

LAVENDER LAUGHS IN THE CHALET SCHOOL



ELINOR
BRENT-DYER

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LAVENDER LAUGHS
IN THE
CHALET SCHOOL

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By
ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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FROM

E.

CHAPTER I

‘I SUGGEST—SCHOOL!’

Dr Marilliar laid down the tiny hammer with which he had been tapping sundry of his patient's joints, and pulled the loose, fleecy robe right over her. ‘That's all now, thank you. Run along into the other room and get into your clothes while your aunt and I have a chat.’

The patient, pulling the robe closely round her, rolled off the high couch, and pattered across the room to the baize-covered door which led into the small room where she had undressed. When the door had closed behind her, ‘Auntie’ leaned forward eagerly. ‘What do you think of her, Doctor? It isn't anything very much, is it? She's just rundown?’

For reply, the doctor got to his feet, and took a turn across the room while she watched him. There was a frown between his black brows, and his mouth looked rather grim. The sallow-faced lady in the big fur coat, which was flung open to show a scarlet dress and a heavy string of black and white beads, gazed at him, and her mouth began to tremble. ‘It—it isn't anything—*serious*, is it, Doctor? Not—not——’ She faltered, and stopped.

The doctor's brows and mouth relaxed. ‘Not what you fear, I can see. No, Miss Leigh. Your little niece is sound enough. But her nerves are all on edge and strained, and that accounts for her bad fits of insomnia, her tempers and petulance, and her lack of appetite. She has been living at far too great a rate, and is worn out. You tell me that she has begun to grow very quickly this last year; and that, on top of everything else, has no doubt helped to bring her to this.’

‘Then what can I do to help her?’

For reply, he turned over some papers on his desk. ‘You tell me that you are called up, and must go before long?’

‘Yes, Doctor. And that is just why I am so anxious about Lavender. I have said nothing to her as yet; but I am sure she will break her heart, when she hears. She has never left me for a day since she was five years old, and the bare thought of being parted from me will upset her badly.’

‘And yet—and please don't misunderstand me—it is the best thing possible for both of you at the moment.’

Miss Leigh's jaw dropped. A flush of indignation came into her cheeks as she repeated, ‘Best for both of us? What can you mean? I confess, Dr Marilliar, I don't understand you at all!’

The great doctor, famed for his success with children's cases, smiled slightly. ‘I was afraid you might feel like that at first. Look here, Miss Leigh, Lavender's is the last case for the present. It is a miserable day and just about four o'clock—tea-time. I'm sure you could do with a cup of tea, and my sister-in-law will have it ready now. Suppose we send Lavender to the schoolroom with my own young people, and go along to the drawing-room and then you and I can have a good talk. What do you say?’

Something in the genial voice, more, perhaps, in the great kindness of the grey eyes looking at her, thawed Miss Leigh's annoyance, and she found herself meekly agreeing to his suggestion. He crossed the room to the baize-covered door, and called through, ‘Are you ready, Lavender?’

The door was thrown open, and his patient came slowly out.

She was a thin—too thin—child of about thirteen. Eyes of lavender blue were set in a nervously-featured face that was too pale for health. She was tall for her years, and her jerky movements and continual twitchings bore out all he had said about her nerves. She spoke in a high-pitched voice with a cultured accent which only just escaped being a whine. Her light-brown hair was twisted into lank ringlets that just brushed her shoulders, and were tied up at one side with a big bow that matched her eyes. Her loose woollen frock was of the same colour, with muslin collar and cuffs, and her silk stockings and beautifully-cut shoes were superfine.

‘Come along, Lavender,’ said the doctor with a smile. ‘I’m going to hand you over to my family while your aunt has tea in the drawing-room with my sister and myself.’ He took up a speaking-tube, and blew down it. Almost at once there came an answering whistle, and then a clear voice said, ‘It’s Alixe, Uncle Frank. What do you want?’

‘You,’ he replied. ‘Come to the consulting-room, will you, dear?’

He left the tube, and went back to his desk, and a moment later there came a tap at the door, and then a girl entered. She was no taller than Lavender, with a mane of reddy-brown hair, neatly combed off her face, and fastened on the nape of her neck with a big slide which allowed little curls and babyish rings to dance about an oval face. Her eyes were deep-blue, almost the hue of blue violets, and her cheeks were pink with health. She came in shyly, and went up to the desk without looking at the strangers. She wore a simple brown frock, and, judging by her appearance, was about fourteen, though they discovered later that Alixe McNab was nearly sixteen.

The doctor drew her to his side. ‘Alixe, I want you to take Lavender—this is Lavender, by the way—and give her tea with the rest of you in the schoolroom. Is Mollie in?’

‘Yes, Uncle Frank. Auntie Peggy said it was too wet for her to go out, so she and George decided to go on with the Magazine.’ Alixe used the name with some pride and importance, and her uncle laughed.

‘Well, tell them I want them to look after Lavender and show her their possessions. Are Monny and Vicky in, too?’

‘Monny is, but Vicky went round to the Evans’ just before the rain came on so heavily.’

‘Good! Then take Lavender and run along quickly. I’ll send for her when I want her. One moment, though. This is Miss Leigh, Lavender’s aunt. One of my nieces, Miss Leigh. Now run off, the pair of you.’ And he chased them out of the room, giving Miss Leigh no chance to interfere with his arrangements. Alixe held out her hand at once to Lavender, drawing her away, and the younger girl went without more ado. Then the doctor turned to Miss Leigh with a boyish smile.

‘We are a large family, Miss Leigh,’ he said. ‘Besides my own pair, I am guardian to the children of my only sister, and there are five of them.’

‘Seven children!’ exclaimed Miss Leigh. ‘What a family for these days!’

‘It’s not quite so bad as that. Barney, my own boy, is twenty, and at Bart’s. Following in my footsteps, you see, though surgery is his real interest. Monica, my girl, is nearly eighteen now, and in her last year at school. Then she goes to Bedford—she wants to be a physical training mistress. Her cousin, Vicky, who is nineteen, is at the Westminster Hospital, training as a doctor. Then there are Alixe whom you have just seen, who is sixteen in March, the twins, Mollie and Geordie, who are twelve; and Ned, who is nine. Ah, here we are; and this is my sister-in-law, Miss Primrose. Peggy, can you give Miss Leigh and myself some tea?’

Miss Leigh found herself seated beside a very charming person, who looked absurdly young to be aunt to anyone. Later, she found out that Miss Primrose was only twenty-seven. She had kept house for her brother-in-law ever since her sister had died; but along with all the duties that the housekeeper for a doctor cannot escape, she managed to put in several hours a week at a canteen, as well as help with Red Cross activities, and do fire-watching two nights a week. At present, she gave her visitor tea and a crumpet, saw that she had a little table for her cup, and chatted brightly on indifferent subjects while she attended to the doctor's wants and her own.

But Miss Leigh was far too anxious about her little niece to pay much attention to anything else, and when she had drunk her first cup of tea, she turned her eyes on the doctor, and said rather piteously, 'What did you mean just now when you said it was best for Lavender and me to be parted? It couldn't be! We've always been together, ever since her parents died and I took charge of her. *I know* she will break her heart. But what can I do?'

For reply, the doctor held out his cup to Peggy Primrose, who took it with a look of sympathy at the guest. Then he turned to Miss Leigh. 'I want to tell you a story,' he said in his delightful voice. 'The autumn before war broke out, my sister Lucia, who was with her husband and children on the Karroo, farming, sent home to us her two elder girls, Vicky and Alixe, because they wanted them to have an English education. In the following April, Lucia and her husband were killed in a thunderstorm, and their three remaining children, the twins and Ned, came home also. My girl and her two cousins were, at that time, going to a very good day-school here; but a year later, the Head retired, and we had to find somewhere else for our four girls. We found it in a school which had evacuated to a large house outside of Howells, a little village about fourteen miles away. This school was originally started in Tirol, but after Hitler seized Austria, it was forced to close down, and was brought to Guernsey, where it had begun again. In the beginning it had had a large number of Austrian and German girls among its pupils, as well as many from other countries, including the Crown Princess of Belsornia.'

'The Crown Princess of Belsornia!' exclaimed Miss Leigh. 'Why, when Lavender and I went to Constantinople, we broke the journey at Firarto for the wedding of the Crown Princess. I remember that we heard that her chief bridesmaid was an English girl who had been at school with her.'

'That would be Mrs Maynard, sister of Lady Russell who began the school. She and Princess Elisaveta have always been great friends, I hear.'

'We caught a glimpse of the bridal procession. I remember thinking how lovely the Princess looked. And her bridegroom was such a handsome man. I wonder what has become of them? Belsornia is overrun by the Nazis, isn't it?'

'I can tell you that,' replied the doctor. 'The Princess and her three children are living in Howells village with Mrs Maynard. As for her husband, Prince Raphael, he is with our Air Force in Libya. The King made them escape—the Princess when her baby daughter was only a fortnight old—and he himself tried to remain in Belsornia. But his people loved their King too dearly to hear of it; they hid him—I believe, almost by main force—and finally smuggled him out of the country. Where he is now no one is very sure, though Lady Russell's husband, Sir James, who is head of the big new Sanatorium—another escapee from Tirol—told me the other day that the Princess had had a letter telling her he was safe.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said Miss Leigh. Then her own troubles came back with renewed force, and she returned to them at once. 'But, Doctor, what am I to do with

Lavender? Where can I send her?’

He smiled. ‘Don’t you see yet what I’m driving at, Miss Leigh? Where can she be better cared for than in such a place as the Chalet School, which is so closely connected with the Sanatorium? I suggest—school!’

‘Vicky was there until she was eighteen,’ put in Peggy Primrose to give Miss Leigh time to recover from the shock. ‘Monny will be there till the end of the summer term. And, of course, Alixe has at least two more years; and Mollie is really not very far on in her school career. If you accept my brother-in-law’s suggestion, Lavender will go there with friends ready-made. And, of course, I know he will see her when we go over to see our own girls. It really is an excellent school, where she would be with children of her own age, who are very nice children, and get a good education into the bargain. If you have to part with her—and if you are called up, I can quite see that you must—then you couldn’t send her to a better place. All our girls are very happy there; and I’m sure Alixe has improved in health since she’s been there. The others are all sturdy enough, but Alixe has given us one or two anxious moments, hasn’t she, Frank? But you’ve been much happier about her lately.’

The doctor nodded. ‘I regard my orphan nieces and nephews as a very sacred charge, as you may imagine, Miss Leigh. Some day I must account to my sister and her husband for my care of them. What I want you to do is to send your little niece to the school where I have entrusted even our delicate Alixe, for I can recommend it unreservedly. Lavender will be happy there, once she has settled down to school life. She will be well looked after from every point of view. And I can keep an eye on her as well if you should wish it.’

‘I should want that, of course. I may be sent anywhere, and to know that someone like you was watching over her would be a great comfort,’ said Miss Leigh in bewildered tones. ‘But—school? Somehow, I’d never thought of it for her. You see, she has led such a *very* different life. I don’t—know—if she would—like it at all. I’ve taught her myself, and I think she is quite well advanced for her age. She’s a clever child, too. But she has never mixed much with other children. Do you think she would be happy in such very different surroundings?’

‘Not at first, I expect. Indeed, unless she is a very unusual child, I, am afraid she will dislike it exceedingly. But she will get over that; and it is what she needs. I don’t wish to be unkind, Miss Leigh; but you can surely see for yourself that she has led a very unnatural life for a child. Of course, you have the final word; but I warn you candidly that unless something of the kind is done, you will find yourself with a nervous invalid on your hands before another two years are over. Neurasthenia is one of the most difficult troubles to cure—and one of the most trying to nurse. If Lavender is taken in time, I think six months will see the end of most of her troubles. But what she needs, more than a rest-cure, as you suggested to me at first, more than any further travelling or distraction of her mind—what she needs is the normal, heedless life of the normal, healthy child. She wants to live by rule—to get up at a certain time, eat her meals at stated intervals, have stated occupations for stated hours; organised play at others; and go to bed at a regular time every night. And she wants it not for a few months, but a few years. Thirteen, isn’t she? Well, if you can give her that for the next five years, you ought to have a normal, happy girl as niece when she is eighteen. I have told you the alternative.’

The doctor sounded very stern as he said this; but he had had a full account at the beginning of the visit of the sort of life Lavender Leigh had led ever since she was five, and he was determined to put a stop to it if he could. To his mind, it was little short of providential that Miss Leigh found herself in her present dilemma. It would give the child a chance she

might not have had otherwise. He was very sorry for the worried-looking lady opposite him; but he was quite clear that Lavender must have her chance if it were possible.

Miss Leigh looked at Peggy Primrose, and that young lady nodded. 'I know my brother-in-law is right. Do take his advice, Miss Leigh. I know you will never regret it. Look here,' she went on eagerly, 'I'll send for Mollie—she's nearest to Lavender's age—and she shall tell you herself about the school. Won't that be best, Frank?'

The doctor nodded. 'Good scheme, Peggy!' He went to the door, and called, 'Mollie! I want you for a few minutes. Come here, girlie!'

There was the scuttering of light feet, and a bonny, sturdy girl of twelve entered. Mollie was sufficiently like her elder sister for her to be known as a member of the same family; but she had none of the traces of delicacy that showed in Alixe's face; and as Miss Leigh looked at the round, beaming countenance with its laughing blue eyes, and halo of brown curls, she began to wish that Lavender was more like this.

'What did you want, Uncle Frank?' asked Mollie cheerfully.

'This is Miss Leigh, Lavender's aunt,' said the doctor. 'She is thinking of sending Lavender along with you to the Chalet School, and would like to know something about it from *your* point of view.'

If Miss Leigh had been an observant person, she would have seen that Mollie's face fell markedly at this news. But she was not. The doctor saw it, and a twinkle came into his eyes as he waited. It was what he had expected after his interview with Lavender.

Mollie said, 'How do you do, Miss Leigh?' very properly. Then she added, 'What would you like me to tell you? It's a very *good* school, you know, and awfully full. I don't know if there'd be room for anyone else. Have you written to the Head to ask? Crowds of people are always *rushing* to come to us. You see, it's such a jolly decent place.'

'You needn't worry about that, Mollie,' said her uncle. 'Tell Miss Leigh about what you do—your gardens, for instance.'

Mollie was a keen gardener, and needed no further spur. She poured out on Miss Leigh a flood of information about the form gardens; and then went on happily about lessons, games, expeditions, and her chums, till that lady was *almost* reconciled to the idea. Almost; but not quite. When the doctor had sent Mollie back to the schoolroom, she needed still further persuasion from him and Miss Primrose. But at length he sent for his own daughter, Monica, a big, jolly-looking person of nearly eighteen, who was a prefect, and asked her to promise to look after Lavender if she were sent.

'Yes; I'll give an eye to her,' said Monica. She was old enough to have some self-control, and therefore even her father did not know her private opinion of Lavender, which was that, of all the conceited, spoiled little wretches she had ever met, Lavender Leigh was the worst.

Finally, Miss Leigh collected her niece, and went off, agreeing to visit the school herself, and see if they could take Lavender.

'And they will,' said the doctor to his sister-in-law. 'I'm ringing up Miss Annersley at once, and she'll take her when she hears what I've got to say.'

CHAPTER II

‘BILL’ HAS AN INTERVIEW

‘What a day!’ Miss Wilson, senior mistress at the Chalet School, cast a look out of the window before she settled down again to her novel.

She had some cause for her remark. All day it had snowed, beginning with sleet in the early morning, and then going on to real, heavy flakes of snow which drove before the wind that had grown fiercer and fiercer with the rising gale. The New Year had come in with a couple of bright, sunny days; but today had shown a bad change, and she was glad that there was nothing to take her out. The big fire and comfort of the staff-room were far more to her liking at present, though she was an ‘open-air person,’ to quote Daisy Venables, an ornament of the Lower Fifth, and usually revelled in long walks, whatever the weather.

She was alone at the school, except for the servants. Even the Head, Miss Annersley, had gone off for Christmas, though she was expected to return by the end of the present week. ‘Bill’ had had two or three invitations, but had refused them all. The previous term had been an exciting one, and she felt she would rather stay at school in peace than be a guest anywhere. She had no home of her own except a little cottage in the wilds of Dartmoor, which had been lent for the duration to a cousin from Portsmouth who had gone there with her three small children. There would be no room for another, and ‘Bill’ had flatly declined to go. The Head had left on Christmas Eve, and the science mistress had had a comfortable if solitary time for the last ten days. Now, as she glanced again at the whirling snowstorm, she told herself that she was safe from any invasion today. She curled up luxuriously in her huge armchair, took another chocolate from the box which had been one of her Christmas presents, and returned to her light novel.

The next moment there was a tap at the door, and then Gwladys-from-the-hill-farm came in to announce with her usual snuffle, ‘A lady to see you, Miss.’

‘To see me?’ asked Miss Wilson incredulously. ‘Are you sure, Gwladys?’

‘Well, Miss, she asked for Miss Annersley, but I said she was away, but you would see her, as she said it was very important whatever.’

‘Oh! Well—where have you put her?’

‘In the library, Miss.’

Miss Wilson got to her feet, looked hurriedly round the room to make sure that it was passably tidy, pushed her chocolate-box under the cushion of her chair, smoothed down the thick white hair that curled rampantly over her head, and said, ‘You’d better bring her in here. It’s warm enough anywhere with the central heating; but a fire looks more cheery on a day like this. If I ring, bring tea, will you? Ask Megan to see to it.’

Gwladys nodded and vanished, to return presently with a tall, sallow-faced lady in maroon jersey suit with hat to match. ‘Miss Leigh!’ she announced. ‘Will I tell the shuvver to come to the kitchen, Miss?’

Miss Wilson sighed inwardly. Gwladys never would have suitable manners for a parlour-maid; but they were lucky to have anyone at all these days. A club foot and short sight had prevented her from being in any of the Women’s Services. Their bright, pretty little Guernsesiaises maids who had come with them when the school had evacuated from Guernsey

had gone long since. Michelle and Rhoda were in the W.A.A.F., and Annette and Olivette had joined the W.R.N.S.; while Dulcie was driving a motor-lorry. Then the mistress came forward, holding out her hand with a pleasant smile. The lady took it eagerly in response to the welcoming, 'Good afternoon. What a terrible day it is! I hope you aren't quite frozen? Come and sit down by the fire, won't you? I'm sorry Miss Annersley is away at present.' Miss Wilson talked on easily, as she seated her unwanted guest in another easy-chair, and took her own again, 'But perhaps I can help you.'

Miss Leigh looked at her fixedly. Then she relaxed in her comfortable chair with a little sigh. 'I think I begin to see what the doctor meant when he told me to send Lavender here. I am *sure* you would be good to her, wouldn't you?'

'Which doctor was that?' asked Miss Wilson, who was a practical person.

'Dr Marilliar of Medbury. He told me that his own daughter and his nieces were here, and very happy with you, and had done well, too.'

'Oh, yes; we have Monica and her younger cousins. The elder girl, Vicky, has left us now, and is training as a doctor at the Westminster. Have you met them?' asked 'Bill.' 'They are all four such dear girls.'

'We did not see the one who is to be a doctor; but he sent Lavender off with one of the younger ones—Alixé, I think, he called her—and she told me that there were a big girl and a little one as well. I had tea with the doctor and his sister in the drawing-room, you see.'

Inwardly thinking that this conversation was beginning at the wrong end, 'Bill' nodded. 'I see. And he wants you to send—Lavender, is it?—to us? Has she ever been at school before?'

'Oh, no. It was impossible with all our travelling, you see.'

'Bill' was puzzled. Who on earth could the woman be? Her face was somehow familiar. And so was the name, 'Lavender.' But in what connection, the mistress was unable to think for the moment. So she only said, 'I see. And now, of course, travel is at an end—at any rate until Hitler and his gang are safely tied up. But how old is Lavender? You see, we are fairly full here, and there are only certain forms in which there are any vacancies. If we can fit her into one of those, well and good. But if not, then I'm afraid we can't take her. This is a big house; but even so, space is limited, and we have nearly as many as we can manage.'

'She is fourteen—or will be next month. She is my niece—I am Sylvia Leigh, you know.'

Once again 'Bill' had that teasing feeling that she knew the name, and once again she was unable to place it. Still, she could hardly show her lack of knowledge, for the lady clearly expected her to understand. 'I see,' she said. 'Then, as it is the doctor who has advised sending her here, I suppose you took her to see him professionally?'

'That's just it!' Miss Leigh leaned forward eagerly. 'You see, when war broke out, we were in Martinique. Of course, I tried to get back at once, and we managed to get away, and, *most* mercifully, we had an uneventful journey—we flew, of course. Then, in the next year we went to Scotland, though, of course, we couldn't go to some of the best parts as they were forbidden. Last year, we managed with Wales, and *that* book will, I hope, be out for Easter. But I had to register then—I am thirty-three, you see—and, apart from that, I've been having so much trouble with Lavender. She wasn't sleeping, and she had no appetite. Then she got—a *little* fretful. In fact,' she added in a sudden burst of candour, 'she was really irritable. I think she misses the excitement of seeing new places. Of course, after the wandering life we have led, and all the journeys we have made, I admit that just visiting Scotland and Wales *must* have seemed a little—well—tame. But she lost weight, and I was really worried about her. Then a lady I met in a hotel in Conway advised me to take her to Dr Marilliar of Medbury—'

such a *wonderful* man with children, she told me. And I must say, I found him very thorough and understanding. It was he who told me that it would be better for Lavender to go to school; and he suggested the Chalet School. Indeed, he recommended it *most* strongly. So I found out where it was, and got someone to take charge of Lavender for the day, and came to see you about it. You *will* take her, won't you? I don't want to seem to boast, but you do know that to have Lavender Leigh in the school will be—well—worth having. She must be one of the best-known little girls in the British Empire by this time, of course.'

By this time 'Bill' had got her bearings. Of course! Lavender Leigh! The heroine of that series of travel-books for children known as 'The Lavender Laughs Series'!—*Lavender Laughs in Cyprus, Lavender Laughs in Brazil, Lavender Laughs in New Guinea*. It was only last term that she herself had said, somewhat unkindly, as she looked at the latest addition to the Junior Library, which—she remembered now—had been *Lavender Laughs in Scotland*, 'And I suppose if it hadn't been for the war we should have had *Lavender Laughs at the North Pole!* I should think it's about the only corner of the earth that grinning little monkey *hasn't* "laughed" in!'

And this must be the 'Auntie' of the series. Then she lost the thread of her thoughts, for Miss Leigh was saying plaintively, 'You *will* take her, won't you? For I may be called up any time now, and I *do* want Lavender happily settled before that happens.'

'Bill' collected herself. 'I can't agree without consulting my Head, I'm afraid. Could you give me any idea of Lavender's schoolwork?'

Miss Leigh nodded. 'Her languages are *very* good, of course. She speaks French fluently, and her Portuguese is excellent too. She knows a little Spanish and Italian—we were six months in Libya; you may remember *Lavender Laughs in Libya?* Such a good *alliterative* title, the publisher told me! I have always read a good deal of history and mythology to her, so that she would understand the underlying meaning of the native customs. And naturally she has picked up a lot of geography. I'm afraid she is not *too* good at arithmetic—it's a weak point with both of us, though I've managed so that we aren't *too* badly cheated over the exchange—money, I mean. But I never went much further than decimals and simple practice myself—I was a dud in Maths at school, though I always won the essay prize. Of course, it was impossible to travel a governess, so I taught her myself, and when we were anywhere where I *could* get someone for a month or two, I did so. But she's never been to school in her life, of course.'

'Bill' was not very sure what to say. It sounded rather as if Lavender would be a problem from more points of view than one. She was irritable, not sleeping, not eating—and her education—if it could be called that—sounded scrappy in the extreme. The mistress decided that matters must wait until the Head herself returned. *She* could deal with it. It was, after all, *her* job. 'Bill' herself was only a stop-gap, and had no official right to say whether they could accept the child or not. But in making this decision, Miss Wilson knew in her heart of hearts that if she chose to say that they could find room for Lavender, Miss Annersley would agree. They were old friends, who had worked together for many years. The Head might be *ex officio* the one to make decisions, but they had always discussed all school affairs together, and in actual fact, 'Bill' had as definite a veto on what they did as Miss Annersley.

'All the same, I don't want to take on a responsibility of this kind,' she thought as she rang for tea. 'Perhaps, if Hilda asks me I'll tell her what I think—if I can find *that* out. Upon my word, I'm not any too sure what I *do* think about it!'

Over the tea-cups, Miss Leigh enlarged on the subject of her little niece, and the science mistress learned among other things that Lavender was very sensitive, and simply worshipped beauty in every shape or form.

‘Of course, I have done all in my power to direct her tastes in that direction,’ said Miss Leigh, as she enjoyed Megan’s luscious toast and some of the school’s own honey. ‘I think it so *necessary* for a child’s tastes to be moulded in the right direction from the very first. I have always tried to keep ugly things from her. I have never even allowed her to listen-in to the war news. I do feel that we should try to keep our children as free from all horrors as possible, don’t you, Miss Wilson?’

‘The little ones—yes,’ said Miss Wilson. ‘But I also feel that when children reach the teens, at any rate, they ought to know something of the evils we are fighting against—something of what other children, no older than they, are enduring in the occupied countries. After all, it will be, in great measure, the boys and girls who are now in their early teens who will have to rebuild life, once the war is over. How can they do it adequately if they don’t understand what it is they have to consider in laying the foundations for what *must* be, to quote Hitler’s words, a new order? And, apart from that, it doesn’t do to wrap children up in too much cotton-wool. It may have answered in our mothers’ day, when a girl was, in the main, expected to stay at home until she married, and went to a home of her own. But these children will have to go out and face the world; and unless we who are responsible for their present training give them some backbone, many of them will crumple up and fall before what they must meet. By all means, keep the worst horrors from them. But I do feel that they must learn something of what war in these days of mechanism can mean, so that they can build and work to prevent its ever happening again. Or, if that be too high an ideal—and it certainly is Utopian—at any rate so that they can prevent its ever becoming so gigantic.’

Miss Leigh stared at her as if she were talking some strange, new language. ‘But—that is a terrible view to take of life!’ she cried. ‘As for facing the world, I hope my little Lavender will not have to do that. She has some money of her own from her parents; and I have saved all I could so that she may be really well provided for.’

‘And who can guarantee that it will be there for her when she is grown-up?’ demanded ‘Bill.’ ‘Or even if it is, if the foundations are not well laid, who can say that twenty-five years or so after peace is declared the world may not be plunged once again into chaos? Did *you* expect ever to serve in the army? Yet it has come. No, Miss Leigh; make no mistake! From the time they are old enough to understand what starvation and terrorism mean, our children must be taught about them, so that they can see to it that *their* children shall not go through what so many of the children of the present day are going through!’ ‘Bill’s’ eyes flashed, and her cheeks flushed as she thus proclaimed her own creed, and Miss Leigh began to feel that perhaps there was something in what she said. But not for Lavender—never for Lavender! The fond aunt felt that she would go to almost any lengths to save Lavender from knowing anything about the present state of affairs. She said as much, and ‘Bill’ discreetly held her tongue on the subject for the rest of the visit.

Finally, when Miss Leigh rose to go with the understanding that she was to return the next week to see Miss Annersley about Lavender’s coming to the school, she turned to the science mistress with a little imploring gesture. ‘I see that you don’t agree with me about giving children nothing but beauty to look on or to hear,’ she said, ‘but you *will* remember what a little sensitive plant Lavender is, won’t you? If it is the rule of the school that a certain amount

of the war-news is told to the girls, you will try to soften it down for her, won't you? But of course I know you will.'

'Much will depend on Lavender's form, if she comes,' replied 'Bill.' 'If she goes into one of the Junior forms, then she will hear comparatively little. So far as age is concerned, she ought to be in the Upper Third. But, judging by what you tell me, I think it much more likely that it will be Lower Third, or even Upper Second, and they get very little.'

'Of course; I quite see that. I am sure you are most careful,' gushed the visitor. 'But then, of course, I'm an old hen with one duckling, and of course I do find it hard to see her dancing towards the water'—'Bill' only just smothered a smile at this remarkable metaphor—'and not do all I can to keep her on dry land. Well, goodbye, Miss Wilson, and thank you so much for all your kindness. And it was a most delicious tea! Such honey. But then, of course, as you keep your own bees, it is hardly to be wondered at, is it? Oh, don't trouble to come out to the door! It is such a terrible day! Of course, after so many years in sunny countries, Lavender and I feel it more than people who are accustomed to it. Goodbye!'

'I wonder,' said 'Bill' as, back again in the common-room, she sank exhaustedly into her chair, 'I wonder just how many times during the conversation that woman used the words "of course"?' I never was so sick of a phrase in my life! Let's hope Lavender hasn't picked it up, or I see some of her future little playmates giving her a time of it. Well, after all that, I think I need some refreshment. I ought to go and change for dinner. But I won't—I'll be lazy and have a tray in here. In the meantime, I'd like to find out just *who* kidnapped "Janey." Half-past six? I've time for the rest of the story, anyhow!'

CHAPTER III

LAVENDER ARRIVES

It was all settled. Lavender was to come to the Chalet School when it re-opened at the end of January. Miss Annersley had listened gravely to all 'Bill' had to tell her, and had then nodded. 'Yes, Nell. There's nothing else to be done if we can take her. Of course——'

'Oh, for pity's sake, *don't!*' implored Miss Wilson.

The Head stared at her in surprise. 'Don't what? What *do* you mean?'

'*Don't* say "of course"!' 'Bill' spoke with tragic emphasis. 'That awful Miss Leigh began every other sentence with it, and I never was so tired of one phrase as I was of that by the time she went. It's to be hoped, for Lavender's sake, that she hasn't picked up the trick, or she'll be ragged unmercifully. Do you remember how Gwensi Howell's gang broke her off ending most of her speeches with "whatever"?''

