardly quaking, appeared at the door, she found her class all squatting on their heels on the floor, the desks having been pushed to one side. What is more, not a single girl looked even Christian! They had all painted their faces with the most startling effects they could manage, and had carefully dishevelled their hair, adorning it with such feathers as they could find. Joyce, perhaps, bore off the palm, for she had ‘back-combed’ her golden locks till they stood out all round her head with amazing fuzziness. They had been obliged to keep on their brown tunics and shantung tops, but two or three people had wrapped themselves in their travelling-rugs, and Mary Shaw had rolled up her sleeves and painted her arms.

‘Girls!’ gasped Miss Norman when she had recovered her breath. ‘How dare you behave like this? Get up at once!’

This command was received with a volley of grunts, clicks, and hisses such as were never before heard in any civilised classroom.

‘Do you hear what I say?’ exclaimed the angry mistress. ‘Get up at once, and go and make yourselves respectable!’

For reply, Joyce Linton sprang to her feet, and began to leap about the room, tossing her arms in the air, and grunting all the time. For a moment Miss Norman wondered if she were in full possession of her senses. Then she knew that the child was merely behaving extra badly. It had only needed this to bring her to boiling-point. Whether or no she must give up the extra work with the extra pay, this sort of thing must be stopped at once. She went to the door, and

when she got there, she turned round. Her face was white, and there was a glint in her eyes that alarmed one or two people who had not lost their heads quite so badly as the rest.

‘I am going straight downstairs to bring Mademoiselle,’ she said. ‘You will all stay exactly as you are until she comes.’

‘Sorry, but I can’t keep *this* position long,’ said Joyce flippantly, balancing on one foot, and raising the other to the level of her eyes, as she spoke.

Miss Norman said no more. She simply left the room, shutting the door behind her, and a dead silence followed on the sharp click that followed, telling them that she had turned the key on them.

‘The mean *pig!*’ cried Joyce. ‘She doesn’t trust us one scrap!’

Two or three people, who had thought of making a bolt for it once the mistress’s back was turned, looked rather shamefaced, and shuffled their feet. As for Joyce, she might be mischievous, idle, and impudent, but she was no coward, and she raged at this insult to their honour.

They were not imprisoned long. In five minutes’ time, they heard footsteps coming along the corridor, and then the door was opened, and Mademoiselle came in, followed by Miss Norman, who still had that queer, white look.

Of what came next, few if any of the girls cared to think when it was all over. Mademoiselle was very gentle as a rule, and governed almost imperceptibly. But on this occasion, she let herself go. Before she had half-finished with them, most of them were weeping bitterly; and if Joyce and Enid managed to control themselves, it was only because they both had an almost boyish hatred of tears. Finally, their sentence was pronounced. For the rest of the term every girl would be degraded to the form beneath her present one. They would go to bed with the Juniors, and would take all their meals at the punishment table. For the remainder of the week, they would be in silence—a terrible punishment, for it meant that they might speak to nobody but the mistresses at lessons, and nobody might speak to them. Finally, they would each receive a bad-conduct report at the end of term, and one or two people looked decidedly blue over this. Emmie Linders, for example, knew that her father would be exceedingly angry with her, and Biddy O’Ryan, whose reports always went to Miss Wilson as Captain of the Guides, howled like a lost dog.

‘And now,’ concluded Mademoiselle, ‘you will each one of you in turn apologise to Miss Norman for your disgraceful behaviour, after which you will go to your dormitories, where the prefects will come to you and see that you make yourselves clean and tidy again. When that is done, Thekla von Stift and Joyce Linton will come to me in the study, Thekla coming first.’ Then she looked round to fix Thekla with a glare, and discovered, what she had hitherto been too much upset to notice before, that Thekla was not there.

‘Where, then, is Thekla?’ she demanded. ‘How is it that she is not with the class?’

There was a dead silence. The Middles were indignant because Thekla had withdrawn from this last ‘rag,’ but they were not prepared to give her away.

‘Was Thekla here before you came for me, Miss Norman?’ asked Mademoiselle, turning to the mistress.

Poor Miss Norman, who could scarcely have told if the entire Sixth Form had been there, such was the turmoil in her mind, shook her head. ‘I’m afraid I don’t really know, Mademoiselle.’

‘Well, I can understand that you were too much shocked at the wicked and unladylike behaviour of these children to notice,’ declared Mademoiselle. ‘They will, of course,

apologise to you at once. I am ashamed to think that Chalet School girls could behave so badly. But I must know where Thekla is.—Joyce Linton, do you know?’

‘No, Mademoiselle,’ said Joyce, thankful to be able to answer this truthfully.

‘Did you know that she was not coming to the lesson?’

Silence! Joyce was not going to tell a lie; neither was she going to tell tales. But Mademoiselle had already passed on, and was looking at Emmie Linders.

‘Emmie Linders, do you know where Thekla is?’

‘I think she may be in her dormitory,’ sobbed Emmie, who was still overcome at the thought of that bad-conduct report that was to go home.

Mademoiselle turned to the door and opened it. Frieda Mensch was passing just then, on her way to the library. Mademoiselle called her, and bade her seek Thekla von Stift, and when she had found her, to send her to the study at once.

Opening her eyes widely at the sights she glimpsed through the open door, Frieda gave up her quest of the book she had been sent to fetch, and ran off to seek Thekla. She finally ran her to earth in the Third form-room, where she had no right to be. She was also reading a novel the cover of which told Frieda that it must have been smuggled into school.

‘You are to go to Mademoiselle at once,’ said the second prefect curtly. ‘She is in the study. And when you get there, you may report yourself for being in the Third form-room, and also for having that book at all.’

‘And if I do not?’ asked Thekla, arching her brows insolently.

‘Then I shall report you,’ said Frieda.

‘Ah yes; you will tell tales,’ sneered Thekla.

But Frieda was not given to losing her temper, and she took no notice of the sneer. ‘Do as I bid you, Thekla, or you will be in trouble,’ she said. Then she added significantly, ‘I think you are that already, so it will be as well not to add to it.’

Thekla coloured furiously, but something in Frieda’s quiet gaze silenced her, and she went off to be sharply catechised and severely lectured on her rudeness to Miss Norman. She soon found that the fact that she had taken no part in that afternoon’s affair availed her nothing, since she had calmly absented herself from the lesson without permission. The report she was obliged to give of herself, thanks to Frieda, made matters worse, and Mademoiselle had never bettered the lecture she administered then.

Finally, Joyce, who after half an hour’s struggle had reduced her hair to something like its normal appearance, arrived, and was closeted with the head-mistress for nearly an hour. When it was over, she disappeared, and no one saw anything more of her that day. Whatever it was Mademoiselle had said to her, it seemed to have taken effect. But when she appeared next morning, her eyes were so red and swollen with crying, that it was difficult to recognise pretty Joyce Linton at all. On the Sunday, she and Gillian had a long talk together, from which Gillian emerged looking very subdued, and Joyce had plainly been crying again.

As for the rest, they went about like mice all the rest of that week. And as long as they had to take those extra classes, they were the most diligent set of pupils the Chalet School had ever known.

CHAPTER XIII

A FRIEND IN NEED

It was Sunday afternoon, and the Staff, freed for the time being from cares, were sitting in the salon at the Chalet School, drinking after-luncheon coffee, and managing very comfortably to forget that they *were* Staff.

Miss Stewart and Miss Wilson, closest of friends, were having an argument as to the best club to use when caught in the bunker at the ninth hole of the golf-links Dr Jem had had laid out on an alm a little higher than the Sonnalpe alm itself. Mademoiselle Lachenais and Matron Lloyd were discussing frocks, and little Miss Nalder, sitting near them and enjoying her cigarette, was putting in a word every now and then. Miss Annersley, curled up in a big armchair, was reading one of the 'More William' stories, and punctuating it with chuckles, while Miss Leslie and Mademoiselle Lepâtte exchanged views with Miss Edwards and Matron Gould from Le Petit Chalet on the latest novels. Mr Denny was manipulating the wireless, and his sister and Miss Norman were discussing what they should do with the week's holiday which was so near.

'Personally, I'm thinking of going to Vienna,' said Miss Denny, as she lighted a cigarette. 'Of course, if there's any likelihood of further political trouble, I'll have to give it up. But if the coast remains clear, I rather fancy that is what I'll do.'

'I'm going up to the Annexe to spend it with Juliet Carrick and Grizel Cochrane,' said Miss Norman, who had more or less got over the mid-week trouble by this time. 'Can't afford to go anywhere very expensive, and it really isn't worth it for a week. We shall have a long summer holiday, thanks to this new arrangement, and I'm going home for that.'

'What's that about going home?' asked Miss Annersley, closing her book with a final chuckle. 'What a kid! How she thinks of all the things, I can't imagine!'

'How *who* thinks of *what* things?' demanded Miss Denny, taking the book unceremoniously from her. 'Oh, "William"! Yes; he is rather a priceless youth, isn't he?'

'Have you finished with that book, Hilda?' asked Miss Wilson from across the room. 'I'm next for it, remember.'

'Not quite, but you can have it this afternoon if you like. I'm on duty with the Seniors, and as it's such a glorious day, I'm going to take them out. Anyone know what the time is, by the way?'

'Nearly half-past fourteen,' said Miss Nalder with a glance at her watch.—'Mademoiselle, that clock of yours is ten minutes fast. You ought to give it to Evvy and Co to boil.'

A laugh went round the room at this reference to the antics of those young ladies in connection with the school clock. It would be a long time before any of them were allowed to forget that particular prank which had taken the fancy of the whole School hugely.

'I prefer to wait till Gluckstein can come up from Innsbruck,' said Mademoiselle Lepâtte placidly. 'But you are right, my dear Hilda. Such a day as this is perfect for a promenade.'

'I think I'll take the Middles off, too,' said Miss Stewart, jumping to her feet as she spoke. 'Coming, Nell?'

Miss Wilson—whose Christian name happened to be Helena—nodded. 'It's my free Sunday, but I don't mind if I do. If I stay here I shall only stew over that idiotic book of

Hilda's, and I haven't been out to-day except to go to church, and you can scarcely call that "out." All right, Con; I'll come.'

'I think the Juniors had better have a walk, too,' said Miss Edwards, rising also. 'But be it known to all here present, we are going alone, as we have a secret to discuss for the Sale of Work. So don't offer to come, anyone, please.'

'You and your secrets!' said Miss Nalder scornfully. 'Miss Norman and I are going round the Dripping Rock, anyhow, so you can take your precious babies wherever you like. *We* shan't trouble you!'

They went off laughing, and Miss Edwards departed to seek her beloved Juniors and walk them up the valley towards the opening to the great Tiern Pass, where they all chattered hard about the secret that was thrilling them.

Meanwhile, Miss Annersley went to collect the Seniors and suggest that they should take a walk round the foot of the lake, and turn down to Torteswald, a little hamlet on the far side of the railway line that runs between Seespitz down to Spärtz.

'Good!' said Jo, who was standing at the door when the mistress came to seek them.

Gillian, who had been very quiet, and had looked thoroughly unhappy since the morning, looked up. 'Will you be my partner, Jo?' she asked quickly.

Two or three people turned and stared at her, and Simone Lecoutier flushed pink. She was always inclined to be jealous where Jo was concerned. Five years before, when the school had just started, she had begged for Jo's friendship, and had, in the beginning, made herself wretched, and Jo irritable, on many occasions by her resentment of any other friends the head-mistress's young sister might have. However, Jo had taken a firm stand and insisted that she had a perfect right to have as many friends as she liked, and the French girl had slowly come to recognise the fact that the only way to keep the girl she admired most was to share her. All the same, sensible as Simone had grown during the years which had passed, she still felt it if Jo went off with anyone fresh. Frieda and Marie were old stories, and the four of them made up a little coterie which worked together quite well. But Gillian was new this term, and Simone didn't like it.

'How quick you are, Gillian!' cried Frieda before the French girl could say anything. 'I'll be just as quick and ask Simone to be *my* partner.'

'And I will take Carla,' laughed Marie who had a great fondness for quiet Carla von Flügen. 'Will you accept me as partner, Carla?'

Carla nodded, and Simone, thus recalled to the fact of her eighteen years and her dignity as a prefect, held her tongue—which was just what Frieda the peacemaker had intended. They all ran upstairs together to get their hats and coats, and were presently standing in the front path which only they might use, waiting for the mistress. As they stood in rank, Gillian turned to Jo with a face of such desperate earnestness as surprised the elder girl.

'Jo, when we break rank will you come with me?' she asked in an undertone. 'I want to ask your advice.—I simply *must* talk it over with somebody!' she added desperately.

Jo looked her surprise. 'Of course, if you like,' she said slowly. 'I don't know whether I shall be able to help you, though. You ought to go to someone with rather more common-sense than I have if you want advice,' she added with a laugh.

'No; I'd rather ask you, and I'm sure you can help me,' said Gillian.

'Oh, all right, then. We'll go off by ourselves, once we break rank,' said Jo easily. She liked what she had seen of Gillian. To her eyes, there was in the girl the right stuff to make a leader in the school in the years to come. And they were coming very quickly. This was her

own last year. In November, she would be eighteen, and she knew that she could not stay at school for ever. The end of the summer term would see the departure not only of herself, but of Marie, Frieda, Sophie, Carla, Eva, Vanna, Bianca, and Simone. There were several girls who were now in the Sixth who would be ready to step into their shoes, such as Anne Seymour, Louise Redfield, and Thora Helgersen. But after them must come the people now in one or other of the Fifts, and Jo felt that if Gillian Linton were still at the school she would make a very good prefect. Therefore, she prepared to listen to what she had to say.

'I only hope it's no bad news of Mrs Linton,' she thought as they promenaded round the lake towards Seespitz which held the terminus to the mountain railway, a large 'Gasthaus' or hotel, and one or two shanties where the railwaymen lived during the season when the railway was open.

It was not till they had turned to cross the water-meadows and the Gasthaus was left behind that Miss Annersley gave the signal for them to break rank; but when she did, Joey slipped an arm through her partner's, and drew her to one side, clearly intimating that they didn't want any of the others to join them. Simone saw, and her mouth took a pathetic droop. But Frieda called to Marie and Carla to join them, and they were soon busily discussing Baby Sybil's christening, and Simone managed to forget her troubles.

Meanwhile, the two walking alone were going in silence. Gillian was not very sure how to begin, and Jo, with no idea what it was all about, could not help her. At length the Fifth Former made a desperate effort, and broke straight into the middle of things.

'Jo, I'm in dreadful trouble, and I want your help.—It's about Joyce,' she added.

Joey cast a side-glance at her. 'Oh? Well, I'm jolly glad it's not what I was afraid it might be,' she said enigmatically.

'You mean—Mummy?' said Gillian in startled tones. 'Oh, no; she's getting on quite well. Dr Jem told me so when he was down yesterday. If this warm weather continues, they are going to take her bed out to the balcony every day for a while. He thinks she's strong enough to stand being moved now. Oh, it isn't Mummy!'

'No; so I see. But, Gillian, I don't see how you can be exactly responsible for Joyce's monkey-tricks. After all, she's fourteen—quite old enough to know what's done and what isn't. That last affair of hers really was the limit, you know. She's deserved every bit of her punishment. They all have, as far as that goes.'

'I know. But—you see—' Gillian gulped for a moment. Then she went on, 'You see—it doesn't—stop there for Joyce.'

'Good gracious! What else? I should have thought she'd got a swingeing punishment enough for anything this time!' ejaculated Jo.

'She isn't to have any further punishment for this affair,' said Gillian slowly. 'Only—Mademoiselle told her that if she were reported for anything more this term, she couldn't be allowed to come back.'

Jo was speechless for a moment. So bad a thing as this had never happened before. They had had insubordinate girls at the Chalet School before Joyce Linton. Grizel Cochrane had caused endless trouble during the early part of her sojourn there; and Cornelia Flower had not borne the best of characters at first, though she had certainly reformed considerably. Even Stacie Benson had been a good deal of a problem, though *her* fate had been decided by her own silliness. But never before had it been suggested that any girl behaved so badly that she must be sent away.