Miss Annersley began to laugh. 'Shall I ever forget! How angry Gwensi used to get! Still, it did do it. She only uses it now when she's thoroughly stirred up and extra Welsh. Well, what I was going to say is that Lavender must do the entrance papers. If she does well enough for Upper Third, I'm afraid that will settle it. That form has thirty girls already and is full. We can't break rules, even for the famous Lavender Leigh.'

However, a letter from Dr Marilliar arrived the next day which rather changed her mind on the subject. That was followed up by a visit from himself, and after a long and serious talk, the two mistresses were agreed that if Lady Russell, who was the owner of the school, would agree to their breaking the hitherto inflexible rule that no form might contain more than thirty girls, Lavender must come, even if it meant having thirty-one in the Upper Third. As it turned out, there was no need to worry on that score. Lavender only just scraped into Lower Third, of which Mollie McNab was an ornament, as well as Lady Russell's second niece, Bride Bettany, who, much to her disgust, had been moved up at the end of the previous term. Bride had to leave all her friends behind, since none of them was either very brilliant or very hard-working, and she felt thoroughly ill-used. Indeed, she went so far as to say that if she had known she would be parted from them like this, she would never have bothered to be top of the form every week throughout the term.

'That's very naughty, Bride,' said her aunt, to whom this remark was made. 'You ought to be proud of getting two removes in two terms.'

'But the rest aren't getting them,' wailed Bride. 'I wanted to stay with my own chums, Auntie Madge. I'm ever so much younger than the rest of the Lower Third, and it'll be frightfully boring to be with them.'

Lady Russell only laughed, and reminded her that she would have plenty of her friends out of school hours, and Bride went off feeling that all her world was against her. 'I won't fag to work now, anyhow,' she told her cousin, Primula Venables, who was one of the Gang. 'Then p'r'aps they won't keep me up.'

'You'll get into awful rows if you do that,' Primula warned her. 'You *know* they'll guess something's gone wrong. They won't put you down again, though. It's only for two terms, anyhow. Julie, and the McDonalds, and the Ozannes, and Nancy Chester ought all to be coming up at the end of the year. Even *I* might. I'll try hard, anyhow.'

‘You’ll be all right,’ said Bride gloomily. And then, to add to everything else, Auntie Madge caught her just half an hour before they had to set out for school, and told her that there would be a new girl in her new form, and Bride was to look after her.

‘I shan’t have any time,’ said Bride sulkily. ‘Who is she, anyhow?’

‘That’s not quite the way to speak,’ her aunt reminded her gently. ‘It is a girl a little older than you. Mollie McNab’s uncle is interested in her, and he asked Uncle Jem if you would be friends with her, as Mollie is to be in the Lower Fourth, so can’t be expected to have much to do with her. Lower Fourth is still the first form in the Middle School, isn’t it?’

Bride nodded. ‘What have I got to do for her? And what’s her name?’

‘I think you’ll be rather interested when you hear. She is Lavender Leigh. Don’t you remember that book you loved so—*Lavender Laughs in Turkey*? Well, this is Lavender. She can’t travel just now, of course, so her aunt, Miss Leigh, is sending her to school, and Dr Marilliar advised the Chalet School. Monica will give an eye to her; but the doctor wants to feel that she has a friend in her own form. Do you see, dear?’

‘But you can’t be friends just like that,’ said Bride unexpectedly. ‘You are or you aren’t. I’ll see she knows about things, and I’ll tell her the rules if she wants it; but I’ve got my own chums, and I can’t drag her in with us unless the others want it, Auntie Madge.’

Madge Russell nodded. ‘That’s all I ask of you, Bride. Now cheer up, girlie, and give me a kiss. I hope you will have a very happy term, and find that being in Lower Third isn’t so bad as you fear. Send Sybil to me, will you? I’ve found her handkerchief satchet, so she must put it into her case now. I’ll come and see you all off presently.’

It was quite a party that left the Round House. Besides Bride, there were her eldest sister, Peggy, who was in Upper Third; Sybil Russell, a small beauty, who happily occupied a midway position in Lower Second; primrose-fair Primula Venables, Sir James Russell’s younger niece; and Primula’s elder sister Daisy, a long-legged, daisy-faced girl of nearly sixteen, who was an ornament of the Lower Fifth. Daisy and Primula usually made their home with Lady Russell’s younger sister, Jo Maynard. But just at the end of the Christmas term, Jo’s husband, Jack Maynard, had come home after he had been given up for lost, and Madge Russell had insisted that the Venables, at any rate, must spend their holidays with her, so that the Maynards might have their Christmas together. It would be the first one since the war began, for Dr Jack, as the girls of the Chalet School called him, had been on foreign service ever since the middle of the first December. So they, and their triplet daughters, and Jo Maynard’s beloved, adopted sister, Robin Humphries, had kept house and enjoyed the Christmas season alone in Plas Gwyn in Howells Village, while Daisy and Primula had been at the Round House; and the McDonald twins, the other inmates of Plas Gwyn, had been taken in by Jo’s great chum, Frieda von Ahlen, who lived in a small house at the far end of the Plas Gwyn lane with her little son, Louis. The Crown Princess of Belsornia had betaken herself and her family of three to the house of a cousin of her mother’s, who was anxious for her to make her home there until Belsornia was freed from Nazi rule. Now that term was beginning, Daisy would be a weekly boarder at school, going back to Plas Gwyn for the week-ends, while the small fry were to be full boarders for the term. No one had forgotten what January and February of the previous year had been like.

Lady Russell duly appeared, her youngest child, Josette, a delightful little person of nearly four, trotting after her. With them came Sybil, the beauty of the family, and a young lady with a very big idea of herself and her own importance as the elder daughter of the Round House. Bride and Peggy had two brothers, and the eldest of the young Russells was David who was a

few months younger than Bride, but they had returned to school on the Tuesday. The Chalet School did not begin till the Thursday.

‘Goodbye, people!’ cried Madge Russell as she kissed them one by one. ‘Work harder this term, Sybs, and do have a better report than you had last. Peg, no colds, remember! The same to you, Primula! Daisy-girl, if you have any pity for us, *stop growing*. Your things won’t let down even a hair’s-breadth more; and how we are ever to supply you for next term on your own coupons is more than I can say. Look after Lavender, Bride, and be happy, girlie. Give Rob my love, Daisy, and say it’s more than a week since she was here, and Josette and I would like to see her now and then.’

‘You always make such a fuss of Robin,’ said Sybil, tilting her small nose disdainfully. ‘She doesn’t *really* b’long to the family at all.’

‘She belonged to the family before you were ever even thought of,’ retorted her mother swiftly. ‘And must I ask you when I invite people here?’

Sybil subsided. When her mother spoke like this she always did. Not so very many months ago, her Aunt Jo had declared that she was becoming unbearable with her airs and graces, which had made Madge take more notice of her daughter. What she saw, she did not like, and the entire family was uniting in doing its best to cure Sybil. She was a very jealous child, hating to share even with the cousins who had lived with them ever since she could remember. When Josette had arrived, it had been weeks before Sybil could be brought to look at the baby. To add to all this, her beauty brought her far more admiration than was good for a small girl of nearly nine, and she tended to look down on Bride who was not in the least pretty and who had, during the previous term, been condemned to wearing glasses to correct a slight astigmatism.

Madge Russell waved to them from the top of the hill where the Round House was nestled among trees, and went back to the morning-room thinking very seriously of her elder daughter’s faults. Sybil was the most difficult of her three children. David was like his father, a jolly, straightforward boy, with an excellent brain, and a passion for cricket and most other outdoor sports. Josette showed signs of being domesticated. She liked nothing better than ‘helping Muvver.’ She was a pretty child, but no more so than any of the others. Sybil, with chestnut curls, sapphire-blue eyes, rose-petal skin, and her mother’s delicately-cut features, was a ‘picture’ child, and all too well aware of it. She was no bookworm like her young cousin Bride; but she had plenty of shrewdness, and a sharp little tongue of her own. She was a leader at school, and her mother was more anxious about her than about either of the other two. She realised that Sybil would need very careful guiding through her childhood and early girlhood if she were to make the woman God meant her to be.

Meanwhile, the five in the big car driven by Sir James himself were eagerly discussing the coming term. Only Bride was rather quiet as she remembered unwanted promotion, and now this fresh burden of a new girl to look after. Sybil remembered her mother’s words just as they turned into the long, winding avenue that led to Plas Howell, where the Chalet School was carrying on for the present, and turned to her cousin with an eager, ‘Bride! What did Mother mean about Lavender? Is it a new girl?’

‘Yes; in the Lower Third, so she won’t worry *you*,’ replied Bride.

Sir James heard. ‘Perhaps not. But I want you to remember what Auntie Madge said about looking after her, Bride, and be good to her. She has never been to school before, and will find it very difficult from anything she has known up to this.’

‘Why hasn’t she been at school, Father?’ asked his daughter.

‘Because she has been travelling about the world with her aunt instead,’ he returned.

‘Pooh! That’s nothing. We’ve lived in Tirol, and travelled through lots of Europe,’ said Sybil calmly. ‘I’ve been to Switzerland, and France, and Belsornia, and Germany.’

‘From all I can gather, Lavender won’t think much, of *your* travels,’ he told her as he drew up the car with a flourish before the steps. ‘Here we are, so jump out. Oh, here’s Robin. Well, Rob? All well at Plas Gwyn?’

‘No; Jo’s not too fit,’ replied the slender, dark-eyed girl of nearly eighteen who had come running out to greet them. ‘Jack asked me to be sure to catch you and tell you to go round that way. I think he’s rather worried about her. She’s not sleeping, and her appetite isn’t very good.’

His face clouded over, but he only said, ‘Very well; I’ll go round. But why didn’t Jack ring me up before? How long has it been going on?’

‘This last week or so. I think Jack hoped it would pass, but it hasn’t. He thinks it’s the reaction from all she went through last term. But it’s rather worrying, of course. Hello, Daisy! We have missed you people, even though Len, Con, and Margot can make plenty of noise on their own now.’

‘Meaning that I’m a rowdy thing?’ asked Daisy cheerfully, as she hauled the suitcases from the back of the car. ‘Thanks awfully, Rob!’

‘Well, we missed your singing most, I think. But you’ll be down tomorrow with me, won’t you? The rest, of course, must stay; but Jo is aching to see you. She says she didn’t know what a big piece of furniture you are till you went off to the Round House. Oh, Bride, the Head wants to see you in the library as soon as you can. You’d better get off at once. She asked for you nearly an hour ago.’

Bride’s face fell. She had planned to get hold of her own gang and have a pow-wow with them at once. Now, of course, she would have Lavender Leigh tacked on to her, and she must certainly lug her about this first day or so, even if she managed to get rid of her later on. However, she could do nothing but go into the house by the usually forbidden front door, walk through the great hall, and turn off down the passage that led to the library. She tapped at the door, and when the well-known voice called out ‘Come in!’ entered, her most well-behaved self.

Miss Annersley was seated at her desk by the window, and beside her sat a girl in whom Bride recognised the far-famed Lavender Leigh. She had read most of the ‘Lavender Laughs’ series, and enjoyed them. But she did *not* want to have to look after the heroine of them, thank you! Talking it over with her chums, Bride had agreed that most likely this Lavender would be ‘awfully stuck-up, and fearfully pleased with herself everywhere,’ to quote Julie Lucy, one of them.

Miss Annersley held out a welcoming hand. ‘Well, Bride dear, did you have nice holidays? And how is Lady Russell?’

‘Very nice, thank you,’ said Bride primly. ‘Auntie is very well, Miss Annersley, and she sent her love to you, and she hopes to come over before long.’

‘I suppose your uncle brought you all over? He will be coming to see me presently, I expect. Have they told you what I want you to do for me?’

‘Auntie told me that a new girl, Lavender Leigh, was coming who would be in my form, and I was to look after her at first,’ said Bride.

‘Quite right! And here she is. Lavender, this is Bride Bettany who has been with us for a good many years now. She will look after you for the first few days, and explain everything to

you. Go with her now, dear. I have put Lavender in your dormitory, Bride. She will have cubicle six. I've moved Amy West into Yellow. Take Lavender to her cubicle first, and then to Matron, and she will give you your times for unpacking. Now, I am very busy, so you must run away. But if you want to see me about anything, Lavender, ask Bride, and she will tell you what time you can come. Run along.'

Lavender got up, and Bride stared as she looked at the new girl. Why, she was quite as tall as Robin, if not taller. How thin she was! And what a cross look she wore! But the Head expected them to go, so they mustn't stay. Bride held out her hand and said politely, 'Come with me, Lavender, and I'll tell you everything I can.'

Lavender ignored the hand, but she followed Bride from the room after muttering something that might have passed for 'Good afternoon.' Outside she stopped as the younger girl turned to go up the back stairs.

'Why do you go that way?' she asked. 'The staircase is the other way.'

'Not our staircase. We use these down here,' said Bride. 'We aren't allowed to use the great staircase—only the prefects. Anyway, this is quickest to the Green dormy. Come along, and I'll show you.'

With an ill grace Lavender followed her, and found herself climbing up a narrow flight of uncarpeted stairs, which led to a wide corridor, down which girls of every age and size were flying, some burdened with armfuls of clothes, others carrying their hats and coats, others just laughing and chatting. There was a cheerful bustle, and if the noise was a little subdued, it was not peaceful, at any rate.

'This is first day, so most rules don't count,' explained Bride as she led the newcomer down the corridor. 'Tomorrow, if anyone catches us talking on the corridor or the stairs, it means an order mark. But it doesn't matter just for today. Here we are; this is Green where we sleep. Come in!' She turned the handle of one of the doors as she spoke, and led Lavender into a long, bright room, with winter sunshine sending the last rays through the big windows at one end. Rods set at a height of six feet divided the room into ten cubicles. There were curtains of palest leaf-green tossed up over the rods at present; but, as Bride explained, the prefects on duty would pull them down after tea, so that when bedtime came, each girl would find her own little private cubby-hole. She took Lavender to one cubicle at the far side on the inner wall, and pointed to the big 'Six' painted above the little white bed.

'I'm next—in "Seven,"' she said. 'This is your bureau. This lid lifts and tips back, and there's your mirror. The desk part is for your brush and comb and things like that. This hook is for your sponge-bag, and you hang your towels here. This part is the drawers, where you keep your clothes. You can put your photos on the table part. The hook in this pole is for your dressing-gown; and this ledge is for your shoes. See this cupboard between our cubies? You share this with us four, and we hang our frocks and best coats here. Sunday hats in their boxes on this shelf; and brollies, in this stand. You can have one of these hangers for a coat and skirt, and one hanger for your best coat, and four others for frocks—see?' And she pointed out the hangers arranged in groups of six, and slung from the rail which ran right across the cupboard. 'Our party frocks go into those bags at the back,' she went on. 'That's to keep them clean, you see.'

Lavender looked dismayed. 'But I can't manage with only four hangers for frocks!' she exclaimed. 'It isn't nearly enough!'

'Why, how many frocks have you brought?' demanded Bride.

'Nine, of course. I never have less. I like plenty of changes.'

‘You’ll have to choose the four you like best. Matey won’t let you keep more. No one ever does, not even the prefects. The others will go back home. Whatever do you want so many frocks for? I sh’d have thought four was heaps for anyone. We wear tunics most of the time. You only want two for evening wear, and two for going out to tea or anything—and a white for parties and things like that.’

‘I can’t possibly do it. *I’ve* always been accustomed to having plenty of changes. And I have no home, so this Matey person of yours will *have* to let me keep them,’ returned Lavender heatedly.

‘If they can’t be sent home, they’ll be hung away in one of the big closets on the top corridor; but you won’t be allowed to keep them,’ retorted Bride as heatedly. ‘I tell you, not even the prees would be.’

‘I must see the headmistress about this.’ And Lavender turned to the door. But Bride caught her arm, and held her back. ‘You can’t go barging in on her like that! She’s seeing fathers and mothers—and anyway, we can’t just rush off to the library whenever we like. Unless it’s awfully important, like getting news of someone badly ill at home, we’ve got to wait till six. She sees us from six till seven every evening except Wednesdays and Saturdays. You can go then if you like, but I know it won’t be the least bit of good. But you can’t go now. She’d be awfully angry, and you’d get into the most frightful row. *Truthfully*, Lavender, you must wait.’

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST DAY

And Lavender found that wait she must, though it took Bride and two of her chums, Julie Lucy and Julie's cousin, Nancy Chester, all their time to get her to do it. She was all for flying off to the library at once and laying her grievances before the Head. But the faithful three talked till they got her persuaded to stay with them for the present, and then bore her off to Matron's room to introduce her to that worthy before she could change her mind. They were fairly sure that 'Matey' would be able to handle this queer new girl quite adequately.

In this they were no more than right. Matron Gould had dealt with girls of all kinds for a good many years, and she was quite capable of dealing with even the famous Lavender Leigh—of whom she had already heard from both Miss Annersley and Miss Wilson. She shook hands with, the tall, thin girl Bride presented to her, hoped she would be very happy with them, and then turned at once to practical things.

'Bride, I'll unpack you and Lavender at ten minutes past six,' she said. 'I hope you've got all your things marked, though I must say your Aunt Jo usually sees to that.'

'I haven't been near Auntie Jo these holidays,' said Bride. 'But Auntie Madge has done it. She says she can now that Josette isn't such a baby any longer, and we've had no visitors all the holidays. Auntie Jo and Uncle Jack have been alone all over Christmas—except for Robin. And the Triplets, of course,' she added. 'Auntie Madge wouldn't let us go near, 'cos she said they wanted a week or two to themselves. They came up to us for Christmas Day, but that was all. We haven't seen them since.'

'No; I suppose not,' said Matron tranquilly. 'Oh, well, if Lady Russell has seen to it, I needn't worry about *your* things. Has Sybil come with you? Peggy came a few minutes ago; and I'm expecting Daisy and Primula. But Sybil hasn't appeared yet. Do you know anything about her?'

'She came with us. Uncle Jem brought us all in the car—Peg, and Daisy, and Primula, and Sybil and me,' said Bride. 'I expect she went to the library p'r'aps. If I see her, shall I tell her to come to you?'

'No; but you can tell her to come to me to be unpacked at half-past five,' rejoined Matron. 'And also tell her from me to be on time.'

'Yes, Matron,' agreed Bride. She turned, and led the way from Matron's room to the Junior common-room with no further comment until they were safely out of hearing. Then she heaved a deep sigh. 'I do wish people wouldn't give me messages like that for Sybs. She gets so mad about it, and it isn't *my* fault.'

'Your Aunt Jo says she has a red-headed temper—I heard her tell Mummy so,' said Nancy cheerfully. 'Aren't I glad I'm not ginger, though!'

'Your sister Beth is!' retorted Bride, who was a loyal little soul.

'Not ginger—chestnut,' said Nancy briefly.

'Well, that's what Sybs is. And Beth hasn't too sweet a temper herself, if you come to that!' snapped Bride, who might object to her cousin's little ways, but wasn't going to have even Nancy Chester do it to her.

Nancy, who was one of the sunniest people ever known, laughed, and squeezed her chum's arm. 'I know it. Don't fly off the handle like that, Bride. They're both ginger, so far as that goes, and they've both got tempers. They can't help it, I s'pose. I'm glad I'm just plain brown.'

'I don't b'lieve hair has anything to do with it,' put in Julie. 'But never mind them. Tell's what's the latest, Bride. Are there any more new girls besides Lavender.' She finished with a smile at Lavender who was walking beside them, a very cross look on her face.

'Yes; there are four more,' returned Bride, who, by virtue of being a niece of Lady Russell, managed to hear a good deal of school news in the holidays. 'They won't bother *us* much, 'cos they're all big girls. One of them is that girl who owns the Dragon House further up the Valley. R'member? Her grandfather or somebody died, and then she got it. She's got a queer name—Jesanne Gellibrand. But she's seventeen, so she'll be with the Seniors. And her chum's come, too; she's the same age, and her name is Lois Bennett.'

'Seventeen's awfully old to come to school,' said Julie.

'Yes; but I've heard Uncle Jem say he wanted to keep Jesanne with him 'cos he was so old he might die any time,' said Bride most *un*-lucidly.

'Who did?'' demanded Nancy.

'Her old uncle or whatever he was. And Lois Bennett had lessons with her—they had a govvy, and went into Armiford for extras.'

'Coo! I wonder how they'll like school, then? It must be jolly hard to begin it as old as that!' Julie looked grave. 'I'm glad Mummy sent me when I was just a kid. By the way, Lavender, where were *you* before?'

'Nowhere,' began Lavender; but Bride interrupted her with a wild shriek.

'I quite forgot, and Auntie Madge told me. Who d'you think Lavender is? Give you three guesses between you!'

'Who is Lavender? Have you gone batty?'' demanded Nancy, staring at her. Then, 'She isn't someone who's been here before, is she? I don't remember hearing you talk of Lavender before. Oh, no; but you said you hadn't been anywhere when Julie asked you,' and she turned to Lavender, who was cheering up a little since her all-important self had come to the front at last. 'Then who is she, Bride? I can't guess, and I'll bet Julie can't either, so tell us, and don't waste time.'

'She's Lavender Leigh,' Bride informed them importantly, while Lavender—I regret to say it—smirked just behind her.

'Lavender Leigh? Never heard of her,' said Julie flatly.

'Oh, yes you have! You've *read* about her—*reams* about her!'

Julie stared. 'I've read reams about Lavender? You *are* batty, Bride! I never met her—wait a sec! Lavender Leigh? Why——'

'Dawned at last? Aren't you thick?'' jeered Bride, whose language sometimes failed to keep up to that high standard of good English expected by the Chalet School, since she possessed a schoolboy brother and cousin, who brought home choice bits of slang and nobly handed them on to the girls. 'Yes; she's "Lavender Laughs"—*you* know, Nancy! *Lavender Laughs in the West Indies*. Didn't you have that one out of the library for the hols? Well,' with sublime disregard for grammar, 'this is her!'

Lavender had no cause now to complain that she was being overlooked. Nancy Chester eyed her with deep amaze and a tiny bit of awe; while Julie Lucy cried, 'Are you really *that* girl? No wonder Bride said I'd read reams about you! I've got every single one of the

“Lavender Laughs” series. Mummy said—’ Here she stopped, and, if Lavender had noticed it, went suddenly red. What Mrs Lucy had remarked to Nan Blakeney, her young, adopted sister, and, therefore, aunt to the Lucy children, had been, ‘The books make quite good reading, and really do give the babes an idea of life and surroundings in other lands. But what an *awful* kid the Lavender child must be! I should *loathe* to meet her!’ Luckily, Nancy was bursting to have her say, and as her cousin broke off, she chimed in, ‘And we’ve got most of them, too. I first got to like jography from reading them. They’re so jolly int’resting. Have you really got an Aunt Sylvia, Lavender?’

Completely reconciled to her fate for the moment, Lavender answered quite pleasantly, and finally accompanied them into the common-room in high good humour, where Bride announced her as, ‘I say! This is Lavender Leigh! *You* know—“Lavender Laughs”—that girl! She’s come to school here for the war while her Auntie Sylvia has joined up in the A.T.S. ’cos Lavender is fourteen in another month, so she couldn’t get let off for her.’

Sensation in the Junior common-room, the occupants of which promptly crowded round the new girl!

‘Are you really Lavender Leigh?’ cried a jolly-looking girl of eleven whom Bride had presented as, ‘This is Vanna Ozanne; that’s her twin Nella,’ pointing to another, much fairer, but still sufficiently like her for the relationship to be plain to anyone. ‘What fun! I s’pose you can’t travel now that there’s a war on. But you’re jolly lucky to be able to come to school here, you know. It’s awfully decent—for school!’

‘You shut up!’ said a small beauty with chestnut curls. ‘It’s not just like any old school. It’s the Chalet School!’

At her words, Bride’s face suddenly became gloomy. ‘I says, Sybs, you haven’t been to Matey yet,’ she said. ‘She says you’re to go at half-past five to be unpacked, and to mind you’re on time.’

Sybil Russell glared at her cousin. ‘Who said so?’ she demanded.

‘Matey did, so it’s no use getting into a bait with me.’

‘Like her cheek!’ Sybil sounded furious. ‘I’m not late ever—not as a rule, anyhow. I call it the limit to send a message like that to me!’

‘Pless me, what are you so mad about, Sybil?’ demanded a slender, dark-eyed girl of eleven. ‘Ass for saying it’s cheek, Matey sends what messages she likes, and you ought to know it by this time.’

‘And who d’you think you are, anyway?’ added Nella Ozanne. ‘The airs you put on just because Auntie Madge is your mother are the limit!’

Sybil’s eyes flashed, but she knew better than to retort. Whatever else school had done for her, it had taught Sybil Russell to take remarks like this more or less in silence. She didn’t relish them any the more, and stored them up in her mind and brooded over them; but she had learned a little common sense in three years of school. Her first terms had been stormy in every sense of the word, and even now she gave way to fits of rage; but she was slowly learning self-control. A very fair child who had just come in, and was greeted by shouts of, ‘Primula! When did you come?’ turned the attention of the others from Sybil, and she pulled herself together, and walked off with a quaintly puckish little girl of her own age who remarked as they retired to a corner, ‘You *are* an ass to let yourself get mad like that, Sybs. You know the Thirds and Upper Seconds will count it against you, and you do it every time. Why do you do it?’

Sybil flushed. 'It gets my goat when Bride talks to me like that. She is only a cousin, but she acts as if she was my elder sister, and I hate it. And Mummy won't see how unfair it is to me to let her and Peggy rule the place as they do in the hols. I wish Uncle and Auntie would come home and all those Bettanys go to their own house. Three's quite a big enough family, I think!'

'My mummy says that's rubbish. And what's all this about Lavender Leigh? Do you mean *the* Lavender Leigh in the books?'

Sybil nodded. 'Her Aunt Sylvia has to join up, and she's come to school. Mummy told Bride to look after her—I heard her. What do you think of her? Isn't she big to be one of us, though?'

'Huge! She's heaps bigger than Julie or Nancy, and they're almost the tallest in Upper Second. How old is she? And what form is she in?'

'Don't know. Lower Third, I expect; or Peggy would have had her to see to and not Bride. Bride's Lower Third this term; did you know? She's rather mad about it. She wanted to stay with the rest.'

'Is she?' But Betsy Lucy was not interested in Bride at the moment. The new girl intrigued her. Surely she was *years* older than any of the rest of them? 'How old is she?' she repeated.

'Nearly fourteen, Mummy said. Oh, she's *old* for Lower Third, but she never went to school in her life before. I 'spect she hasn't done many lessons any time,' replied Sybil, who had forgotten her temper now.

'That's *awfully* old for Lower Third. Why, Bride is only ten, isn't she? And Peggy is just eleven, and she's in Upper Third.'

'I know. But Peg and Bride have *brains*.' Sybil was quite proud of her clever cousins when she did not let her jealousy get the upper hand of her. Betsy Lucy knew it, and was astute enough to use that fact to ward off a good many of her fiery chum's tempers. She was fond of Sybil, who could be a very charming little person when she chose; and in many ways was good both *to* her and *for* her. Sybil was not nearly so trying after a few weeks with Betsy as just after the holidays when they had been parted for some time. But then Betsy was one of five who were all rather near together, while Sybil's brother David was three years older than she was, and little Josette was nearly five years younger, which made a big difference. Now wise little Betsy talked her friend into a sweet frame of mind, and when they all went into the big dining-room for tea, Sybil had forgotten her woes, and gave Bride a sweet smile, and pushed along her own special jar of honey for her cousin's use.

Meanwhile, Lavender was trying to make up her mind if she would like school or not. She had enjoyed being the centre of attraction in the common-room; but it had not lasted long. As soon as Primula Venables had come in, the girls had crowded round *her* to ask about her holidays; and then it had been someone else, and though Bride had stuck faithfully by her side, and Nancy and Julie had backed them up, still, there was so much else going on, that it seemed to the new girl that no one had very much time for her.

After tea, they went back to the common-room, with the exception of ten people who vanished upstairs in the wake of some of the grandees of the school. This, Bride explained, was for the purpose of unpacking.

'The prees always help,' she said. 'There's such crowds of us, you see, Matey would never get round if she did it all by herself. The prees dig in always. See that one?' she pointed to a short, rather thickset girl who wore a short, wavy crop about a round, pleasant face. 'That's Mary Shand, the Head Librarian. She's American, only she can't get home 'cos of the

Germans. That foreign-looking one is Lorenz Maïco. She's a great chum of Robin Humphries who lives with my Auntie Jo. You haven't seen *her* yet. She lives in the village, and she has triplets, and she writes books—just like your auntie does. Last term they thought Uncle Jack was drowned or something, but he came back, though he was awfully hurt, and Auntie Jo was ill. That is why we didn't go there much these hols. Primula—that fair girl who was just after us in the common-room—lives with her, too, and so does Daisy, who's the oldest of us all. They're my cousins as well. They used to live in Australia, but Daisy never talks much about that time. Auntie Margot, their mummy, brought them to us in Tirol when Prim was just a kid. She died after we went to Guernsey, and I think that's why Daisy won't talk about it. Prim doesn't remember it, of course.'

With chatter like this, Bride kept her charge amused until it was time for them to go upstairs for unpacking, where Bride was whisked off by Lorenz Maïco, and Lavender herself fell to the share of a small, jolly-looking girl with twinkling blue eyes, a peach-like face, and a quick, decided manner. Bride had already pointed her out as Enid Sothern, another friend of the 'Robin' who had not, so far, appeared on the scene.

Enid and Lavender nearly came to blows over Lavender's frocks. Enid had shown horror at the nine dresses which Lavender considered a necessity, and had been even more certain that they could not be allowed than Bride had been.

'Nine frocks!' she ejaculated. 'My good child, you can't have all that many; it isn't allowed. You'll have to see Matey. Wait here, and I'll get her. Some of those must either be sent home or put into your trunk when we get it emptied. You'll have to choose which you prefer.'

'I can't do with less,' said Lavender, rather more meekly than she had said it to Bride. She stood a little in awe of Enid, whose assured manner and air of competency might have kept in check people even more self-assertive than Lavender Leigh.

'Oh, nonsense!' said Enid. 'Other people do, so why should you be any different? You can have four—any four you like. But the rest must be put away till the hols. Now you wait here as I said, and I'll fetch Matey to see about it, and help you to decide.'

Lavender's temper rose. 'I need them all,' she said. 'I've never had less than nine at a time in my life, and I'm not going to do with any less just because I've come to school. I can't help what the rest of you do. *I've* been accustomed to that sort of thing all my life.'

'Then I'm afraid you'll have to get *unaccustomed* to it,' returned Enid drily. 'Don't talk nonsense, Lavender. The rule of the school is that every girl may have four frocks for evening changes, as well as one white one for big do's and her Sunday coat and skirt. No one is going to be allowed to be any exception to that rule, so I'm afraid you must make up your mind to it. You'll soon find you can manage all right.'

For reply, Lavender pushed all the frocks back into the trunk, slammed the lid shut, and sat on it before Enid could do anything to stop her.

'I'm going to keep my nine frocks!' she declared. 'I don't care what you say—so there!'

With an effort, Enid kept her temper. 'Perhaps not,' she said, still drily. 'But I'm not the person to have the casting vote. That's Matron; and I'm afraid you'll find that you have to care for what *she* says, whether you like it or not. However, I'll bring her to you, and you can hear her own verdict for yourself.'

With this, she departed in search of Matron, whom she ran to earth in the middle of scolding Mollie Carew of the Lower Third for coming back with three new pairs of stockings and a dozen handkerchiefs unmarked. Matron was never at her sweetest on first night, as the

old hands knew, and Enid approached her warily, not wishing to make more trouble than she could help for the silly new child.

Matron wound up one of her best efforts in ‘ticking-off’ by bidding Mollie remove the offending articles, and bring them to her by bedtime on the morrow with all the name-tapes sewn on, and then turned to the prefect. ‘Well? What do you want now, Enid?’ she demanded.

‘It’s the new girl, Matron,’ replied Enid. ‘I think her people didn’t understand the rule about how many frocks we may bring to school, and she has nine. Would you come and say which she is to keep, please?’

‘Which new girl is this?’ snapped Matron.

‘Lavender Leigh, Matron.’

‘Lavender Leigh? Oh!’ Matron had guessed there would be trouble with any girl brought up as the Head and Miss Wilson had assured her Lavender had been; but she had not expected it to start with frocks. ‘Didn’t that aunt of hers get the official inventory?’ she demanded.

‘Yes, Matron.’ Enid had seen it fastened, as was usual, into the lid of the trunk, so was in no doubt on this subject.

‘Then why couldn’t she follow it?’

Rightly guessing that this was a rhetorical question, Enid kept silence, and meekly followed the small, wiry figure of the school’s domestic tyrant along the corridor to the Green dormitory where, in Number Six, they found Lavender still sitting determinedly on her trunk, while three of the other members of the dormitory—among them Bride, who had done her best to get her charge to see reason—peeped round their curtains, wildly curious to know how Mately would deal with this rebel.

‘Now then,’ she began, ‘Enid tells me you have brought nine frocks. Didn’t you read the inventory, child?’

‘My aunt had it,’ said Lavender calmly. ‘*She* saw to my outfit, and she decided what it was necessary for me to have.’

‘Well, let me see these frocks of yours,’ said Matron, wisely shelving the question; though if anyone like Bride or Mollie Carew, or even Enid herself, had spoken like that, she would have had short shrift.

Lavender looked at her, inwardly making up her mind not to move from the trunk. She got a look in return that prised her off it in double-quick time. She opened it, and handed out her maltreated dresses, one by one. Matron looked them over in silence.

‘Well,’ she said at length, ‘you’ve got five too many here. Also, why on earth were they packed like this? They’ll all have to be ironed to take the creases out. Another time, please see to it that they are properly folded. The maids have quite enough to do without you girls giving them extra work, and I don’t suppose you can manage it yourself—Or can you? Are you a Guide, by any chance?’

‘No, I’m not,’ replied Lavender sulkily. ‘My aunt doesn’t approve of the Guides.’

A gasp sounded from the neighbouring cubicles, and Enid opened her eyes as widely as they would go. The Chalet School was keenest on Guides of all its out-of-school activities. There were two large companies, a Ranger company, two Brownie packs, and a small Cadet company. Lavender had no idea how she was offending against one of the dearest parts of the school when she spoke as she did. Bride made up her mind to enlighten this nuisance of a girl as soon as she could; and Nancy Chester, who was also there, decided the same thing. The other person, one Norah Bird, was dying to get away and tell the others. They *would* have fits when they heard!

‘Well,’ said Matron, ‘I expect you’ll soon know all about it. You evidently know nothing at the moment. However, that’s beside the mark. Be quick and choose which four of these frocks you want to wear this term, and get your unpacking finished. It’s almost six o’clock, and I’ve more to do than I can find time for as it is; so hurry up!’

‘I need them all,’ said Lavender sullenly.

‘Rubbish! No girl of your age needs nine frocks at once! The inventory says four, and if you’d had any sense, you’d have kept to the inventory, and saved all this fuss. Now hurry up and choose. I’ve told you I have no time to waste.’

If she had dared, Lavender would have treated Matron as she had Enid. But she had already gone as far as she dared. Matron had a quelling manner, and even Lavender Leigh hadn’t the hardihood to brave her any further. She looked at the frocks, took the first four sulkily, and left the rest in Matron’s arms. That lady, if short-tempered, was understanding, however.

‘You’d better put that bright blue back and take this lavender affair,’ she said, hitting on the frock that was Lavender’s own favourite, but which the silly child had left out because it was not among the first four. ‘It will suit you far better, and is lighter and more suited for Saturday evening romps than the other.’

Lavender looked as if she might dispute the matter, but Matron gave her no chance. Lifting the bright blue frock off the pile, she exchanged it for the lavender one, and then went off with a parting admonition to Enid to get the new girl finished as quickly as she could, for she was wanted for others.

The rest of the unpacking was done, and Enid finally left Lavender to Bride and Nancy, who offered to help her finish while the prefect went to someone else. While they were performing their task, they both tried to impress it on the new girl that to talk as she had done wasn’t a ‘done’ thing at the Chalet School. Also they did their best to change her opinion of Guides. They were not very successful in either effort, and there was coolness on both sides when they went downstairs to the common-room again. Meanwhile, Norah, an inveterate little gossip, had already spread the new girl’s views on Guides among the Juniors, and Lavender found herself regarded rather as if she were some strange aborigine. Luckily, before very much could be said, the bell rang for Prayers, and they all had to rush to clear up the room, and then fall into line, and march demurely into Hall to receive the official welcome of the Head and the Staff.

CHAPTER V

THE PEACE LEAGUE

‘We do get them!’ observed Miss Phipps as she sat drinking her coffee at eleven o’clock with the rest of the Staff. The school was all safely in bed, and the mistresses were having a little deserved rest. They sat about their pretty common-room with coffee-cups, cigarettes—those of them that smoked—and buns, and relaxed in a way that would have scandalised many of their pupils if they could only have seen them. Jolly little Mlle Lachenais, who had been languages mistress in the school for a good many years now, was discussing French affairs with Mlle Berné, her compatriot and understudy. Miss Wilson, curled up on a pouffe, was listening to Miss Burnett’s account of her Christmas holidays, and Miss Burn, sprawled out on the chesterfield settee near by, was chiming in at intervals. Mary Burnett and Hilary Burn were old girls of the school. Both had been head-girls in their time, and both, when their training time was ended, had returned to the school as Staff with deep joy—Mary as history mistress, and Hilary as gym mistress, since Miss Nalder, who had held that honourable post for eight years, had finally given in to the pleadings of a certain classics master she had known since her childhood, and married him shortly after the school’s flight from Austria. The rest were all engaged in chatter of one kind and another, but no one had even hinted at school affairs until Miss Phipps, quite out of the blue, had made her remark to Frau Mieders, an Austrian who, after sundry thrilling adventures, had contrived to smuggle herself and her young sister out of Austria. The mother had died as a result of her sufferings under the Nazi régime, and Frau Mieders and Fräulein Kalkmann had lost all they possessed, save what they had contrived to carry with them, and that was little enough. But once in England, Frau Mieders had come to the school where she had formerly been domestic science mistress, and Miss Annersley had been glad to re-engage her, since the lady who had been doing the job had been called to take charge of the household of a brother who lost his wife as the result of an air-raid. As for Lieserl Kalkmann, now eighteen, she had joined up in one of the Women’s Forces, and was now away, training in Scotland.

At Miss Phipps’ remark, Frau Mieders opened her eyes, and asked what the mistress meant. ‘For you know, liebe May,’ she said, ‘we were talking of how I should get the bedrooms in my cottage coloured, and I cannot see what your statement has to do with that at all.’

Miss Phipps laughed. ‘It sounds a bit mad, I agree,’ she said. ‘I was only thinking of that extraordinary child Lavender Leigh, and the scene she made over the Peace League after Prayers tonight.’

To explain this, it is necessary to go back a few hours.

Prayers was always a dual affair at the Chalet School. As it had been begun in a Catholic country, it had been necessary to separate the girls for religious teaching. Several of the mistresses were Catholics, too, and Miss Wilson, as second-mistress and a Catholic, always took Prayers for the Catholics; while Miss Annersley, the Head, and a staunch member of the Church of England, did the same office for the Protestants. But after Prayers, the school came together for what was known as ‘Head’s remarks,’ and any other business or reports which must be done.

On this evening, they had met, as usual, in Hall, and after everyone had settled down, the Head had stood forward to bid the girls welcome, and give them the special message for the new term.

‘We are still at war,’ she had said. ‘Peace looks a long way ahead, and it may be that we have many difficult days and hard times before us. Do any of you remember Madame’s words to us at the beginning of our last term in Tirol? She bade us, “Be brave!” Those of you who were with us then know how much we have needed to remember that word. Now, more than ever, we must keep it before us. We must be brave as, perhaps, people have never been before. Supplies may run short, for the transport is needed for other things—munitions, men, guns. Some of us are already finding the clothes question a difficult one. We must be prepared to make sacrifices and to make them cheerfully: to do, perhaps, things to which we are not accustomed, and which we never expected to have to do. But if all these seem hard to us, let us remember what those in the occupied countries are enduring. It is a little thing to find ourselves called on to help with the housework, let us say, compared to being called on to face imprisonment or death rather than give up our ideals and hopes. Among us there are those who have already had to endure this. I know that every one of you, even the youngest, would endure much rather than prove to be false to all that we know to be the truth and the best of life. God helping us, I think we would all try to meet that sort of thing as bravely as we could.’

‘But I hope we shall never have to meet it. We have a wonderful army to keep it from us—a true citizen army, where the humblest is a soldier. It is an army in which *we* can serve. We can’t all shoot, or go night-flying, or man destroyers and tanks. But we can bring our offering as well as any general or private of them all—the offering of a cheerfulness that will not fail, however badly things seem to be going; the offering of a faith in the goodness of God that will outlast all our trials; the offering of a love that will teach us to hate the sin but not the sinner; to loathe Nazi-ism and all it stands for, and yet to grieve for our fellow-men caught in its hideous net, and forced to share in its evil deeds. Let us remember our Peace League of which we are so proud. And let us never forget to use our Prayer which is so much ours. Above all, when victory has come, let us be generous, and true to the Master Who bade us to love our enemies. We will now all join in saying the Prayer of our Peace League.’

They had all knelt then, and said together the Prayer of the Peace League which had been specially written for them by Joey Maynard—once Jo Bettany. Those who knew it said it with a loving reverence. The new girls listened to it, and one of them, at any rate, wondered about it.

‘O God, our Heavenly Father, watch over all members of the Chalet School Peace League, we beseech Thee. Keep us all safe in Thy Fatherly care. Help us to live up to the ideals we have set before us. When peace shall come, help us to be ready to use it nobly and faithfully. And grant that, in Thine own time, we shall all meet again. For Christ’s sake, Amen.’

When they had risen from their knees, Miss Wilson had taken the Head’s place, for it had been agreed that she, who had suffered so much because of the vow of the Peace League, when she, Joey, Robin, and some of the other members of the school had been forced to escape from the Gestapo, should be the Staff Head of the League.

Standing with her hands clasped on the reading-desk before her, she looked at the girls sitting looking up at her, and her clear-cut face took on a graver look than usual as she said, ‘For the sake of the Juniors who may not always remember, and those among us who are new girls, we speak of our Peace League at the beginning of each term. It was born when Hitler and his men first marched into Austria. Our girls, many of whom have left us since, though

two or three have returned as members of Staff, and we still have many of those who were Juniors at the time as our present Seniors, agreed that, since we had been a school of many nations, we would form ourselves into a League which should forget the barriers of nationality. To that end we took a vow'—'Bill' unrolled a scroll before her—'and this vow we have always tried to keep. All new girls are invited to join with us; but no one is obliged to do so. If any girl prefers to stand apart from us, she may do so. I am the only person besides Joey Maynard who knows the names of the girls, and whether any have elected to pass us by. But I will read the vow which we all signed then. Afterwards, if any girl who has not already done so wishes to add her name to the roll, she may come to me at any time during the first seven days of the term and sign her name. Should she do so, it remains a secret between her and me. Only, as I have said, Jo Maynard is told. For I think that Joey is in herself a kind of embodiment of what we like to think the school stands for. Now I'll read the vow, and then those of you who have not yet signed it must think over it seriously. I should add that no girl is allowed to sign until she is thirteen. You must understand what you are doing, for this is a very solemn vow.'

Then she had bent once more over the scroll and read aloud:

'We, the girls of the Chalet School, hereby vow ourselves members of the Chalet School Peace League. We swear faithfully to do all we can to promote peace between our countries. We will not believe any lies spoken about evil doings, but we will try to get others to work for peace as we do. We will not betray this league to any enemy, whatever may happen to us. If it is possible, we will meet at least once a year. And we will always remember that though we belong to different lands, we are members of the Chalet School League of Peace.'

There had been a moment's silence when she had finished. Then a small clear voice was heard to remark, 'But that's saying we'll be decent to the Germans! I call it most unpat——'

The speaker got no further. In fact, she nearly choked; for a hand was thrust so suddenly over her mouth that she felt dazedly for a moment as if her teeth had all been forced down her throat. Bride did not mean to be rough; but she had promised Auntie Madge to look after this weird new girl, and certainly no one could be allowed to talk of the Peace League like this. It would give her the worst possible start. Every one of the under-thirteens was looking forward to the day when she, too, could go to 'Bill' and ask leave to sign her name on the lengthy roll. If they heard Lavender holding forth in this style, she would have a poor life of it among them all. Hence the shock Lavender got.

Naturally, the Staff could take no official notice of the affair. The Head dismissed the school to its supper, and after that, bed came for the Juniors, so there was little time for Lavender to hold forth as she might otherwise have done. Indeed, Bride's rough and ready treatment of her had silenced her for the time being with sheer bewilderment which later changed to fury. Never, in all her life, had she felt anything but the tenderest touch, and Bride's handling roused everything that was fiery in her nature.

Meanwhile, Bride was complacently feeling that she was managing quite well. She must keep her promise to Auntie Madge, and for three whole days she would 'nanny' Lavender. After that, no one could expect her to go on. It was, therefore, with great surprise that she met an angry onslaught from the new Junior when they were alone together after supper.

‘How dare you treat me as you did before supper?’ raved Lavender. ‘How dare you hit me like that, you horrid, rough, little girl?’

‘Hit you? I didn’t hit you,’ retorted Bride. ‘I only stopped you saying a silly thing. You were going to say our vow was unpatriotic, weren’t you? It isn’t—Bill says it’s the truest patriotism and real Christianity. If you’d gone on, you’d have heard of it from some of the others, I can tell you! Quite likely you’d have been had up before the prees, and that’s not a very nice thing. I’m sorry if I hurt you, and I never meant to; but you had to be stopped somehow. I promised Auntie Madge I’d be decent to you.’

‘I don’t know who your Auntie Madge is, nor what she’s got to do with me,’ panted Lavender, ‘but I’m going to write to *my* auntie, and tell her how you treated me, and then she’ll come and see your Head, and you’ll be in serious trouble—and I hope you are, too!’

Bride stared at her. ‘You must be dippy,’ she said simply. ‘Do you really mean you’ll run with every little thing to your aunt? Well, all I can say is that if she’s anything like any of mine she’ll put you in your place jolly quick. And if she doesn’t, the rest will if ever they get to know that you’re given to sneaking.’

‘Do you think I care for what little hooligans like you and your dear friends may think or do? *I* have been brought up to behave in a ladylike way!’

‘Well, if to be ladylike is to be a nasty little sneak, then I’m thankful that *I* haven’t!’ Bride was growing angry in her turn.

What might have happened, it is hard to say; but at that moment the bell sounded for all the Juniors to go to bed, and even Lavender, in her excited state, was not quite prepared to disobey it, since the promptness with which it was always obeyed, had impressed her despite herself. The two parted, Bride strutting off with her small nose in the air, and Lavender herself following, nearly in tears between anger and the feeling that Auntie Sylvia was too far away for her to run to her at once with her tale.

Of course, some of the others noticed it, but between hurrying to get to bed in time for one of Fiona McDonald’s far-famed stories, and the excitement caused by Nancy Chester when that young lady jumped into bed and poked her feet down to find two hair-brushes—Nancy howled in the surprise and the rest shut her up vigorously, since no one wanted to bring Matron on the scene—it was forgotten. When Miss Phipps made her remark, the entire dormitory had been asleep for nearly two hours, even Lavender having drowsed off, though she was the last.

Now, as the mistress’s speech attracted the attention of half the Staff, they dropped their desultory chatter, and all joined in, giving their views of the famous Lavender Leigh in a way that would have shocked both that young lady and her aunt.

‘Beyond her French—which is really good,’ said Mlle Berné who took languages with the Juniors, ‘I can really find nothing—but *nothing*—to admire about that child. She has learnt no Latin, and it seems to me as if she is unlikely to learn any, for I have had her for two lessons, as our dear Hilda asked me to coach her so that she might work with her form, and she does not know a nominative from a verb—not even that!’

‘Her arithmetic is enough to drive one silly,’ added Miss Slater, the maths mistress. ‘She can just keep up with the ruck of the Lower Third, and only just. And I wouldn’t mind so much if she’d only realise how very little she knows and try to learn now she has the chance. But she won’t. Her one idea is that as she is Lavender Leigh, she can’t do anything wrong. Bride Bettany, who is three years younger, and has just come up, knows more than she does. And there isn’t a girl in the form who isn’t ten times more teachable! I’m inclined to wonder

if it wouldn't be as well to put her back to Upper Second for arithmetic. The shock might do her good.'

'I doubt it,' said Mary Burnett sceptically. 'She doesn't know the first thing about history except a few of the old stories—Alfred and the cakes, for instance—and what she *does* know as a story, she doesn't know in its proper period. She couldn't even tell me the other day in whose reign Sir Walter Raleigh lived, and I should have thought everyone knew *that*—at her age, at any rate!'

'That is what makes her so annoying to teach,' agreed Miss Slater. 'She knows a very little and knows it badly. And she is so conceited, she won't take the trouble to learn properly.'

'What says our Bill?' asked Hilary Burn lazily. 'I say nothing about her drill, for she doesn't know the first thing. I haven't had that form for either games or gym yet, so I can't pass any judgment there. Bill! Wake up! How does the one and only Lavender Leigh do for you?'

'Not at all, and it's going to take at least a year's hard work before she gets anywhere near the proper standard for her age,' replied Miss Wilson promptly. 'She has a fair idea of how various peoples live, and so on; but then so would any other girl who has travelled as much as she has. As for physical geography, she is blankly ignorant of it. And her botany is enough to make me tear my hair.'

'Oh, don't do that!' laughed Hilary. 'It's very pretty as it is.'

'Do you think, then,' asked Frau Mieders, 'that it would be well to ask Miss Annersley to put her down into the Upper Second?'

'No,' returned 'Bill' promptly. 'I most certainly do not. You must remember, you people, that all her life she has been the highlight wherever she was, and to put her down when she's already in a form well below her in age would hurt her pride badly'—'Might do her good to take her down a peg or two,' murmured Miss Slater who had suffered badly from Lavender in arithmetic—'and might make her resentful—more so than she is already, I mean. You're wrong, Slater. Her pride's being taken down every day at the moment, and she isn't answering kindly to the process. Besides, how would you like *your* pride taken down as you express it?'

'It was done years ago, my dear, when I was a kid at school myself,' replied Miss Slater calmly. 'I used to dread hearing that I'd got full marks for my maths, for I was sure to get a squashing shortly after from someone who thought I was showing bounce over my work. And *see* what a nice creature I am as a result!'

'*Well!* How's that for bounce?' cried Hilary, sitting up.

Whereupon the discussion descended into a rag between the younger members of the Staff, while their elders laughed at them, and the question of how to deal with Lavender was shelved for the time being.

CHAPTER VI

LESSONS AND LAVENDER

Miss Leigh had been obliged to depart for her training centre a week sooner than she had expected, so, as there seemed to be nowhere else for Lavender to go—the fruits of their continual travels abroad—the school had agreed to take her plus one case of necessities. Her trunk was to remain unpacked until Matron could attend to her with the rest of her dormitory. Miss Burnett, Mlle Berné, and Hilary Burn had all been at the school for various reasons. Hilary, for example, who had been spending Christmas with her future husband's people, had planned to go home for the final week of the holidays, but two small brothers had nipped that plan in the bud by starting measles. Mary Burnett's people were in rooms since they had been bombed out in a minor raid on the east coast, and Mary had decided that if she went to Plas Howell it would make things easier all round. Mlle Berné, afraid of what the weather might do, had left Mme and M. Lecoutier, with whom she had spent the holidays in their far Highland home, a week before term began.

Miss Annersley had suggested to these people that it might be well to find out what Lavender knew in their various subjects, since her entrance papers had been so poor. 'It may have been the formality of an exam,' said the kind Head. 'Girls are sometimes upset by that, and if they were questioned verbally would prove to know far more than they seem to. As a rule we have to find such things out by degrees; but you have a good chance now with Lavender here a week before term begins.'

So the three mistresses had done their best at odd intervals, and the results are now known. Those who had yet to meet her in lessons were not encouraged by the reports. Miss Slater's test had been given the day before after she had arrived, and her one comment as she scribbled cross after cross on the young lady's ideas of arithmetic had been, 'Ghastly!'

The first lesson on Friday for Lower Third was arithmetic, and the young mistress wondered, as she hurried along the corridor to the form-room, how Lavender would get on in class. She would certainly find it very different from being taught alone by an indulgent aunt.

As she neared the door of the form-room, such a noise was to be heard proceeding from it, that Miss Slater hastened her steps, and flung it open on a scene of chaos. Mollie Carew, form prefect, was at the mistress's desk, banging on it, and shouting, 'Order—order!' though for all the effect she seemed to be having on her fellows, she might as well have done nothing. Bride Bettany and the new girl were having what Miss Slater mentally described as 'a regular set-to' in front of the desks, and the rest were either trying to pull them apart, or else shouting at them to be quiet, or someone would come and *then* there would be a row!

Miss Slater marched up to the combatants, pulled them apart, giving each a slight shake to bring her to her senses, and, at the same time, said in her most biting tones, 'Is this a decent form-room; or a back street in a London slum?'

The foremost people slunk off to their seats at sight of her, and the rest followed their example, only Mollie holding her ground. The mistress, still holding Bride and Lavender in a firm grip, turned to her, and asked, 'Now, Mollie, what is the meaning of this scene, if you please? And why, may I ask, were the form not in their seats, waiting for me?'

Nearly in tears, Mollie replied, 'Please, Miss Slater, Bride and the new girl were quarrelling, and the rest took sides, and they made so much noise I couldn't get them to hear me, though I *did* bang the desk hard.'

'I see,' said Miss Slater. 'Well, you can go to your seat now. Bride, I should like an explanation from you, please.'

'Please may I pick up my specs?' asked Bride meekly.

'By all means. Where are they?' Then, as Bride mutely pointed to the said 'specs' which lay half under the big blackboard, 'What are they doing there? Why are they off at all? I thought you were told you were to put them on first thing in the morning and only remove them to wash your face, until you went to bed?'

Silence; the truth being that Lavender had made a snatch at them, yanked them off, and flung them where they were. Bride was no tell-tale, so she held her tongue. Not so Mollie, who knew herself, as form prefect, to be more or less responsible for what went on when they were alone, and, as she said later to a select coterie of her own chums, thought it as well that someone in authority should know what a real little wild-cat Lavender was. 'Please, Miss Slater, Lavender threw them there,' she said; adding quickly, 'And I'm reporting it to you as form prefect now.'

'I see.' Miss Slater was silent for a moment. Then she ranged the pair before her desk, took her seat, leaned her chin on her hands, and looked across at Mollie. 'And what else have you to report, Mollie?'

'Lavender for going for Bride; and Bride for going for Lavender—though, honestly, Miss Slater, Lavender started it. And all of us for making a noise. But after Lavender chuck—I mean *threw* Bride's specs away like that we were really trying to stop them fighting.' Mollie ran down, and stood looking at the mistress with rather frightened eyes. If Miss Slater were to report them to the Head, as she was well within her rights for doing, there would be trouble for Lower Third. Whoever heard of a form having to be reported the very first morning of term?

However, Miss Slater had no such intentions. She merely nodded, said, 'Thank you, Mollie; you may sit down now,' and turned her attention to the pair before her.

In the battle, they had bumped violently against one of the desks, which were of the folding variety like all the desks in Junior school, only the Middles being honoured with locker desks. As for the Fifths and Sixths, they had tables with locking drawers. The result of the bumping had been that the ink from the newly-filled inkwells had splashed them, and Lavender's new blouse and Bride's face had both suffered. In addition, Bride had tripped over Lavender, and had a big bruise on one cheek, and Lavender herself was adorned with a long scratch over the nose where she had caught it on Bride's very new Guide badge which had come undone during the tussle. All in all, both looked as though they had been having a catch-as-catch-can fight, and Miss Slater's face became grimmer and grimmer as she took in the details. Bride bit her lips, and her rough brown head sank lower as her cheeks went scarlet. Lavender burst into tears, and sobbed loudly.

'Now stop being a baby,' said Miss Slater gravely. 'And you, Bride, can go and wash your face and hands and make yourself fit to be seen. Elfie Woodward, go and bring our first-aid box here. I'll attend to that scratch on your nose first, Lavender.'

'Bride scratched me,' sobbed Lavender, who was getting over her rage, and beginning to be afraid. 'She's unki-ind. And she *told* me——'

‘Hush!’ Miss Slater held up her hand impressively. ‘I don’t want to hear anything from you at the moment. The rest of you, sit up! Barbara Smith, set that desk straight, please, and then go and ask Megan for a wet cloth and wipe up the ink. Ah, here comes Elfie. Find me the iodine, Elfie, please, and give me some cotton wool as well.’

Elfie, a small girl of eleven with curly fair hair and wide blue eyes which gave her a kittenish look, found the iodine and cotton wool, and the mistress ministered to the scratch very thoroughly. Lavender jumped and squealed at the sting of the iodine, but by this time she had managed to stop her tears, and when Bride, very clean, and very shamefaced, with the bruise on her cheek already going black, came back into the room, she was standing looking sullen, while as for the rest of the room, you could have heard a pin drop!

‘Bride, come here,’ said Miss Slater. ‘Lavender, go to the splashery and make yourself tidy. Oh, you won’t know where to go. Take the first-aid box back, Elfie, and show her at the same time, will you?’

‘Yes, Miss Slater,’ said Elfie. She took up the box into which the mistress had packed the iodine and packet of cotton wool, and turned to Lavender. ‘Come along, Lavender,’ she said.

Lavender stood still. ‘I’m not going,’ she said. ‘I’m not going with any of you. I’m going straight to Miss Annersley to tell her how horrid and unkind you’ve all been to me. I’m—’ She happened to glance up and caught Miss Slater’s eye. What she saw there brought her speech to a sudden stop, and she crimsoned, even as a gasp sounded all round the room. No one at the Chalet School was in the habit of arguing like that before a mistress.

Miss Slater took no notice of the gasp. She simply fixed Lavender with her most freezing look and said, ‘You’ll either go at once with Elfie—and *come back with her*; or you’ll come with me to the Head. Which is it?’

Slightly subdued, Lavender mumbled, ‘I’ll go with Elfie.’

‘Very well,’ said Miss Slater. She spoke with indifference, but she told the Staff afterwards that she felt very quaky about what *might* happen if Lavender had decided to defy her, she would have been in a quandary. Luckily, that young lady was coming to her senses, and she went with Elfie, who showed her the way to the splashery used by Lower Third, went on to the cupboard where the Junior forms’ first-aid box was kept, and came back for her. By the time they had returned to the form-room, Lavender’s assurance had all oozed away, and she took up the place pointed out to her by Miss Slater as meekly as Bride had done. Elfie went back to her seat, and the mistress opened fire.

By the time she had finished with them, Lower Third were inwardly squirming. Mollie was once more on the verge of tears, and two or three others were in much the same condition. As for Bride and Lavender, they first had to apologise to Miss Slater for their behaviour, and then to the form.

‘I cannot congratulate either of you on your beginning here,’ said the mistress coldly. ‘I consider the conduct of both of you disgraceful. We are not accustomed to such scenes in Lower Third, whatever you may have done in Upper Second, Bride.’ Whereat Bride shot her an indignant glance. If she had dared, she would have protested; but with Miss Slater looking like that, she did *not* dare. ‘As for you, Lavender,’ went on Miss Slater, ‘I should like to know your explanation for all this. Everyone is agreed that it was you who began it—though that is no excuse for Bride, who has been here long enough to know what is and is not allowed. What is your reason for your behaviour?’