‘She surely hasn’t been as idiotic as all that?’ said the head-girl at length. ‘I know she’s got into endless rows; but goodness! we all do at that age!’

‘But not rows like Joyce’s,’ said Gillian, more composed now that she had got the worst of the telling over. ‘She proposed that feast that made her so ill. And the ragging of Miss Norman was her idea too. And Mademoiselle told me to-day that all the Staff complain that she is idle and disobedient and rude, and some of the younger ones are following her example. You know, Jo, she’s my own sister, but I’ve got to say it—she *is* very pretty and taking, and all that, and the girls *do* follow her. They always did. It was the same thing at the High School. She’s always been frightfully popular.’

‘Oh, I can guess that,’ said Jo. ‘She’s a picture for looks, of course. And I know she’s got pretty manners, and can talk prettily when she likes—not that she’s ever wasted any of it on me,’ she added with a grin. ‘I can see that lots of the others would rally round her; but I didn’t know it was as bad as all that.’

‘I’ve always known she was a little slacker at lessons,’ said Gillian. ‘At home it used to take me all my time to get her to do enough prep to keep out of any fearfully bad rows. Here, of course, I simply can’t do it. We do prep in our own room, and she’s with the rest of the Middles. That’s just the worst of it, Jo. She has no one to stand over her and *make* her do her work if she doesn’t choose to do it.’

‘My dear girl, there’s always someone on duty.’

‘Yes; but you don’t go round and prod them on, and say, “Have you done your Latin?” and insist on seeing their French so that you can point out any *ghastly* mistakes, and hear her over her history.’

‘Mean to say you did all that in England?’

Gillian nodded. ‘Of course,’ she said simply. ‘Mummy was never strong enough to bother with it, so I had to.’

‘I don’t see when you got time for your own work.’

‘Oh, I managed. For one thing, I’ve got the kind of memory that makes it easy to learn. And then I got so that I could do things quickly and accurately. It really is largely the result of practice.’

‘I don’t know so much about that. No amount of practice would make me accurate as a general rule,’ said Jo with an infectious grin. ‘They all say that there’s no monotony about my efforts, anyhow. For if I get a thing right twice running, it’s safe to be weirdly and impossibly wrong the third time!’

Gillian smiled faintly. ‘Well, I found it easy enough. But Joyce has always hated work of all kinds, and if she wasn’t made to do it, she would never have learnt anything.’

Jo was silent. Herself a very much younger sister, she had never had to cope with this sort of thing. And all the elder sisters she had ever known had left their juniors to look after themselves and expected them to stand on their own feet. To her mind, Gillian seemed to have nursemaided Joyce all along the line.

‘I suppose you think I’ve been horribly selfish about it since we came here?’ queried Gillian anxiously. ‘I know I should have thought more about Joyce—I can’t think what made me forget her like this. I suppose it must have been partly Mummy’s illness, though that’s no excuse, really.’

Jo found her voice. ‘If you want to know,’ she said bluntly, ‘I think Joyce is a jolly lucky babe to have had you behind her like this. At the same time, it couldn’t go on, of course. She’s fourteen now, isn’t she?’

Gillian nodded, her sapphire-blue eyes fixed eagerly on Jo's face.

'Well, at fourteen, she ought to be standing on her own feet, and I think you'll have to let her. Oh, I don't say you oughtn't to keep, say, half an eye on her doings. But you simply *can't* go on playing sheepdog to her all her life. For one thing, it's not giving her any chance to show what she's got in her. For another, it's not fair on you.'

'But, Jo, you don't understand! You may think I'm an idiot, but hand of honour, Joyce isn't really fourteen in anything but age. She—she's just a *little* girl, not much older than your Robin.'

'Not as old in some ways, I should think,' said Jo crisply. 'Even the Robin has sense enough to know that you can't rag a mistress as that crowd did without getting into scaldingly hot water. But look here, Gill, don't you think that the very fact that Mademoiselle talked like that to her will have given her such a shock that she'll try to pull up?'

Gillian was silent. Joey, looking at her, saw that she was horribly worried, and wondered. To her mind, the bare threat of being sent away from the school should be enough to make any girl, however wickedly inclined, behave herself decently for the rest of her school career. For the first time the head-girl wondered if there were wheels within wheels of which she knew nothing. Subconsciously, she noted how pretty Gillian was with her black curls rippling round her face and floating over her shoulders in two tails; with her pink-and-white skin, like apple-blossom; and with her very blue eyes beneath the long black lashes.

'Quite as pretty in her own way as Joyce,' thought Jo. 'And a heaps more interesting prettiness. Joyce is nothing but a fairy-tale-princess picture; but Gill has a good deal in her, behind her lovely colouring. I wonder what's at the bottom of all this?'

Then Gillian spoke. 'I think it may have given her a lesson—I hope so. You know, don't you, Jo, that such a thing might—might—would upset Mummy very badly?'

'Does Joyce know that?'

'I said something about it this morning when—when we were talking. I don't know if she took it in—you see, I don't want to make her unhappy about Mummy, and she never has realised just how—how bad it's all been.'

'Look here,' said Jo abruptly, 'what about *me* having a talk with her? Is she still in silence—oh, but she can't be if you've been talking to her.'

'No; the silence ended last night,' said Gillian.

'Then shall I see what I can do?'

'Joyce may not listen to you. You see, Jo, you *are* a pree—head-girl at that. And kids of Joyce's age always look on the prees as mortal enemies and something miles away from ordinary folk.'

'It always seems to me such a mad thing,' said Jo. 'Of course, when I was a small kid at Taverton High School—before we came here, that was—I know the prees seemed *aged!* But I'm not so awfully much older than Joyce, and we aren't nearly so inaccessible as they were.'

'I guess you seem so to the kids here,' said Gillian shrewdly. 'Still, Joyce rather admires you at a distance—I know that from things she's said. For one thing, you're the only English prefect here. For another, you are so awfully fair—not that the rest aren't. But—well, Joyce does think an awful lot of you at the bottom of her heart.'

'Oh, rot!' said Jo uncomfortably.

'It isn't rot—and I'm surprised at you for using such language!' Gillian was beginning to feel happier. Jo was proving herself a real friend in need. 'Will you really talk to her, Jo?'

‘Of course! Hello, we seem to be turning. Come on and join Marie and Co. We’ve discussed this enough for the present. All the talking in the world won’t alter things at present. I’ll try and get hold of Joyce some time during the week and see if I can make anything of her. Don’t worry, Gill. The kid will probably pull herself together after this last fussation. I’ve seen it happen before!’

CHAPTER XIV

JOEY KEEPS HER PROMISE

‘Joyce—Joyce! Are you doing anything just now?’

Joyce Linton stopped in her aimless walk round the playing-field, and looked round. Jo Bettany was coming up with her, her flushed face and tossed hair showing that she had been running. Joey’s black mop was cropped page-fashion, with deep fringe in front, since it would have cost a small fortune to keep her in slides or clips. Even so, it was rarely tidy, and at the moment it looked like a golliwog’s wig.

‘Are you doing anything just now?’ repeated Jo. ‘Because if not, I’m going round to the Post Hotel to get some stamps, and if you’d like to come with me, you can. I asked Mademoiselle, and she said it would be all right. Will you come?’

Joyce’s face, which had been gloomy before, lightened a little at this, and she nodded. ‘I’d love to come if you’re sure it’ll be all right. May I really?’

‘Rather! As long as Mademoiselle knows where you are, it’s quite all right. You can always go out with a prefect providing you’ve got permission first. Come along and get your hat. I don’t think you need bother about a coat; it’ll be warm enough in our blazers.’

Joyce nodded. It was a *warm* day. April had opened with varying fits of sunshine and rain; but for the last week the rain had gone, and only the sunshine remained, and the girls found their blazers quite warm enough even in the fresh breeze that was blowing. The pair walked decorously across the field to the school to get their hats and gloves. Then, duly attired, they went down the hall, and out by the front door which Joey, by right of her head-girlship, might always use. They passed the door of the Lower Fifth on their way, and just as they reached it, Thekla von Stift came out. She started when she saw them, and then glared at Jo, who took no notice of her, being engaged in struggling with a glove-button. Joyce flushed, and looked hurriedly away. She was not anxious to have any more dealings with Thekla than she could help in these days. But already Jo had finished with her glove, and was opening the front door.

‘Come along, Joyce. Thank goodness the head-girl can use this, and not have the long trail round by the side door and the gate in the fence! It’s one of the few—sadly few!—advantages of being head-girl!’

Joyce smiled, but her face was grave almost at once. They shut the door behind them, and went down the broad, flagged path, between borders already filled with blossoming flowers. Daffodils and hyacinths were nearly over; but tulips and white narcissi tossed their heads in the wind, and red and golden wallflowers perfumed the air deliciously. Near the gate lilies-of-the-valley were swaying closed green bells, that would open shortly and scatter their incense round. The garden was hedged round with sturdy, flowering bushes, all in bud, and outside these there was a stout fence of iron stakes and withies over which climbing plants were already throwing a delicate green veil. Jo swung open the gate in the fence, and she and Joyce went across the plank bridge which crossed the wide, deep ditch which had been dug all round the estate as a precaution against any flooding by the stream which ran across the alm, and which was subject to floods in thaw-time. Directly before the girls lay the Tiernsee, blue as a sapphire, with tiny waves, crested with pearly foam, and glittering in the sunshine. The birds were singing, and everywhere there were signs that spring had arrived with all her court.

Joyce turned and glanced across at the great mountain up the slope of which lay the shelf known as the Sonnalpe. From where they stood it was impossible to see the village; but she knew where it was.

Joey followed her wistful gaze, and her face became graver. 'Better news this morning, though, Joyce,' she said gently.

Joyce nodded, her face still sombre. 'I know. But it's pretty awful. I thought Mummy was going on so well and would soon be quite fit again.'

'She's bound to have some ups and downs,' said Jo, still in that curiously gentle tone. 'Try not to worry, old thing. At bottom, she *is* better. Only it will take time before she really gets on to her feet again.'

Joyce said nothing. She had had a nasty fright on the Monday of that week when a telephoned message from the Sonnalpe had told her and Gillian that their mother had had a slight attack of haemorrhage. Mademoiselle had broken the news as gently as she could, softening the details as far as she dared. But Mrs Linton was still in too critical a state for them to leave her daughters in ignorance, and Joyce, with that heavy load on her conscience, had been bitterly unhappy about it. But this morning had brought the news that she was stronger, and there had been no return of the haemorrhage, and the doctors thought it only meant a temporary set-back.

Jo had been very busy all the rest of that Sunday when she had promised Gillian to talk to Joyce; and since then, she had thought it best to let matters slide till they saw how Mrs Linton went on. But now that the two days of anxiety were past and Dr Jem had 'phoned down that morning that his patient was once more making steady progress, she felt that she ought to fulfil her promise. Hence her invitation to Joyce.

She said nothing about it at first. Indeed, until they had been to the little shop built below the Post Hotel, which served the purposes of post office and general stores to the lake-folk, she chatted about school gossip—Cornelia's brilliant construe of *Festina lente* as 'a Lenten festival'; the netball match they were to play against St Scholastika's on the coming Saturday, when they hoped to get their revenge, the Saints having defeated them by nine-seven in the last match; the milk puddings which had been the production of the Fourth on their last cookery day, and which they had forgotten to sweeten.

But when she had got her stamps and two bars of milk chocolate, she turned to her companion and said, 'What about a stroll to the Dripping Rock? I said we might go when I asked leave, and Mademoiselle said we could so long as we weren't late for Kaffee und Kuchen. You haven't seen it yet, have you?'

'No,' said Joyce, looking interested. 'Some of the others have told, me about it, though, and I'd love to see it.'

'Right, then. We'll promenade along and take a squint at it. It ought to be simply shooting just now after all that rain last week. Here, take this; it'll be something to nibble as we go. This weather always makes me ravenous, and I should imagine it has the same effect on you.'

Joyce took the proffered bar of chocolate, and together they went along the lake-path, munching amiably. Jo strolled along, her hands in her pockets, her hat on the back of her head. Once or twice she broke into a clear fluting whistle, but she always checked herself.

'It's a terrible thing to have a temptation to whistle on all occasions, Joyce,' she said once.

'But you do it so beautifully,' said Joyce, who was totally unable to manage anything like a whistle herself. 'It sounds like a blackbird.'

‘I dare say; but it’s very strictly verboten—in term-time, anyhow. Only I keep forgetting, and it’s so easy to forget sometimes, as I dare say you’ve found out. When I hear the birds all fluting away, I simply *ache* to join in.’

‘I didn’t know grown-ups were like that,’ said Joyce with a startled glance at her.

‘Oh, my *aunt!* Is *that* how I seem to you?’

‘Well, you are, aren’t you? If you had long hair it would be up, wouldn’t it?’ said Joyce in amazement.

Joey gripped hold of both pockets on her blazer. ‘My *dear* Joyce! How ever old do you think I am?’

‘I hadn’t thought about it. But the head-girl at the High was nearly nineteen, and *her* hair was up. And Marie and Frieda and Simone and Sophie and Bianca all have theirs up, and they’re your chums.’

‘I’m not eighteen yet,’ interrupted Jo with great impressiveness. All the same, she looked grave. She was beginning to see that Gillian was right, and that she did seem rather inaccessible to the younger girls. ‘However, Joyce, my child, I’m going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle—or would “aunt” be a better way of putting it? Look here, I know that Middles get full of beans at times; I did it myself when I was a Middle. But there are ways and ways of expressing it. Can’t you find out some less sensational way of doing it than you’ve tried lately?’

Joyce reddened. ‘I know I haven’t always been as decent as I might.’

‘I’m saying nothing about that midnight feast of yours,’ went on Joey. ‘It never occurred to our crowd to want to do such a thing, which is rather queer when you come to think of it, for the girls here were always so awfully keen to “be very English,” as they called it. They got hold of all sorts of school-stories, and tried to carry out as many of the ideas in them as they could.’ Here she stopped and grinned as she thought of some of those same stories.

‘How did they do it?’ asked Joyce curiously, forgetting that she had been on the point of resenting what promised to be a ‘pi-jaw.’

‘Well, the *Chaletian* arose out of that, for one thing. And another was the celebration of my sister’s birthday. You know we always keep that as a holiday, even though she’s been at the Sonnalpe for three years now, don’t you?’

Joyce nodded. ‘Corney told me about that—and that you all went to Oberammergau last year to see the Passion Play,’ she said.

‘Well, those are two of the things. There were others—Oh, ask some of your own crowd to tell you if you must know!’ said Jo; then added virtuously, ‘I am not going to give anyone away. But that’s what I meant when I spoke of being full of beans. We weren’t any of us archangels by any means. But we didn’t count ragging a mistress in the particular way your crowd ragged Miss Norman as “English fun.” It’s too much like kicking someone weaker than yourself.’

Joyce went beetroot colour. ‘I didn’t think of it that way,’ she said ashamedly.

‘I know. But look here, Joyce; supposing you had been in Miss Norman’s place? She doesn’t profess to teach elder girls, you know. The babies love her, and she’s splendid with them. But she’s taken on this extra job of helping you people with your languages so that you’ll get on better in form. She does it in her own free time’—Jo, it is needless to state, knew nothing about the extra salary, and never even thought of it—‘and then the only way you thank her is by behaving like little brutes—for you *were* brutal, you know!’

No one, so far, had put it to Joyce quite like this. She could go no redder, but her head drooped, and she felt more ashamed of herself than she had ever done in her life.

'You know,' went on Joey conversationally, 'I should never have thought that *you* would have gone in for that sort of thing. After all, it's hardly good enough, you know.'

'I wasn't the only one,' said Joyce after a long pause.

'No; but you were the chief one,' retorted Joey. 'I can guess it was your idea. You have brains, you know, even if you don't always use 'em!'

This silenced Joyce again. She had an idea that she ought to resent all this, but Jo's casual manner and that hint that she herself had never been a model disarmed her. Besides, she was still under the spell of Mademoiselle's last words to her, and she was inwardly terrified lest the threat of expulsion should be carried out.