‘Bride is rough with me,’ sobbed Lavender, who was quite unaccustomed to such treatment as she was receiving, and, being all unused to controlling herself, had dissolved into

tears. 'She slapped me across the face last night——'

'I *never* did!' exclaimed Bride, unable, even now, to put up with this. 'I only tried to stop you saying silly things, and——'

'That will do, Bride! You forget yourself!' Miss Slater's voice cut across Bride's hot denial. 'Go on, Lavender. And Bride, be quiet. I will hear what you have to say presently.'

'Bride slapped me,' repeated Lavender with a gulp. 'And when I was angry, she said her aunt had told her to look after me. And when I said I'd tell *my* aunt, and she would write to Miss Annersley, and Bride would get into trouble, she—she called me a—a little s-sneak!'

'Yes?' said Miss Slater. 'That was last night. What about this morning? I suppose you didn't carry on that baby's squabble this morning?'

Lavender's only answer was loud sobbing, so Mollie Carew took a hand. 'It was partly my fault, really, Miss Slater,' she said. 'Bride told Lavender to get herself a desk, and she bagged mine—the form prefect's one, I mean. And then Bride, and Elfie, and Anne Montague all told her that she couldn't have that. I'd been seeing there was chalk, and I turned round, and I told Lavender to get another desk 'cos that one was mine—and she wouldn't. And then Bride went and tried to pull her to another, and Lavender hit Bride, and pulled her specs off and ch—threw them away. Then Bride went for her—and you came in—and please that's all.'

'Quite enough, too, I think. Lavender, when you were told that the desk already belonged to another girl, why did you not leave it and go to another?'

'I wanted that one—it's right by the window, and I like to look out of the window. It helps me to think,' muttered Lavender, who had managed to stop her sobs during Mollie's explanation.

'All the more reason why you should have another, if that is the way you work,' said Miss Slater. 'You will find that here you have no time for looking out of windows. Well, Bride, have you anything else to say?'

'Yes, please, Miss Slater. It isn't true that I slapped her face. I only put my hand over her mouth to stop her saying something silly about the Peace League. Auntie Madge told me to look after her, and I knew if any of the others heard what she was going to say she'd be awfully ragged. I didn't mean to be rough, but I had to be quick.' Bride still sounded indignant. 'I did try to explain to her last night, but she wouldn't listen to me. And I only just took her arm just now to get her to the desk next mine when she bag—*took* Mollie's. I never meant to hurt her.'

'I see. Well, Lavender, I think you've been a very silly little girl to take offence like this,' said Miss Slater judiciously. 'As for you, Bride, please try to avoid being rough again. Now you may both apologise to me for upsetting my lesson in this way; and then you may apologise to the form for making such a bad beginning to the term for them. As for the rest of you——' Here she paused, and then went on to give them a lecture she had never bettered. When she had ended, she demanded the apologies again, and got them. When she looked like that, even Lavender dared not rebel.

The bell rang for the end of the lesson by that time, and Miss Slater, after reminding Mollie Carew to come to the staff-room for their prep, gathered up her books and departed for the Upper Fourth, wishing most devoutly that she was form-mistress for another form just now. 'For I can see,' she thought to herself, 'that we are going to have fireworks with Lavender; and, apparently, with Bride, too. I always thought she was such a good-tempered little thing. Well, there's forty-five minutes simply wasted! Let's hope no other form is going to spend my time like this!'

French was the next lesson on the form's time-table, and it seemed good to Mlle Berné to use the forty minutes allowed for it in revising verbs Lower Third had done—present, imperfect, and historic past indicative endings for the three regular conjugations—during the previous term, and they were supposed to be able to give any person in the three tenses correctly. Nine-tenths of them could. Bride, who had not gone so far, stuck over the historic past of *vendre*; and two or three others made a mess of the imperfect of the second conjugation, Anne Montague writing out every person she was given on it without the 'iss' to the root; while two or three careless people forgot it for odd questions. The same occurred in the third conjugation, and Mademoiselle was caustic at their expense. She commended Bride, who had got what she knew correct, and offered her some extra coaching so that she might catch up with the rest quickly. Bride, who was very subdued, partly as the result of her cheek which was very sore, and partly as the result of Miss Slater's remarks, said 'Thank you, Mademoiselle,' quite meekly.

Then Mademoiselle turned to Lavender's work, ticked it quickly, and said in the French which was always used in the lesson since the school was taught by the direct method, 'You evidently know your regular conjugations well, Lavender. I shall hope to see such good work in the irregular verbs when we come to them.'

'But we have done only three conjugations—the first, the second, and the fourth. You've left out the third,' said Lavender with a superior air.

'But no, my child. What you call the third—by which, I think, you mean the verbs ending in "o-i-r"—are reckoned as irregular verbs now,' said Mademoiselle.

'I have always learnt them as regular,' returned Lavender, still loftily. 'Not that I ever had much trouble in learning, for I have spoken French so much, that it is like my own language now.'

Mademoiselle opened her eyes widely at this. It was not considered good form in the Chalet School to argue in this way with a mistress. And, in addition, Lavender's manner was anything but courteous. However, she was a good-natured little person, so she took no more notice of it, but turned to reasons for endings.

'Elfie, why does the imperfect indicative of the second conjugation add "i-s-s" to the infinitive root?' she asked.

The Christmas holidays had wiped all such information out of Elfie's brain, so the question was passed on to Mary Lowe, who was in a like state; Dora Robson, Audrey Simpson, and Leslie Pitt were no better; and the question came to Lavender. Now, although that young lady could both chatter and write French fluently, she had done very little actual grammar, and had no answer to give. So when Mademoiselle said, smiling, 'Well, Lavender, we must look to you for the reason,' she felt herself going very red—the more so as Bride, two desks further along, was waving an eager hand.

'Come,' said Mademoiselle persuasively. 'What is the reason?'

But Lavender did not know, and it was not a question to which she could invent an answer that might pass muster, grammar being one of the exact sciences, quite as much as arithmetic. She sat dumb, and Mademoiselle finally went on to Anne Webster, who murmured, 'J'ai oublié,' and so came to Bride.

'It is because the imperfect indicative is always de—de— comes from the present participle,' said Bride importantly, having given up her attempts at remembering the word 'derived.' She had every reason to know it, having been made to write it out twelve times in the previous term for whispering in form, or it is likely she would have done as ill as the rest.

Mademoiselle beamed on her, however, and said, 'Well done, Bride. Our youngest to remember! Now, girls, pay attention. I will write it on the board, and you may put it down in your note-books to learn for next time.'

The form obeyed her—with one exception, and that was Lavender. She made no attempt to copy down the rule, but lounged back in her chair with a casual air which aroused Mademoiselle, who was famed, like her immediate superior, Mlle Lachenais, for giving fewer punishments than anyone else on the Staff.

'Lavender, I bade you all copy what I have written,' she said.

'I can remember without that,' returned Lavender, who was so accustomed to the easy rule of Aunt Sylvia, that she had no idea that she was being outrageously rude.

Mademoiselle reddened, and her eyes flashed. But she remembered that this girl was quite new to school life, so she controlled herself, and said quietly, 'That may be. But when I give a command, I expect to be obeyed. Please take up your pencil and your note-book, and copy that at once.'

Lavender did as she was told then; but if Mademoiselle was prepared to look it over for once, the form were not, and sundry of the girls made up their minds then and there that this new girl must be taken down a peg or two at the earliest possible date. The bell rang a few minutes later, and Mademoiselle set their homework, and then dismissed them to break and 'elevenses' before going to the staff-room for her own well-earned rest.

History came after break, and here Lavender soon showed that she knew almost less about it than Sybil Russell. She confounded Elizabeth with Victoria; gave the date of the Spanish Armada as 'somewhere in the Middle Ages'; and when asked if she could give any reasons for its defeat, said airily, 'Not one. I've never bothered with stupid things like that.'

Mary Burnett was young, and, in addition, had only three years of teaching experience to set beside Mlle Berné's nine, so she was angry at the new girl's reply, and showed it at once.

'That is not the way to answer a mistress!' she snapped. 'And if you know no more about history than you seem to, I think you had best take it with Lower Second. I grant you that they are four years younger than you, but I dare say they could teach you a few things about it.'

It was Lavender's turn to be furious. She opened her mouth to reply, but Leslie Pitt nudged her, so she kept silence for the moment. Inwardly she was resolving to write to Auntie Sylvia at the first chance she got and beg her to take her away from this horrid school. That she might have met with even more severe treatment in some schools, she did not know.

Having dealt her rebuke, Mary passed on to Anne Webster, who knew and was only too pleased to answer. 'Please, Miss Burnett, there came a great storm. It says on the medal Elizabeth had made afterwards, "God blew with His wind and they were scattered." And they *were*. Some of the ships went ashore all round Scotland; and some of the others off the west coast of Ireland, and only a few of them ever got home.'

'Quite right, Anne. Only that happens to be the last reason, and came after the actual defeat of the Armada in the Channel. Bride, can you give us something else?'

'The English admiral used incendiary bombs and set the Spanish ships on fire,' replied Bride.

A chuckle came from some of the form, and even Miss Burnett smiled as she said, 'Not incendiary *bombs*, Bride. Who can help her out?'

'It was fire-ships, Miss Burnett,' cried Barbara Smith. 'They had tar and other things that burned easily, and they set them on fire, and the wind was blowing that way, and blew them

down to the Spanish ships, and lots of them took fire, and they set some of the others on fire.’ And having ended her knowledge, Barbara sat down, quite pleased with herself.

‘Right. Was there any other reason, Bride?’

‘The English ships were very low down on the water, and the Spanish ships were high up, so they could fire through them, but the Spaniards’ shots only went through their rigging,’ was Bride’s muddled reply.

‘*Who* could fire through *whom*?’ asked Miss Burnett.

‘Oh—the English through the Spanish, of course. And then the English ships were easily moved about, but the Spanish ships were too big, so they had to stay where they were, and couldn’t get away quickly.’

‘Yes; well, I think that answers my question. But how is it you know this, Bride? You were in Upper Second last term, and were doing the early Plantagenets. And I know you haven’t done the Tudors in any other form.’

‘No; but Auntie Jo made up a story for us last summer holidays, and I remembered from that,’ explained Bride.

‘I see.’ Miss Burnett pursued the question no further, but went on with the lesson, which passed off more or less peacefully.

After history came dictation, and here, indeed, Lavender shone. Her spelling was excellent, and she gained full marks. But dictation was followed by geography, which they took in the geography room, a big garage once upon a time, but now altered and linked up with the rest of the science apartments by a makeshift passage-way of wood and corrugated iron. Stables and garages had been altered and adapted so that the laboratories, art room, geography room, and gymnasium, with its little ‘remedials room,’ were all under the same roof, and the time-table had been so arranged that people due for one or other lesson were able to spend either one-half of their morning in the buildings, or else the end of it or the afternoon there, so as to save waste of time, for it meant going out of doors.

Lower Third worked with Miss Stevens who took all the junior geography, and it seemed good to her to take physical geography for the first lesson. This, in the case of Lower Third, meant definitions, and she began to ask questions round the class to find out how much they remembered of last term’s work—or how much they had forgotten might be better.

‘How many kinds of mountains are there?’ she asked Mary Lowe.

‘Two,’ replied Mary promptly, ‘folded mountains and volcanoes.’

‘Good! Elfie, what is the difference between them?’

Elfie gaped at her. She was a shining light at games and gym, but it was only with difficulty that she kept her place at sixth or seventh in the form lists, and she would probably not have done that, but it was her ambition to be a Games mistress, and she knew she must ‘get matric’ if she meant to go to one of the big training colleges. So she worked hard and hoped that by the time matriculation came along she could just manage to ‘scrape’ through. But Christmas parties had put anything connected with geography out of her head, and she never *had* understood about those old mountains, anyhow!

Seeing how matters stood, Miss Stevens passed the question on to Primrose Day—who had had to endure a good deal of teasing from her elders about the name with which her god-parents had unkindly saddled her—and got the answer, ‘Folded mountains are made by the earth folding up—like an apple roasting; and volcanoes are made by steam and gases exploding inside the earth and forcing a way out.’

‘Not quite a geographical explanation,’ said Miss Stevens, smothering a smile, ‘but I know what you mean.—Audrey, can you put it better?’

Audrey could. ‘Folded mountains are caused by bits of the earth inside slipping where there are chasms and cracks, so that the surface has to slip too, and then parts of it that were flat—or flattish, anyhow—are made to stand up higher. But it takes hundreds and hundreds of years for it to happen as a rule,’ she added cautiously.

‘Yes; that is a little better,’ agreed Miss Stevens. ‘And now—Lavender, isn’t it?—can you tell us a little more about volcanoes?’

Lavender stood up. ‘I have seen a good many volcanoes, of course,’ she said with her most superior air. ‘Those like Etna and Vesuvius are largely formed of lava or molten rock, which finds its way through the crater and flows down the slopes of the mountain till it cools, thus adding to its size. But Jorullo in Mexico, for instance, which was formed in a single night, is mainly of ash and liquid mud turned hard. I have been part of the way up. And I have climbed Pélée in Martinique, and Vesuvius. Have *you* ever climbed any volcanoes, Miss Stevens?’

Miss Stevens had been so petrified by this form of answer to her question, that she had allowed Lavender to continue. Now she came to herself, and said crisply, ‘That is only a part answer, Lavender. As for my mountain activities—or yours, either—we’ll leave them alone for the moment. You say that volcanoes are caused by lava or ash or liquid mud. Quite so! But what causes these to overflow?’

There Lavender was gravelled. She had no real idea, and she had reeled off her information about Jorullo—which is unique among volcanoes—mainly because she had learnt it parrot-fashion when she had heard the guide mention it. So she sat down abruptly, saying, ‘I am afraid I was never told that. Such things were not considered necessary by my aunt.’

Miss Stevens reddened—most of the Staff who had come in contact with Lavender during that morning had had quite a good deal of practice in that exercise—but she kept her temper and replied, ‘What you pick up during travels is a good thing to remember. But when it comes to lessons, I’m afraid we have to go to the root of the matter. Dora, can *you* do better?’

Dora Robson stood up. ‘It’s because the centre of the earth is very hot, Miss Stevens. There are lakes and seas there, and rock goes liquid. The heat makes it expand, and then it has to find a way out, because steam which comes from the inside lakes and seas takes up a lot more room than solid rock. It breaks a way out, and goes by the easiest way, which is the places where there are kind of cracks inside the earth. That’s what causes volcanoes. And the gases help, too, of course.’

‘Well, I think we have it now,’ agreed Miss Stevens. ‘Mollie, name me three important ranges of folded mountains.’

Mollie was quite able to do this, and after that, the lesson went fairly smoothly, the only other sensation being caused when the question, ‘What do you mean by a watershed?’ came to Lavender, and she answered it by saying, ‘A place to store water for use in times of drought.’

All the same, when the quarter-to-one bell sounded, Miss Stevens was glad to collect her possessions and bolt to the staff-room, where she relieved her feelings in no measured speech, winding up with, ‘Lavender Leigh is a conceited, ignorant, empty-headed child, who wants taking down a dozen pegs; and I hope her form do it as soon as possible!’

‘Oh, it’s not quite so bad as that,’ said Miss Wilson tolerantly. ‘She must learn that she’s not quite well informed or so important to the world at large as she thinks she is. But I don’t blame the poor child one half as much as I blame that idiot aunt of hers. I only hope that *she* is

finding her level pretty quickly. We shall make something of Lavender if we're only given the chance. But dear Auntie is a trifle elderly for that—well over thirty, if not forty, whatever she may *say* her age is—and I'm afraid it may be too late to be able to do very much about it.'

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW SENIORS

While Lower Third were making up their minds that Lavender Leigh was one of the worst samples of new girl they had ever known, the Seniors were considering *their* additions. A good many of them knew of Jesanne Gellibrand, for the late Sir Ambrose Gellibrand's death was fresh in the minds of all those who lived near Armiford, and Jesanne was his sole heiress. As a result, one or two people had wondered if she 'would put on frills,' for Sir Ambrose had been a very big land-owner and a wealthy man, and what slangy Mary Shaw of Lower Sixth described as 'one of the big noises in the county.' So they had met Jesanne with real curiosity.

They found her very delightful and quite unspoilt. She was small for her age, very dark, and very determined; while her chum, Lois Bennett, was a long-legged creature with a curly mop tied back with wide ribbons, and saucer-like blue eyes. Both said they were keen on games; but, as Jesanne explained when Jocelyn Redford asked her, 'We haven't had much chance, except for tennis and golf. There were only two of us, and you can't do much at cricket or hockey with only two, can you? But I played at my old school in New Zealand; and Lois had begun lacrosse at hers near London. But that was before the war. We've lived at the Dragon House ever since, and had a governess—worse luck!'

The Chalet girls were too well trained to ask questions; but it was plain in their expressions, so Lois came to the rescue. 'Jesanne's cousin, Sir Ambrose, wanted her with him,' she explained. 'Mummy and Dad had to go to Burma—and goodness only knows where they are now—they got away, I know, but we haven't had any news since their cable. I went to live with my uncle who was estate agent to Sir Ambrose, and he asked if I could go to have lessons with Jesanne. So that's the whole thing explained.'

'And you've come for a last year or two of school to finish up? I see,' said Amy Stevens, a slender girl of eighteen, who looked delicate, and who had been a source of anxiety to the Chalet School people all her school life. Her father was a well-known journalist, at present in Egypt, and Amy and her sister Margia had known very little home life, for Mrs Stevens went with her husband whenever it was possible. At present, she was living in a pretty farmhouse at the other side of Armiford, and Amy had been revelling in 'proper' Christmas holidays. Her sister Margia, a clever young pianist, had been caught in South Africa by the war, but had got to Australia where she had completed her concert tour, and was now training as a nurse in one of the big Sydney hospitals. Having been at the school since she was a small child of six, Amy was its oldest pupil now, being nearly nineteen. A clever girl, she had been sorely handicapped by her health. But the last two years had been better for her, and everyone was hoping that Amy would now be able to continue with her education. She was entered for Oxford in the coming October, and hoped to be able to teach when she had finished her degree.

Now she gave Jesanne a smile of fellowship, and then went on: 'Well, you'll have your hands full, won't you? And what about you, Lois?'

Lois heaved a deep sigh. 'What *I* should like would be to be curator of a museum. I'm keen on antiques; and, thanks to Sir Ambrose, I know quite a bit already. Dragon House is crammed with ancient things; and I've wanted to go in for that sort of job ever since we found the Lost Staircase.'

'Found the lost *what?*?' demanded half a dozen voices at once.

'What are you talking about?' added Robin Humphries. 'A staircase can hardly be *lost*. It's much too big a thing.'

'This one was, though,' said Jesanne with a grin at her chum. 'We found it with the aid of Little Tommy—my cat; but he was a kitten then.'

'*And* gave us the fright of our lives,' supplemented Lois. 'At least, it was actually Jesanne who gave us the fright. But Little Tommy was the cause of it all.'

'I smell a story!' Elizabeth Arnett, the head-girl, sat up in the big wicker chair in which she had been lounging. 'What is it, you two?'

'Too long to tell now,' said Lois tersely. 'It isn't only the story of finding the Staircase itself. There's a lot before it. I've often thought it would make a book. We know—we've been told so, anyhow—that Josephine Bettany the authoress has something to do with the school, and I want Jesanne to tell her the whole thing and let her make a book of it.'

'Why not do it yourselves; or one of you, at any rate?' asked Amy.

'Not built that way. I'm not much on work, as you'll soon find. I do put my back into it; and I'm to take School Cert. in July, and I want to get Matric on it if I can. But it'll mean hard labour all the time if I'm to do it. Then I want a couple of years at an Agricultural College, and after that I'm to go back to help my uncle who is Jesanne's estate agent. And Jesanne's not much on English. *She* goes in for chemistry and science.'

'If it weren't for the Dragon House, I'd have been a doctor,' explained Jesanne. 'As it is, I can't. I've got too much on my plate as it is. But when Lois goes to her college, I'm going, too, so that we can work together. Her uncle, Mr Jennings, has a little son, who will follow in his father's footsteps some day, we all hope; but Richard is only three and a bit now, so it'll be some time before he is ready. He arrived in the June before the war began, with his twin sister, Ruhannah.'

'What a queer name!' exclaimed Robin. 'I've never heard it before.'

'It's an old name in the Jennings family,' explained Lois. 'There's always been a Ruhannah in every generation since Queen Anne's time. My Aunt Ruhannah married a Scottish doctor, and lives in Inverness, but all her girls were boys—oh, well, you know what I mean!' as a shout of laughter greeted this extraordinary explanation. 'I'm Lois Ruhannah. Auntie and Uncle's first girl was Edris, after Auntie's mother, who died just a few days before Edris was born. But Edris died when she was only a baby, and there haven't been any more till Richard and Rue came along. She'd have been just our age now if she'd lived, so it was a great thrill when the twins arrived. But that's enough about us. You take a turn and tell us if it is really true that Josephine Bettany lives near here.'

'I should think it *is* true!' laughed Enid Sothern, a pretty girl from Cornwall. 'Jo and her Triplets live just outside Howells Village, and it's a wonder she hasn't been up to see us first day. She generally does.'

'Jo hasn't been too fit,' said Robin gravely. 'What she went through when we all thought Jack—that's her husband, you two—was dead, has told on her rather badly, and she's got to keep quiet for the next few weeks or so. We shan't see much of her this term, if anything.'

'Isn't that the hard luck, now?' complained an Irish girl, Biddy O'Ryan. 'Is she really bad, Robin? And who's looking after the Triplets?'

'Juliet is,' replied Robin, naming a girl who had not only been one of the Chalet School's earliest head-girls, but who had taught there for some years, being married from there the same year as Jo herself. Juliet's first son had arrived in the preceding summer, and she had

come to Armiford with him about two months later, much to the joy of all those who had known her. Now, hearing that she was so near, they all gave vent to joyous cries. Armiford was a good fourteen miles away; but Howells Village was only three. They might see something of Juliet now.

‘How do you know, Rob?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘Jack rang me up an hour ago to say that the car would come for me at seven this evening, and he told me then.’

‘When did she come? Is she likely to turn up here soon? Has she little Donal with her?’ demanded Enid eagerly. ‘I’ve never even seen him.’

‘Donal is with her, and she came yesterday. As for when she’ll get up here, I suppose she’ll come as soon as she has time,’ said Robin serenely. ‘What a question-mark you are, Enid!’

‘Not I—I’m much too tubby for that sort of thing,’ retorted Enid, who was short and inclined to be plump.

‘But is Josephine Bettany married?’ interposed Lois eagerly. ‘And—it seems too good to be true!—but has she really got triplets?’

‘Oh, yes. Like your young Richard and Rue, they’re a great joy. They’re two and a bit—two months to be exact. They’re all little girls, and very pretty. For the first year or so they were very much alike except for their eyes. Connie’s are brown, Len’s are grey, and Margot’s are blue. But they all had red hair. But now Margot’s hair is going quite fair, and Connie’s is darkening. We think it will end up by being as black as Jo’s. Len is the only one to keep the red—so far. But even hers seems to be getting browner this last few weeks,’ said Robin. ‘Babies do change so quickly!’

‘I know,’ nodded Lois. ‘Richard and Rue had black hair when they were born; but it came off when they were a few months old, and now they’re both flaxen-fair.’

‘But do tell us something about your Lost Staircase. Why do you speak of it as though it were spelt with capital letters?’ asked Enid curiously.

‘Because it was lost for centuries—quite literally centuries,’ said Jesanne. ‘Also, it’s all mixed up with the family history, and quite important. No; I’m telling you nothing. But I’ll see Mrs Bettany—is that her married name?—if she’ll let me, and tell her. It really would make a most thrilling story if only someone who could write would do it.’

‘Jo will love to hear it,’ agreed Robin. ‘She’s always on the look-out for fresh ideas. But she’s Mrs Maynard, Jesanne. Jack Maynard was one of the doctors at the Sanatorium until he was called up to go as a naval surgeon. What will happen now, I don’t quite know. He’s been badly injured and he has six months’ sick leave, anyhow. He has a medical board in June, I know. At present, we’re all rejoicing to have him safely with us.’

‘What’s she like?’ asked Lois. ‘I’ve often wondered.’

‘Very jolly,’ began several voices. But Enid, with a wicked glance round, hushed them. ‘Oh, we’re not going to go into any detail. What do you *think* she’s like?’

Lois wrinkled up her brows. ‘It’s hard to tell from her books. But I imagine she’s not very tall. I think she has brown hair, and blue eyes, and lovely pink-and-white colouring; and *perhaps* her nose turns up a wee bit—like Lynette’s, you know.’ And then she quoted, ‘“Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.”’

‘Oh, I don’t!’ cried Jesanne. ‘I think she’s very tall, and awfully keen on games, with coppery hair—didn’t you say her babies all started red?—and very keen grey eyes, and very much tanned. But, of course, it’s all guess-work. One can’t tell till one sees her.’

‘One can’t,’ agreed Robin drily. ‘Well, she’ll be up before long, I expect, and then you’ll see her for yourselves——’

‘See who?’ demanded a very sweet, clear voice.

With a shriek of joy, the entire Sixth, with the exception of the new girls, precipitated themselves on the newcomer, and surrounded her with cries of joy.

‘Joey! It hasn’t seemed like school with you not here to welcome us!’ declared Enid. ‘Are you better now?’

‘Much better, thank you. But what I’ll be if you all insist on mobbing me like this, I won’t undertake to say,’ said the voice with a chuckle.

‘We’ve two new girls,’ said Robin. ‘Lois and Jesanne, come here and meet Josephine Bettany the authoress. They’ve been dying for it, Jo.’

The throng parted, big Monica Marilliar who had been standing in front of the newcomer till now moving well to one side, and Lois and Jesanne at last saw one of their favourite writers.

She was tall, with black hair cut in a straight fringe across broad brows, and knotted up in big, plaited whorls over either ear. Her eyes were black, too, and she had a pale, clear skin. Anything less like the Josephine Bettany the pair had imagined it would have been hard to find, and they stared at her, as Jo herself complained afterwards, ‘as if I were an animal escaped from the Zoo.’ Jo looked back at them, and wondered. But she had little time for it, for the Sixth, having seen the effect she had on the newcomers, broke into shrieks of laughter, even Robin and Lorenz, who were graver as a rule than the rest, joining them.

‘What on earth is all this about?’ demanded Jo as she went forward, holding out her hand. ‘Lois and Jesanne, do I look so awfully funny that you must stare at me like that? Have I suddenly developed a squint, you people?’ to the rest of the two forms. ‘Am I covered with purple spots?’

Pulling herself together with an effort, Robin replied, ‘No; it’s just they’ve been telling us what they thought you were like from your books. And oh, Joey! It’s such a total difference!’ And she doubled up again.

Jo gurgled. ‘I see. Well, I hope I’m not too much of a shock. Let’s sit down, shall we? I haven’t long to stay because we’ve got to get back almost at once. Who d’you think wired to say she was coming by tonight’s train, Rob? Give you three guesses among you, all of you. And I bet you don’t get anywhere near, anyhow,’ she added tantalisingly.

‘Evvy Lannis—no; she couldn’t. She had leave for Christmas. Well, Elsie Carr, then!’ cried Enid.

Jo shook her head. ‘Elsie had Christmas leave, too. It isn’t her,’ she said, with shocking lack of grammar in a writer. ‘Guess again.’

‘It isn’t Corney, is it?’ asked Robin doubtfully, naming a well-beloved former head-girl, who had left in the summer after the outbreak of war and had gone to join her father in Ireland where he had set up his home.

‘No; Corney’s dying to come, of course; but Mr Flower has been so ill she can’t leave him yet. She wants to come as soon as she can, though.’

‘Well, then, what about Stacie?’ suggested Biddy O’Ryan. ‘She wasn’t here for Christmas, I know, for she went to Cornwall to stay with her aunt there, as her cousin Ned was missing. She wrote and told me all about it when I was with Elizabeth. Have they had any other news about him, Joey?’

'I haven't heard from Stacie for a week or two. But it would never surprise me to hear that he'd turned up,' said Jo casually, as she sat down in a wicker chair, and the rest followed her example and found seats. 'The Trevanion boys seem to have as many lives as any cat. Aren't you *thick* all of you! No; it's Polly Heriot. Old Mr Wilmot has gone at last, and Polly is closing up the house, warehousing the furniture, and coming to me for a few weeks to have a rest before she goes for training in something. She must be very tired, for he's had a dreadful time these last months, and she wouldn't leave him. Oh, they had a nurse, of course; but it must have been terrible to see him suffer. I believe they kept him under morphia for the last few weeks. I'm glad it's all over now.'

'Poor Polly,' said Robin. 'She's been very brave, I know. And she was so fond of him. I'm glad she's coming to us, Joey. We must nurse her for a little, and try to cheer her up. She would feel very much alone if it weren't for you, I know. She hasn't a relation left in the world, has she?'

'Not one,' said Jo soberly. 'But of course I always told her she must look on us as home when Mr Wilmot went.' Then she turned to the new girls. 'You won't understand, of course. The rest must tell you about Polly later on, and then you will. But now, what news has anyone? How is Lonka getting on, Lorenz? And how are your people? Have you any news of Margia, Amy? Come on! I want all the gossip!'

For a few minutes they all talked eagerly, giving her all the news they could. Then Kitty Burnett, sister of Miss Burnett, suddenly said, 'Oh, Joey, you *did* know we had Lavender Leigh here, didn't you?'

Jo grinned. 'I should think I did! Daisy shrieked the news to me this morning when she was phoning. What is she like, or don't you know yet?'

The Sixth looked at each other. Finally Biddy said, 'Sure, you'd better meet her for yourself and then you'll know. Are you having your usual new-girl do this term, Jo?'

Jo nodded. 'I am. But it's got to be very soon. I thought of next Saturday if that would suit everyone. There aren't any fixtures for then, are there, Monica?'