'Over this railing,' said Jo as they reached the fence which divides Briesau from the lake-path to Geisalm, the next hamlet. 'Keep up to the mountain-slope as far as you can. The rocks have been falling again, I see. If this goes on, we shan't be able to get along here in another year or two.'

'What will you do then?' asked Joyce.

'No idea. I suppose they'll cut a path higher up, and bring it down further along to join the original one. This is always breaking away now. Bill says it's friable rock, but she thinks it doesn't go very far. She has an idea that probably this part was yards wider not so many years ago. However, I can't be sure about it.'

The two girls climbed the fence, and then for some distance hugged the mountain-side, for just here the path overhung the lake until it reached a wide fissure which was crossed by a plank bridge which ran a good distance into the path at either side.

'Know the story of this?' demanded Jo, waving her hand towards it. 'We were here when it happened—Christmas term before last. *And* most of St Scholastika's. We'd got across, but some of the Saints, along with Miss Browne, hadn't. It was beginning to widen before that, and whether we set it going or not, I can't tell, but anyhow, it suddenly seemed to give, and there we were—planted there; for we couldn't possibly get back as it was. We had to go on to Geisalm, and then climb up the mountain to the big alm where a good many of the valley cattle are pastured in the summer, and where there is a little village called Mechtthau. Then we had to scramble down the other side, and so reach the Pass. It was winter, and the snow lay thick on the ground, and it had been freezing, so you can imagine what it was like. The Saints had only come that term, and weren't accustomed to climbing, and some of their Juniors were there, too. It was a nice little expedition, believe me! We were thankful to find haycarts waiting for us at the end of the Pass.'

'But how did they know to come there?' asked Joyce, thankful that the conversation had left her own doings.

'Bill had rung up from Geisalm to the school to let them know; and, of course, the Fawn had to go back with the few left her, and she called in and told them. She was—well—rather agitated when it all happened,' and Jo grinned puckishly at the remembrance.

'Why?' asked Joyce.

'My child, what a question! How d'you think you'd have felt if you'd been responsible for about thirty girls who were all at one side of a chasm while you were at the other? Especially when you'd *seen* the rocks avalanching down. We daren't try to cross on the ice, either. There are springs all around here, and even in the hardest frosts it's not safe.'

'Oh, I see.—Oh, Jo, is that the Dripping Rock?'

Jo nodded. 'This is it. It's made by a tiny stream that runs through the alm above and shoots over just here. She's spouting pretty well to-day,' she added, with a glance at the water which was pouring over the edge of the shallow basin it had hollowed for itself in the huge rock that jutted out from the mountain wall. 'We shouldn't be able to get to Geisalm to-day even if we wanted to, unless we were prepared to risk a wetting.'

Joyce watched the hurrying water, enraptured. It crashed down on to the rock beneath, and then tore across it to fall into the lake. Jo let her stand for a few minutes, and then suggested that they had better turn. Otherwise they would be late for Kaffee und Kuchen.

'It's lovely,' said Joyce with a final look as she turned and followed the head-girl along the path. 'What is it like in winter when it's frozen? But perhaps it doesn't freeze?'

'Doesn't it just! Oh, it's like a fairy-tale picture then, of course. And when the sun shines, and all the icicles sparkle, it's one of the loveliest sights I ever saw,' said Jo. 'Mind where you're going, Joyce. I don't like the look of the path. The rain we've had since Half-term seems to have loosened it a little.'

'What would happen?' Joyce wanted to know.

'What happened before. It would vanish into the lake. And us with it!'

'Is the lake very deep here? Couldn't we swim somehow?'

'Oh, it's deep all right. This is one of the deepest parts. It varies very much, you know. But I shouldn't fancy a bath to-day. The springs keep it icy, even in summer, and what it must be like with all the ice and snow water from the mountains, I shiver to think. That's one reason why we never have swimming early.'

However, they were not to be tested this time. They reached the fence in safety, and Jo vaulted over neatly, Joyce following her with a flying leap that made the head-girl open her eyes.

'I say! You're not a bad jumper!' she exclaimed. 'Are you keen on gym?'

'Rather! If I'd got to earn my living, I'd like to be a gym mistress like Miss Nalder,' said Joyce.

Jo glanced at her. 'That means plenty of hard work, my child. For one thing, I know you've got to pass London Matric. to get into any decent college. You'll have to dig in at work if that's your idea.'

'Oh, are you sure?' Joyce looked crestfallen. 'I thought you'd only have to work at gym and folk-dancing.'

'Oh, my goodness, no! There's heaps more than that to do,' said Jo. 'I know, because Grizel Cochrane, up at the Annexe, once thought of it, but her people wouldn't hear of it. You must do massage and anatomy, and lots like that. And you've to be as strong as a horse, too.'

'Well, I'm strong enough,' said Joyce. 'Bilious attacks are the only things that ever upset me.' And then she suddenly went red as she remembered the cause of the last one.

'Then you'd better begin to pull up on your work,' said Jo, kindly ignoring her blushes. She suddenly stood still and faced round on the younger girl. 'Look here, Joyce; it's no business of mine, of course, but—*can't* you pull up a bit?' Then, as she saw the sulky resentment coming into Joyce's eyes, she added, 'Think how bucked your mother would be! It would be as good as a tonic to her to hear you'd decided to pitch in and really do something. I don't believe you're stupid, you know,' she went on. 'You have got ideas, even if they aren't quite the right kind. If I were you, I'd produce some of the other, and show people what you've got in you. You *could!* Corney has, and if she has, then you can.'

Joyce stood silent. Suddenly she looked up. 'Perhaps—Corney was a—much nicer girl than me all along,' she said unevenly.

'Corney was a trial when she first came,' said Jo lightly. 'She'll tell you that much herself if you ask her.' There was a pause. Then the head-girl suddenly touched the Middle lightly. 'What about it, Joyce?'

Joyce laid her hand into the slender, tanned one Jo was offering her. 'I'll—I'll have a shot,' she promised.

'Good for you, I knew you'd be a sport if you tried,' said Jo largely, and not altogether truthfully, for she had been doubtful on this point. 'And now, my child, we must run, or we shall be late, and then there'll be a fuss!'

CHAPTER XV

THEKLA'S PLOT

With a resolution born of her promise to Joey, Joyce worked steadily during prep that evening. What is more, she really tried, a thing she had not once done since she entered the school. The result was that next day those of the Staff who dealt with the Lower Fifth were agreeably surprised by the quality of her work, and came to the conclusion that Mademoiselle's latest lecture must have done her all the good in the world.

Still better news came down from the Sonnalpe. Mrs Linton had passed an excellent night, and the doctors thought that if she continued to go on as she was doing, both the girls might spend the week-end with her. Joyce went to her dormitory that night feeling as if everything was going to go right. She had gained an A+ for her history, and B for both algebra and French. During prep, she again worked with all her might, refusing to heed anything else, and turning a cold shoulder to all Thekla's whispers. The rest of the form regarded her with curiosity, wondering what on earth had happened to her to change her so completely. Gillian, catching her sister for ten minutes before Abendessen, went off after that meal to dance in the common-room quite happily, for Joyce had whispered, 'I'm going to try hard with my lessons, Gill—really I am! Do you think Mummy will be bucked?'

'I should think she'll be so bucked when she hears that she'll be out of bed in no time,' said Gillian. 'Oh, Joyce, I *am* glad, darling!'

Altogether, as Joyce rose from her knees at the bedside and climbed into bed, she felt a much happier girl than she had been for some time. Violet and Greta bade her good-night quite pleasantly, and she replied gaily, 'Good-night, and pleasant dreams!' Cornelia, by virtue of her additional year, did not come upstairs for another hour.

Joyce was tired, and soon drowsed off to sleep. She was wakened from a very sound slumber by someone shaking and even pinching her. She sat up, and almost uttered an exclamation. But a hand was slipped over her mouth, and a well-known voice whispered, 'Hush! You must not cry out. I will to speak with you now. Come!'

Greatly wondering, and still drowsy and somewhat confused, Joyce tumbled out of bed and looked for her dressing-gown. As tidiness was not one of her virtues, she failed to find that garment—it happened to be under the bed where she had dropped it before getting in—and went out into the moonlit corridor in her pyjamas. With her tossed golden curls, her sleepy blue eyes, and her bare feet, she looked very small and young, and the girl who had summoned her in calm defiance of all rules, looked very much taller and older.

'What d'you want, Thekla?' asked Joyce, yawning drowsily. 'And whatever time is it?'

'That is no matter,' said Thekla. 'I wish to speak with you, Joyce. Come to that window, and we will sit behind the curtains.'

Joyce always took a little time to waken completely, so now she followed the elder girl to the window, and they sat down on the window-seat. Thekla pulled the chintz curtains across them, so that they were hidden from view—though anyone desiring to investigate must have noticed the suspicious-looking bulges.

'What is it?' repeated Joyce impatiently. 'Do hurry up, 'cos it's fearfully cold, and there's a ghastly draught here—and anyway, it's against the rules!'

‘It is this,’ said Thekla, paying no heed to what the child said. ‘I wish that you shall not be friends with Jo Bettany, for I hate her, and she shall not be friends with you.’

Joyce was awake with a vengeance now. ‘I say, have you gone balmy?’ she demanded.

‘Balmy,’ repeated Thekla, to whom the word was new.

‘Yes—moonstruck—dotty—oh, *mad*, then! ’Cos I never heard such rot in my life before! What business is it of yours *who* I’m friendly with, I’d like to know? D’you mean to say that you’ve dragged me out here and are making me break rules just to say things like this? You must be completely off!’

Thekla’s cold grey eyes grew colder, and her face set in hard lines. ‘It is that you are *my* friend, and I do not wish that you should friends with that horrible girl be,’ she said. ‘Do you hear, Joyce? I am older than you, and have the right to guide you—’

‘I can see myself letting you!’ retorted Joyce with more vigour than caution.

‘Hush!’ said Thekla imperatively. ‘You will rouse the others, and then there will be trouble.’

‘Don’t care if I do!’ Joyce was thoroughly angry. She had been wakened out of a sweet sleep, and brought here on a chilly night to talk rubbish about Jo Bettany who had been so kind to her. And, if you please, Thekla coolly claimed the right to choose her friends for her! The spoilt darling of the Lintons had never been treated like this before, and had no idea of submitting to it—the less so, since Thekla was deliberately making her break a stringent rule.

‘I can tell you this, Thekla von Stift,’ she said furiously, ‘I shall choose my friends to suit myself. The *only* person who has any right to interfere with me that way is Mummy, and *she* won’t when it’s a girl as jolly decent as Joey Bettany. If you were more like her, it would be better for you!’

Joyce was quite right to be indignant; but she chose a most unwise way of showing her indignation. To be told that she ought to be more like Jo made Thekla nearly choke with rage. She gripped Joyce’s wrist so tightly that the younger girl nearly cried out with the pain.

‘How dare you—how dare you!’ hissed the Prussian venomously. ‘You think you will treat me like a glove that you throw away because he has holes in him! But I will teach you, Joyce Linton! Yes; and I will on that Schweinhund, Jo Bettany, revenged be!’

‘“Schweinhund” is swearing,’ said Joyce nastily. ‘I should have thought—’

‘Anyone there?’

The voice gave the pair in the window-seat an unpleasant shock, for it was the last thing they had expected. But Joyce had left the dormitory door open, and her own furious tones had awakened Cornelia Flower, head of the dormitory by virtue of her fifteen years, and she had come out to see what was going on. Her sharp eyes at once noticed the queer distortion of the curtain folds, and she made straight for the window and pulled them aside.

‘Joyce Linton—and Thekla von Stift!’ she exclaimed in her usual bell-like tones. ‘What on earth are you doing here at this time?’

‘Be quiet!’ hissed Thekla furiously. ‘You will us into trouble bring!’

‘Well, what are you doing here?’ demanded Cornelia, dropping her voice a little. ‘Do you know that it’s after one?’ And she glanced at the watch she had forgotten to remove from her wrist when she went to bed. ‘Joyce, get back to your cubey at once. If anyone catches you here there’ll be the father and mother of a row!’

Joyce needed no second telling. Besides, she had been frightened by Thekla’s rage, and still felt shaky. She slipped past Cornelia, and reached the dormitory door before Thekla could

recover her senses sufficiently to snatch at her and hold her back. But just as the child reached the door, she was held up by Miss Wilson's amazed tones.

'*Girls!* What are you doing here at this time of night?'

Joyce had been afraid of Thekla, but she was no coward. She shot back and stood beside Cornelia, who looked rather taken aback. Miss Wilson advanced along the corridor till she came up to the trio, at whom she looked so coldly that even Thekla's rage was cooled down, and she shivered a little.

'What are you doing here?' she asked again.

Even in that moment, Cornelia's brain was saying, 'Her hair's naturally curly! Anyhow, she hasn't any pins in it. What a whacking plait! And, I say, she looks quite young! I guess she isn't so old after all!' At the same time, she said in her very blindest tones, 'I heard a noise and came out, Miss Wilson. Perhaps Joyce and Thekla did the same.'

Miss Wilson looked at the three closely, and for the first time was struck by the pinched blue look in Joyce's face. The child was shivering now, what with her light attire and the fresh chill of the early spring night. The mistress stretched out a hand, and took one of hers.

'Joyce! You are frozen with the cold! Why did you come out without your dressing-gown, whatever noise you may have heard? Here; come to my room all of you!' And without more ado she whirled them off to the pretty little room where she switched on her electric radiator—stoves in the dormitories and passages were out now that the spring had come—and made them sit down beside it. Then, noticing that Joyce was still shivering, she stripped a blanket off the bed, and rolled her in it before she ran down to the kitchen to purloin a jug of milk and three mugs. Then she came back, plugged in her milk-heater, and dropped it into the jug. While the milk was warming, she sat down, and turned to Cornelia again.

'Now, Cornelia, I want to know the meaning of all this.—Joyce, are you getting warm?'

'Yes, thank you, Miss Wilson,' said Joyce, who looked warmer already.

'Bill' nodded, and then turned to the young American. 'Well, Cornelia?'

'It's just what I said, Miss Wilson,' said Cornelia earnestly. 'I heard a noise in the corridor, so I got up and went to see what it was.'

'I see. I suppose you know that your yelling woke me? I only wonder the whole house isn't raised! When do you mean to learn to moderate your tones, Cornelia?'

'I'm sorry,' apologised Cornelia, the pink in her cheeks deepening.

'Well, it's all right as it happens.—Now, Thekla, you are next oldest in age—wait, though, aren't you older than Corney? Yes? I thought so. Now will you be so good as to tell me what took you into the corridor at one o'clock in the morning?'

'It—it is as Cornelia has said,' said Thekla, carefully avoiding looking at either Cornelia or Joyce. 'I hear a noise in the passage, and I go to see what makes him, and then I see Joyce. I was asking why she was there, and Cornelia came.'

The other two girls were startled into silence. Cornelia, knowing where she had found the two, and how, was so taken aback at this flagrant falsehood, that she had nothing to say. As for Joyce, that lie of Thekla's ended the last feeling of friendship between them. She sat up, looking a little warmer for 'Bill's' prompt treatment, and faced the mistress.

'I didn't hear any noise in the corridor, Miss Wilson. I—' Then she came to a sudden full stop. She could not tell the exact truth, for that would mean giving Thekla away, and whatever the Prussian might have done, Joyce was too well trained in the schoolgirl's code to tell tales. So she stopped short and went red.

Miss Wilson got up, and went to the table to test the milk. It was hot now, and she poured it out, and gave each of the girls a mugful. 'Drink that, girls,' she said briefly. 'Now, Joyce, when you have finished, I want to know what woke you in the first instance.'

Joyce drained her milk, and set the mug down, feeling considerably better for the hot drink. 'I—a sound, Miss Wilson,' she said in answer to the mistress's question.

'What sort of a sound?'

'A—a—whispery sort of sound, I think.'

'Where was it—in the corridor? But you said you heard no sound in the corridor.'

'I didn't.'

'Where, then?'

Joyce set her lips and remained obstinately silent.