Monica, who was Games captain, shook her head. 'No; it should have been the Red Gables return hockey, but they've had to turn out of their place for drains, and won't come back for another month, so we've had to postpone it. And St Winifred's comes off tomorrow fortnight.'

'Good! Then will you two come with the rest of the new girls and have tea with me tomorrow week? I nearly always have any new girls to tea early in the term,' explained Joey. 'You each bring one old girl with you, and we have as jolly a time as I can manage. How many new people are there this term, by the way, Elizabeth? Not too many, I hope. I can't have a regular party. Rations won't allow it, you know.'

'Lois and Jesanne here,' said Elizabeth thoughtfully. 'Then there's Gillian Culver in Lower Fifth. She's a kid of fifteen or so, and seems quite jolly. And Upper Fourth has a new one, too. Anyone know her name? I don't think I've heard it yet.'

'Jean Mackay from Selkirk,' said Jocelyn Redford. 'And, of course, we have the famous Lavender Leigh. She's in Lower Third. That's all this term, Jo, unless anyone else turns up later. You never know, do you?'

'You never do,' agreed Jo. 'Well, Rob, we must get back for Polly, so what about your case? And is Daisy's ready, do you know? Hop off and see to them, and tell her. You can come here for me when you're ready. André is driving us, as Jack can't yet, and they won't let me

just now. He must get back to the Round House as soon as possible, as Jem may need him, so don't be long, either of you.'

Robin nodded, and departed, and then Enid suddenly remembered what they had been talking about just before Jo's arrival. 'Oh, Jo, Lois and Jesanne have a story for you. At least they say it would make a gorgeous story, all about a lost staircase——'

Jo reacted like everyone else to this. 'A *lost* staircase? What on earth are you talking about? You couldn't *lose* a staircase; no one could! It's much too big. Have you been pulling their legs, you two?'

'Oh no; ours really was lost,' Jesanne assured her. 'It was lost for nearly two centuries at least, and we were thrilled to find it, for all sorts of people had hunted for it, and no one ever found it till Little Tommy did. At least, he fell through on it, and then I went after him, and that's how we found it in the end. But honestly, Mrs Maynard, it's like any thrilling story you ever read. When we knew we were coming here, and someone told us you lived near, we hoped we'd meet you and get to know you, and then we could tell you all about it, and perhaps you could make a book of it.'

'I'm sure she could,' put in Lois. 'That's why we won't say any more about it now, because it would give the whole thing away, and if you *could* use it, it wouldn't be fair to you, would it?'

'But what about us?' lamented Enid. 'I call it most unfair to *us*! You whet our appetites for the story by all these hints, and then you won't tell us a thing more. Mean, I call it!'

'I don't,' retorted Jo. 'I think it's downright sporting of them. I'm longing to hear the tale, and you simply must tell me as soon as you can. I've finished *Luella was a Land Girl*, and sent it off before Christmas, and I was just looking round for something else. This sounds most promising. And it brings its own title, and a jolly good one, too—*The Lost Staircase!* Intriguing, I call it. I shan't be able to do much at it till after Easter. I'm very busy just now, and going to be busier. But then I hope to have a few peaceful months; and I always like to turn over my books in my mind before ever I begin to put them down. Perhaps you two had best come to tea some time by yourselves. With those other three as well, there wouldn't be much chance of hearing the full story. You come with them next Saturday, and have a jolly time. Then Rob must bring you down the next week, and we'll hear the tale.'

So it was arranged, and so, later on, it came to pass. Jo had her new-girls' party on the Saturday; and the following week, Lois and Jesanne went to Plas Gwyn, her pretty home, with Robin, where they spent a delightful afternoon, and Jo got such a plot for her next book as assured her that she was in for a busy summer. Neither she nor the new girls would tell anyone else what the story was, but she promised the school that if the book were published, it should be given to the school library, and she also added that she would make an extra carbon copy as she worked for the delectation of the two Sixths, so that all present might read it then. As Enid had pointed out with great feeling, it was the last year of school for a good many of them, and after that, who was to say where they might be? It might be exceedingly difficult for them to get a copy of the book. But they had to give their word that no hint of the story should go beyond the walls of their own room, and with this Jo was satisfied.

CHAPTER VIII

LAVENDER AND HOCKEY

Lavender was duly told that she was going to have tea with Mrs Maynard on the second Saturday of term, and asked which friend she would take with her.

‘Bride, I suppose,’ said Elizabeth Arnett who had brought her the message. ‘She’s been very good to you, I’ve noticed. I’ll tell the Head.’

‘You needn’t say Bride Bettany. I’m not going to take her anywhere with *me!*’ returned Lavender with some spite.

Elizabeth stared. ‘And why not, pray?’

‘Because Bride is a rude, rough, unladylike child, who I know my aunt would not like me to associate with, and I’m not going out to tea with her anywhere and be disgraced by her,’ declared Lavender heatedly.

Elizabeth’s lips suddenly relaxed in a grin. ‘Oh, you needn’t worry about that. Mrs Maynard happens to be Bride’s aunt. I imagine she knows all there is to be known about her. And why, may I ask, do you call Bride rude and rough? We’ve known her here since she was a toddle, and no one has ever applied such terms to her before.’

‘She hit me in the face at Prayers the second night the school came back, and she has never even said she was sorry for it.’

‘You mean,’ said the head-girl firmly, ‘she put her hand over your mouth to keep you from saying a silly thing that would have brought trouble on your head. I know all about that. She may not have been as gentle over it as she might. Probably she wasn’t. It seems she had to work quickly, and Bride hasn’t enough control over her muscles as yet to be both quick *and* gentle. But to say that she hit you is to tell a downright lie. She did not. I don’t advise you to go on saying that, Lavender, or you may find that other people who know Bride thoroughly and don’t either know or understand you will be apt to cold-shoulder you. She is a favourite here, as you may have seen for yourself; and your own clan are too young to make allowances for anyone. You take my advice and make it up with Bride. She never bears malice as some people do, so you won’t find it hard.’

Lavender herself was one of the people to bear malice, and she had not yet forgiven Bride, so she only primmed up her lips and said nothing. Sorry for the silly child, Elizabeth spoke again, this time more gently. ‘Lavender, take my advice. You are very new here—quite new to school, I am told. I’ve been at school since I was eight, and I do know what I am talking about. You can be either very happy here, or very unhappy. It lies very much in your own hands. And now,’ she added, ‘if you won’t take Bride, whom will you take? Hurry up and choose, for Miss Annersley wants to know. She is waiting to ’phone Mrs Maynard.’

‘I don’t think I will go at all, thank you,’ said Lavender stiffly.

‘You have no choice, my child. Go, you must. I can tell you, Mrs Maynard’s invitations aren’t to be sneezed at. The Head won’t let you refuse. So hurry up and decide whom you want, for I must get on to Gillian Culver in the Lower Fifth before I finish. Make haste, please.’

Lavender was angry. How dare they rule her like this? She had rarely before had to do anything she did not like. When she did refuse, Aunt Sylvia had been in the habit of coaxing

or bribing her, and she was still so near her old life, that she fully expected the same treatment here. However, Elizabeth was eyeing her in a way that made her give in, even if it were sulkily, so she mumbled, 'I don't know many of the girls. I'd better have Julie Lucy, she's in my dormitory.'

'Julie's people live in Armiford. She may be tied up already,' said Elizabeth. 'You'd better run along and ask her first. I'll go on to Lower Fifth and see Gillian, and then I'll go to the prefects' room. You can come to me there with the name. But do be quick, child!'

She hastened off, and Lavender was left to go and seek Julie and ask if she would go to Mrs Maynard's with her.

Julie stared at her request when she was finally run to earth in Upper Second. 'Go with you on Saturday to Mrs Maynard's?' she repeated. 'Why do you want me? I sh'd think you'd ask Bride. She's been doing nanny to you ever since you came, and she's been jolly good to you. It would be a nice way of saying thank you to her. Mrs Maynard's her aunt, and she's seen nothing of her all the hols. Bride would love to go. No; I'm not coming, thank you, though you can give her my love, and say I'm dying to see her again. You hop off and ask Bride and don't be an idiot.'

Lavender turned away haughtily. 'When I want your advice, I'll ask for it, Julie Lucy,' she said. 'I'm not going anywhere with Bride Bettany, so there! She's a horrid, rough girl, and I don't want anything to do with her. And what do you mean by saying she's been "doing nanny" to me?'

'Looking after you, I mean. There isn't one of us would have done as much for you; 'specially after the way you treated her the other night. She's saved you from at least half a dozen rows, one way and another. I think you're horrid ungrateful to her as well.' And Julie marched off.

It was the same when Lavender tried the other people she knew. The Ozanne twins both declined, telling her that she *ought* to ask Bride who had been 'so jolly decent to you—we wouldn't have put up with you as she has!' Nancy Chester said much the same thing. Even Norah Bird said reproachfully, 'Oh, Lavender! *Bride's* the person you ought to ask. Just look how nice she's been to you. And she'd love to go to see her auntie.'

'*Hang* Bride!' thought Lavender at this. Aloud, she said, 'Well, I don't want to go at all, but that girl Elizabeth what's-her-name says I must. *I* don't think so very much of Mrs Maynard, even if she *is* Josephine Bettany. What's she written that's so awfully well known? My Auntie Sylvia's books are known all over the world. I'm sure *hers* aren't.'

'Then you're sure all wrong,' retorted Norah, who might be a gossip, but who was a nice child otherwise. 'Jo gets letters from all over the world about her books.'

Eventually, she had to go and tell Elizabeth that she could get no one to go with her. Elizabeth said nothing—and said it very expressively. She dismissed Lavender to her own form-room, and went off to see the Head, who listened to the story and then said, 'Poor child! I'm afraid she has a very great deal to learn. Do what you can for her, Elizabeth.'

'I will; but I can't do much,' said Elizabeth ruefully. 'It's so silly of the kid—child, I mean. Bride's a little dear, and she has been awfully good to her, Miss Annnersley. It all seems to hang on that silly business when she shut Lavender up over the Peace League vow. I know Bride would make friends all right; but Lavender is hanging on to this silly grudge of hers, and even her own gang don't seem able to make her see straight. What can we do about it? I don't see how we can interfere.'

‘You can’t,’ said the Head promptly. ‘Whatever happens, don’t try to interfere with their friendships, Elizabeth, unless one child seems to be having a directly bad influence on another. Then come straight to me about it. We don’t ask you prefects to take that sort of responsibility on your shoulders. Well, Lavender must just go alone, and I must ring Jo up and explain to her. Perhaps *she* may be able to do something, though as matters stand it can’t be much. We shall see very little of Jo this term, I’m afraid.’

‘Well, here’s the list, Miss Annersley. Jesanne wants to take Enid, and Lois has chosen Kitty. Gillian wants Alixe McNab, and Jean has plumped for Gay Lambert. That will be all right, won’t it?’

‘Perfectly. Thank you, Elizabeth. And don’t look so worried, dear. It’s only Lavender, and we all knew we should have trouble of one kind or another with her. The life she has led was bound to make for that. When she has been here a little longer, and got to know what is or is not done at school, I expect she’ll settle down like everyone else, and then we shall have no more bother with her. Oh, by the way, you will all like to know that Stacie Benson rang me up from Taverton this morning. Her cousin Ned Trevanion has been heard from. It appears that he baled out over Zurich, and has been interned. But he is quite all right.’

‘Jo said he would be. She says those boys have as many lives as a cat,’ said Elizabeth laughing. ‘I’m very glad for his mother’s sake. I only wish *my* brother was in Zurich instead of prisoner of war in Germany.’

‘Still, he may get away any day,’ said Miss Annersley comfortingly. ‘He wouldn’t be your brother if he didn’t do something quite mad—and get away with it,’ she added, laughing. ‘You did quite a few wild things in your Middle days, my dear, and I know you got away with a good deal that we’ve never heard of. When you leave school, I hope you’ll let me know about some of them. I should think they might be quite interesting.’

Elizabeth looked very conscious. ‘Oh, I know I was anything but a little angel, and gave you all heaps of trouble. But once I saw how mad it all was, I did try to pull up.’

‘And succeeded. You are my right hand among the prefects, dear.’

‘How nice of you to say that,’ said the girl gratefully.

‘You deserve it. Well, now you must go, and I must ring up Jo. I’ll see you after Prayers if you want to talk anything else over with me.’

Elizabeth departed, and went to her preparation with a warm feeling at her heart. She had been a firebrand of the worst kind in her earlier days, and it was pleasant to know that the Head knew that she had tried to reform; still pleasanter to be told she was her right hand. The head-girl settled down to her Virgil determined to do all she could to help even with a tiresome child like Lavender Leigh.

However, in the next affair, Elizabeth could do very little, for it was Monica Marilliar’s business, and she had to deal with it, as Games captain. It was something which had never before come up, and taxed all Monica’s abilities, for, as she said later when discussing it with her peers, ‘We’ve never had to deal with lunies before!’

Games for Lower Third took place on the Monday afternoon at two o’clock. Lavender had spent a very trying morning in school. She had had another battle with Miss Slater and had come off second-best, as might have been expected. A Latin lesson with Lower Second, while her own form went joyfully to botany with Miss Wilson, had upset Mlle Berné’s temper to such an extent that she snapped at her forms for the rest of the morning, and Lavender herself finished it in a state of sulks from which she had not emerged when two o’clock came, and

she found herself, with the rest of Upper and Lower Third, carrying a very new hockey-stick to the playing-field.

Lower Third were the youngest form to take hockey, and even they had only one practice in the week, their other two games' practices being spent on netball. The form contained fifteen girls, while Upper Third had twenty-three. Thirty-eight is an awkward number for hockey. Miss Burn made up two elevens of the best players, and sent the remaining sixteen to Monica, who as Games captain helped with the coaching, so that they might practise passing and shooting. Lavender was naturally among these last, rather to her disgust, for she hoped to shine at games, being a good tennis-player for her age, and certain that her prowess on the courts would enable her to play well at hockey almost at once.

While Miss Burn made her dispositions, and supervised a thrilling game with her twenty-two, Monica assembled her own flock, and delivered a brief résumé of the main rules of the game to them, and then divided them into two lots of eight to play against each other so that she could get some idea of their various weaknesses. She was a very big, masterful girl, standing five-foot-nine in her stocking-feet, and broad in proportion. She was not pretty, but her bright face was very attractive, and Lavender had rather liked her when she had had tea in the schoolroom at Many Bushes, Dr Marilliar's house, on that memorable occasion when it had been decided that she was to go to school. Therefore, the younger girl's sulks tended to depart just at first.

The practice began, and before they had been playing three minutes, Anne Montague, who was given to raising her stick above her shoulder, was hauled up for 'sticks.' Monica reminded Anne quite gently of the rule and they began again. Five minutes later, Dora Robson had to be checked for the same thing, and Lavender, who was managing quite well, gave a contemptuous smile. As she was near Monica at the time, the Senior saw it, and was annoyed. Dora was not good at games, though she did her best, and Monica thought that there was no need to point her own remarks by any such exhibition as Lavender's. Therefore, when the new girl committed the same fault two minutes later, the prefect came down on her heavily.

'Lavender Leigh! Sticks! You've heard what I said to Anne and Dora, and I told you about it before we began. Keep your stick below shoulder-level, and do try to remember a simple thing like that!'

Lavender went red. At no time could she bear to be rebuked, and this was a very public rebuke. She said nothing, however, and the practice went on. Then Norah Bird's sister, Joy, hitting harder than was necessary when passing to her wing, sent the ball out, and Monica blew her whistle for a throw-in. She called Judy Rose, another member of Upper Third, to throw, and Judy, in her excitement, quite literally threw, causing a yell to rise from more than one player in line with her. Luckily, no one was hurt, and Monica took the ball herself, and demonstrated to them. Then she bade Judy try again. But Judy had been demoralised by her first mistake, and tossed the ball so carelessly, that it rose high, missing Barbara Smith by a hair's-breadth, whereat another yell went up. Miss Burn, leaving her teams to their own devices for the moment, tore across to see what was happening, and after scolding Judy sharply, told her that if she could do no better, she would be taken off, and sent to join the Second Form netball. Thus admonished, Judy managed to remember what she had to do, and rolled the ball in. Unfortunately, it met a little tussock of grass, and bounced up, hitting Lavender on the ankle. By this time Miss Burn had gone back to her own players, who were just staging a bully-off on the twenty-five line, so she saw nothing of it. Lavender, already indignant at being pulled up for 'Sticks,' turned on Judy with a fury that startled the others.

‘You did that on purpose, you horrid, rough girl! I’m going straight over to tell Miss Burn about it! She’s quite right; you aren’t fit to play hockey with us! You ought to be playing with a woolly ball!’

Sheer amazement had kept Monica silent at first. Now she woke up, and took charge in no uncertain way. ‘Lavender Leigh! Have you taken leave of your senses? Get back to your place at once, and *never* let me see you lose your temper on the playing-field like that again! It wasn’t Judy’s fault. She sent the ball in correctly, and no one could foresee that it would bounce up from the grass like that. In any case, *I* am the one to correct her, not you. Now go back to your place, and kindly mind your own business!’

‘It *is* my business! She hurt me, and she threw it at me! I’m going——’

The excited child had actually started off to go to Miss Burn, but her running powers were no match for Monica’s long legs. Before she had gone half a dozen yards, the prefect had caught her in strong arms, and was carrying her back to where a gaping throng were watching them. She set Lavender down quite gently, but held her arm in a firm grip as she said, ‘You’ll stay where you are. Let me see your ankle. I don’t believe a little knock like that could have hurt you much. Undo your stocking and roll it down and let me see. Be quick, please. I don’t want the practice held up all day in this fashion!’

Lavender had just enough sense left to do as she was told. She rolled down her stocking, and showed a bony ankle on which a faint red mark was quickly fading. Monica got off her knees, and cast a look of scorn at her. ‘All that fuss for a baby knock like that! Even one of the Seconds would be ashamed to make such a row. Fasten up your stocking and be quick about it. Judy, take the ball and send it in again, please. The rest of you get ready to take it. Now then: off you go, Judy!’

Judy did as she was told, and the game went on calmly for the next few minutes. Lavender was inwardly seething, and the rest were indignant at her attempt to carry tales. But Monica had her eye on them, and she was annoyed enough already. No one wanted to rouse her any further, for she had an unpleasant tongue when she was really angry. So they all played up to the best of their ability, and half-time was called without any further trouble.

But after half-time, it began again. In shooting for goal, Anne again sinned in the way of ‘sticks,’ and was again called to order. And the very next minute, Lavender committed the same fault. Monica might be excused for feeling irritated, but she kept her temper with an effort, and corrected the child quite mildly. But Lavender was tiring now. Except for tennis and a little climbing, she was unaccustomed to any strenuous exercise, and she found it harder and harder to keep up with the rest. She lagged behind, and her attempts at passing were so feeble, that the Games captain wondered if she were ‘playing up.’ She shouted, ‘Lavender! *Hit* the ball, don’t spoon it! Send it out with a good tap. It won’t bite you!’

This was the finishing touch. Lavender’s temper was gone. At this inauspicious moment, Joy Bird passed in to her, and Anne Montague, who was playing opposite her, saw her chance, and dashed in to get it, just as Lavender raised her stick to a forbidden height, and brought it down with all her force, even while Monica’s shout came ringing down the field. The stick fell across Anne’s fingers, and she dropped her own with a gasping cry, for it was a cruel blow, and her knuckles were bleeding where the skin had been broken. At once the whistle trilled out, and everyone stopped dead in time to hear Lavender cry, ‘*Now* who’s a baby crying for a knock!’

CHAPTER IX

OSTRACISED!

‘Did she really say *that*? Oh, what a horrid little pig she is!’

‘Yes; and she did it, too. Anne’s fingers were all bleeding. She hit so hard, I shouldn’t wonder if they didn’t have to send for the doctor.’

‘Well, *I* thought one of Anne’s fingers looked as if it was broken.’

With gossip like this going on in the cloakroom when the girls were changing after that fatal hockey practice, it is small wonder that the tale swelled until, shortly before supper, Elizabeth Arnett was electrified by being asked by small Di Verdin, who was Anne Montague’s cousin, if Anne’s hand *really* had to be cut off because that horrid new girl, Lavender Leigh, had banged her so hard at hockey that it was all smashed to a jelly. Di was in tears, for she and Anne were great allies in the holidays, since they lived in the same village where Anne’s father was vicar and Di’s the doctor.

‘Of course it isn’t true,’ said Elizabeth. ‘Who on earth has been telling you fairy-tales of that kind? Anne got a painful knock which skinned her knuckles, and she was sick when she saw the blood, so Matron put her to bed to get over it; but that’s all. She’ll be all right by tomorrow. Stop crying, Di, and I’ll take you to Matron and ask if you can go and see Anne for a few minutes. Here’s a hanky, so mop up.’

Matron was quite agreeable to letting Di see Anne, and when the small girl came out of the cubicle ten minutes later, her round face was all smiles, and she spent the rest of the time before bedtime in contradicting the penny dreadfuls that were raging among the Juniors about the affair.

But in spite of that, Lavender found that her own form and Upper Third weren’t going to forgive it as easily as all that. Anne was popular with her own set, and the new girl’s taunt, especially after the way she had spoken to Judy for a much smaller hurt, set them all against her.

‘I’d like to tell her just what I think of her,’ said Barbara Smith hotly. ‘I think she’s horrid. Anne had done nothing to her. And to hit her like that, and then not even say she was sorry! She ought to be cut by everyone. If *that’s* what comes of being famous, I’m glad I’m *not*!’

‘We can’t tell her just what we think of her,’ said Elfie wisely. ‘It wouldn’t be polite. But we can *show* her, can’t we? So long as we aren’t rude, no one could object. I vote we do as Bab says, and just cut her.’

‘If she asks us things, we’ve got to reply,’ Dora reminded her. ‘That *would*, be rude, to say nothing. And then we’d have the Staff *and* the prees down on us like a ton of bricks.’

It must be owned that Dora sounded as if the prefects would be the worst of it; and if you had asked Lower Third, they would probably have assured you that it *was*. There wasn’t one of them who wouldn’t rather have encountered ‘Bill’ at her most sarcastic than a prefect. As the Head was wont to say, their own generation kept them far more in awe than even the most unpleasant of the Staff. She herself was, perhaps, an exception. No one liked to be sent to the library. She was very popular out of it; but it was on record that Sybil Russell, who was quite fond of her out of school hours, had had to be *carried* to the library door on one occasion when Miss Norman, head of the Junior English Staff, had sent the young lady for a well-

deserved Head's interview! When Sybil felt like that, it may be imagined that the rest were even more in fear of the Head when they were sent to her for unpleasant reasons.

Monica had reported the event, of course. She had no choice. And Miss Burn had told what she knew of it. This was very little, since she had been busy with her own crowd at the time. But Monica's story, though the Games captain kept to the very barest facts, was not nice hearing. The Head's face grew grim as she listened, and her lips set in a way that evil-doers would all have recognised with quaking.

'You say you told her to hit the ball hard, and she deliberately lifted her stick above her shoulder, and brought it down on Anne's fingers?' she asked. 'You had warned her about "sticks," of course?'

'Two or three times,' said Monica, who looked almost as grim as Miss Annersley. 'I don't say she hit Anne on purpose. I think that *was* a mistake. But I *had* pulled her up more than once for "sticks." And I *did* say she was to give the ball a good tap and not spoon at it as she was doing. I feel it's a good deal my fault, Miss Annersley. Perhaps I shouldn't have said anything. But she'd riled me more than once as it was, and she didn't seem as if she was playing her best. That's why I said it.'

'I don't think you were to blame if that was all you said,' replied the Head quickly. 'You were there to coach, and you had to see to it that everyone did her best. No, Monica; I can't agree that it was your fault. It might have happened if Miss Burn had been in charge. Don't worry yourself on that score, child. But what I *do* see is that Lavender is going to be even more of a problem than I feared. She seems to have had little or no discipline, and to resent the slightest rebuke. But she must learn to take rebukes and correction without giving way to temper, just as everyone else must. Well, if that's all you can tell me, dear, I think you may go now, and send her to me. I must see her, of course, and try to set things in the right light before her. One moment, Monica! Have you any idea how the other Juniors are taking it?'

Monica's lips relaxed as she replied, 'They're making real thrillers out of it so far as I can hear. I've shut them up, of course. But one can hardly stop them talking about it. I think it wouldn't have mattered so much if she hadn't said what she did when Anne cried out. That *has* put their backs up—especially after the fuss she made when the ball hit her on the ankle—trying to rush off to Miss Burn and complain. That was no one's fault, Miss Annersley. Judy rolled the ball in properly, and no one could guess that that tuft of grass would make it bounce like that.'

'I see. Well, will you go and send Lavender to me. And try to keep the Juniors from exaggerating about it if you can. It's no more than a nasty knock which will make Anne's knuckles sore for a day or so, added to her own weakness for turning sick at the sight of blood.'

'I'll do my best,' said Monica. 'Perhaps if *you* spoke to them, Miss Annersley, it might choke them off a little. Some of those babes do chatter, and they make mountains out of molehills so easily.'

'I don't want to make too much of it, for everyone's sake. But I'll see what I can do,' agreed Miss Annersley. 'Thank you, Monica.'

Monica went off, and presently Lavender appeared in the library. She had changed according to the rule, and had washed her face and hands, but it was clear that she had been crying, for her eyes were still swollen. The Head decided to take it for granted that her tears were caused by the accident to Anne, and try to get hold of the child that way. But Lavender was not prepared to take it so, and her first words showed that.

‘You’ve been crying, Lavender,’ said the Head in her kindest tones. ‘Well, I can understand that you are upset at having caused such a nasty accident to Anne, but it isn’t as bad as it might have been, so try to cheer up, child.’

‘I wasn’t crying over that,’ said Lavender sullenly. ‘It was an accident, as you say. But the girls are all horrid to me, and they are saying nasty things to me. I couldn’t help hitting Anne. She shouldn’t have got in the way of my stick. I was aiming at the ball.’

‘I know that. I can’t think that any of you girls would try to strike each other on purpose. But I’m afraid the others are upset because of the unkind way you treated Anne when she cried out—as anyone might.’

‘It was no more than Monica said to me when the ball hit *me*.’

‘That was rather different.’ The Head sounded a little sterner. ‘Judy rolled the ball in, and it was a tuft of grass that caused it to bounce up and hit you. But from all I can hear, you broke a strict hockey rule, hurt Anne badly, and then made fun of her for crying. Have you told her yet that you are sorry for it?’

‘No; she was sick, and Miss Burn and Monica carried her off the field and Matron put her to bed. No one put *me* to bed, though my ankle is ever so sore and bruised.’

Miss Annersley made a big effort and kept her temper. ‘Anne was put to bed because she *was* sick. Unfortunately, the sight of blood always affects her that way. As for your ankle, Monica told me that it was just a little rap. But if it is really bad, you had better let me see it.’

Once more Lavender rolled down her stocking and showed her ankle, and Miss Annersley inspected it gravely. ‘I see no bruise here,’ she said at last. ‘I expect it smarted for a few moments, but I don’t think there is any harm done, Lavender. Fasten up your stocking again. And now, tell me. Did Judy say she was sorry to you?’

‘No,’ said Lavender as she pulled up her stocking and fastened it.

‘She didn’t? That is unlike Judy. I will send for her, and she can tell you now.’ And Miss Annersley touched the bell on her desk. To the maid who came in answer, she said, ‘Ask little Miss Rose to come here to me, please,’ and then sat back. Lavender stood before her, head down, lips set in sulky lines, and there was silence in the library till a rap sounded at the door, and Judy, looking faintly scared, entered.

‘Come in, Judy,’ said Miss Annersley. ‘I hear that you were the cause of a slight accident to Lavender this afternoon, and forgot to say you were sorry. I have sent for you so that you can do it now.’

Casting a furious glance at Lavender, Judy mumbled, ‘I’m sorry if I hurt you, Lavender. I’d have said it at once, but you were so—upset, I didn’t have a chance. And then Monica stepped in.’

Lavender said nothing, and the Head waited for a moment. Then, seeing that the elder child would not reply, she spoke. ‘Thank you, Judy. That is all, dear. You may go now.’

Judy bobbed the curtsey that the Chalet School always insisted on to the Head, and went out, seething with rage at what she considered to be Lavender’s tale-telling, and the Head turned once more to the very sulky person beside her, wondering how she could bring the child to a better frame of mind, and make her see where she was wrong.

‘Judy has apologised to you now,’ she said. ‘Tomorrow, I shall expect you to apologise to Anne. She will be back in school then, I expect.’

‘I’m not going to,’ retorted Lavender. ‘I believe she made all that fuss just to get the others to be horrid to me, and I’m not sorry, and I won’t say I am to please anybody. Why should I?’

‘I don’t want you to tell a lie,’ replied the Head gravely. ‘But if *you* aren’t sorry, Lavender, then I am very sorry for you.’

Lavender eyed her as if she had said something unheard of. ‘Why?’ she demanded. ‘If you think I care because a pack of children are nasty to me, you’re mistaken. I don’t! I’m going to write to my aunt and ask her to take me away. I never wanted to come to school, and when I tell her how unhappy I am, she won’t let me stay.’

No one had ever spoken to Miss Annersley like this at the school, but she knew that Lavender *did* care about the others, and she felt that what they would say and do mattered a very great deal to her. The hot speech was nothing but bravado. Neither did she worry unduly about the threat to tell her aunt, for Miss Leigh had told her that Dr Marilliar had insisted that a year’s trial to the school must be given, and she gathered that he had frightened the lady wholesomely about her little niece’s state, demanding her promise that she would not interfere, whatever Lavender might write to her. Therefore she took no notice of the silly child’s angry words but turned back to her desk, saying quietly, ‘I see it is of no use to say anything further to you now, Lavender. You may go. When you are ready to say you are sorry to Anne, you may come to me again. Until then, I don’t want to see you.’

She took up a letter that was lying before her, opened it, and began to read it, paying no more attention to Lavender, who stood there uneasily, not very sure what to do. At length the lady spoke. ‘I told you to go, Lavender. The bell has already rung for preparation, and if you are much later, you won’t have time to get all your work done. Go at once.’

Thus dismissed, Lavender had to go. What is more, she gave up her first idea of rushing up to her cubicle and scribbling a letter to her aunt, begging to be taken away, and pouring out all her grievances. Instead, she did exactly as she was told—went to her form-room, where the form was working in an atmosphere that was not exactly peaceful, sat down at her desk, after a mumbled explanation that she had been with the Head to Miss Stevens who was on duty, took out her work, and tried to bury herself in it.

After she came in, you might have heard a pin drop. Everyone studied with an industry that might have been startling if the Staff had not known what had happened. No one looked at Lavender, or took the least notice of her. She had sinned too deeply against them for that. Strangely enough, she missed the usual little whispers and stirrings, the tiny smile Bride now and then gave her, the silent offers of rubber or blotting-paper, or the equally silent requests—a pleading hand held out—for those commodities that normally annoyed her. Tonight, not even Bride gave her so much as a glance. She repeated the endings for the first declension in Latin and their meanings over and over to herself without taking in anything she was saying, and when she came to her next Latin lesson there was good reason for Mlle Berné’s wrath, for she did not know the first thing about it. She laid aside her *Ora Maritima*, and tried to work the three problems Miss Slater had set them for arithmetic homework. But as she divided where she should have multiplied, and subtracted where she should have added, it was waste of time. For St Matthew, they had to learn the Beatitudes by heart, and Lavender generally liked learning by heart; but the beautiful words from the Sermon on the Mount meant no more to her in her present mood than the multiplication table would have done. She was thankful when the bell rang for the end of prep, and she could put her books back in her desk, while Miss Stevens gathered up the exercises she had been correcting, and left them to their own devices until the supper-bell rang.

For some minutes, Lavender busied herself with putting everything neatly away. But she couldn’t go on with that for more than five minutes, so at length she closed the lid of her desk,

and looked up. Half the form was staring at her, but as she raised her head, they all looked away, and became very busy among themselves. Bride, Mollie, and Dora began to talk about the chances of the inter-form netball teams; Primrose Day and Audrey Simpson compared answers to their sums; the rest chattered about various interests they had. No one spoke to her at all. Lavender didn't like it. She had been accustomed to being the centre of affairs, and hitherto, even at school, some of them had included her in their talk. Now she was left entirely to herself. She didn't quite know what to do. She was a sensitive girl, and she could feel the unspoken dislike that radiated from the others, though she was too proud, and too sure of her own rightness, to admit it. She looked at them, but they paid no heed. They were intent on carrying out their plan of 'cutting' her as far as it was possible.

Finally, she left the room, and went to the Junior common-room, where Upper Second and some of Upper Third were enjoying themselves. Approaching Vanna Ozanne, she opened her lips to say something—what, she could never have told. But Vanna was too quick for her. With a toss of her brown curls she put an arm round Julie Lucy who was near, and walked away, saying loudly, 'Come along, Julie. We don't want to talk to *sneaks*, do we?'

Lavender was struck dumb. She turned quickly away to Fiona McDonald, but Fiona gave her one look, turned up her nose as far as a very straight little nose could be turned up, and said distinctly, 'I hafn't anything to say to you unless it iss something *necessary*, Lavender,' before she, too, turned away.

Peggy Bettany, leader of the Upper Third, was there, and as she saw the new girl's face, she went to her, a very grave look on her own fair little countenance. 'I'm sorry, Lavender,' she said gravely, 'but we don't like tell-tales here. And you hurt poor Anne very badly, and never said you were sorry. You only made fun of her. We don't like that either. So, until you *do* say you're sorry, and stop telling tales, I'm afraid no one will have anything to do with you. We shan't be rude to you, but we just won't talk to you unless we have to. If you'll say you're sorry, we'll wash it out, but not until then. Do you see?'

The rest had stopped talking when Peggy began, and as she ended, they applauded. 'That's quite right!—Peggy's put it in a nutshell.—Now you know what we think, and it's up to you!' The last came from Judy Rose, who was still smarting over having had to say that *she* was sorry for something that she couldn't help. The supper-bell rang just then, so they had no time for more. They formed into line, and marched quietly to the dining-room, where Lavender, who had joined on at the tail-end, for she dared do no other—the Head had impressed her in spite of herself—found that things were no better.

She sat in her usual place between Bride Bettany and Sybil Russell. Bride saw that she had everything she wanted. Bread and butter were passed to her as soon as she had finished what was on her plate. The prefect at the head of the table asked her to have more cocoa as soon as her cup was empty, and Sybil passed it up with no more than a toss of her chestnut locks, and passed it back without even that. Nancy Chester, sitting opposite, pushed the sugar-bowl across to her before she could ask for it. But no one spoke to her, and she felt quite unable to speak to anyone on her own account. She munched her bread-and-butter and drank her cocoa in silence, and wished it was time for bed. The chair between Nancy and Nina Williams, which was Anne's usual seat, was empty, and no one had set it aside. Lavender stared at it, and wished—well, she didn't quite know what. All she knew was that she couldn't stand this sort of thing much longer. If only it were bedtime, and then she could cry as much as she liked! Or no; she couldn't. Those horrid girls would hear her, and then they would think

that she cared what they said or did to her, and *that* she wasn't going to have, not if she died for it!

From her seat at what was known as 'High' table, where she sat with those of the Staff who were not on supper duty, the Head saw it all, and wondered if the girls' handling would have any better effect than her own. She meant to leave it to them for the present, though she was on the watch for anything in the least like bullying. Not that she had much fear of it. The Chalet School had never been worried by that particular sin to any degree. But sometimes the younger ones got carried away, and they might say more than could be allowed. But she trusted to Peggy Bettany, Mollie Carew, and one or two others who were leaders to see that it did not go too far. She was intensely sorry for Lavender, but until the girl came to her senses a little and was prepared to own herself in the wrong, she felt that she would be wiser not to interfere.

After supper, all below Upper Second went off to bed. The rest of the Juniors were given till eight o'clock for play, and as Lavender was in a Junior form and a Junior dormitory, as well as because the doctor had ordered it, she had to go with them. Generally, she resented it, having been accustomed to keep the same hours as her aunt. Tonight, she only wished she could have gone off when Sybil Russell and Betsy Lucy and all the rest of the small fry went. She followed the rest to the common-room, for she did not know what else to do. They settled down to their usual ploys of collections, jigsaw puzzles, books, and a game in one half of the room of twos and threes. Lavender took up a book, and sat down in a wicker chair near the fire; but she read the same words over and over again, and when at long last the bedtime bell sounded, she had not turned one leaf.

The Head stood at the foot of the stairs to wish them each good night.

They had had Prayers in their own form-rooms tonight, as well as preparation, for something had gone wrong with all the lights in Hall, and the electrician could not get out from Armiford until the next day, so she had not seen them all together as she usually did. Therefore she said something more to each one than the ordinary 'Good night' with which she despatched them to bed on most nights.

'Good night, Norah; no nightmare tonight, if you please, dear—good night, Barbara. Not feeling too tired, are you?' Barbara Gow, a girl who was inclined to outgrow her strength at present, shook her head as she replied, 'No, thank you. Good night, Miss Annersley.'

'Good night, Fiona. No frightening stories, please'—whereat Fiona blushed and laughed, two or three of her dormitory mates joining in—'Good night, Flora. Sleep well, dear.' It was Lavender's turn. 'Good night, Lavender. Don't forget to say your prayers, my child.'

She muttered, 'Good night, Miss Annersley,' made the usual curtsey, and went on upstairs to the Green dormitory, where she speedily shut herself into the privacy of her pretty curtains. She undressed, and folded her garments with her usual meticulous neatness. She went to the bathroom, and washed as usual, and came back. All round her she could hear the gay chatter they were allowed so long as they remembered that the younger ones were supposed to be asleep, and kept their voices properly lowered. Matron came in to rub Nancy Chester's chest, since that young lady had been coughing rather frequently, but she finished her work, and went out again amid a chorus of 'Good nights!' from the rest. Lavender got into bed, having deliberately omitted her prayers, and lay down, pulling up the bedclothes till all that could be seen of her was a mouse-brown head adorned with rubber curlers, for she still stuck to her ringlets. The rest followed her example, so far as getting into bed went. She heard Fiona McDonald's low, clear voice begin on one of the stories for which she was famous. It was

only half done when the prefect on duty came in to switch the lights off. There was a chorus of, 'Oh, Lorenz! Fiona hasn't nearly done yet!' answered by Lorenz Maico's grave tones, 'Then I am afraid it must wait till tomorrow night for the end. Lie down and go to sleep, all of you. Good night, girls!' A second chorus replied, 'Good night, Lorenz!' And Bride's voice chirped cheerfully, 'Let's hope Jerry doesn't come tonight! I'm so sleepy!' The lights went out, and Lorenz shut the door. For hours, so it seemed to her, Lavender waited, till she heard the light footsteps of the Seniors coming upstairs. Then, as the last sound died away, she suddenly turned and buried her head in her pillow, and cried and cried until she fell asleep from sheer weariness.

CHAPTER X

JOEY'S PARTY

For the whole of that week, Lavender tasted the horrors of being one alone amidst a crowd. Nobody was actively unkind to her. When she spoke to anyone, she was answered, *very* politely. At table, her wants were attended to scrupulously, and she could never complain that she was neglected. But—and it was a big ‘but’—no one sought her out for a jolly, chummy talk; no one worried her for the loan of pencils, rubber, or blotting-paper; no one gave her a sly little nudge, or sent her a quick smile when something funny occurred in form. When library day came, no one advised her to ‘try this one—it’s ever so jolly!’ She was left to choose her own book. They had games again on the Wednesday afternoon—netball, this time. Taught by what had occurred on the Monday, Lavender listened carefully to what Miss Burn had to say about rules, and really tried to follow them out. Being so tall, she was told to play goal defence, and more than once she managed to ward off what might have been a telling stroke on the part of the opponents’ goal attack or shooter. But her efforts were met with either silence or a polite, ‘Oh, well tried!’ When she made mistakes, and she made them in plenty, no one called, ‘Look out, idiot!’ as they did to Nancy Chester who sent the ball straight into the enemy’s hands more than once. *Her* errors were deliberately ignored by all save Miss Burn, who certainly corrected them vigorously, as she did everything else.

On the Saturday, when the rest were getting into Guide uniform in readiness for Guide meeting which came at half-past ten, no one asked her if she meant to become a Guide. Before the fateful Monday, if anyone had asked her that, she would have refused at once. She had seen too little of the Guide movement to know much about it, as Matron had shrewdly surmised. But now, if only Bride, or Fiona, or someone else had said, ‘What about coming to the meeting and looking on, Lavender? You might like to join when you see it properly,’ she would have agreed at once. But no one did say it.

Not knowing what else to do, she got into her tunic and blouse as usual, and then, when she emerged from behind her curtains, Bride, who appeared at the same time from hers, glanced at her, and said coldly, ‘I forgot to tell you that we don’t wear school kit on Saturdays, Lavender. You must change after brekker, and I’ll tell Matron it was my fault.’

Lavender said nothing. She left the dormitory with head held high, but her heart was very sore, and she followed at the end of her form into Prayers feeling as if she must break down and cry at a word. So far, although her wet pillow might have told a tale to anyone who felt it at night, she had contrived to keep a stiff upper lip during the day. She had vowed that she would never cry before these girls; but it was a hard struggle to keep from it this morning, and more than once she gulped down a lump in her throat as she fought the usual battle with her porridge.

Of all the normal school things, Lavender found the food the worst to meet. Her appetite had been so pampered, that she had none for the sensible, nourishing food which the rest ate hungrily, however much they might pretend to growl at it. Until she came here, she had never eaten porridge since her baby days, and not even the rich, creamy milk from the school’s own herd of Jerseys and the sprinkling of sugar which most took with it made it palatable to her. Nor did she enjoy the Saturday morning fish-cakes any better. And the very milky coffee

which came to her never tasted half so good to her as the rich, sweet Turkish coffee she had been in the habit of swallowing in the mornings. Yet already she was sleeping better than she had done for the past twelve months, once she had got through her nightly weeping. She had had none of the unpleasant dreams that used to haunt her, for the past three nights, nor did she have broken sleep. The good food was already strengthening her, and the regular hours of work and play were quieting her nerves. Had she been happy, there is no doubt but that she would have made startling progress. As it was, even under present conditions, she was improved.

After breakfast, they all went up to the dormitory to make their bed and dust their cubicles. Bride politely reminded Lavender once more to change her frock, and Lavender did as she was told in silence. When it was all done, she tossed up her curtains as the rule said, so that a fresh current of air might pass through the room from the widely-opened windows all day, and then turned to Bride who had finished about the same time.

‘Must we get dressed for the walk now, please?’ she asked, almost timidly.

‘No, that was only first Saturday,’ said Bride. ‘We have prep and mending now, till a quarter past ten. Then elevenses, and Guides after that. Girls who aren’t Guides go for a walk with one of the duty mistresses if it is a fine day like today. Get your stockings and anything else that needs mending, and come down to the form-room. Don’t forget your work-bag.’

Lavender got out the stockings which had come back from the washing the previous day, and looked at them. There were holes in both heels and one toe, and she felt appalled at the idea of having to mend them herself. She had never in her life done such a thing. Auntie Sylvia had done anything of the kind that was needful. She looked helplessly at Bride who was watching her. That young lady had not forgotten her promise to her aunt, and though she flatly refused to show any friendship to the new girl, she was doing her best to help her to keep rules. Now she said, ‘I think you pulled a button off a blouse-wrist at netball yesterday afternoon, didn’t you? You’d better take that down and sew it on again. What about your other blouse? Is it all right?’

Lavender got both out, and looked at her buttons. Yes; the other, which had been washed on Wednesday, also needed a button. She added it to her little pile. ‘Is—is that all?’ she asked.

‘I expect so,’ said Bride. ‘Take them down, and either Frau Mieders or a prefect on duty will show you what to do. When you have finished, you get on with any prep you have left over from last night. If you have none, you can read your library book, so you’d better take it with you.’

Lavender picked up *The Two Form Captains* which she had chosen because she had heard Elfie praising it to someone else, gathered up her mending and her work-bag, and went down to the schoolroom where two or three people were already assembled, among them Leslie Pitt and Primrose Day, the latter bemoaning the fact that she had torn the sleeve of her blouse, and it would take *ages* to mend!

‘How did you manage to do that?’ asked Leslie. ‘It’s an *awful* tear!’

‘Caught it on the barbed wire between the playing field and the paddock,’ returned Primrose. ‘I went to get my ball that that silly ass, Anne Webster, chucked over. I crawled under the wire all right, but I got caught coming back, and *that’s* what happened.’ And she regarded her blouse with melancholy eyes.

‘Well, you can’t very well tell Mately that,’ said Mollie Carew who had just come in. ‘You know the rule about messing about with the barbed wire as well as I do. You’ll have to mend it, and it serves you jolly well right! If you’d been caught you’d have got rep into the bargain.’

‘I know that. You needn’t rub it in. It’ll take me all my time to get it done before Guides, and that means I’ll have to take between tea and the Evening to finish my arithmetic, and I’ve got such a decent book from the library—*Susan’s Last Term*. Barbara Smith says it’s simply It.’

‘Oh, well, it’s Sunday tomorrow. You can read then,’ said Mollie consolingly. ‘And look here, Primrose, get some paper and tack the tear in place, a bit from the edge of course, and it won’t be half so awkward to manage. Look; I’ll show you.’

They got the paper and set to work, as the rest drifted in one by one, and settled down to mending. Biddy O’Ryan came to take charge, and having seen that most people were occupied, turned her attention to Lavender, who was struggling to thread a darning-needle like a poker with wool which she had previously sucked.

‘You can’t thread a darning-needle like that, me child,’ she said. ‘Put the wool round the needle—Mercy! Is that the finest you have? A nice mess you’ll make of those fine stockings if you try to darn them with a thing like that! Here; let me see what you’ve got.’ Biddy spoke with a faint flavour of creamiest brogue which bespoke her nationality, and Lavender liked her deep, sweet voice. She offered her well-filled needle-case and the elder girl selected a much finer needle, showed her how to loop the wool round it, and then push it through the eye. Then, feeling that she had done her duty, returned to her own stockings.

Lavender had not the faintest idea how to proceed. She knotted her wool after a good many attempts, and set to work to mend her stocking by the only method she knew—to pull the edges together. She finished, and then looked at it in despair. It certainly wasn’t like the nice, smooth mends Auntie Sylvia had done for her! And would Matron pass it? She had heard that Matron insisted on seeing all mending unless it had already been seen by Frau Mieders. Somehow, Lavender felt sure that that cobbled-up mess would never do for Matron. But what was she to do?

Biddy glanced up at this moment, and surprised the look on the child’s face. Laying down her own exquisitely done darning, she came across once more, and took the stocking. ‘Don’t ye know how to darn?’ she asked as she inspected it with some horror. ‘Ye don’t? Well, then, I’ll show you meself. Give me your scissors, for we’ll have to cut this out.’

Lavender handed over the scissors, and Biddy, having cut out the stitches, hunted through the work-bag, found a ‘mushroom,’ showed Lavender how to fit the stocking over it, and then began to make a smooth, even mesh with the wool. ‘That’s the way,’ she said when she had taken half a dozen stitches. ‘And niver make a knot when you’re darning. Ye’d have blisters all over your heels if ye tried to walk on *that*. Now go on until you’ve filled up the hole, and done two or three lines beyand it. Then bring it out to me, and I’ll show you how to do the other way. And here; give me that other stocking. At this rate ye’ll be darning the whole morning if ye try to do them both yourself.’ And she walked off with Lavender’s other stocking, which she proceeded to darn swiftly and well, regardless of the frowning looks cast on her by the rest of Lower Third.

Lavender managed to do as she had been shown, though it was not a very successful effort. Then she brought the stocking out, and Biddy showed her how to pass the needle over and under each alternate strand of wool. It was a fearful labour, for Biddy had impressed it on her pupil that only one strand at a time must be used, and Lavender frequently found that she had taken up two or even three, and had to go back. But at long last it was finished, and then she had to sew the buttons on her blouses. This was a simpler matter, once she had been shown how; but by the time it was all done, the bell rang for elevenses, and she had never

touched her homework. How she was to manage when she was going out to tea, she did not know. The prefect, however, explained matters to her.

‘Ye won’t be going down to Mrs Maynard’s till three,’ she said, ‘so ye must just try to get it done between two and then. Now put your work away, and get off for the walk—Ye aren’t a Guide, are ye?’

‘No,’ said Lavender, as she dropped her sewing materials into the bag.

‘Don’t ye want to be one?’

‘I—I don’t know. I don’t know anything about them.’

Biddy considered. ‘Well, suppose ye come and watch for this morning, and then ye can see what ye think of them. It’s meself thinks ye’d be the better av thim. I’ll go and ask B—Miss Wilson, I mean—if ye can come. Go and get your elevenses, and I’ll tell ye afterwards.’

A little cheered up by the Irish girl’s kindness, Lavender went off to put her things away, and the remainder of the watching Thirds at once surged round Biddy with reproaches for her helping the new girl.

‘And pray why shouldn’t I?’ demanded Biddy. ‘If any of you had been the good Guides you ought to be, you’d have given her a helping hand yourselves, and not leave the poor kid to struggle on by herself as you did.’

‘We’re having nothing to do with her that we can help,’ said Elfie primly. ‘Not after the way she treated Anne on the hockey field.’

‘That happened at the beginning of the week,’ said Biddy. ‘You’ve kept it up long enough now. Let up on it, and give her a chance to make good. If you don’t, let me tell you, it’s getting to bullying.’ And she marched off, leaving them staring at each other in rather conscience-stricken manner. None of them wanted to be hauled before the prefects for bullying, but it had dawned on them that they were nearing it.

‘I—I suppose we’d best do as Biddy says. But it’ll be horridly hard,’ said Primrose. ‘I mean, how can we begin all of a sudden?’

‘We can’t—at any rate not this moment,’ said Mollie. ‘Clear up, you people, and let’s get off to elevenses, or we shan’t get any.’

They obeyed her, and then streamed off to the big outer kitchen where milk and biscuits awaited them. Lavender had already had hers, and Biddy had taken her off to ask Miss Wilson if she might look on at the Guide meeting instead of joining the walk arranged for the unhappy few who for one reason or another were not allowed to join the Guides. ‘Bill’ was quite agreeable, so Biddy led her protégée to the big First Form-room where the First Chalet School Company had their meetings, and gave her a corner where she could see everything and be out of the way. Then she departed to seek her compeers, and Lavender was left alone.

The truth of the matter was that the prefects had decided to take a hand, seeing that the Lower and Upper Thirds were still treating Lavender more or less as if she were a pariah. They felt that the treatment had lasted long enough and must end.

‘If we let it go on, the Staff will butt in,’ Enid had said the previous evening. ‘We don’t want that, so we’d best stop it ourselves. You’re on prep duty with those kids tomorrow, Biddy. See what you can do about it.’

So Biddy had done what she could, and Lavender began to feel a little happier, even though no one took much notice of her during the Guide meeting. But when it ended, Bride, mindful of her promise, went to her where she still sat in her corner, and said, ‘We must get ready for dinner now. *We*’ve all got to change, and you’ve got to brush your hair and wash your face and hands. So come along, or we shall be late. I’m coming with you to Auntie Jo’s

this afternoon. She rang up this morning and asked me specially. So you won't have to go by yourself, 'cos I'll be with you.'

She led the way upstairs, and Lavender followed her. None of the others said anything yet. As Primrose had said, they found it hard to begin, and they were not very sure what to do or say. So they left it alone for the present, and Lavender found herself between Bride and Sybil as usual, with only Bride making two remarks that had nothing to do with dinner. Sybil, knowing nothing of what had happened, took no more notice of her than if she had not been there, and the rest were no better. But somehow, Lavender caught herself towards the end of the meal thinking that after all she might have been mistaken about Bride. She clearly meant to be kind now.

After dinner, the new girl had to go to her Latin and arithmetic, and spend the free hour in getting them done; but when Bride came to fetch her to get ready for their party, she had finished, and, as later transpired, had even managed to get *one* sum quite right and the other two *nearly* so; while her Latin, when it was returned to her, was not quite such a mass of red ink as before.

It was a three miles' walk to Plas Gwyn, Mrs Maynard's house, and as darkness came on early these days, they were taken down on one of the hay-carts which would call for them at half-past six, for no one had petrol to take them, and no one was going to allow a parcel of schoolgirls to walk three miles along country roads and up the long avenue to Plas Howell after black-out. The cart was quite clean, and cushions had been put in, so they squatted down cheerfully, and began to chat with all their might.

Except for Bride and herself, all the girls were Seniors, Jesanne, Lois, Enid, and Kitty being Sixth Formers, while Gillian, Jean, Alixe, and Gay were members of one or other of the Fifths. If she had been alone, Lavender would have felt very much out of it, for naturally the big girls were interested in their own affairs, and had little to say to two members of the Lower Third, though Enid spoke a few pleasant words to them, and Kitty also said something. But Gay Lambert was very much taken up with Jean Mackay, with whom she had struck up a great friendship; and Alixe McNab was famed for being one of the shyest girls the school had ever known, and though she gave Lavender a smile, kept to the new girl, Gillian Culver, for the most part.

The two Juniors sat together, and spoke occasionally. But for the greater part of the way they sat quietly, since they were in the presence of their Seniors, including two prefects. Lavender noticed that Jesanne and Lois seemed to have a secret, and Enid and Kitty were teasing them to tell it. But they shook their heads, and refused to say anything.

'Oh, you and your old Lost Staircase!' cried Enid at last. 'We'll wait until Jo knows about it, and then try to coax it out of her.'

'That's no go,' said Kitty. 'Jo's closer than an oyster when she likes. You ought to know that by this time, Enid. No; I suppose we'll just have to wait until the book comes out—if it ever does. But I must say I think you two are mean to give us all these hints and then refuse to say any more. I've heard of lost secret ways, but never of a lost staircase, and when you've got a thrilling tale like that, I think you might share it.'

At her words, Gillian Culver started, and opened her lips as if to say something. Then she closed them again with a curious expression. Only Lavender noticed it, and she wondered what it meant. However, at this moment, they had reached the end of a long lane, and here the cart stopped, and they all had to jump down, taking their cushions with them.

'You'll be back for us about half-past six, won't you, Evan Evans?' asked Enid, who was leader of the party.

'Well, yes indeed, Miss Sothern,' replied the short, dark Welshman who was head-gardener at Plas Howell. 'You'll be waiting here for me?'

'Yes; we'll be here,' said Enid. 'Now then, you folk,' she added as Evan Evans whipped up his horse and rattled off along the road. 'Come on, or Jo will think we aren't coming at all. It's only about ten minutes' walk up here.' She turned to her own friends, nodding towards a small house on the right-hand side. 'That's where Frieda von Ahlen, another of our old girls, and one of Jo's greatest chums, lives. She, and Frieda, and Simone Lecoutier—both! I mean de Bersac!—and Marie von und zu Wertheimer—only she was Marie von Eschenau at school—were always known as the Quartette because they did everything and went everywhere together. Marie married almost as soon as she left school; but the others were a bit later. Jo came next when she was twenty, nearly twenty-one. She'd been in India for the cold weather just before, and she got engaged to Dr Jack shortly after that. At least, it was about a year later. They were married just after they escaped to England. Ask Jo for that story some time, Jesanne. It's a thriller if you like! Frieda came on just about the time the Triplets arrived. Simone was the last—the term after we left Guernsey. Here we are at Plas Gwyn, and there's Jo watching at the window.'

It was a very pretty house they had reached, with white walls in accordance with its name, and roses and honeysuckle climbing up it. Mrs Maynard stood at the big french window on the left of the porch, and as she saw her guests, she came running to the door, followed by three small girls who trotted after her with wide, beaming smiles.

'Welcome!' she cried, as she threw the door open. 'Come along in, all of you. What an age you've been! I said three o'clock because you've got to get back early for the Evening, Enid. What happened that you're so late?'

'We left at ten to three, but it meant coming in the cart, and it's on the slow side,' explained Enid. 'Now, Jo, you know Jesanne and Lois already. This is Gillian Culver, and this is Jean Mackay. And here is Lavender Leigh. That's all our new girls this term. I *think* you have met the rest of us. Correct me if I am wrong!' she added, laughing.

Jo chuckled. 'They're not *quite* strangers. All right, Alixe? How's Vicky getting on with her nursing? And have you any news from China, Gay?'

Gay, most of whose people lived in the heart of China on a tea plantation, nodded. 'Ruth had a letter from Mummy just before we came back. It seems to be still fairly quiet where they are; but Paul and Basil are both in the Air Force now, of course, and Uncle Tom is having a hectic time on his own. Micky went back to school the same day as I did. We had a gorgeous time with Ruth and Tommy—he got leave for Christmas. And little Nan is a dear. I wish you could see her, Mrs Maynard.'

'Perhaps Mrs Lambert could come with her for a few weeks in the summer,' suggested hospitable Jo. 'If she came in June, then she could see the school. And Nan and my babes would be nice little chums. Just about the same age, aren't they?'

'Nan will be three in July,' said Gay.

'My three will be three in November, so they would fit nicely. Well, Lois and Jesanne, and the rest of you, what do you think of my triplet daughters? This is Len; that's Connie; and this,' she laid her hand on the golden head, 'is Margot, the youngest of the three. Say "How do you do," girlies.'

The three tiny girls held out their hands, and said ‘How do you do?’ very properly. Then Jo swept the entire party into her pretty drawing-room, after taking their coats and caps and tossing them down on a big settle in the hall; and there, a tall person with chestnut hair knotted at the back of her head, rose from a low chair, and was greeted with loud cries of joy from Enid and Kitty, who flung themselves on her bodily.

‘Polly! Jo told us you were coming! How nice to see you after all this time! And aren’t you grown-up with that big knob at the back of your head!’ Thus Enid, as she promenaded round Polly, inspecting her all round.

‘Twenty, aren’t you, Polly?’ asked Kitty. ‘Oh dear! How *elderly* everyone is getting nowadays! There’s our Mary a history mistress, and twenty-five; Jo’s twenty-four, and a proud mamma; Hilary is another mistress; and even Evvy was sporting a new ring when she came on leave at Christmas.’

‘Is Evvy Lannis engaged?’ asked Polly. ‘What is he? I hope he’s prepared for wild outbreaks—unless Evvy has calmed down a little. Oh, Jo! *Do* you remember when Evvy and Corney became Senior Middles at St Clare’s and jumped on all the Juniors who used slang? Bill came along and caught Corney hauling up Mary Shaw for saying “Sez you,” and I believe her own language was a real eye-opener, as Mary had checked her over it.’

Jo burst into shrieks of laughter. ‘Do I not? I heard all about it that night we sat up to catch Elizabeth and Co. at that weird play of theirs on the roof-garden. I know I thought it *was* a case of Satan rebuking Sin.’

‘Well, what about Evvy’s future husband?’ asked Polly when the laughter had died down. ‘Who can tell me anything about him?’

‘He’s a lieutenant in the American army. They met when Evvy was with her people in America just before war broke out,’ said Kitty. ‘They’ve been writing ever since, and got engaged by letter, if you please. Evvy says they’re to be married when the American army gets over here. In the meantime, she’s a W.A.A.F., and saving towards her trousseau.’

‘All this can’t be very interesting for Jesanne and Lois and the rest,’ said Jo. ‘If you people want to reminisce, you’ll have to choose some other time to do it. Polly’s here for a while, so she’ll be up to the school often, and you folk can talk over old times then. For the present, let’s do something. What shall it be, Lavender? What about hide-and-seek all over the house?’

‘Jo! You can’t rush about like that,’ protested Polly. ‘Do remember your family. Hide-and-seek all over the house isn’t for old, married ladies, my child. Let’s get the bagatelle board and have a game of that.’