Miss Wilson glanced at her. Then the sound of the big clock striking two decided her to end the inquiry for the present. She turned to the other two: 'Finished your milk? Then go back to bed at once, please. I will see you all in the morning. Joyce, as you have no slippers, and I am certain you would wake the whole house if you tried to flounder along in mine, I am going to carry you back. Come along!'

Joyce gasped; but Miss Wilson was already as good as her word, and had swung her up in strong, capable arms, and was carrying her, blanket and all, back to the dormitory. It was less exacting than it sounds, for Joyce was small and lightly built for her age, and Miss Wilson was tall and athletic, and made nothing of her light weight. She laid the child in her bed, still rolled up in the blanket, and tucked her in.

'You had better keep that round you for to-night, Joyce,' she said. 'You were very silly to go out without your slippers and dressing-gown, and I don't want you to start a cold, with the Sale of Work next week. Are you quite warm now? Let me feel your hands.'

'Much warmer, thank you, Miss Wilson,' murmured Joyce, who was on the verge of tears. She was worn out, and the unexpected kindness of the mistress she had always regarded as her pet abhorrence, had unnerved her. Perhaps Miss Wilson realised this. She made sure that the froggy paws were warming up, tucked the bedclothes more securely round the child, and then left her, and went to see that Cornelia was safe in bed. She finished by visiting Thekla, but that young lady was apparently asleep, so Miss Wilson, having closed the door behind her, retired to her own room, where she spread her travelling-rug on the bed to make up for the blanket wrapped round Joyce, and settled down to finish her own disturbed slumbers.

Next morning she sent word to the three that she would see them in the chemistry laboratory at Break; they were to come to her as soon as the bell sounded and bring their cocoa and biscuits with them. Joyce had tried to get hold of Thekla to ask what she had meant by her extraordinary statements, but the elder girl kept out of her way; and as Joyce had extra German for the first period, and Thekla did not take algebra, it was comparatively easy for her to avoid the English child.

As for Cornelia, she had looked at Thekla once with such meaning in her eyes, that that young person had gone fiery red, and turned hastily away. Things were not going to be quite as easy as she had imagined, but she had decided on her story, and she meant to stick to it. Joyce should regret her temerity of the night before; and since Jo Bettany had obviously decided to take up the younger Linton, then Jo should be hurt by Joyce's hurt.

When Break came, Cornelia marched up to Joyce. 'Come along,' she said. 'Bill will be waiting for us, I expect.'

'What have you been up to, Corney?'

demanded Evadne, overhearing this.

‘Tell you later,’ said Cornelia. ‘Bill told us to get our cocoa and biscuits and go to her at once, so we’d better.’

‘I guess you had,’ agreed her compatriot. ‘Bill don’t like being kept waiting one mite, though she does make such a fuss about being patient and persevering.’

The two got their cocoa and biscuits, and then went off, not waiting for Thekla, who had not yet come from the extra English lesson she had at this period. They went to the laboratory, where Miss Wilson was waiting for them, her cocoa before her. She was nibbling a biscuit thoughtfully, and when she saw them, waved them to one of the benches. ‘You had best sit down, girls,’ she said. ‘We must wait for Thekla, of course, so get on with your lunch while you wait.’

Thekla came a few minutes later. There was a cold light in her eyes, and her lips were set in a straight line.

‘You are late,’ said Miss Wilson coldly.

‘Miss Annersley did not finish,’ said Thekla sulkily.

‘I see. In that case I must excuse you. Sit down, and let us get this over.—First of all, Joyce, I wish to know why you were out on the corridor last night. You told me that you heard a noise, but it was not out there. Where was it, then?’

‘In my cubicle,’ said Joyce, who had decided that she might say so much.

‘In your cubicle? And pray, what made it?’

Joyce was silent. Thekla might tell as many lies as she chose, but Joyce was not going to give her away. The mistress, guessing partly at what lay behind her silence, left her, and turned to the German girl.

‘I will hear your story while Joyce is deciding to obey me, Thekla,’ she said. ‘Why were you out there in the first instance? You can scarcely have heard any noise in Joyce’s cubicle, as your own dormitory is at the other end of the passage.’

‘That is true,’ said Thekla, fixing her eyes on her cocoa. ‘But I heard Joyce walking in the corridor, and I went to see what was wrong. I feared that the house on fire might be.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Miss Wilson sharply. ‘If that had been the case you would certainly have heard more than Joyce’s footsteps. And as it is, I cannot imagine how you heard those, since she was barefoot.’

‘Still, I did hear them,’ said Thekla sulkily. ‘I heard the pit-pat, and went to see who it was and what was wrong. It might have been someone who was ill. I did not know.’

Cornelia deliberately turned round, and looked at her. Then she set down her mug with decision. Thekla changed colour. She was only sixteen, and though she could tell lies quite brazenly, there was something in the other girl’s action that upset her. Miss Wilson took no notice of the American’s action, but went on with her catechism. ‘Well; so you heard a noise and went to investigate. Go on!’

‘I found Joyce in the corridor,’ went on Thekla, still not looking at anyone. ‘I went to ask her what she did there, for it is against the rules. Then Cornelia did come out, and you also, and that is all.’

Miss Wilson was silent for a moment. ‘Who is the head of your dormitory?’ she asked at length.

‘It is Margia Stevens,’ said Thekla, lifting her eyes in amazement.

‘Cornelia, go and bring Margia here, please.’

Cornelia got up and went off. As she went, she gave Thekla another of those straight, hard stares, and again Thekla went red.

‘Finish your biscuits while you are waiting,’ said Miss Wilson briefly; and she drank the last of her own cocoa.

Margia, looking rather guilty—she was racking her brains for the reason for this summons, and could find none, having a fairly clear conscience for once—entered the room a minute or two later with Cornelia behind her, and came to attention before the mistress.

‘Did you hear any noise last night after you had gone to bed, Margia?’ asked ‘Bill,’ plunging headlong into things.

‘Yes, Miss Wilson,’ said Margia. ‘I heard the dormitory door open and Thekla come in. I knew it was Thekla from the cubey she went to. Then I heard you follow, and, of course, there were voices in the corridor. But as I knew you were there, I thought I had better not interfere.’

‘I see. Nothing else?’

‘No, Miss Wilson.’

‘Thank you. You may go—Oh, wait a moment! Are you sleeping better now?’

Margia, who had been suffering from slight insomnia lately, nodded. ‘Yes; much better, thank you.’

‘Still wake easily, I suppose?’

‘Fairly easily, Miss Wilson.’

‘And do you find it an easy matter to see that your dormitory get up when the rising-bell goes?’

‘Yes, thank you. As a rule it is quite easy.’

‘Who are the most difficult to rouse?’

With her eyes wide with wonder, Margia replied, ‘Thekla and Hilda are the worst, Miss Wilson. I had to shake Thekla this morning,’ she added.

‘Thank you. Then that is all. Please do not repeat what I have said.’

‘No, Miss Wilson.’ And Margia withdrew, nearly ill with curiosity.

When she had gone, Miss Wilson turned to Thekla again. ‘Well, Thekla?’

Thekla sat in sullen silence.

‘What have you to say?’—and oh! the cutting ring in Miss Wilson’s usually pleasant tones!—‘You claim to have heard a noise that did not disturb a girl who is a notoriously light sleeper, while you, who are evidently a heavy one, were awakened by it. Margia’s cubicle is near the door; yours, as I noticed last night, is at the other end of the room. I should like to know the meaning of all this.’

‘I—I was awake before,’ stammered Thekla, rather losing her head.

‘Indeed? You gave me to understand that it was the noise of Joyce’s footsteps that roused you.’

There was a really ghastly pause after this. The bell rang for the end of Break, but Miss Wilson took no notice of it, so the girls were unable to do so. It was a free period for the mistress, and she simply carried on with her interrogation, regardless of what her compeers might have to say over the absence of the three from their classes.

‘Once more, Joyce,’ said Miss Wilson, turning to the youngest of the trio, ‘I ask you what it was that disturbed you? You may as well tell me,’ she added, ‘for I intend to know, and you all stay here till I do. Also, though the code of never telling tales is, as a rule, quite justifiable, I am afraid you must break it for once. I cannot imagine that any girl in your circumstances would be likely to do such a mad thing as to break the rule about leaving your dormitory after Lights Out without an adequate excuse. Besides, the very fact that you were merely in your

pyjamas and had not even troubled to put on your bedroom slippers points to the fact that you were roused out of your sleep suddenly. Who roused you—Thekla?’

Joyce literally jumped, for Miss Wilson shot out the last word at her with the suddenness of a boomerang. Also, she was startled by the perspicuity of the mistress.

‘Answer me, Joyce!’

‘I—I—’ stammered poor Joyce in a regular quandary.

‘Miss Wilson, I’ll bet my bottom dollar it *was* Thekla!’ burst out Cornelia at this point. She had been aching to speak, but respect for Miss Wilson had kept her silent up till now. ‘Joyce won’t tell you, but I am going to *report* as head of her dormitory that when I heard the sound of voices in the corridor and went out, I saw a queer bulge in the curtains over the window where we were when you came. I pulled them apart, and Joyce and Thekla were both there, sitting in the window-seat; Thekla had hold of Joyce, and Joyce looked scared out of her seven senses. Maybe I’ve no right to go horning in like this, but I guess I’m not leaving this story to a girl who’s told you nothing but dead-straight *lies* about it all!’

‘Thank you, Cornelia; that will do,’ said Miss Wilson, recovering her self-possession, of which Cornelia’s sudden descent into the arena had robbed her. ‘Kindly refrain from using slang, and leave Joyce to answer for herself.’

But if her words were tart, her tone was not, and Cornelia suppressed a grin with difficulty.

‘Now, Joyce,’ said the mistress, turning to the child once more, ‘I am still waiting for an answer to my question.’

Seeing that Cornelia had already given away things most handsomely, Joyce looked up, very flushed and uncomfortable. ‘Corney is right, Miss Wilson. But I’d never have told you if she hadn’t got it first shot,’ she said.

‘So I gather,’ replied Miss Wilson drily. ‘I wish you people would try to realise that there are times and seasons when the schoolgirl code cannot be followed implicitly. I should like the full story, please.—Cornelia, I do not think you can help us any further, and you have only missed a quarter of an hour of your lesson, so perhaps you had better go to your form-room and make the most of what is left. Who is with you now?’

‘Mademoiselle Lachenais for French translation,’ said Cornelia, whose face had fallen appreciably at this.

‘Please give my apologies to Mademoiselle Lachenais, and tell her I will see her about Joyce and Thekla at the end of the morning,’ said Miss Wilson, ‘and explain why I have detained you also.’

‘Yes, Miss Wilson.’

Cornelia left the room quietly, but once the door was safely shut behind her, she paused to execute a dance of rage at being sent away just when things promised to become really interesting. As Mademoiselle Lepâtre happened to be coming along in search of Miss Wilson, she got the full benefit of it, and Cornelia received a sharp reprimand for her behaviour, which, however, did not subdue her noticeably. Then she was dismissed to her form-room, and had to go with becoming sedateness, while Mademoiselle opened the laboratory door, and walked in on a scene she had little anticipated.

‘And now, Thekla,’ Miss Wilson was saying, ‘I should like your account of last night’s performance once more; and please tell me the truth this time.’

It was at this point that Mademoiselle, still somewhat annoyed at Cornelia’s outrageous behaviour, irrupted into the room and into the very middle of things. Naturally Miss Wilson had to give some explanation, and she told the whole tale in a few bald words.

Mademoiselle looked anxiously at Joyce. 'Joyce, is this the truth, my child?'

'Yes, Mademoiselle,' replied Joyce.

'What have you to say, Thekla?'

Thekla shrugged her shoulders. Her plot to get Joyce into trouble with Mademoiselle, and so hurt Jo Bettany who had taken her up, had gone wrong, thanks to Cornelia Flower. Well, she must just acknowledge it, and plan better another time.

'As you know all now, it is of little use my saying anything,' she said in her own language.

'Joyce, you may go,' said Mademoiselle gently. 'Miss Wilson will finish with you later on. Please explain to the mistress in charge of your form.'

She looked at 'Bill' as she spoke, and that lady nodded. Joyce departed, rather inclined to wonder if she were standing on her head or her heels. As Mademoiselle Lachenais, good-natured as she was as a rule, was annoyed at the way her class was being broken up, she was received with the terse remark, 'You may go to your seat. We will continue with this matter of your lateness after the lesson!'

Joyce sat down, and ten minutes afterwards proceeded to make a thorough mess of the paragraph she had to translate. However, when Mademoiselle Lachenais understood it all, she forgave the child, and remitted the detention and bad mark she had awarded.

Meanwhile, Mademoiselle Lepâtre was busy with Thekla.

'Will you please bring Thekla to the study, Miss Wilson?' she had said, and, shepherded by the science mistress, Thekla duly went to the study, prepared to receive another severe lecture. It never came. Mademoiselle catechised her closely until she had got the whole story. Then she leaned back in her chair and looked across at Miss Wilson.

'Will you please take Thekla von Stift to Matron?' she said, a cold incisiveness in her tones. 'Then I should be glad if you would ask Miss Annersley, Miss Stewart, and Mademoiselle Lachenais to join us here. They may set their forms work to do, and perhaps you would ask Josephine Bettany to send prefects to sit with any forms thus left who are below Upper Fifth.'

Miss Wilson got up. 'Certainly, Mademoiselle,' she said.

She took Thekla, now becoming vaguely uneasy, out of the room, and handed her over to Matron. Then she sought out the three members of Staff Mademoiselle had named, and returned with them to the study. For an hour the five mistresses were closeted together, but at the end of that time they had come to a final decision. A message was sent to Matron, who brought her prisoner down to the study once more. Mademoiselle put two questions—and two only—to Thekla. The venom in the replies settled the matter.

'I did it because I hate Jo Bettany, and Joyce was becoming friendly with her,' declared the Prussian girl. 'I knew that if Joyce got into bad trouble, it would grieve Jo—if Joyce were expelled, then Jo would be hurt; so as Joyce would not give up this so-foolish new friendship of hers, I decided to do it to punish them both. No; I am not sorry I did it. At least it will have given Joyce a nasty fright.'

'Do you realise what you are saying, Thekla?' demanded Miss Annersley, who was the first to recover her breath after this.

Thekla's eyes glinted. 'Yes; I know. But I tell you, I hate Jo; and now I hate Joyce too. I meant to harm them—I am only sorry I did not succeed. For I suppose Joyce will be forgiven, since you have found it all out.'

The mistresses looked at each other. It was plain that in her present mood Thekla would listen to nothing. There was only one thing to do.

‘I am sorry, Thekla,’ said Mademoiselle slowly, still speaking in the German which had been used throughout the interview. ‘We have done our best for you. Had you expressed sorrow for your wrong-doing, it might have been just possible to give you another chance. But your only sorrow is because your wicked plans have not succeeded. Our best has done you no good. For the first time in the history of the School we have to say that a girl is gaining no good here. Instead, you are doing actual harm. That cannot be permitted, so we must send you away.’

‘Send me away?’ Thekla did not understand.

‘Yes; expel you, as you would have got Joyce expelled if you had had your own way. You have proved yourself to be ruthless, vindictive, and unchristian. We cannot keep you here. I will telegraph to your father now—this very afternoon, asking him to come and take you away. Until he does so, you will remain in the Sanatorium, for I cannot allow you to associate with the other girls. You will never be left alone, for we are unable to trust you—you have no sense of honour. Now you will go with Matron, and your possessions will be brought to you from your dormitory.—Take her away, please, Matron. I will send someone to relieve you of your watch presently.’

Thekla went white to the lips. She had never expected this to happen, and her pride was bitterly hurt. It had seemed to her that *she* had bestowed an honour on the School by coming to it. Now, it seemed that the School did not want her. More; she was told that she was a harm to the School.

‘You cannot do this,’ she said slowly. ‘For just that one little fault you cannot do this thing.’

‘Ah, if it were only a *little* fault—or only *one* thing!’ said Mademoiselle sadly. ‘But it is an accumulation of things, Thekla, all ending in this big thing. No; you need plead no more, for I shall not listen to you. I cannot do it. The Being to Whom you must now go is God, Whom you have hurt by your wickedness far more than even Joyce or Josephine. You are untrustworthy and deceitful. Last term you showed us that you were bad-tempered and selfish. At the beginning of this term you proved yourself greedy, and you end with this wicked plan of revenge against a girl who had not harmed you at all. What is worse, to make for the success of your plan you thought to use a girl who is two years younger than you and whom you had called your friend. If you had succeeded, it would in all probability have meant the death of Mrs Linton. I want you to think of that, Thekla—to remember that it is only by God’s mercy that you are not, indirectly, at least, a murderess.’

‘That is not true! You are cruel to say such things to me!’ Thekla was broken at last. Something in Mademoiselle’s solemn tones struck home, and wakened her conscience at long last.

‘No, Thekla; I am not cruel. I should be so if I allowed you to leave us without doing one final thing to try to bring you to a knowledge of how far along the road to wickedness you have gone. I pray God that this terrible knowledge may prove to be your help and safeguard for the future against such things. Now go with Matron. When I have heard from your parents, I will see you again.’

Sobbing, all her hard, silly pride gone, Thekla stumbled out of the room. Never before had her conduct been put before her in such plain language, and she shrank back appalled from the ugly picture she saw.

The girls never saw her again, for her father came to take her away two days later, and in his silent fury at the account the School had to give of her, Thekla read his opinion of her

conduct, and it added to her suffering. She expressed no sorrow for what she had done, then. But years later, when Mademoiselle had almost forgotten her own words to the girl, a letter came from her, acknowledging that she had deserved all that had been said to her, and telling how it had indeed been a safeguard to her. She begged the pardon of all concerned, and hoped they would send her their forgiveness.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SUPPRESSION OF 'BILL'

'It is my wish,' said Mademoiselle, 'that the matter should not be discussed. Thekla has gone. She is the first—the only—girl with whom we have failed. That is not pleasant to remember. So, girls, if you should hear any of the younger ones speaking of it, please hush them. We will try to forget as soon as possible.'

'Yes, Mademoiselle,' murmured the prefects en bloc.

'That is all, then. Now will you bring out the boxes and let me see what we have for the Sale.'

Thankful to have heard the last of Thekla and her doings, the nine jumped to their feet and made for the big cupboard, where, carefully stored in boxes and cases, were the many things they had collected for their annual Sale of Work. The proceeds of the Sale always went to the free ward in the Sanatorium, the Chalet School providing one bed, the Annexe having undertaken another, and the Saints (as they called the girls of St Scholastika's, the school at the other side of the lake) being responsible for a third. The Guides and Brownies of both schools supported a fourth between them, but they usually did it out of their funds, and an entertainment which they gave during any term that seemed suitable.

This year they had all resolved to make the Sale as big as possible, and although nothing has been said about it so far, they had given up as much of their free time as possible towards making various articles for it. Mademoiselle fingered sets of delicately embroidered collars and cuffs, and many others made in pillow-lace—for a goodly number of the Seniors were keen on this work, and some of them were very clever at it. There were also long strips of lace, and handkerchiefs edged with it. Then she had to look through a small hill of fancy-work of all kinds. Marie von Eschenau had taken up painting on china, in imitation of her sister, Wanda, and she had some very charming results to show. Wanda herself had sent her usual contribution of the same sort of thing, and as the Juniors had been doing pottery for handwork that term, there was quite an appreciable amount of crockery. Joey's hobby was cutting jigsaw puzzles, and she had cut thirty of all sizes. The Staff had undertaken to provide a sweets and confectionery stall, and were all hard at work in the Domestic Economy kitchen, turning out cakes and bonbons of all sorts. Matron had donated twenty dozen pots of home-made jam, which always found a ready sale. Even the domestic staff had contributed sundry pieces of embroidery and wood-carving.

'Mademoiselle,' said Jo solemnly, 'as we have all this china this year, can't we have a kind of bric-à-brac stall, with it and the wood-carvings and Simone's leather-work and my puzzles?'

'Shall we have enough?' asked Mademoiselle cautiously.

'Yes; I think so. There is still some more to come in, and Grizel promised some of that Florentine leather-painting she's been doing lately. It hasn't arrived yet—I expect she'll bring it down when she comes with the children. But with all that, I think we certainly *could* manage a stall.'

'Well, let me see,' mused Mademoiselle. 'We shall have one fancy-work stall; one of plain needlework—these baby-clothes are beautiful, Bianca—one for sweets and cakes and jam; and this one that you suggest—besides the one for the Annexe, and the one for St

Scholastika's. There are those water-colour sketches from the art classes, Jo. We might add those to your bric-à-brac stall. And the Juniors will have their lucky dip as usual. How are you going to arrange it this year?'

'Well, we thought of a Wishing Well,' said Jo. 'We've got that well in the acting-cupboard. If we set it on one of the mistresses' platforms, then two of the children could stand below and put the prizes into the bucket. We could arrange the platform as a kind of mossy bank with art muslin and creeper-plants, and it would look very pretty.'

'I have a still better idea, my Jo!' interrupted Simone excitedly. 'We have the dress for the Frog Prince. Let one of them wear that, and be the Frog to put the gifts into the bucket. And deck another as the Princess.'

Jo solemnly stretched across the table and felt her head. 'Quite cool!' she remarked. 'It's a stroke of genius, Simone, and that's a strain on the best brain, so don't have another for some time to come, or we shall have you down with brain-fever.'

'I wish you would not ruffle my hair,' protested Simone, whose hair was just long enough to turn up in a roll at the base of her head, and who found it none too easy to keep it tidy as yet.

'Que vous êtes bébé!' said Mademoiselle with a shake of her head at Jo. 'Simone, my child, your hair is hanging loose at the right side. Pray go and coiffe again, I beg you.'

'I have to spend so much time that way,' sighed Simone, leaving the room to obey orders.

Her cousin—Mademoiselle was a half-cousin of Simone's—laughed and turned to the business in hand. 'Well, we will have the stalls, then, and the Wishing-Well as you suggest. St Scholastika's will also have a stall, and they will use the conservatory and make there a Magic Cave, for so Miss Browne told me over the telephone this morning. Then the Annexe will have their stall also, and that will be sufficient. And for entertainments—'

'Variety show in the common-room,' said Jo briskly. 'Clock-golf—and I hope to goodness Elsie and Evvy can explain it lucidly to those who don't know it!—if fine, in the garden. Folk-dance display in the Third—good thing it's a large room—and tea and refreshments in the Speisesaal. Frau Mieders is taking charge of that, and the two Matrons are helping her with some of the babes—I forget which, but they know. Miss Wilson and Miss Stewart are being responsible for the show, and Miss Nalder will see to the dancing. Then Herr Laubach is going to have the Fifth for his lightning sketches, and the St Scholastika competitions will be held in the Lower Fifth, with two of their staff in charge. Who is going to be responsible for the Bishop?'

'I will, naturally,' replied Mademoiselle. 'And Frieda must be there, too, for he is her uncle.'

'I only hope he likes his fountain-pen,' sighed Jo. 'If he'd been a woman we'd have got the usual bouquet and no worry. But you can't offer a man—least of all a *bishop*—a bunch of flowers.—You're sure it's a fine nib he likes, Frieda?'

Frieda nodded. 'Oh, yes; I asked him,' she said calmly.

'You *asked* him? Do you mean he knows what to expect?'

'Oh, no! But I said I liked his fine, clear writing, and how did he do it,' she explained. 'When he wrote back, he thanked me for the compliment, and said it was because he always used a very fine pen.'

'Well, the one we've got is a regular needlepoint, so it *ought* to be all right,' said Jo. 'That was a real brain-wave, Frieda.'

‘Well, I think we have now settled all,’ said Mademoiselle. ‘I rang up St Scholastika’s before I came up, and Miss Browne informs me that they will be here at half-past fourteen to help prepare everything. There is now half an hour left before Mittagessen, so I suggest that you should go out and play on the field till the bell rings.’

They were very willing to go, and got up an impromptu hockey-practice for the short time. After Mittagessen, they rested for the prescribed half-hour, and then the sound of voices and the tramp of many feet outside told them that the Saints were arriving, and Joey fled to the door to bid them welcome.

They were led by Gipsy Carson, the head-girl and a great friend of Jo’s, and Hilda Wilmot, a dreamy, artistic girl. Other members of the Chalet School greeted the newcomers joyously, for during the eighteen months that St Scholastika’s had been established on the Tiernsee, the girls had fraternised a good deal, though at the beginning there had been a feud which nearly caused a tragedy at the two schools. However, that, as Mr Kipling says, is another story, and has been told elsewhere. Now, the two communities were great friends, and shared the visiting staff at the Chalet among them. The Chalet was the larger school, for St Scholastika’s was for English girls only. But there was room for both, and both were prospering finely.

‘Hello, Gyp!’ called Jo to her friend. ‘You’re in good time.’

‘I know we are,’ said Gipsy, as she followed the head-girl of the Chalet to the cloakroom to discard her hat and coat and change her shoes. ‘The Fawn thought we’d better get off as there’s a good deal to do. And then Anders was getting fussed about the competitions. The Fourth are to have charge of those under her and Soamesy, you know, and they need a lot of arranging, I believe.’

‘Well, we’ll need all our time,’ said Jo. ‘Come along, and let’s get going.’

Accompanied by Hilda and two other girls, Elspeth Macdonald and Maisie Gomm, they made for the big hall where the stalls were to be erected, while the others followed them, bearing baskets, boxes, and parcels, containing all the articles they had made or begged for the Sale.

‘Where are we?’ asked Gipsy.

‘Over here between these windows. There are your frames—Eigen and Andreas were down this morning and set them up while we were at lessons. Your art muslin and other props arrived just before Mittagessen, and are behind. If you want tacks or drawing-pins or anything like that, you must go to Mademoiselle Lachenais at that table. She’s got charge of them.’

‘Right!’ said Gipsy. ‘I say; these are jolly decent frames!’

‘They are—and pretty strong, too. Well, can you manage? I ought to be getting on with the bric-à-brac stall over there.’

‘With the *what* stall?’

‘Bric-à-brac. Don’t they teach you French at St Scholastika’s?’ demanded Jo, cheerfully insulting.

‘They do. To my sorrow I know it. On the whole, I think I’ll send Hilda over to Maddy to ask for nails and things. I see she’s chumming with Mademoiselle Lachenais as usual, and I’d rather not remind her that I exist just at present.’

Jo raised her eyebrows in a question, but Gipsy merely shook her head and looked provoking, so the head-girl of the Chalet left her friend to her own devices, and went across to the big frame which had somehow to be turned into the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs.

Joyce, who was standing there with her arms full of canvas painted to imitate a tiled roof, heaved a sigh of relief. ‘Oh, Jo! Thank goodness! What am I to do with all this?’

‘Oh, shove it down somewhere, and then go and ask for two boxes of tacks and three hammers,’ said Jo easily. ‘Who else is supposed to be helping here?’

‘Gill and Corney, and—oh, most of our crowd,’ said Joyce easily. ‘Lonny and Cyrilla are coming along with the ivy-trails and those long sprays of artificial wild-roses from the acting-cupboard.’

Jo whistled. ‘I say! You are an energetic crowd! What are the rest going to do?’

‘Well, Marie is turning the fancy-work stall into the Garden of the Beast in “Beauty and the Beast,”’ said Joyce as she piled her load behind the stall. ‘She’s begged all the pot-plants she can get, and all those tree-flats you have for gloomy woods and so on for the stage. Frieda is busy with the Wishing-Well, and Simone and Bianca are doing plain-work into the Sleeping Beauty, though how they are going to get anyone to *sleep* all the afternoon and evening is more than I know!’ she finished with a giggle, and Jo chuckled too.

‘Well, go and get the nails and things,’ she said when she was grave again. ‘I will mount up yonder, and begin to fit those roof-things on.’

She suited the action to the word, and climbed up on to the stall. Then she called loudly to Luise Rotheim who was standing near to hand her up one of the ‘roofs,’ and work began.

The big room rang with the noise of hammering, and there were frequent bursts of laughter, punctuated by shrieks as someone hammered a finger rather than a nail. Sophie Hamel had undertaken to help with the Annexe stall, and was surrounded by a bevy of small girls, all very eager to help, and most of them hindering as she tried to turn the bare wooden frame into something that would give some idea of Rapunzel’s tower. It was no easy matter, and, as she said, how people could be expected to take an interest in a tall white thing was beyond her to fathom.

‘It looks exactly like a tall candle,’ said Jo, passing it during the afternoon.

‘I know,’ confessed Sophie. ‘But what can I do? It won’t look so bad when we get Rapunzel’s hair floating down it, perhaps.’

‘Who on earth is to be Rapunzel?’ demanded Anne Seymour, pausing on her way to the Speisesaal with a trayful of vases.

‘No one. We are to use a model my father has lent us.’

‘Good thing, too,’ said Jo.

‘Yes; you could not expect any of the Annexe to sit up there all the afternoon,’ agreed Marie von Eschenau, who had left her own labours on the Garden of the Beast, and come across to see how Sophie was progressing.

‘But how do you make the hair?’ asked Bianca from the next stall.

‘It is skeins of golden knitting-silk all plaited together,’ said Sophie. ‘My father used it for part of his Christmas decorations, in one of his shop-windows, and he sent it up to us when I told him about this. The articles for sale are to be fastened to the silk. And that also is his idea.’

‘He’s got jolly good ones,’ said Jo. ‘No wonder he’s got such a top-hole place in Innsbruck!’ Then she ambled back to her own stall, which was beginning to look more like a cottage now that the ‘roofs’ were firmly fixed.

‘Shall I put up the sides now, Jo?’ asked Joyce eagerly. ‘Doesn’t it look rip—er—jolly?’

‘Very,’ said Jo amiably, passing over her slip. ‘Yes; I should think you might.’

Joyce went flying to the corner where stood the ‘flats’ with white cotton tacked lightly across them to represent white-washed walls, and came presently, breathlessly lugging one, for they were an awkward shape to manipulate in the crowded room. Jo helped her to fix it

firmly across the front, hiding the skeleton framework, and then turned to see that the other two were put into place. They were firmly lashed, for no one wanted any trouble with them falling down during the Sale itself, and then the trickiest part of the work began.

Joey had set her heart on decorating her 'cottage' so that it looked as if it were covered with ivy and roses. The men who worked for the school had been busy all the day before, getting trails of ivy and other climbing plants, and there were plenty for everyone.

'You people choose out the longest trails and hand them up to Eva and me,' said Jo. 'We'll stand on the counter part and fasten them up. Then you can secure them at the bottom. Only do leave spaces so that people can see what we've got.'

'We might interlace them across,' suggested Eva, a quiet, steady girl, who, without being very noticeable, was yet a quiet influence for good in the School.

'Good idea! Hand me that hammer, Gill, and *don't* forget what I said about leaving spaces to show our goods.'

Jo and Eva mounted on the stalls, for the three step-ladders had already been grabbed by other people; indeed the tallest of them, set on the stall itself, formed the framework for Sophie's 'tower.'

'This will be rather difficult,' remarked Eva as she manœuvred to a position where she could get the trails fixed beneath the 'roof.' 'Are we to put some over the roof too?'

'Oh, yes!' cried Joyce. 'That will make it all the prettier. And sometimes the creepers go right across the roofs, you know.—Remember that cottage we had near Worthing, Gill? It had ivy all round the chimneys.'

'*We* ought to have chimneys,' said Jo. 'Idiot that I was not to think of them!'

'But we can add them even now, can we not?' asked Eva, whose English was apt to be very formal.

'Yes; I suppose so. Here, Evvy—and you, Lonny! Hop up to the acting-cupboard and see if you can find any. There ought to be some there. We'll bag the steps when Marie has done with them, and stick them on after we've finished with this. Leave some sprays to twine round them, you people.—That's a good idea, Joyce; I'm glad you thought of it.'

Evadne and Ilonka ran off to the big cupboard that ran all along one side of the top corridor, where all the acting properties were kept, and the rest set to work to arrange their decorations.