‘Bother you!’ sighed Jo. ‘My family are quite used to me and my ways.’

‘You’re not going to ramp up and down stairs as I know you will do if we play that,’ returned Polly firmly. ‘I promised Dr Jack to see that you did nothing mad till he came back, and I’m keeping my word. I’ll get the board, and we’ll have a competition. The prize is a copy of one of your books.’

‘Well! I like that! Who says so, pray?’

‘I do! I know you’ve got some odd copies floating round somewhere. Come along and help me get the board and the balls, Bride. Kitty, pull that table into the middle of the room, please. Now get going, everyone.’

They set to work, and soon Lavender found herself in the middle of an exciting struggle, while Mrs Maynard sat in her big chair by the fire and the Triplets ran about and fielded balls which were sent off the board by too violent knocks. With so many to play, it was a little time before one’s turn came round; and on one occasion, Lavender found herself beside the tall,

slim person who sat laughing at them and chattering gaily. She looked at the delicately-cut face which, for all its laughter, had something wistful about the black eyes, and felt a sudden attraction. Jo smiled down at her as she sat on the humpty, clasping her hands round her bony knees.

‘Well, Lavender! What do you think of our school?’

‘I—don’t quite know,’ said Lavender slowly.

‘How’s that? Haven’t you had time to make up your mind yet?’

‘I don’t know.’ Then, in a sudden burst of confidence, ‘Mrs Maynard, when you went to school, did you like it so very much?’

‘I loved it,’ said Jo with emphasis. ‘Of course, I was very much younger than you when I first went—only six. It was a kindergarten.’

‘I never was at school before.’

‘I know—and you feel as if you had been plunged into the middle of everything all at once.’ Jo’s eyes were soft with sympathy. ‘It makes it hard for you, Lavender. Especially as you’ve led the sort of life you have. But remember this, kiddy; the only way to live with other people happily is to make allowances for them and their ideas. We all think differently on lots of subjects, and it’s quite likely that other people are just as much right as you may be. You’ve got to think of that. It won’t be easy at first, I know. But if you really try, it’ll get easier every time, and then it’ll become second nature. There are three things to remember if you want to be happy at school. That’s the first. The next is to stand on your own feet, and not go rushing off to someone every time something happens that you don’t quite like. No good ever comes of telling tales. And the third is to remember that you aren’t the only pebble on the beach. The school has nearly two hundred pupils now. There are the Staff, too. It’s impossible to let all that crowd do as each one likes. You’ve got to fit in with the majority. That will be almost hardest of all for you, because you’ve been one on your own for so long. I’m sorry your aunt left school so late for you, because it’s harder for you to learn to live with other people. I mean to send my babies to school as soon as they are five, so that they can learn that almost from their earliest days. And, of course, they do get a good deal of it now. There are three of them to begin with. Then there are heaps of cousins; and several of my friends live close at hand, and they have tinies of much the same age. We’re always running in and out of each other’s houses, so my three haven’t had much chance of thinking that they are the only people in the world who matter. But I know that where it’s a question of being the only one, that is very difficult.—Oh, well done, Bride! Jolly good score! Who’s next? Jesanne? Come on!’

That was all the private talk that Lavender had with Mrs Maynard, but somehow the words stuck, and helped her when times were hard, as they very often were. When Jesanne won the prize, with Gillian as second, Lavender, who had been longing to be first, managed to congratulate the prizewinners almost as heartily as Bride had done. It was an effort, but she did it. Perhaps it was the first time she had ever succeeded in doing so, for she was not a good loser, and she *did* covet a copy of one of those books.

Jesanne was led to the big cupboard where Mrs Maynard kept ‘spares,’ and given her choice of titles. She ‘swithered,’ as Lois said, between *The Robins Make Good*, a Guide story, and *Gipsy Jocelyn*, a story of a girl and a caravan holiday, but finally chose the latter. Gillian plumped for *Indian Holiday*, which had been the result of Mrs Maynard’s trip to India before the war broke out. Then tea was announced, and they went to the dining-room for a tea as gorgeous as Anna, the Maynards’ faithful maid, and Jo herself had been able to manage, and after tea, while Polly showed them over the house, its mistress had them to herself, one at a

time, and talked to them with a sweet gravity which was surprising to those who did not know her well. Jo Maynard, on most occasions, seemed a good deal more of a teasing schoolgirl than, as Polly said, 'a proud mamma.' But she had the other side, and, for the past two years, every new girl had got a glimpse of it—some of them more than a glimpse. Miss Annersley always declared that Jo was her sheet-anchor in times of difficulty. She was near enough to her own very riotous schooldays to know how the girls felt. But she had known the deeper things of life as well, and she could be a very gentle mentor when it was needed.

She said little more to Lavender. But one thing she did say which made that young lady think pretty hard. 'When things go badly, Lavender, before you blame everyone else, just sit back and try to see how far *you* are wrong. Ten to one, it's quite half your own fault. If you can see that, so much the better. There'll be a chance of things straightening out. And if ever events are too hard for you, and you like to do it as your aunt is so far away, ask the Head if you may come to me. Unless it's absolutely impossible, I'll see you, and perhaps we can put things right between us. Now here are the others back again, and it's almost time for you to go.'

'Not without a song!' cried Enid, who had overheard this. 'You've got to sing to us, Jo, if we do keep Evan Evans waiting, and are late for supper! *One* song we must have!'

'Oh, bother you!' grumbled Jo. 'Well, only one song, then. It's high time you were off, and more than time that my infants were put to bed.' But she went to the piano, and sat down at it, for all that.

'Sing Ernest Farrar's "Brittany,"' coaxed Kitty 'I do so love it, and you sing it toppingly, Jo.'

'All right. I'll sing that, then; but no more, so it won't be any use your asking.' And Jo fished out the song from a pile on a chair near by, and sang it in a golden voice which seemed to soar upwards with the almost unearthly sweetness of a chorister's, yet with something else in it that no boy could ever have.

They had to run after that, for Evan Evans would be waiting, and though he was good-natured enough, the Head would not be pleased if they were too late. On the way home, Kitty told the rest that 'Brittany' had been composed by a young English composer who had been killed in the last war. He had known their own somewhat eccentric singing-master, Mr Denny, who had declared that if he had lived, he would have done great things. As it was, he had been shot down before his great gift had had time to mature, and England was the poorer by it.

All in all, it had been a memorable time for Lavender, and it left its mark on her. Later on in the term, that happy, jolly visit was to help her through even harder things than she had yet encountered.

CHAPTER XI

SNOW—AND THE CONSEQUENCES

Lavender went back to school and ‘the Evening’—which meant games and dancing after supper till nine o’clock for everyone but the very tinies—with her mind made up to do the best she could from now onwards. She did manage very well, too, for the next three or four days. The Lower Thirds gradually showed themselves more friendly than before; and the Upper Thirds joined them. The rest of the small fry more or less followed the others, so the new girl found that life was quite bearable on the whole.

But on the Tuesday it began to snow; and once it began, it seemed as if it had no idea of ending. It snowed, and it snowed, and it snowed, until those people who had been at school when it was in Tirol, began to declare that the weather must have followed them to England. If it happened to cease for an hour or two, it was only to fall yet more heavily afterwards. Morning after morning, the girls got up to survey a bleak landscape of coldest white, overshadowed by heavy grey clouds which seemed to press down on the mountain tops and drop ever lower and lower, and a mournful wind sang a dirge through the bare boughs and branches of the trees, till, as Kitty said, it was enough to make you think that the end of the world was coming. And still it snowed in dancing white flakes that spun, and twisted, and turned dizzily down to the earth.

At first, it was a joy to the Juniors to watch the onslaught of winter from their cosy rooms. But as day after day passed, and all games were at a standstill, and there was no chance of walks, they became cross and fretful, and, finally, quarrelsome. There could be no question of going out for the smaller folk, for the snow was soft and wet, and they would have been over boot-tops at once. Evan Evans and his coadjutors shovelled paths whenever the snow ceased, but it was really labour in vain; for before very long it returned, and the paths were swallowed up again. No cars could get up or down the avenue, and the horses only managed it with difficulty.

By Friday, they were all sick of the form-rooms, sick of the gym where they took such exercise as they could get, sick of everything, so Elfie said. If only it would freeze it would have been all right. Games would be out of the question, but they could have had a walk. Some people chattered eagerly of the joys of snowballing and building snow men. But as long as it merely snowed, that was no use to anyone.

‘If only it would *stop* and come a good, hard frost, we might get out!’ sighed Barbara Smith as she stood by the window of the Junior common-room after dinner. ‘But as long as this goes on, they won’t let us put a nose out of doors. How deep do you think it is, anyone? I sh’d think it must be *feet* deep by this time!’

‘Only two feet or so—except in the drifts,’ said Bride, peeping over her shoulder. ‘But then, there’s drifts everywhere. Did you hear what came over the radio at six o’clock last night? They said that there were villages in Yorkshire and places where they were completely cut off. They couldn’t get food through or anything.’

‘Wouldn’t it be awful if that happened here?’ suggested Primrose Day, ever a Job’s comforter. ‘Just *s’pose* even the horses couldn’t do it. How ever should we manage?’

‘It’s not likely to go on as long as that,’ said Mollie Carew. ‘It never does in England.’

‘It does in Canada,’ said Lavender, who had once spent three months there during the winter. ‘But people have snow-shoes and sleighs, and they take the wheels off the carts and put runners on them. The snow is so crisp and dry you can go out into it quite easily, and it brushes off like powder.’ She wound up with her most superior air; and Joy Bird, who had got out of bed ‘the wrong side,’ snapped at her, ‘Oh, of course, *we* know nothing about it! We’ve never travelled as you have! You’re the only one to have any idea of what it’s like in Canada. I suppose you can’t tell us what it’s like at the North Pole, too, can you?’

Lavender was innocent on this occasion of trying to impress, but her manner had been unfortunate. She stared at Joy now, and then said, ‘You rude girl!’

‘Oh? Doesn’t my manner suit your Majesty? Sorry, I’m sure!’

‘Here!’ said Bride. ‘What’s wrong with you, Joy? Lavender said nothing at first; and we all know she’s been all over the world—or nearly. *I* don’t see why you should snap her up like that. She’d done nothing.’

‘But then, my dear Bride, you must remember that you are *very* young—a mere babe, in fact,’ drawled Joy. ‘No one expects you to understand a little thing of that kind. You’re too much of a child.’

Bride was sweet-tempered, but she was not going to put up with this. She went scarlet, drew a long breath, and prepared to reply, when Anne Montague saved her the trouble. ‘Joy’s got up the wrong side of the bed,’ she said. ‘That’s all that’s wrong with her. Don’t you two worry about her. *We* know that Lavender has seen leagues and *leagues* more of the earth than *she* ever will. It’s just jealousy—that’s all it is!’

‘Don’t be cheeky, Anne!’ said Peggy Bettany. ‘And you, Joy, what on earth’s gone wrong with you that no one can make a simple remark without you going off the deep end like this?’

‘I’m not going to be cheeked by impudent babes from Lower Third!’ cried Joy. ‘Anne and Bride can just apologise to me!’

‘Shan’t,’ said Bride briefly. ‘Done nothing to ’pologise for.’

‘Nor me!’ Anne ranged herself beside Bride. ‘You’re only a form ahead of us; and you’re the oldest in it, and ought to be in Lower Fourth, only you’re such a dud, you can’t be!’

This happened to be true, but wasn’t any pleasanter hearing for Joy, who lost her temper completely. ‘You horrid little brat, Anne Montague!’ she cried. ‘How dare you speak to me like that?’

‘’Course I dare! Who do you think you are? And if anyone ’pologises, it ought to be you to Lavender.’

Joy nearly choked in her rage at this. She spluttered over her first words, but then they came out in a spate. ‘Anne Montague, you’re the most impudent kid I ever met! And Bride Bettany’s no better! It just shows that neither of you has been decently brought up; you’ve only been *dragged* up, and one can only be sorry for you. But the sooner you learn how to behave decently, the better for you!’

This was too much, even for Peggy the peacemaker. Her blue eyes sparkled angrily as she retorted before either of their Juniors could get a word in, ‘That’s enough from you, Joy! Don’t you dare to say things like that to Bride! You must be mad! You were to blame in the first place, for Lavender only made a simple remark. I quite agree with Anne that if anyone apologises, it ought to be you. You’d no right to say to Lavender what you did. And to insult my Auntie Madge like that is the limit!’

As Lady Russell was known and respectfully adored at a distance by most of the girls, Joy began to feel that she had better have held her tongue about Bride’s upbringing. Everyone

knew that the Bettany girls were her concern, and that insulting them in this way was insulting the best friend the Chalet School had. But Joy was proud, and had no intention of acknowledging that she was in the wrong. Besides, Anne's remark about her age had got under her skin. She was fourteen, nearly fifteen, and certainly should have been in Lower Fourth, if not Upper. But she was not a clever girl, nor very hard-working either, so she had been kept down when most of her contemporaries had gained their remove at the end of the summer term, her form-mistress, Miss Denny, drily remarking that perhaps another year in Upper Third might drive a few facts home to her mind.

To make matters worse, her place in the Christmas term's form-lists had been sixteenth among twenty-three, which meant that a good many of the people who had come up from Lower Third had beaten her. Her report had not been good, and her parents had been very angry with her about it, telling her that if the Easter term's showed no improvement, she should leave the school at the end of the year, and go to a day-school in their own town, when they could oversee her homework every night. Joy hated this idea, for they had made it clear to her that her little sister Norah, who was no more clever than she, but a hard worker, should remain at the school even if she had to come home. So, all things considered, it was hardly wonderful that she flared up anew at Peggy's words.

'You Bettany girls do think you're somebodies! I suppose you imagine that because Lady Russell is your aunt, you can run the school as you like. But *I'm* not going to bow down to you—I can tell you that! And until Bride apologises for her rudeness, I'll have nothing more to do with you; or any of your pals, either. So if any of you want to be friends with me, you needn't try to suck up to the Bettanys and Co.! I'm having nothing to do with them. As for Lavender Leigh, just because she has a mad aunt who fancies herself as an authoress and drags her round the world till she doesn't know enough to be fit for *even* Upper Third—though she's nearly as old as me—she needn't think she can get away with it by putting on airs about her wonderful travels! She's only a silly, ignor——'

Smack! Joy's outburst was brought to a sudden stop by a slap across her face given with all Lavender's force. It was as well that she was a weedy young thing, for the blow would have been a hard one. As it was, the imprint of her fingers was left in a flaming patch across Joy's cheek, and she burst into tears with the shock of it.

'Oh, Lavender!' cried Peggy, while the rest stood aghast, free fights not being usual at the Chalet School. 'You *shouldn't* have done that!'

'I don't care!' panted Lavender, who was being firmly held by Bride and Elfie, who had recovered from their surprise and sprung forward to grab her in case she showed any signs of repeating her treatment of Joy. 'She has no right to say such things of Auntie Sylvia! How dare she? Auntie Sylvia is a dear, and she knows a lot more about things than a stupid girl like Joy Bird!'

At this point Lavender herself relapsed into tears, and howled loudly. The horrified members of the two forms who were present, hastened to shut up both her and Joy. No one wanted either Staff or prefects to come in on such a scene. All those who had kept their heads knew well enough that that would mean the end of free playtime for them for a considerable period if it happened. The girls of the Chalet School were very free from supervision in their off-times, and they were trusted to behave themselves properly. This was an isolated affair, and they were determined not to have their fun spoilt because Joy Bird had got up in a bad temper, and Lavender Leigh was a young wild-cat when she lost hers. So while Bride and

Elfie reduced Lavender to comparative silence by rough-and-ready methods, Peggy and Judy Rose begged Joy to 'shut up for mercy's sake! D'you want to drag someone in on this?'

'I don't care if I do,' sobbed Joy, touching her smarting cheek gingerly. 'I only hope they do, and Lavender Leigh is punished as she deserves. She ought to be shut up in an asylum! She must be mad, flying out at me like that!'

'You asked for it,' said Daphne Russell, an outspoken child of twelve. 'You'd no right to be so rude about Miss Leigh—or Lady Russell, either.' Daphne was no relation of the Russells, but she, in common with the rest, was very fond of the gentle owner of the Chalet School, and she was also a chum of Peggy's, so she resented Joy's remarks on both scores.

'I *wasn't* rude—I was only going by Bride and Lavender. If they want people to think their folks are decent, they ought to behave decently.'

'You *were* rude—very rude,' retorted Daphne. 'And if it comes to that, *you* ought to behave better or we shall think your folk aren't up to much. And anyhow, as Anne said, you're the oldest here, and you jolly well ought to set a better example. That's what the Head would say, anyhow.'

By this time, Lavender's own friends had succeeded in quieting her loud sobs, and now they pulled her away to the form-room, where their story to the rest lost nothing in the telling. By the time the bell went for afternoon school, the entire Lower Third were banded together against Joy Bird, while the Upper Third was split by a nice feud between those who felt that Joy was to blame for the scene, and those who argued that even if she had been rude about Lady Russell and Miss Leigh, Lavender had no right to hit her, and both Bride and Anne had been very cheeky to her.

Things being in this state, it was scarcely to be wondered at that the Staff who dealt with them that afternoon felt the angry atmosphere that reigned, even in Miss Burn's extra gym lesson which the two forms had to take together, in place of the games they had to miss. Still, even so, it was wrong of Joy to give a deliberate pull on the jumping rope she was holding when it was Lavender's turn to jump, so that that young lady, finding it higher than she had expected, caught one foot in it, and sprawled flat. Miss Burn, who had, as some of them had complained on more than one occasion, eyes all round her head, saw it, and scolded Joy sharply, ending up by sending her to the side, and ignoring her completely for the rest of the lesson. She would have sent the girl to the library, but Miss Annersley was fighting a bad headache, so the Games mistress kept the affair to herself, once she had made sure that Lavender was no worse for her tumble.

Needlework came after games in the time-table, and again this lesson was taken by both forms. To the amazement of Frau Mieders, they separated for once, though usually they sat in chummy groups. Lower Third formed a solid block at one end of the Junior common-room where it was taken, and while part of Upper Third surrounded Peggy Bettany and Daphne Russell, the rest sat in a third clump, and not one of the three had anything to do with either of the others. For once, Frau Mieders forbade talking, and sent Joy to bring a book from the library for reading. Then she gave them each ten minutes of reading aloud to the rest, while they went on with their sewing. It was certainly good for their reading, if not for their tempers, for Frau Mieders spoke English fluently and well, and was a stern critic. But it made a dull hour for them. Half-way through, Lavender had to go for a music lesson with Miss Cochrane, and Peggy was summoned for a violin lesson with Mr Denny, Miss Denny's brother, who also took singing in the school, and who was known as 'Plato' to the girls, though to most of them the reason was lost in the mists of antiquity. Only a very few knew that naughty Margia

Stevens, Amy Stevens's famous sister, had named him so because when he had first come to the school, he had quoted what Plato says about basing education on gymnastics and music in season and out of season.

Lavender was still feeling shaken by her weeping fit before school. She was at the very beginning of music, for their roving life had made it almost impossible for her to learn. She didn't like Miss Cochrane—Grizel Cochrane of other chronicles of the Chalet School—for that lady was not a patient person, and even seven years of teaching had not taught her very much in that line. On this afternoon, Lavender did so badly that Miss Cochrane lost her temper, and scolded the girl till she was reduced to a state of sullen stupidity and could do nothing right. When the lesson, which had been a species of purgatory to both mistress and pupil, came to an end, Lavender went off in a thoroughly bad mood, and Miss Cochrane herself, feeling ready 'to fight with a feather,' as her old housekeeper, once Cookie in her father's household, would have said, proceeded to make Joy Bird's lesson as unpleasant as she could.

The weary afternoon came to an end at length, and at tea the school at large was treated to a nice display of feelings. Peggy Bettany removed her seat to one as far removed from Joy Bird as possible, and Daphne Russell, Judy Rose, Jane West, and one or two others of her special cronies went with her. Lower Third made itself into a solid block, excluding even such sympathisers as the McDonald twins, the Ozanne twins, and their especial group. Joy Bird was supported by Sylvie la Touche, Marilyn Wynn, and Hester Layng, who were her particular chums. The rest of Upper Third sat by itself. They were very much split up by this time, for while a good many of them resented the way Bride and Anne had treated Joy, they also objected to what she had done in gym, for they felt that she had let the form down. They therefore refrained from joining her coterie, but they were not going to have Lower Third crowing over them, so they sat aloof.

'What on earth is the matter with the Thirds?' demanded Daisy Venables of Gwensi Howell, her great friend. 'They all look as if they had been having remarkably *uncivil* war. Have you heard anything, Gwen?'

'Nancy told me some weird tale about a row between Lavender Leigh and Joy Bird,' put in Beth Chester, sister of Nancy, and the third member of what was known in the school as The Triumvirate. 'I don't think she was present, but from what she said, young Bride took a hand, and Joy made some sort of insulting remark about Madame' (the School's usual title for Lady Russell) 'and Lavender's priceless aunt. Lavender flew at her and boxed her ears, and Peggy Bettany, of all people, took a hand. They look fairly well split up, don't they?'

'What's that little ass, Joy Bird, been saying about Auntie Madge?' demanded Daisy.

'How on earth should I know? Nancy didn't say. She only said Bride told her that Joy had been downright insulting, and she wasn't going to forget it in a hurry. Oh, well; why should we worry? I suppose babes of that age have to blow off steam sometimes. And Lavender is a little fly-out.'

'I'm not going to have anything said against either Auntie Madge or Jo; so if Joy Bird doesn't look out, she'll find she has me to reckon with,' returned Daisy. 'Anyway, what is she doing down in Upper Third? Nearly fifteen, isn't she? And with infants like Peggy! When we were her age, we were in Upper Fourth, Beth. So should she be. You can excuse it in Lavender. Roaming round the world may have its advantages, but it doesn't teach you much that you need for school work. But Joy's been at school since she was eight, and she ought to

be much higher than she is. I don't like big girls like that among Juniors, anyhow. It makes things hard.'

'Oh, Joy Bird never had any brains,' said Gwensi easily. 'Beth and you always had your share of them; and I'm not exactly a dud. I couldn't be with a brother like Ernest always at me when I was a kid. Besides, she's a lazy little object. Look what she's like in games. She never does a stroke that she needn't. And she's in my Guide Patrol, and the bane of my life. I'm always expecting her to give it up because it's so much work.'

Joy happened to overhear most of this, for Gwensi's voice, though low in tone, was very clear, and the Upper Fifth table was not very far from the one at which she sat. She raged inwardly at this further reflection on her work, but she had enough common sense left to know that she could not make a scene with Upper Fifth girls. So she sat there, fuming at Gwensi's words, and, most unjustly, blaming Lavender, Bride, and Anne Montague for what the Fifth Former had said.

Tea over, she retired with her set to their form-room, and there treated them to her views on the subject. Gwensi's ears should have burned during the next ten minutes. At length Hester, in whom most of the brains of the four were to be found, suggested that it was nearly prep time, and they had better be getting their books out in readiness.

'And do cool off, Joy,' she added. 'You won't do any decent work if you go on boiling up like this.'

This was so true, that it added fuel to the fire of Joy's anger, and that night's prep was wasted on her, with the result that next week she was informed that unless she pulled herself together and worked better, she would have an even worse report to take home at Easter than she had had at Christmas. 'And that was bad enough!' finished Miss Denny, who happened to be the one to say it. 'Your last report was a disgrace to a girl of your age, Joy, and you ought to be ashamed of it.'

This was on the Tuesday, when it was still snowing, and the great drifts made everywhere impassable. But that night the snow ceased, and frost came to take its place. The girls woke up to find a sparkling world under the pale February sunlight, and to be told after Prayers, that there would be no lessons that morning. They had been so closely mewed up for the past ten days or so, that they were all to have a long walk that morning in case the snow came on again. Most of them met the announcement with clapping; but Joy, who was still in a black mood which made it hard for even her faithful followers to be friendly with her, kept her hands down at her sides, though she should have been very thankful for the respite, seeing that she knew nothing about her Latin, very little more of her history, and her essay, which had to be handed in that day, would certainly be returned to her with Miss Denny's most scathing remarks.

However, the rest were glad enough, and once Prayers and breakfast were over, there was a wild dash for the cloakrooms, where they all got into coats, caps, shawls, and big, nailed boots or wellingtons. Then they assembled in Hall, where they were divided up into groups of thirty or so and told which routes they were to take, and which mistresses would go with them. After that, they marched out to the long avenue, where they separated, and then set off, all of them unaware of what was to happen before they came together again.

CHAPTER XII

FURTHER CONSEQUENCES

The two Sixths went off together. When all were present, there were twenty-three of them; but Robin Humphries had not been up since the snow had begun, and Jeanne de Marné was in bed with a bad cold. So there were only twenty-one of them. As none of them was under seventeen, and several were over eighteen, and all the prefects were among them, they were sent off by themselves, and elected to go up the hill, and round to the far side. A path would lead them half-way down, when they would again enter Plas Howell property at the farthest boundary, so they would have a good walk. The Upper Fifth had twenty-eight people, and Miss Slater took them, while Lower Fifth, one of the largest forms, with its full complement of thirty girls, went with Mlle Lachenais. Grizel Cochrane was made responsible for Upper Fourth, and Miss Burnett and Hilary Burn went off with Lower Fourth, which was another form of thirty people, most of whom could be trusted to get into mischief if they were given half a chance. Upper and Lower Third, making up thirty-three girls, went in charge of Miss Stevens and Miss Edwards, and Upper Second, with its twenty-seven little people, were claimed by Mlle Berné and Miss Anderson. Lower Second, which was, to quote Elizabeth Arnett, 'full to bursting,' had Miss Norman, Head of the Kindergarten, and her great friend, Miss Winter, who took charge of the handwork. The Kindergarten, which numbered about forty-five tinies, were the responsibility of Miss Phipps, Gillian Linton, and Miss Carey. The rest of the Staff, with the exceptions of Miss Wilson, and the Head's secretary, Rosalie Dene, went off on their own account. The Head herself was in bed, convalescing from the severe bilious attack with which her Friday's headache had culminated. She was still very weak after all the pain and sickness, but she felt well enough to try to attend to some of her correspondence this morning, so Rosalie went to her, with the promise that she should go out later; and 'Bill,' who had had charge of the school during Miss Annersley's illness, vowed that she was all behind with her marking, and meant to take the opportunity to get some of it done. Later on, she declared that if she had only known what was going to happen, she would have let marking and everything else go to the winds, and gone with the girls herself. *And* she would have made the entire school go together.

However, not being either a prophet or the daughter of a prophet, she waved a gay goodbye to them from the door, and went back to the staff-room feeling that all was well at last. The girls would come home with the various sulks, fidgets, and cobwebs blown off them; the Head was much better and ought to be back in school by the end of the week; *and*—very important, this last—fresh supplies would be able to get out to them. They had managed so far, but Megan, who was head of the domestic staff, had told her only that morning that there was neither meat nor fish in the house, and unless something could be done, there would be only vegetables and milk pudding for dinner. Now, Evan Evans had gone off with two large baskets to see what he could get in the village; and Megan herself had gone to see if the buses were running to Armiford. If not, then she was going to walk in, trying to get a lift on the way, and sure she would get one on the way back since it was Wednesday and market day.

So 'Bill' retired to her table and the piles of marking that awaited her with a light heart, and was soon immersed in the Lower Fourth's attempts to show the development of a

snowdrop, and only left her work long enough to drink the delicious coffee one of the maids brought her at eleven until the walks began to come in shortly after twelve.

Meantime, most of the school set off down the avenue, and when they reached the gates, parted and went their several ways. Upper Fifths were going to the village so that Daisy could slip in at Plas Gwyn for a moment to see how everyone there had fared during the storms. Lower Fifths crossed over the high-road, and went on up the lane opposite the big gates, for their goal was a small cottage where lived a family of children which the school helped in various ways. The Fourths were bound for two villages in the Armiford direction, so set out along the high-road, turning off at the lanes which led thither. The two Second Forms were to remain within the Plas Howell boundaries, but parted at the gates, and went to left and right. As for the united Thirds, they marched down the road in the direction of Howells Village, but only went as far as a lane end. There they set off up the lane, making for the summit of a long, low escarpment along which the mistresses meant to take them some distance before turning back. The forms were no more friendly than they had been of late. Peggy led the way, with Daphne as usual for her partner, and Judy Rose and Jane West just behind. Joy Bird and Hester Layng came next. The rest paired off as they always did, Bride having Lavender with her. It was a great grievance with Bride that her own coterie in Upper Second were not allowed to join their walk, for she wanted to discuss matters with them. But though she had summoned up courage to ask Miss Stevens about it, that lady had vetoed it so firmly, that she had dared to say no more. However, Lavender was there, and Lavender must be looked after. Besides, the two were becoming more friendly with Elfie, Primrose, and Anne Montague, who had quite forgiven the hockey incident, so when the word was given to break rank, they joined together and talked affairs over with a vim and point that would have made their elders think seriously if they had heard them.

‘Has Joy Bird apologised yet?’ asked Primrose, as she collected some of the snow for a ball to fling at Audrey Simpson, who was walking with her great chum, Barbara Smith, talking earnestly.

‘Not a word,’ said Bride. ‘I’m not going to speak to her till she does, either. To talk of Auntie Madge like that! She must have been mad!’

‘Oh, quite loopy,’ agreed Elfie. ‘What are you doing, Primrose? Will Steve and Teddy *let* us snowball, d’you think?’

‘Why not? There’s no one to see what we do?’

‘No; but it’s rather a narrow path. Won’t they be afraid we’ll tumble if we ramp about?’

‘Oh, bother you!’ Primrose tossed her ball away. ‘I s’pose we’d best wait till we’ve got leave. Here, Bride; you run and ask, will you? I’d do it, but Steve was rather sarky about my last lot of prep, and I don’t know if she’s forgotten it yet. You got full marks, so she might say yes to you. Anne, you weren’t bad, either. You go with Bride.’