By Eva's advice, 'windows' were made on a level with the counter of the stall, and they contrived so to arrange their sprays that these were left unveiled. Ivy formed the groundwork, and then, Jo and Eva, working very carefully, fastened sprays of the artificial briar roses up one side, so as to give the effect of climbing roses.

'Oh, it looks simply gorgeous!' cried Joyce as she knelt beneath the erection, tying down some long sprays with which they had adorned the lower part. 'It's just like a real cottage, isn't it, Hilda?'

Shy Hilda Bhaer nodded. 'I think it is very pretty,' she said. 'But it will be more like a cottage when it has its chimneys.'

'Yes; what on earth are Lonny and Evvy doing?' asked Jo, pausing, hammer in hand, to look down the room to the door. 'They must be *making* them, the time they are taking!'

'Oh, well, it gives us all the more time to finish this part of it,' said Eva soothingly.

Crash! Yell! Simone had let her hammer fall dangerously near Mademoiselle Lachenais who was wandering round, admiring all the effects, and who had come within an ace of being brained by her young compatriot.

‘Simone!’ she cried when she had recovered from the shock. ‘Is it that you wish to slay me?’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle,’ exclaimed the scarlet-faced Simone, descending from her ladder with more haste than grace. ‘I hope you are not hurt?’

‘Simone, you really must be more careful!’ said Miss Wilson, who had entered the hall in time to see this little episode, and had hastened up to make sure that no real harm had been done. ‘You might have hurt someone badly.’

‘Oh, I was not harmed,’ said good-natured little Mademoiselle Lachenais. ‘The hammer did not touch me.’

‘All the same, we don’t want any accidents of that kind.’

Simone, still scarlet, retrieved her hammer, and mounted once more to finish securing the cardboard outline of a spinning-wheel which surmounted their stall. The mistresses passed on to praise the Wishing-Well, and then stopped to admire the huge ‘tower’ of Sophie, with Rapunzel already safely settled at the window.

‘Are you sure it is quite safe, Sophie?’ called up Mademoiselle with a laugh. ‘This so-tall tower of yours would do much harm if it should fall.’

‘I have blocked—no—*choked*—the ladder with very big and heavy books, Mademoiselle,’ replied Sophie, who was standing at the top of the ladder, peering round the shop-window model her father had sent up the previous day. ‘Eigen has also lashed the ladder to the counter and the top bar of the stall, so I think it is quite safe. And we do not fasten the hair except just here among her own wig.’ And she waved the great plaits of golden-hued knitting-silk which she was preparing to attach to the model’s own very yellow locks.

‘This will be very effective,’ observed Miss Annersley, joining the other two mistresses at the foot of the erection.—‘Well, my Robin, are you pleased with your stall?’

‘But *yes!* I think it is *lovely!*’ said the Robin with emphasis.

‘And who is to be the Prince to stand at the foot of the hair?’ asked Miss Wilson with a smile.

‘Robin is,’ said Amy Stevens, sister of Margia of the Upper Fifth. ‘And *I’m* to be the old witch! Oo-ooh! Won’t it be fun?’

The mistresses assented and went on, coming to Jo’s ‘cottage’ just as the tardy messengers sent for the chimneys arrived, very dusty and untidy, for Evadne had torn her stocking, and Ilonka’s long plait had come undone, and the heavy brown hair spread over her shoulders like a cloak.

‘If length were all that was wanted, a good many of our girls might have acted Rapunzel very nicely,’ remarked Miss Wilson as they paused to watch the fun. ‘Frieda and Marie both have long fair hair, and now that Frieda has hers up, she is letting it grow properly. I saw it loose the other night, and fairly gasped at the quantity she has. It comes down to her hips.’

‘Oh, well, most Tyroleans seem to have long hair and plenty of it,’ said Miss Annersley. ‘They had to keep it shorter while it was down. You couldn’t have hair like that falling into your work, my dear.’

‘No; I suppose not,’ acknowledged Miss Wilson.

‘And why you should complain, I cannot think,’ added Mademoiselle Lachenais in her own language. ‘Your own hair comes below your waist.’

‘To my sorrow I know it. I’m often tempted to crop it. Only I think of the sensation it would create if I appeared in school with a shingle, and refrain from doing it,’ replied Miss

Wilson. 'Now what are those children going to do with those things?' And she turned an interested look at the 'chimneys.'

'I hope you've been long enough!' Jo was sarcastically greeting her messengers. 'And what on earth have you done to yourselves? It's a good thing you get your hair washed to-night, Lonny, for "dusty" simply doesn't describe its appearance!'

'I know. But the chimneys were behind everything else, and the things *are* dusty,' said Ilonka, shaking back the heavy mane from her eyes. 'How are you going to get them up there, Jo?'

'I'll manage,' said Jo confidently. 'Gill, be a lamb and go and ask Marie if she's finished with the steps. If she hasn't, try Simone.'

Gillian nodded, and went off to come staggering back with the steps. Cornelia, who had just finished fixing the last spray at the bottom, got up, stretched herself, and went to help her.

'They are Simone's!' gasped Gillian, who was hot and perspiring as a result of her journey. 'Oh, they are horrid things to carry! And people are so *rude*!'

'H'm! How many have you knocked down?' asked Jo, descending to the floor as she spoke.—'Oh, sorry, Lonny! Was that your foot?'

'No; but it is not your fault that it was not!' retorted Ilonka, who had let out a strangled yelp as Jo dropped very nearly on top of her. 'You will injure someone before the day is ended, Jo; I am certain of it!'

'Certain your granny!' was Jo's response to this.

'*Not* very witty,' said Miss Wilson, coming up. 'Since when have *you* descended to the use of Third Form repartee, Jo?'

Jo jumped. She had not seen the mistresses before this. She also went very red, and Miss Wilson, in mercy, moved away.

'Let's get these chimneys up,' said Gillian, coming to the rescue of what looked like developing into an awkward pause. 'How d'you propose to set about it, Joey?'

'Climb the ladder, which we'll set at the side there, and slide them on,' said Jo, recovering herself again. 'Get them set up properly, you two. You know how to fasten them, don't you?'

They did. The chimneys were set up four-square, and then secured by means of clips which would be turned to the back so that the visitors would not see them. They were made with triangular openings at two opposite sides, and could be slid along the ridge-pole of the 'roof' into place. Then someone would have to be stationed inside to fasten the under-clips to hold them steady.

'You'd better go under, Eva, and fasten them,' said Jo.

But at that moment there was a call for Eva elsewhere, so Gillian, as the next tallest, was shown what to do, and then sent inside, to climb up on the counter in readiness for the coming of the chimneys.

Evadne and Ilonka finished setting them up, and then Evadne went off in response to a summons from Elsie to come and see about the clock-golf, and two of the others hastily pulled the ladder into position, without very much heed as to whether it was properly set out or not. Jo climbed up it, Cornelia mounting up to the cross-bar on the other side to steady the erection as she took the first. The chimneys *were* heavy things to manage, as the girls had said; and now they were set up, they were exceedingly awkward. Jo found that she must climb to the top step before she could set on the one she had. She had expected to be able to manage by stretching up, but she was unable to steady the weight. As it was, Cornelia had to make a long leg to the second cross-bar and stand there ready to help her.

The Staff had moved on before this; but just at this moment Miss Wilson heard her name uttered in plaintive tones by Simone, and turned back to go to her. She reached the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs just as Jo, with a final effort, got the chimney fitted down on the roof. Cornelia, her own part over, jumped down to be ready with ivy-sprays to twine round it. Whether she shook the ladder or not with her jump, it is hard to say.—Cornelia was fairly solid, and she jumped clumsily for once. Gillian always declared that at that identical moment Jo overbalanced herself. However it happened, the fact remains that Jo, standing on the topmost step, gave a sudden lurch, and then plunged, a whirling mass of arms and legs, straight on top of Miss Wilson, who had paused to watch the delicate operation.

A chorus of shrieks rose at this, and several people rushed to the rescue. Jo was pulled off the mistress, who had received the head-girl's full weight in her chest and was temporarily winded. The sight of the austere Miss Wilson sitting on the floor, crowing for breath, momentarily paralysed the girls, and it was left to Miss Annersley, who had fled back to the group at the sound of the screams, to do anything sensible—none of the rest of the Staff happened to be in the room at the moment—and she promptly drove the crowding girls away, ordered someone to bring a glass of water, helped her friend to a chair, and seated her near a window. Meanwhile, Joey was surrounded by her helpers, all anxiously asking where she was hurt. Only Gillian was not there, she sensibly considering that her first duty was to secure the chimney in case it should fall and add to the trouble. By the time she was able to jump down and come out of the cottage, Miss Wilson had recovered her breath, and the deeply embarrassed Jo had managed to convince her followers that she had neither broken nor sprained anything. All she had done was to bruise one knee.

Miss Wilson sipped her water and gradually recovered, while the excited girls sheered off, and drifted back to their work. Finally, only Jo and her helpers were left near, and they all stood silent, not quite knowing what to say or do.

'Well,' said the science mistress when she could speak, 'you'd better get on with that job, hadn't you? It must be nearly time for Kaffee und Kuchen.—As for you, Jo, I suppose your bones are *not* made of cast-iron, but I must say you feel uncommonly like it!'

'I—I hope I didn't hurt you much, Miss Wilson?' stammered Jo, for once thoroughly minus the wind in her sails. 'I—I—'

'Only winded me, though I still feel sore. But what I wish to know, Joey,' continued the ruthless Miss Wilson, 'is why you have such a grudge against me?'

'Miss *Wilson!*' gasped Jo, more taken aback than anyone had ever seen her since her early Middle-school days. 'I—I—'

'For,' went on 'Bill' solemnly, though there was a wicked twinkle in her eye, though Jo was too embarrassed to see it, 'it certainly looks like it. In the summer you abused me roundly when you fell into the pit when we were in camp. Now you try to extinguish me altogether by falling on me.'

Jo didn't know where to look. She decided to face the mistress. What she saw in the face before her suddenly reassured her. 'Miss Wilson!' she cried resentfully. 'You've been pulling my leg!'

'Well,' said Miss Wilson placidly as she took the handful of hairpins Cornelia brought her—her hair had come down in the fall—'*you* tried to rob me of my breath. It's only a fair exchange, I think.'

'You had better go and put up your hair again if you feel all right now,' said Miss Annersley hastily. 'Jo, you must leave that other chimney alone. It can be taken back to its

place. Are you sure the other one is quite safe?’

‘Oh, yes, Miss Annersley,’ said Gillian. ‘I’ve clipped it on quite firmly.’

Miss Annersley mentally resolved to send Eigen and Andreas round to make sure that all erections were safe while the girls were at Kaffee und Kuchen, but she said nothing about that now. ‘Very good,’ she replied to Gillian. Then she raised her voice, ‘Girls, you must finish quickly, for you must be ready to set out your goods after Kaffee und Kuchen, and that will be ready very soon. Clear up all this mess, and leave the room quite tidy.—Now, Miss Wilson, if you are ready, we’ll go.’

They left the room, and the laughing girls cleared away the mess of leaves and sprays, papers, muslin, tacks, and all the other rubbish that seems to accumulate on these occasions. Ilonka and Luise carried the second chimney back to the acting-cupboard, and when the gong sounded to call them all to Kaffee und Kuchen, the room was tidy.

‘*You’re* a nice girl!’ the Sixth told Jo afterwards in the privacy of their own form-room. ‘Even if you *don’t* love Bill’s lessons, there’s no need to try to murder her!’

‘I didn’t!’ protested Jo. Then she stopped and began to laugh.

‘What is the joke?’ asked Marie.

‘Just that I believe this is the one and only time since she came to the School that anyone’s succeeded in completely suppressing Bill!’

CHAPTER XVII

THE SALE OF WORK

The next day saw the Chalet School seething with excitement. Early in the morning the Saints came across to finish up any odds and ends there might be left to do. When all was ready, they took a tour of the whole place, and the noise the two schools and the Chalet Annexe made is indescribable. Only one place was forbidden them, and that was the Magic Cave, which was in charge of Miss Elliott and Mademoiselle Berné, the music and French mistresses at St Scholastika's, who had locked the doors of the salon, and taken the keys. When two or three bright people suddenly bethought them of the entrance through the conservatory, and rushed round into the garden, they found that locked also, and the windows completely obscured by dark green curtains.

'How jolly mean!' said Cornelia disappointedly.

'*Who* is mean?' demanded Hilary Burn, one of the Fifth Form Saints.

'Your folk for taking the key and then stopping us from seeing through here,' Cornelia told her. 'Isn't this *your* stunt, by the way? You might tell us what it's all about.'

'Got Charlotte Yonge's books in your library?' asked Hilary detachedly.

'Not an earthly,' was the calm reply. 'Jo could tell you.'

'Jo could tell her what?' asked Jo herself, coming on them from the lawn, where she had been satisfying herself that the clock-golf was quite ready and that Elsie and Evadne, who were to be in charge of it, knew how to explain it adequately.

'Have we any books by—*who* did you say?' asked Cornelia, turning to Hilary.

'Charlotte Yonge,' replied Hilary in rather more respectful tones than she had hitherto used. Hilary stood in wholesome awe of the Chalet School head-girl.

'Yes; we have some,' said Jo. 'Why do you want to know?'

'It isn't me—it's Corney,' explained Hilary.

'*Corney?*' Jo stared, for at no time was Cornelia much of a reader. 'What's at the back of all this?'

'Well, I be gum-swizzled!' ejaculated the indignant Cornelia. 'She asked me, and I said you could tell her. I guess she's gone batty.'

'You asked me about the Magic Cave,' said Hilary with dancing eyes.

'What on earth has Charlotte Yonge to do with that?' asked Jo, now thoroughly puzzled.

'Only that we got the idea out of one of her books,' explained Hilary.

'Which one? I've read a good many of them—the historical ones, at any rate, and I don't remember anything about Magic Caves in them.'

'This isn't historical. It's the one called *The Three Brides*. It was Elspeth's idea in the beginning. She read the book at Christmas, and thought it would be rather a good idea for the Sale. So she brought it back with her, and honestly, we were all thrilled. You'll pay so much—a schilling, I believe—and then you get a prize, as well as all the fun.'

'We haven't got *The Three Brides*,' said Jo thoughtfully. 'We have the historical ones like *A Reputed Changeling*, and *The Chaplet of Pearls*, and *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest*. But we haven't gone in for any of her contemporary tales except the *Daisy Chain*, of course, and *Pillars of the House*. I must see about getting some of the others. They are all nice, I know.'

And goodness knows, no one could pick up slang from *her!*' she added with an infectious grin.

'But,' complained Cornelia at this point, 'if we haven't got it, how under the canopy am I to find out about the Magic Cave?'

'You can't. That was the great idea,' said Hilary calmly.

Jo chuckled at this, and went off, leaving the highly indignant Cornelia to settle with her friend in her own way, and obligingly closing her ears for once as the opening sentence floated after her: 'Of all the mean, flubdub, left-footed *gumps*—'

She did stop to call back, 'You be careful who hears you, Corney!' but that was all she did, and Hilary Burn was subsequently in a position to inform her own crowd that Corney Flower's language was an eye-opener, once she was fairly started.

At noon the Saints went back to their own abode for Mittagessen, a rest, and to change their costumes for the afternoon. The Chalet School went in for their own meal with unimpaired appetites, in spite of all the excitement prevailing. After Mittagessen, they were very indignant when they were all despatched to their cubicles with orders to lie down on their beds and stay there till they heard the bell. Mademoiselle knew that some of them were already screwed up to the highest pitch, and she did not want any outbursts of weeping. They went with many grumbles, for they were also forbidden to talk. However, once they were settled, the quiet, after the busy morning they had had, worked its usual spell, and a good many of them went to sleep; while even those who didn't were greatly calmed and refreshed.

At fourteen the bell sounded, and they all jumped up and proceeded to dress for their parts. As it was a Fairy-Tale Bazaar, the girls were to assume the characters of the old fairy-tales. The Robin made a delightful little Prince, with blue tunic and cap, and short mantle over one shoulder. Amy Stevens wore a full witch's dress, pointed hat, broomstick and all. Simone Lecoutier was another witch. Marie von Eschenau made a charming Beauty, with big Louise Redfield, an American girl in the Sixth Form, for the Beast, though Louise had flatly refused to spend the afternoon in the Beast's mask, having had experience of it before. Jo, whose cropped black hair always caused her to be in constant demand for male characters, was the Prince for Snowdrop, clad in crimson slashed with cream. Gillian Linton, possessor of the authentic colouring of Snowdrop herself, was the Princess, all in white. Luise Rotheim was the wicked Stepmother, and the Seven Little Men were Cornelia, Joyce, Hilda, Olga, Ilonka, Maria, Lilli, and were all clad in green, with long beards fixed to their pointed caps. They looked very well, and as both Jo and Gillian were a good head taller than any of them, they made a most effective group.

The Saints had elected to represent Bluebeard, and Gipsy Carson was the wicked tyrant with a huge horsehair beard dyed blue, and a magnificent turban. Hilda Wilmot was Fatima; Maisie Gomm, a pretty, somewhat empty-headed girl of seventeen, was Sister Anne, and Elspeth Macdonald was the faithful Hassan. Simone's stall was attended by Vanna di Ricci as the Sleeping Beauty, with trails of briar-roses twined about her, and Margia Stevens as the Prince. The rest of the Upper Fifth were there, also having been brought in as various palace characters. The remainder of the Sixth and Lower Fifth were in attendance on the refreshments, where the cakes and sweets would also be sold, and wore any garments that seemed to fit in with the rest, so that Goody Two-shoes might bring your coffee, and Dick Whittington would try to persuade you to buy marrons glacés. All the Juniors were clustered round the Wishing-Well, clad as fairies—there were twenty-two fairy-dresses of their size in the acting-cupboard—and those of the Fourth and Third who were to give the dancing display,

wore their simple, short-waisted, long-skirted frocks, which fitted in delightfully with the rest of the characters. The rest had been assigned to posts as door-keepers and so on.

The Fifth Form of St Scholastika's were to help with the Magic Cave, Miss Elliott and Mademoiselle Berné having reserved to themselves the places of 'unseen musicians.' They all wore Eastern draperies, with the exceptions of Ida Reaveley and Nancy Wilmot, the two biggest among them, who were got up in full Turkish male costume, and Hilary, who was to be the Peri, and whose floating garments were hung with strings of beads to such an extent that she vowed she felt like a walking jeweller's-shop!

'I say! They're coming!' called out Elsie Carr, darting in from the garden where she and Evadne, with two of the Fourth to take money at the gate, had been arranging clubs and balls in readiness for the clock-golf. 'There's about twenty coming from the "Kron Prinz Karl"; and at least fifty from the other side.'

'Frieda—Frieda!' called Jo across the hall to where Frieda, in flowing white draperies, with the wonderful golden mantle of her hair falling round her, was seated on the edge of the metamorphosed mistress's platform as the Good Fairy of the Well. 'Are all your people ready?'

'Quite as ready as yours, and so *much* more quiet!' returned the Fairy with emphasis; and Jo subsided, duly squashed, for her Seven Little Men were chattering from sheer excitement like so many magpies.

Then the doors opened, and the crowds poured in. At fifteen o'clock, Mademoiselle led a little procession on to the prettily decorated platform at the head of the hall, and the girls all looked eagerly at the thin, scholarly Bishop, whom many of them were seeing for the first time.

The chair was taken by the local dignitary, the Baron von und zu Wertheimer, a young man in the early twenties, who had officiated at school celebrations before, and who could, as wicked Jo said, be relied on not to spend too long on speechifying. Indeed, he said even less than that young lady had anticipated. He called on Dr Russell to read out the report on the free wards at the Sanatorium, introduced the Bishop as briefly as he could, and then sat down. The Bishop, too, was merciful, and after talking for seven minutes about the great work which the Sanatorium and its devoted servants were, under God, performing, he declared the Sale of Work open, and wished it every success.

Amidst tumultuous cheers from the girls, the two youngest members of the two schools—Yolanda di Maladetta and Marjorie Burn—were hoisted up on to the platform, and trotted up to him to hand him the fountain-pen the girls offered for his acceptance. They were followed by the Robin as head of the Annexe, who had been chosen to present a bouquet to Mademoiselle Lepâtre, and little Ailsa Macdonald from St Scholastika's, with a similar offering for Miss Browne. Then votes of thanks were offered, and the real business of the afternoon began.

With wild bounds, the girls fled to their own particular posts, the Chalet Fourths and Thirds hurrying to get ready for the dancing, and those people with outside work hastening to take their places.

Jo and Luise disappeared into their cottage, while Snowdrop stood at the door; the Seven Little Men clustered round her, and the other girls grouped themselves as picturesquely as they could. The Bishop, having left the platform, whither a small orchestra was making its way 'to charm the savage breast and make it yield up its cash,' as Jo remarked, began a tour of the stalls. He had a genial word for everyone, and paused to chat with those girls whom he had

met at the wedding of Frieda's sister, Bernhilda. Greatly to the joy of the Chalet School Juniors, he went to the Wishing-Well first, and demanded 'a present for a *good* boy.'

'I am that, eh, Frieda?' he said with a smile at his pretty niece.

Frieda laughed up at him. 'Are you so sure, Uncle? Well, the Frog Prince must see what he can do for you.—Lower the bucket, Princess.'

The Princess, Yolanda di Maladetta, lowered the canvas bucket carefully, and demanded, 'If you please, Prince Frog, a present for a good—bo—bishop!' Whereupon the Bishop chuckled.

There was a pause, and then a somewhat muffled voice said, 'I reckon that's done it this time.—Haul away, Princess!' with an unexpectedly American accent, for the Prince was little Marie Varick, whose mother was slowly dying up at the Sonnalpe, though Marie, of course, had no idea of that.

The Princess hauled, and when the bucket reached the top of the well one of the fairies made haste to take out the parcel and hand it to the great man with a funny little bob intended for a bow.

Frieda saw it and only just suppressed a wail of remonstrance. She had devoted nearly an hour the day before to teaching Wanda von der Kock to bow prettily. The Bishop smiled, and patted the straight brown locks of the fairy before he opened his parcel.

'Oh, I do so hope it isn't a pen!' breathed Faithful John who was standing near.

It was not a pen. When his lordship had got it undone, it turned out to be a parti-coloured stick of candy.

'It is a really good one, isn't it?' observed the Frog Prince who had climbed out to see what it was.

'It is very good indeed,' said the Bishop gravely. 'You have made a neat choice.'

'I reckon it'll be a help when you write your next sermon,' said the Prince with equal gravity. 'Seems as if you get so much more done when you've something handy to suck.'

The Bishop nearly choked over a chuckle, and after another word or two, passed on to Beauty and the Beast. Here he had a chat with Marie and Simone, both of whom he knew, and then proceeded to invest in hem-stitched handkerchiefs.

He left them, and went on, pausing at each stall, till, when at length he reached the cottage of Snowdrop and her satellites, he was laden with parcels of all sizes and shapes, some of them coming undone, for the excited girls had not packed them properly.

'Let me have those put together for you, my lord,' said Joey from one of the 'windows.' 'They are all dropping out. What an advertisement for the Guides!—Here, Lonny, get some paper and string and make them into a respectable package, won't you?'

The Bishop thankfully resigned his purchases to Ilonka, who bore them off, and presently returned them all securely fastened, and packed into a bass bag she had discovered somewhere.

'And now,' said the Bishop when he had thanked her, and was watching Jo tuck in the china and puzzles he had added to his shopping, 'this is the last of the stalls. What ought I to do next?'

Jo meditated. 'There's the Magic Cave—but that might wait.—What is the time, someone?—Oh, then, Monsignor, I think you had better go and take your seat for the folk-dance display.—Corney! Take Monsignor along, will you, and see that he gets a good seat. It's due to begin in ten minutes now.'

‘And when it is over, may I not have the pleasure of escorting you to the Magic Cave?’ he asked her, laughing. ‘And Snowdrop and the Witchwife too?’

‘Oh, thank you,’ said Jo. ‘That will be awfully jolly. Won’t you leave your things here till you come back, Monsignor? Then you needn’t worry about them.’

He left the bag in her charge, and went off in Cornelia’s wake to enjoy the dancing, while the girls turned back to attend to their customers who were now thronging round them. For the next hour or so they were kept very busy, and the bag into which the proceeds were put soon grew heavy. Jo seized a moment’s breathing-space to rush out and see how the clock-golf was getting on, for it had been her suggestion, and she was anxious about it. She was met by Elsie and Evadne with beaming faces. The fathers and brothers who had ventured to the Sale with their womenfolk had been thankful to find it, and were enjoying themselves hugely.

‘*Thought* it would appeal to them!’ quoth Jo; and departed to find the Bishop had left a message that he was waiting for her at the door to the Magic Cave. She made sure that everything was quite all right, and then departed for the salon, where she found him surrounded by a motley throng of characters from the fairy-tales.

‘We are all going to see the Magic Cave,’ he told her as she came up. ‘This is my—how do you say it in England?—I am inviting you.’

‘You mean it’s your treat,’ said Jo. ‘How awfully good of you, Monsignor.’

He laughed, and led them in to the doors of the conservatory, whence issued strains of music played by a violin and piano, while at the doors stood the two turbaned figures who were Ida and Nancy in everyday life, but who now looked simply gigantic with their high-piled turbans, and anything but English with their browned skins, flashing teeth, and huge brass curtain-rings tied to their ears.

‘The Bishop first!’ cried Jo eagerly.

The two figures salaamed low to him, and a voice sang softly from the Cave:

‘Hush! The Peri’s cave is near,
No one enters scatheless here;
Lightly tread and lowly bend,
Win the Peri for your friend.’

At the same time, Ida advanced on him with a folded band of muslin which she tied over his eyes, and then a graceful Eastern lady appeared, caught his hand, and led him inside, and the doors were shut. Suddenly, shrill blasts of a whistle broke out, and then there came the clapping of hands and shouts of laughter.

‘Oh, I wish they’d hurry up!’ said Jo impatiently. ‘I’m simply longing to see what it is—and we’ll have *The Three Brides* added to the library next term,’ she added with decision.

One by one they all passed inside, and again and again those left heard the shouts of laughter and became more and more anxious for their turn. Finally, it was her turn. She was bidden advance, and while the song rang out, Nancy blindfolded her. Then she felt her hand taken, and was led on between the rows of sweet-smelling flowers. Again the chorus rang out, and even as she made a low bow in obedience to the command, the whistle blast sounded just behind her. With an exclamation, Jo swung round, only to hear it behind her again, while something seemed to be tugging at her. She spun round once more, and then again, and with the final twist came on disaster, for the foil slung from her left hip got between her legs, so that she sprawled ignominiously, face downwards, on the tiled floor, where her groping hand shot out and grasped someone’s ankle in a grip that drew a squeal from its owner. At once the

bandage was whipped off, and she found herself lying at full length in front of Hilary Burn, and clutching at her foot as if it were a rope flung to a drowning man.

Somewhat embarrassed, Jo scrambled to her feet, aware that the Bishop and all who had preceded her were rocking with laughter over her confusion. Then she found that a string had been attached to her sword belt, and tugged at it sharply, expecting to find the annoying whistle at the end. To her amazement it was not there; but she found instead a pretty little brooch of gold twisted wire, surrounding a small Roman pearl.

‘Am I to keep this?’ she asked doubtfully.

The only answer was another song from behind the tall palms which had all been massed together across one corner:

‘Away, away! No longer stay.

Others come to join our play!’

So she laughingly slipped aside to join the throng behind the Peri and watch the next-comer, even as Hilary, before she settled herself again, remarked, ‘Well, everyone has bowed to me so far. But Jo is the only one who has prostrated herself.’

Gillian was the last, and she, like Jo, stumbled, this time over her unaccustomed long skirts, and only the outstretched hand of one of the genii who were in attendance on the Peri saved her from complete bouleversement.

‘Your party don’t seem very steady on their feet, Joey,’ said Gipsy Carson, who had been one of the first there. ‘First you, and now Snowdrop!’

‘It’s the sight of your beard, Bluebeard,’ retorted Jo. ‘It’s enough to give anyone nightmare for a week on end!’

‘You’ll have to go now,’ said the Peri, as she shifted her position with a sigh. ‘I believe there are crowds outside, and this place is getting like an oven!’

They slipped out into the garden through the doors which the genii politely held open for them, thus giving the poor Peri a breath of sadly needed fresh air at the same time. Then the Bishop went off to try his hand at clock-golf, and the stall-holders suddenly remembered their duties and fled back to them.

At six o’clock—eighteen, by Middle Europe time—the variety entertainment opened, and the bazaar part of the affair was deserted, and everyone crowded in to be accommodated on backless forms, where they listened to choruses, solos, recitations, and dialogues. ‘Plato,’ the School’s somewhat eccentric singing-master, exhibited some wonderful feats of conjuring, and Biddy O’Ryan, clad in little short skirt and shawl, with bare feet, and her splendid hair hanging loose over her shoulders, executed an Irish jig that nearly brought the house down.

The wind-up of it was a chorus and dance by the entire company. Jo sang the solo, her lovely voice being always in demand on these occasions, and all went well till they linked arms for a kind of breakdown.

It was a breakdown, though not quite what they had intended. For as they careered from the back to the front of the platform, it was felt to shake ominously. The performers were far too much excited to notice it. With a stamp they all turned right, and pranced along for three steps. Then they turned with another stamp which sounded like thunder on the hollow boards. They prepared to prance left; but the stage had had enough of it. Unable to bear up any longer, it collapsed amidst clouds of dust and to the accompaniment of wild yells.

Luckily, no one was hurt, and once the audience was assured of that, they simply held their sides with laughing. It only ended when the dust-choked orchestra rose to their feet, and with

a fine, resonant chord, struck up the old German chorale, 'Nun danket alle Gott,' which had been adopted as one of the School songs. With full throats everyone sang it; and then the girls sang the other School song, 'You'll Get There!' and if many of the audience were unable to understand the words, the spirit of the song must have got through to them.

After that, people began to gather up their parcels, and to say good-bye, and the long queues which had led *into* the Chalet in the afternoon, now led *out* of it.

Abendessen came next, and after that was over—and a most hilarious meal it was!—they returned to the Hall where they settled down to count up their gains. It had certainly *seemed* a very successful afternoon, but they could not be sure until they knew their total.

Three times the members of each stall or entertainment added up their money before they brought it to Mademoiselle Lepâtre and Miss Browne (who, with Miss Soames and Miss Leslie, were sitting at a big table in the Speisesaal) to find out the final total. Three times was this added up by the four before it was announced. Then—there was a dead silence as Mademoiselle, as the Head of the longer established school, rose and gave it out. When the girls heard it there came such a burst of cheering as must have been heard nearly down to Spärtz. For the proceeds were almost treble the highest sum they had ever made before, and Mademoiselle held out hopes that this year they might be able to support yet another bed.

'How simply gorgeous!' said Jo joyously. 'This has been the nicest Sale we've ever had, and it certainly is the best from the point of view of money. Three che—' Her voice suddenly trailed off into silence, as her eyes caught a movement at the door.

Dr Jem stood there, his face very grave, his keen eyes searching the serried ranks of the girls. Jo said afterwards that her heart stood still. Her brother-in-law had left the Sale early, and had returned to the Sonnalpe, and she knew that only bad news could have brought him back like this. Her mind flew to little Marie Varick; but even as she looked round for the child, the doctor's voice sounded.

'Gillian—Joyce!' he said. 'I want you at once.'

With a spring, Gillian was at his side, her long gown held up, her hand pushing back her long black hair impatiently from her face. Joyce was struggling to get at him from the crowd where she had been standing. Silence had fallen, for they all guessed that something was very badly wrong. Joey followed them, anxious to help if she could. The four left the room, even as Mademoiselle hurried after them.

Later on that night, the Chalet girls knew that Mrs Linton was very ill—dying, the doctors feared—and Gillian and Joyce had been taken up to the Sonnalpe to see her—most likely, to say good-bye.

CHAPTER XVIII ALL'S WELL!

In the quiet room at the Sonnalpe there was a great hush. The slim, black-haired girl with eyes like blue pansies sat watching the still occupant of the narrow white bed as if there was nothing and nobody else in the whole world. By the bedside sat Dr James Russell, and behind him stood Dr Jack Maynard, his most trusted assistant. A white-clad, white-capped nurse stood at the other side, and the eyes of all three were on the patient, who lay there so quietly that it almost seemed as if she had ceased to breathe.

Three days had passed since the day of the Sale—the day when they had all been so happy at school, and their happiness had been cut short by the abrupt summons of Gillian and Joyce Linton to their mother. During those days, the doctors and nurses had fought death with every means at their command. Sometimes they seemed to be gaining the battle; sometimes it seemed as if they must lose it; sometimes, as now, it appeared to be a drawn affair. Mrs Linton was still living, but that was all that could be said.

When the doctor had called the girls, he had told them that there was heart trouble which had caused this sudden collapse. No one could account for it. That afternoon, Mrs Linton, whose bed had been wheeled out on to the balcony of her room, had been better than she had been since she had entered the Sanatorium. Her nurse had left her to bring the milk and sponge-cakes which formed her afternoon meal, and had returned to find her lying back on her pillows with grey face and blue lips. They had worked madly on her, but never once since that moment had she fully recovered consciousness.

‘A shock,’ said Dr Jem in answer to Gillian’s questions. ‘We have no idea at present what it was. She had no letters, and, so far as we can find out, no visitors. When she wakes up and is fitter we’ll hear all about it, I expect. But she is terribly ill now. Yes, Gill; you shall be with her. But you must be very quiet and self-controlled, whatever happens.’

Gillian thanked him gratefully. She was too inexperienced to know that he only allowed the two girls to be so constantly with their mother during the day because he feared that there was no hope of recovery. Joyce, even more ignorant than she, thought her mother sleeping, and hoped that when this long slumber was ended she would wake much better and stronger.

The School had broken up since then, and Joey had arrived at the Sonnalpe that day, together with Maria Marani who was to spend the week with her sister. Frieda had gone home to Innsbruck to greet her new-born nephew, but Giovanna and Anita Rincini had joined their cousin, now Signora di Bersetti, though very little changed from the Bette Rincini who had been such a tower of strength to the Chalet School in its early days.

During the night, Gillian and Joyce slept in a little room not far from their mother’s, for the doctor would not allow them to be deprived of their sleep. But in the daytime, they spent nearly all their time in that white room. Joyce had left it only half an hour before, sent out by the doctor to get some exercise. Gillian he had been unable to move. She acquiesced to Joyce’s going, but she remained herself.

‘I’m not going,’ she said quietly. ‘Jo will see to Joyce, I know. I can’t leave Mummy just now. When she’s better—oh yes; I’ll go for walks then. But while she’s like this, I *can’t*!’

Dr Jem looked at her sharply. What he saw in her pretty face made him let her alone. He reflected somewhat sadly that in all probability the time was near at hand when the girl would

be glad to think that she had sat thus with her mother during those last hours.

As the four sat watching, there was a little stir from the bed, and all were on the alert at once. Gillian rose from the chair near the foot of the bed where she had been sitting, and bent over her mother lovingly. The doctor slipped his fingers down the thin wrist to feel the pulse that was beating there so feebly that for a moment he thought it had ceased.

‘Careful, Gill!’ he said very softly.

The warning was necessary. Tears had brimmed Gillian’s eyes for the first time during those awful three days, and but for his word, she would have sobbed aloud. But once more she pulled herself together, and stooped down so that her lips were at the ear so long deaf to everything.

‘Mummy!’ she said gently. ‘It’s Gill. Won’t you wake up?’

For a minute or two there was no response. Then a low moan came from the pale lips. ‘Oh, Joyce—my little Joyce!’

At once Dr Maynard slipped out of the room to seek the child. He knew that she and Joey were only playing tennis on the hard court which had been laid for the use of the nurses, and he brought her back very quickly. Jo came with them, for Joyce clung to her childishly.

By this time there could be no doubt that Mrs Linton was rousing out of the heavy stupor, though whether she was coming back to consciousness or fever, no one could say yet. Her eyes remained fast closed, and she paid no heed to Gillian’s tender whispers.

‘My baby!’ she moaned as the young man and the two schoolgirls entered the room. ‘Oh, my little Joyce! Expelled!’

At the words, Joyce’s face whitened, and she shrank back against Jo, who flung an arm round her. Gillian was speaking now, in her low, soft tones. ‘Oh no, Mummy! She isn’t expelled—indeed she isn’t! It’s Thekla who has been expelled. Joyce is all right, and doing well at school now.’

But the sick woman paid no heed. The heart-rending moans went on, and every now and then they could catch broken murmurs about Joyce and expulsion.

It was plain now to the doctors what had caused this sudden collapse. Mrs Linton must have heard someone talking of the latest doings at the Chalet School—scarcely a surprising thing when one remembers the number of patients who had daughters there—and the awful shock of Joyce’s supposed expulsion was quite enough to have brought on this.

Dr Jem’s jaw set like a ramrod as he inwardly cursed the heedless gossip which had done this. Jo was wishing that she could have had a quiet ten minutes alone with Thekla von Stift.

‘It’s all *her* fault this has happened,’ she thought as she held Joyce tightly to her, trying to give the child courage by contact with herself. Then she spoke aloud. ‘Joyce, go and tell your mother it’s all right, mein Vögelein! Perhaps she’ll hear you and wake up properly.’

Terrified, almost heart-broken, Joyce stumbled up to the bedside. ‘Mummy!’ she said piteously. ‘Oh, Mummy, I’m not expelled—hand of honour, I’m not! Wake up, Mummy dearest! It’s your own little Joycie!’

But Mrs Linton did not hear the words, nearly choked as they were with sobs. She seemed to be relapsing into her former state of coma, and the doctors knew that if this happened, only a miracle could save her. Already they had pushed the girls aside, and, with nurse ably backing them up, were once more in the thick of the battle. Gillian came round the bed, and was standing holding one of Joyce’s hands. The poor silly child was undergoing the bitterest pain she had ever known, and even the grip of her elder sister was no comfort to her now.

‘Oh, *make* her wake up!’ she cried. ‘Oh, I’ll be so good if only she wakes up! Tell her, Gill!—Jo, *you* tell her!’

‘Hush, Joyce!’ said the doctor sharply. ‘If you make a noise—’ Then he broke off, for Jo, releasing herself from Joyce’s hot clutch, had come to the bedside, and was wriggling past him.

‘Let me, Jem!’ she said. ‘My voice is clearer than either of theirs—and anyway, if she’s as ill as all that, it isn’t likely to make much difference.’

The doctors realised that. They had administered powerful stimulants, and could only wait and see if they would take effect. Jem Russell made room for his young sister-in-law, his finger still on that barely beating pulse, his eyes searching the grey face for signs of renewed life.

Joey knelt down, her face just above the one on the pillow. For a moment she was silent as she flung all her energy into a frantic prayer. Then she spoke in her normally clear, bell-like tones. ‘Mrs Linton! Who on earth told you that rigmarole? There isn’t a word of truth in it! You wake up and listen to me, and I’ll tell you the *real* tale.’

It was certainly the last thing anyone had expected. Jo’s voice was as ordinary as if she were talking to one of the Middles. Perhaps there was even a little more head-girl authority in it. At any rate, where all else had failed, it began to succeed. Mrs Linton’s lashes quivered, and though she didn’t lift them, the doctor, on the alert at once, acted promptly. Shoving Jo aside so unceremoniously that she fell sprawling, he put a teaspoonful of the powerful stimulant he had been using between the pale lips, saying quietly, ‘Drink this, Mrs Linton, at once, if you please.’

Unmistakably she swallowed, and then he stepped back. ‘Tell her again, Joey—Joyce, come here!’

Joyce crept to his side, thankfully giving him her hand which he held in a firm grip, while Jo, on her mettle despite a bruised shoulder, once more spoke. ‘Mrs Linton!’ It was the complete head-girl now. ‘Will you please wake *at once* and listen to me! Joyce has not been expelled! She is quite safe, and quite all right.’

This time, success followed the effort. The stimulant was doing its work. Already the pulse, fluttering uncertainly in the wrist, was growing stronger, and the grey pallor was leaving the face. Once more the long lashes fluttered, and this time they lifted, showing the blue eyes so like Joyce’s.

‘Joyce, come here!’ said Jo imperatively. Joyce came at once, and Jo, with one arm round her, told the tale in a few bald words. ‘Here’s Joyce herself. She’s all right. Someone has been telling you a pack of lies! She isn’t expelled, and she isn’t going to be! I never heard such poppy-cock in my life!’

A faint smile quivered on the pale lips at the Americanism. Jem Russell slipped an arm under the pillow and raised the patient’s head slightly. ‘Drink this, Mrs Linton,’ he said, holding a medicine-glass to her lips.

Mrs Linton drank, her eyes fixed all the time on Jo, who, with Joyce and Gillian on either side of her, was engaged in willing the invalid to pull back up the slope. Suddenly she relaxed her efforts. ‘Tell her it’s all right, you little ninny!’ she said fiercely to Joyce, giving the child a slight shake as she did so.

Obediently Joyce did so. ‘I’m not expelled, Mummy, and I’m not going to be. Hand of honour, it’s all right!’

Urged to it by a shake from the watchful Jo, Gillian added her quota. 'It's just as Jo says, Mummy. Joyce isn't expelled. She isn't going to be, and she's got a decent report.'

The blue eyes slowly showed comprehension, but Mrs Linton was still too near to death to speak or move. The nurse gave her an injection, and again there was silence. But presently the white lips moved, though they had thought that never again would they do so in this world. Gillian, leaning close, caught the whisper.

'Darlings—is this holidays?'

The girl nodded. Then she managed to control herself sufficiently to reply. 'Yes; only a week, though, so hurry up and get better, for we want to talk. We've such lots of jolly things to tell you.'

A faint smile came. Then the heavy lids fell again, but it was in natural sleep, and not that terrible coma. Dr Jem made a swift examination, then he nodded. 'Stay for the next hour, will you, Jack?—Girls, you come with me.'

Obediently they followed him out of the room, and along the corridor to the room the Lintons had been using. Arrived there, he made them sit down before he said anything. Then he spoke. 'Children, I think we have a good chance now of pulling her through. Stay here for the present, and I'll come back in an hour and tell you how she is.—Jo, I'm going to send you folk something to eat, and it is to be eaten—mind that! Otherwise, nobody goes back to that room to-night.' Then he vanished.

An hour later he came back with good news. Mrs Linton had fallen asleep and was appreciably stronger. The three girls were to go to 'Die Rosen,' where they were to go to bed, and they were to stay in bed till he gave them permission to get up. If there should be any change at all before then, he would see that they knew.

Gillian would have liked to dispute this, but she was too worn out by what she had endured during the past three days to find strength for it. Dr Mensch came with the car, and drove them the short distance to 'Die Rosen,' where they were met on the doorstep by Madge Russell, who marched them all off to bed, saw them safely between the sheets, and then dosed them all with hot milk. Gillian's held something else, for the doctor knew that the reaction would most likely keep her awake, and she had had as much as she could stand. Jo and Joyce needed nothing. Joyce's lashes fell almost before she handed back the milk-mug, and Jo cuddled down with a yawn and a murmured 'O-oh! How done I am!' and was asleep like a baby. But the doctor's wife never left Gillian's side till she saw that she, too, was safely over.

It was noon of next day before Gillian roused out of that deep sleep, and then Joyce and Joey were there, waiting to tell her the good news that her mother had turned the corner, and, though she was still not out of danger, yet she was slowly and surely making her way back to life again.

'Of course, it's all thanks to you, Joey!'

It was a week later, and Mrs Linton had been having a tea-party consisting of her own two girls and Jo Bettany. They had been out on the balcony, and if the patient still looked very frail, there was about her an air of returning strength that thrilled those who loved her with happiness. Gillian was leading the way home after they had been dismissed, and now she stopped suddenly to turn and fling this remark at Jo. As that young lady, who was immediately behind her, had not expected the stop, she promptly fell over her leader, and the pair rolled on the ground together.

‘The next time you intend to stop pointblank, Gillian Linton, I’ll be grateful if you’ll give me due notice!’ said Jo when she had got to her feet again. ‘It’s as well it’s been fine the last few days, or a nice mess we’d both be in with the horrible chalky clay there is about here.’

‘I’m sorry,’ apologised Gillian. ‘I didn’t mean to upset you. Really, I was only trying to thank you for all you’ve done for us.’

‘Rubbish!’ said Jo. ‘All I did was to speak properly. Jem says so. He says if you’d only spoken out and bossed your mother as I did—well, anyhow, she’s getting on all right now,’ she concluded lamely.

But Gillian stuck to her point. ‘All the same, Joey, you did save Mummy’s life for us, and we can never be grateful enough.’

‘Well, don’t talk nonsense to me about it—that’s all I ask!’ said Jo ungraciously. She hated being thanked, and she really had no idea what to say in reply. ‘Are you coming down to school to-morrow, by the way, or does Jem intend to keep you up here a bit longer?’

‘We’re staying over the week-end, but after that we’re to come down as usual,’ said Gillian. ‘Stacie is to come down with us—isn’t it splendid that she can walk now?—and I don’t suppose we’ll come up for a fortnight after that.’

‘And anyway,’ struck in Joyce, ‘I want to do a little work and get settled in. This will be such a short term—and I do seem to have such an awful lot to make up,’ she added with a sigh.

‘Oh, you’ll soon do that,’ said Jo, thankful that the conversation had left her own doings. ‘You’ve got plenty of brains, and now that you’re going to use them, you’ll soon find that you get on as well as anyone.’

Joyce, whose term-end report had shown her as second-bottom in the Lower Fifth, nodded. The events of the last few months had made a very great change in her, and the spoilt, selfish little piece of indolence who had come to the Chalet School after Christmas had gone, never to return again. She knew that she would have to work hard, but she felt that it would be something she could do for Joey, and Joyce almost adored Joey now. As for Gillian, she had always been a worker, but, as Madge Russell had gently pointed out to her, she had tried to make Joyce’s life far too easy, and had helped to spoil the younger girl. Now she was beginning to let her stand on her own feet, and though it would be some time before she gave up worrying herself unduly about her sister’s welfare, still she was more or less prepared to leave her to work out her own salvation. Incidentally, Gillian was losing her careworn look, and becoming more girlish than she had been for the last two or three years.

‘Altogether,’ said Jo, as she tossed a pebble over the edge and watched it strike against a tree-stump and bounce off again at a tangent, ‘things might have been worse this term.’

‘Next term will be your last,’ said Gillian, standing beside her. ‘What are you going to do then—go to the University?’

Jo shook her head. ‘No; if I go away at all, it’ll be to Belsornia to be lady-in-waiting to Elisaveta. But I don’t think it’s very likely—not with all the babies we have about the place now. No; I think I shall probably just stay at home and help my sister with David and Sybil and the twins. And I shall go on with my singing, of course. And then I want to write books.’

‘You’ll have plenty to do at that rate,’ said Gillian.

Joyce looked wide-eyed at her idol. ‘Write books? Oh, how *wonderful* that will be! Do be quick and write the first one, Joey! Then we can all swank about knowing an authoress!’

‘You’ll have to wait a bit yet,’ grinned the would-be authoress. ‘It’s to write, yet. And then it’ll probably go the rounds of all the publishers and none of them may appreciate it.’

‘Oh, of course they will!’ said Joyce quickly.

Gillian looked at the head-girl with mischief in her eyes. ‘Fancy you an authoress, Joey! Well, when that happens, you’ll *have* to grow up, of course!’

‘*Never!*’ said Jo with decision as she turned away and led them up the road to ‘Die Rosen’ and Kaffee und Kuchen.

[The end of *The Chalet School and the Lintons* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]