Nothing loath, the pair raced after the mistresses, who were strolling along chatting about their own private affairs, and put their request. ‘Please, if we’re very careful, may we snowball a little?’ This was Bride.

‘We’ll be awfully careful not to go over the edge,’ added Anne.

Miss Stevens, who was normally sweet-tempered, laughed. ‘I can see you people being careful if we let you start a snow-fight! You must wait till we get to where it widens. You may then, if you like. Run along, now.’ She turned and glanced back. ‘And don’t straggle like this! Prim-rose!’ she lifted her voice in a clear call, ‘Go back and tell those stragglers to hurry up, please! You must keep together.’

Primrose turned back, and whipped in the three or four folk who were behind their own group, and the mistresses waited till all the girls had passed them. Then they fell in behind, and kept there till they came to the small plateau, where Miss Stevens said they might have their snow-fight if they wanted it.

The announcement was met with cheers, and she and Miss Edwards were begged to pick up sides. They agreed easily, and then each retired to her own side of the plateau with her army after brief instructions had been issued to keep well away from the edge, and to be careful that they threw only snow; after that, Miss Edwards uttered a loud cry, and the battle was joined.

Lavender had never done such a thing in her life before. She found it great fun. Even when Peggy Bettany powdered her face well with a straight-flung ball, she only laughed, cleared her eyes, and returned the ball. Lavender's intentions were good, but her aim was not, and the wildly-flung ball missed Peggy and landed full in Joy Bird's mouth. She saw where it came from, and the wrath she had industriously nursed all the week rose high. She hurled the ball she held at Lavender, who saw it coming in time and ducked. It caught Barbara Smith on the shoulder, and Barbara returned it with interest, and, being a straighter shot than Lavender, got her mark neatly. The mistresses, carefully keeping an eye on those girls near the outer edge, saw nothing of this, and Joy 'went for' Barbara, and pushed snow down her neck with a fury that had none of the fun in it that most of the battle had. Barbara gasped and struggled, but Joy was bigger and stronger than she, and Jane West and Nina Williams had to come to the rescue before the younger girl could get away.

Joy's own face was well scrubbed, and Barbara, who was well warmed up with the exercise, made no complaints. Sylvie la Touche was upset into a drift from which she was hauled, shrieking wildly, and Miss Stevens came running to make sure that she was not hurt. At that moment Lavender and Joy were near the edge, and almost alone, for Bride and Primrose were pursuing Audrey and Elfie to revenge themselves for good shots, and the rest were also busy with their own private wars. Lavender had a ball, and she flung it at the figure standing near without seeing who it was. Had she done so, she might have refrained. As it was, for once one of her wild shots came off, and Joy got the ball in her hair, she having, against orders, pulled off her cap. It put the coping-stone to the rage that was seething inside her. Not seeing what she was doing nor where she was going in the blindness of her fury, she bore down on Lavender, who fell beneath her weight, clutched at the slippery snow with a frightened cry, and vanished over the edge, leaving Joy panting and triumphant for the moment.

It was only for the moment. Almost at once, her senses returned to her and she rushed to bend over, and look down at the narrow dip about ten feet below. To her horror, Lavender had disappeared altogether. The snow was sliding down from a drift, and Joy realised that the younger girl had fallen into it and was completely buried.

In her terror, Joy lost her head. She should have stayed where she was and called for help. Instead, she went over the edge, slipping and sliding, but managing to keep control of her feet somehow, until she, too, floundered into the drift, which she found to be very much deeper than she had expected. She was just at the verge of it, and she was up to her waist in it. What was worse, she had lost the place where she had seen the snow slipping. It was still now, and she had no idea whereabouts Lavender was.

Mercifully for them all, Peggy Bettany had turned just in time to see Joy go over, and she fled to Miss Edwards to tell her. 'Teddy,' as the girls all called her, came at once, calling to

Miss Stevens, who had helped Sylvie to her feet, to come immediately. Miss Stevens, sensing from her colleague's voice that something was very wrong, came at top speed, and was in time to hear Peggy say, pointing downwards, 'She went down *that* way, Miss Edwards.'

'Do you mean she fell?' asked Miss Edwards sharply.

'No; she *went*,' replied Peggy simply.

The two mistresses looked over to see Joy up to her waist in snow, frantically digging at the drift with both hands, and calling Lavender's name loudly. But no Lavender was to be seen.

Miss Stevens knelt down. 'Joy! What are you doing?' she called.

Joy looked up. 'Lavender fell over, Miss Stevens. She's somewhere in this drift, but I can't find her.' Even in the midst of her terror, she felt that she must try to keep anyone from knowing how much she was to blame for what had happened. There would be such terrible trouble for her if it was ever found out. And then her father might make good his threat and take her away from the Chalet School. The bare idea set Joy shivering. Only let her find Lavender safely and persuade her—somehow—to hold her tongue about what had made her fall, and she would let the girl alone for the future. She would even set to work and try to do better in school.

Miss Stevens consulted a moment with Miss Edwards. Then she bent down again. 'Stay where you are, Joy. I'm coming down, and we'll soon find her. Go on digging, though,' she added, more with the idea of giving Joy something to occupy her mind and keep her warm than because she thought there was any chance of her reaching Lavender. The drift was evidently very deep and Lavender's fall might have deepened the snow at that point.

Meantime, the girls, realising that something was badly wrong, had stopped their game, and were crowding to the edge. Miss Stevens waved them back. 'Go back, girls! Mollie Carew and Peggy Bettany, get everyone into rank, and keep them marching up and down at the far side until I tell you to stop. Miss Edwards, I am going down. Will you wait here? If you see anyone coming, stop them, and get them to come and help. It's a pretty big drift, and that child has vanished. She must be right under, and must be got out as soon as possible.' Then, her orders given, Miss Stevens slipped over and scrambled down the best way she could till she was standing beside Joy, who had not ceased to dig as hard as she could, but with no results. For a moment the Junior geography mistress surveyed the piled-up snow. Then she saw a break in one direction, and guessed that this was where it had fallen in on top of Lavender. Sending Joy to one side, she began to dig with might and main, and was presently rewarded by seeing a corner of a brown coat appear. The big difficulty was that the snow kept sliding down again, so she was forced to call Miss Edwards to come down to help her, and trust to Mollie and Peggy to keeping the others safe.

It was an anxious ten minutes for everyone; but at length Lavender was lifted clear, and carried to the lower edge of the drift, where she lay white, unconscious, and, so far as the terrified Joy could tell, *dead*. Miss Stevens bent over her, slipping her hand inside the wraps on the child and feeling for her heart.

'Well?' jerked Miss Edwards, after it seemed to her hours had passed.

Miss Stevens nodded. 'All right, thank God! But she must be got out of this and taken home as soon as possible.' She stopped, and looked round. 'Let me see. Isn't there a path down to the high-road a little further on? Then Mollie and Peggy must bring the girls along to it, and we must carry Lavender through the drifts. I believe there's a hedge there, but we can get over it somehow. There's sure to be traffic of some sort on the road now, and we must hold

up a car or something, and get them to take her back to school as quickly as possible. Give Peggy a shout, and then I'll tell her what to do. Joy must come with us. I don't believe any of us can get up again.' And she glanced at the slippery steep they had come down.

Miss Edwards raised her voice in a yell that must have reached the road, and brought Peggy to the edge in double-quick time.

'Mind you don't slip and come down, too,' said Miss Stevens, as she saw the fair face with its halo of flaxen curls peering over. 'We've got Lavender safely, but she's unconscious at the moment—shock, I expect. Now listen, Peggy. We can't get up again, so you must march the girls on till you come to that lane about a quarter of a mile further on. Turn down the lane and be ready to help us over the hedge with Lavender. We must carry her along to it. Then we'll get to the road, and find someone to give us a lift. Do you quite understand? You and Mollie Carew must take charge. Go as quietly as you can, and see that no one does anything silly. We have trouble enough here as it is.'

'We'll be careful,' promised Peggy. Then her face clouded. 'Shall you be able to get through? This place drifts up horribly. Some sheep were lost here last winter, and they had an awful business getting them out again.'

'We'll manage somehow,' said Miss Stevens. 'Don't worry about that. You girls get off, and be waiting for us. If I remember rightly, that hedge is a nasty one, and it will be a job to get over it. Off you go!'

Peggy nodded and disappeared, and they could hear her clear voice giving orders. Then they stooped and lifted Lavender between them. It was going to be a bad struggle to get her to the hedge, but Miss Stevens felt that if they could only do that the worst of their difficulties was over. They set out, skirting round the foot of the big drifts that everywhere filled the rift, as well as they could. But it was not always possible, and more than once both mistresses were up to their waists in snow. Joy followed them, weeping bitterly, but they had no time to spare for her. Beyond bidding her keep closely to their track, Miss Stevens left her to herself, and bent all her energies to getting the other child to the end of the way. It was a mercy that Lavender was so thin. If it had been anyone else—say Joy herself—they could hardly have managed it.

At long last they reached the place where the hedge was. It was smothered in snow, and a great drift lay against it. The two mistresses looked at each other in dismay when they saw it. The frost was not yet so hard that the snow would bear them; and then there was Lavender to consider. They could hear the voices of the girls on the other side, but they were only little girls, whose ages ranged between Bride Bettany's eleven and the thirteen of Elfie Woodward. Miss Edwards must get over somehow, and then Miss Stevens would pass Lavender over to her. But the question was, how was Miss Edwards to get there in the first place?

Peggy heard them at that moment, and shouted across, 'Is that you, Miss Stevens? Bride says if there's a drift, Lavender told them what to do. In Canada, they bang the snow with snowshoes till they get it packed hard, and then you can stand on it.'

'All very well if we had snowshoes, but we haven't,' said Miss Stevens.

'Perhaps ordinary shoes would do as well,' suggested Miss Edwards, beginning to unlace the heavy boots she wore. 'We can try, at any rate.'

But Peggy spoke again. 'We've found a chunk of a tea-chest. I'll throw it over. That might do, don't you think?'

Before either of the mistresses could say anything, a large, flat object came skimming over the hedge, nearly braining Miss Edwards, and fell just beside them. It was half the side of a

tea-chest, and Miss Stevens seized it, and began to bang on the snow as Peggy had advised. It was not very easy work, but between them they got the snow packed at last, and then Miss Edwards climbed up, fought her way through a very brambly hedge, and finally reached the other side, where she fell headlong into a minor drift from which she was yanked with any amount of goodwill by a half a dozen hands. She felt there was no time to be lost, so she stood knee-deep in the snow, and called to Miss Stevens that she was ready.

‘I’m sending Joy over first,’ called Miss Stevens. ‘She can help you to take Lavender from me. She’s beginning to rouse up, by the way. Look out, now; here’s Joy coming. I’m lifting her.’

There were sundry grunts and gasps from the mistress as she lifted Joy’s six stone three of bone and muscle. Then Joy herself suddenly appeared over the top. There was a sudden heave, and she floundered over them in a spread-eagle fashion which made it impossible for anyone to catch her. But at least she was over. Miss Edwards got her to her feet, and bade her in a brisk tone to stop crying, and stand by to help with Lavender. Mollie Carew, Peggy Bettany, and several others also offered to help; but none of them had Joy’s length of arm and leg, and they were too slight for the mistress to think of it. She told them to stand clear, and Peggy and Daphne to go on as fast as they could to the road and try to stop a car or cart and bring someone to help carry Lavender down to the highway. Mollie was to keep the rest going slowly.

‘We don’t want a crop of bad colds to top off with,’ she said grimly.

Getting Lavender over was no easy job. She was rousing fully now, and was not limp and still any longer. In one way, it was a good thing, for both the mistresses had been getting very anxious about her long faint. But, on the other hand, it meant that she might struggle, and that would make it harder than ever for her supporters. However, there was nothing to be done but to chance it. Miss Stevens, with a final effort, raised her in her arms, and got her on to the top of the hedge, and Miss Edwards and Joy lifted her down, and laid her on the road. Then Miss Stevens, after a frantic struggle, got over herself, and they were on a road at last.

What might have happened next, no one could have said. Both mistresses were done with the long fight to get Lavender to the hedge, and the last effort had finished Miss Stevens, who was looking as white as Lavender herself. Miss Edwards was not in much better case; and neither would hear of Elfie’s idea that some of them should take off their coats and find stakes somewhere, and so make a stretcher.

‘Thank you! I suppose you want to add pneumonia cases to the list of today’s mishaps!’ said Miss Stevens in her most biting tones.

Luckily, Peggy and Daphne, who had torn recklessly down the lane to the high-road, had met Dr Prosser, the doctor at Howells Village, in his car. He had stopped at once when he saw their agitated waving, and on hearing their story, had come with them. He was a big, strong man, and he made nothing of Lavender’s weight. He swung her up in his arms after he had satisfied himself that there was no bad harm done by her fall, and strode off to his car with her. He took Joy as well, and Miss Stevens, who was the worse off of the two mistresses, for she had done the most work.

‘I’ll try to send some sort of shandrydan for the rest of you,’ he promised Miss Edwards. ‘In the meantime, keep them going, and they won’t catch any colds. As for this youngster, she won’t hurt after a day or two in bed, unless she gets the sniffles. She’s well round now, and a hot bath, bed, and a jorum of boiling milk ought to settle her nicely.’

With that, he was off; but evidently he was unable to keep his promise to send 'some sort of shandydan' to pick up the rest. They had to walk every step of the way, and by the time they reached Plas Howell most of them were at their last gasp. Matron was waiting for them, with cups of hot cocoa, though it was past dinner time, and their dinner was waiting for them. When they had changed, drained their cups, and had their meal, bed for the afternoon was the order for them. Lavender was in San., having wakened up thoroughly on the way home, and had had a bath and a bowl of soup, after which she had gone to sleep, and was slumbering peacefully by the time the last straggler trailed up the avenue, hanging on to poor Miss Edwards, who was included in the bed order, as well as Miss Stevens. Joy had also been sent there. Between fear of consequences, remorse for what she had done, and the very trying tramp through the snowdrifts in the rift, she was in almost worse case than the centre of all the excitement, and was thankful for a reprieve from the schoolroom.

'All the same,' said Miss Wilson as she sat with Miss Stevens after tea, and heard the sad story so far as that lady knew it, 'the next walk the school takes will be with every member of the Staff in charge, including myself. We've had a nice chapter of accidents! Jesanne Gellibrand turned her foot on a hidden stone, and had to be carried all the way home from the far boundary with a wrenched ankle; Dilys Vaughn stepped into a hidden pool, and had to come home with soaking wet feet, and you know what Dilys is like with colds; and now you've topped the lot with this. I haven't heard Lavender's own story yet; but I'm going to hear it, and find out what she was doing to fall like that. No, my dear! I don't blame you and Dorothy. I should have given permission for the snow-fight if I had been there. It should have been safe enough, and I know you watched them carefully. So don't start being silly and blaming yourself. You turn over and have a good sleep, and you'll see things differently in the morning. I'm going to switch the light off, so that you can't read, and you pipe down for the rest of the night. Good night, and pleasant dreams!'

CHAPTER XIII

STANDING ON HER OWN FEET

‘Please, Matron, may I go and see Lavender today?’

Matron looked up from the sheet she was turning sides to middle. ‘Oh, you, Joy! Yes; I see no reason why you shouldn’t. Lavender is much better now, and Bride and some of the others have been in to see her. You can go for half an hour after tea if you like. Don’t talk too much, and don’t excite her. And come away when your half-hour is up.’

Joy thanked Matron, and departed. It was a week since the snow-fight, and Lavender had been in San. ever since. She had suffered from shock as the result of the accident, and Dr Marilliar, who had come over on getting ‘Bill’s’ agitated ’phone-call, had recommended quietness and complete rest for her for the next few days. At the same time, he said that school had already done wonders for her, and he did not think her fright had harmed her very much. For the last two days, her friends had been allowed to pay her short visits, but it was only now that Joy had screwed up her courage enough to enable her to make the request. So far, no one had said anything to make her think that her share in the matter was known. Indeed, she had been praised for her pluck in going at once to the help of the other child. And if ever a girl felt mean, Joy Bird did when Miss Stevens told ‘Bill’ in front of her that it was she who had marked where Lavender had fallen, and so saved them a good deal of time!

‘At the same time,’ thought Joy, ‘Lavender won’t keep a thing like this to herself. She’s safe to tell someone as soon as she gets well. I *must* know where I stand. Perhaps I can get her to keep some of it dark. I’d give her anything I have, or do anything she wants, if she would!’

Punctually at half-past five she went up to San., where she tapped on the door with her knees knocking together. If Lavender refused to keep silence, then it was bad trouble for Joy. But anything would be better than this horrid wondering from day to day if the sword would fall before bedtime.

Lavender was alone. She was sitting in a big armchair by the fire, for the four rooms that made up ‘San.’ were in a wing of the house where there was no central heating. This meant fires, and Nurse grumbled about it; but people who had to spend a few days there were quite pleased. As Peggy Bettany had once said after a fortnight of it with ’flu, the fire was such company. Lavender had a table with a half-done jigsaw puzzle on it beside her, and an open book was in her lap. But at the time, she was neither reading nor getting on with the jigsaw. When Joy knocked, she had been sitting gazing dreamily into the fire, trying to make up her mind to a big problem. And the amazing thing is that the problem concerned someone else far more than it did her; for what she was trying to decide was whether she should let someone know that her fall had been caused by Joy Bird; or whether she should keep that bit of it to herself. At first, she had been too drowsy to think much. Then, as she got better, she saw so few people, apart from Nurse and the doctor, that she said nothing. Nurse was Nurse, and nothing else. And the doctor would not understand. So she kept everything to herself, and brooded on it when she was alone.

Nurse had spent the afternoon with her, playing quiet games with her, and then helping her with the jigsaw. But after tea, when any visitors who did come might put in an appearance, the Head of the San. had gone to her own room first, and then on to the staff-room for a little rest.

No one had come at first, and Lavender was thinking hard of what Jo Maynard had said to her about standing on her own feet, and wondering if this was a time when she should do it.

As she glanced up and saw Joy standing just inside the door which she had closed behind her, she realised that she must make up her mind quickly one way or the other, for she knew that the other girl would never have come to see her except to find out what she was going to do. She shut her eyes—rather like ‘Alice in Wonderland’ on another occasion—and thought hard. Then she opened them, and looked again at Joy, her mind settled.

‘Hello,’ she said gravely. ‘I didn’t expect you to come to see me.’

Joy winced. ‘I don’t suppose you did,’ she said.

‘Well, as you have come, you’d better come and sit down.’ Lavender waved to a chair at the other side of the fireplace, but Joy did not move.

‘What are you going to do about it?’ she demanded, coming to the point.

‘About what?’ asked Lavender, rather startled.

‘How much do you know—do you remember how you fell or anything?’

‘Of course I do. You pushed me.’ Lavender was as blunt as Joy now that she knew where she was. ‘What about it?’

‘That’s what I want to know. Have you told anyone?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Are you going to?’

‘No!’

‘You’re—not—going—to—tell?’ Joy came nearer. ‘Do you *mean* it?’

‘Yes; I do.’

‘But—wh-why?’ stammered Joy.

‘’Cos I’m not,’ was the unsatisfying answer she received.

Joy dropped into the chair Lavender had pointed out to her when she first came in. She literally could not believe her ears. If anyone had asked her what she expected, she would have said at once, ‘Lavender to tell as soon as she feels fit enough, of course!’ Therefore, Lavender’s curt replies came as a complete shock to her. She knew that she herself would have given the thing away if the positions had been reversed. Lavender had so far shown herself much more inclined to hold grudges than any other girl in the school. That she was not going to take advantage of a thing like this was more than Joy could believe.

‘I don’t believe you,’ she said.

‘I can’t help that. I’m saying nothing. So unless you choose to tell anyone about it, no one will ever know. I don’t think anyone else saw what happened. I’m sure neither Steve nor Teddy did. And if any of our crowd had seen it, you’d have known all about it by now. They’ve said nothing to you, have they? No; I thought not,’ as Joy shook her head.

There was silence after that for a short time. Joy really did not know what to say. To begin with, she had never liked Lavender. That dislike had grown to positive hatred, which had helped to bring about the accident. Now this girl, whom she had certainly caused a good deal of unpleasantness if nothing else, was going to leave things as they were, and say nothing! The more she thought of it, the less Joy liked it. Of course, it meant that her people would hear nothing about it, and if she worked hard, as she meant to do, she would stay on at the school—and at the moment, Joy felt that it was the one thing on earth she wanted more than anything else. On the other hand, it meant that she owed a good deal to Lavender, and she did not see how she was to repay it. Again, if they quarrelled again, it was a weapon that Lavender could use against her—or so Joy fancied.

‘I can’t see why you are doing it,’ she said at last.

Lavender smiled, a small, secret smile. ‘Can’t you? Well, that’s all I mean to tell you about it, and it’ll have to do for you. It will be no good asking me, for I shan’t say another word one way or the other.’

Joy got to her feet, and came and stood over Lavender. ‘Look here, Lavender Leigh, if you think you’ll be able to do what you like with me just because you’ve got some sort of a hold on me, you’re wrong! So if that’s what you’re thinking, you’d better send for Bill and tell her now.’

Lavender stared. ‘You must be quite mad! As if I’d do a thing like that! If I’d been going to tell, I’d have told as soon as I felt able. I told you I wasn’t going to say anything about it to anyone, and I meant *any* one. That means you, as well as the rest. As for why I’m doing it, that’s my business, and has nothing to do with you. So if all you came for was to find out what I’m going to do, you’ve found out, and you might as well go. Anyhow, Nurse will be coming soon. It’s nearly six, and the doctor says I’ve to go to bed at six for the rest of the week. Goodbye!’

Thus dismissed, Joy had no choice but to go, and she went, feeling as if her head were going round and round. What *did* it mean? What was at the back of Lavender’s mind? That there was something, she felt very sure.

As for Lavender, that young lady took up her book and tried to read. But even the exciting adventures of Mrs Maynard’s heroine, Jocelyn Wyatt, could not hold her attention at present, and when Nurse came to put her patient to bed, she found her sitting as Joy had seen her, her book in her lap, her chin in her hand, staring into the fire.

‘Don’t you like *Jocelyn*?’ asked Nurse.

‘Yes, thank you,’ said Lavender, ‘but I was thinking about something else—that’s all. I can read for a bit after I’m in bed, can’t I, Nurse?’

‘You can read till your supper comes,’ replied Nurse, as she took the book and laid it on the table. ‘Stand up, and let me help you to undress.’

Lavender stood up, and Nurse helped her to bed, bringing her book when she was safely there with the remark, ‘You’d better make the most of your time. Dr Maynard was in this afternoon, and he says you can go back to school for an hour or so on Monday, and we’re to extend the time by degrees. Once you’re into the full swing of it again, you won’t get much time for stories, you know. Here’s your book; and here’s some orange-water if you feel thirsty. Have you everything you want? Then I’ll go and see to Jesanne’s ankle before she goes into prep.’ And with this, Nurse left the room, closing the door behind her and Lavender was left to pursue the adventures of ‘Gipsy Jocelyn’ which had been Joey Maynard’s fourth book.

Supper over, the book was taken away, and Lavender had to lie down and Nurse switched off the light, and left her to go to sleep. The room was not dark, for the fire had just been made up, and little flames flickered and danced, sending the shadows flying round the walls and over the ceiling. Lavender snuggled down under the warm blankets and watched them thoughtfully. She was not sleepy, and she wanted to try to understand why she had told Joy Bird that she was going to say nothing to anyone about what had caused her fall. It wasn’t that she felt any kinder to Joy. She knew that. And Joy’s idea that she was going to keep it as a hold had so infuriated Lavender, that the wonder was that she hadn’t flown out at her and sent for someone to hear the tale then and there. Then what *had* held her from doing it? She was very sure that something had.

Lying there, watching the moving shadows on the walls, the child who up till this had thought only of what would please her most, pondered it over gravely. She didn't like Joy at all. She didn't really care if that young person got into trouble over the affair or not. She knew very well that her own clan would hardly have blamed her if she *had* told—or, at any rate, hinted at what had occurred. So far, the Staff had said very little to her about it, and she had a feeling that she would never hear much in any case. But she knew that they must have thought her very tiresome, to say the least of it, to fall like that, and spoil everyone's fun. Lavender was proud, and she did *not* like to think that they were blaming her, even if they said nothing to her. And yet, even when Joy had most angered her that afternoon, she had held fast to her decision to say nothing.

After long thinking, she got it settled at last. Of course! It was what Mrs Maynard had said to her that afternoon a fortnight or so before! What exactly had it been? Lavender thought hard.

'There are three things to remember if you want to be happy at school.'

Yes; that was it! The first had been to make allowances for other people, and try to see their point of view as well as one's own. The second—now she was coming to it!—was to stand on her own feet. *That* was why she had felt she must say nothing. She must stand on her own feet. As for trying to see someone else's point of view, well, she supposed Joy had a point of view. She hadn't liked being cheeked by Lower Third people. And even if Lavender herself had not said the worst things, she had said enough. And then, there was that business of the hockey field.

It was at this point that Lavender actually squirmed in bed. Oh, if only she hadn't hit Anne like that and then jeered at her! It was true that Anne, who was a sweet-tempered child, had forgiven it all, and was quite friendly with her now. But Lavender felt that as long as she stayed at school, so long would everyone remember it against her. Of that she felt sure.

'I've a good mind to ask Auntie Sylvia to take me away and send me to another school,' she said aloud. 'I'd hate it, 'cos I do like this—yes; I do! When I get back into school again, I'm going to work like a nigger, and see if I can't get my remove into Upper Third at the end of the term. Bride got hers from Upper Second in one term. If she can do it, so can I. I'd hate to leave her, though. But she'd be coming up at the end of the year. She's awfully clever. And I'm fourteen next week. I ought not to be with little girls of eleven and twelve.'

By this time, the warmth and quiet were beginning to do their work. The shadows were blurring, and the sounds of the fire were growing fainter. Lavender never knew when she fell asleep. But it is certain that her last thought was that she must work and get her remove. The next thing she knew, Nurse was saying, 'Now then, sleepy-head! Are you going to sleep all day? Sit up and take your tray, do! I want to go and get Jesanne into her chair.'

Lavender sat up and took her tray, and Nurse went off to get Jesanne Gellibrand into the invalid chair in which they were able to wheel her about, so that she had had only four days of San., thereafter joining the others at lessons. There was a lift in this part of Plas Howell, and it was an easy matter for someone to wheel the chair to the lift, and then they could take her down to the ground floor, and she could go anywhere. As she was an ambitious girl, who had sorely missed school during the life of her old cousin, and was only too glad to be back again, she had been thrilled to hear that she need not stay in San., and after the first week, had even persuaded Nurse and the doctor to let her go back to her dormitory to sleep. She had her breakfast in bed, and then someone came and helped her to dress. When she was ready, Nurse went and, with the help of Hilary Burn, lifted her from the bed to the chair, which had an

extended seat, so that she could keep her foot up. She went to all her lessons except gym, games, and science, the last because Miss Wilson flatly refused to have anyone in the laboratories who could not move about on her own feet. Jesanne mourned loudly about this, since her best-loved subject was science; but, as she said, half a loaf was better than no bread. She went to the dining-room with the others, and to prep, but had to retire after supper. Still, the ankle was healing nicely, and though she had been told there would be no more games for her this term, she hoped for cricket and tennis next if she were careful now. She had told Lavender about this, during one of the many visits she had paid her fellow-sufferer, and Lavender had sympathised with her over the lost hockey.

She was wheeled in for her usual five minutes this morning before she went down, and was startled when the younger girl said, 'Oh, Jesanne, I wish you'd ask Bride to bring some of my books up when she comes to see me after tea. I'm nearly well now, and I'd like to get on with the work a bit.'

'Will they let you?' asked Jesanne cautiously.

'Oh, I expect so. Why shouldn't they?'

'Well, you'd better ask Nurse first. If she says it's all right, tell me, and I'll give Bride your message. But I can't go doing things like that off my own bat. It might be all wrong for you at present.'

'I don't see it,' argued Lavender, 'They've let me read as much as I like this last day or two. What difference does it make if I read history, for instance, instead of a story-book?'

'I should think history might be all right. But I don't know so much about arithmetic and Latin and so on. You ask Nurse first.'

'Oh, all right. But I'm sure she'll say yes at once.'

'Well, I'll get Lois to trot up after dinner, and, if she does, then I'll give Bride your message; but not unless.'

'All right; and thank you,' said Lavender.

Jesanne nodded, and Lois came just then to wheel her away, and the small girl was left to herself and 'Jocelyn.' Mindful of the fact that she had asked for her lesson books, Lavender buried herself in the latter's adventures, and read till she had finished. Then she laid it down with a sigh, which made Nurse, who had come in and was making the bed after getting her up, look at her and ask what was the matter.

'Only that I do envy Mrs Maynard. It must be such fun to write books.'

'It must,' agreed Nurse, who was a most matter-of-fact individual, and was wont to lament that she was often hard put to it to cover four sides of notepaper to her nearest and dearest. 'But you told me that essay-writing was your favourite lesson, so I should think you might have the fun yourself if you tried. Why don't you? You must be tired of reading and jigsaws all day.'

'I never have. And anyway, I've no paper or pencil.'

'That's easily remedied. I'll ask someone in the staff-room for some when I go for my elevenses. You can have that folding-desk set up, and you would enjoy it, I think.'

Then Lavender remembered. 'Please, Nurse, may Bride bring some of my lesson-books when she comes this evening? I'd like to do some for a change.'

Nurse considered. 'There's no reason why you shouldn't do a little history or geography. But not arithmetic or anything that you've got to worry about too much yet, I think. You must go slow at first.'

‘But my rep? I could have that, couldn’t I? The others will be getting verses and verses ahead of me, and I’d like to keep up as far as I can.’

‘Very well. You may have your atlas and geography book, and your history and repetition if you like. But nothing else at present. Now I’m going to get your milk and biscuits. You can take another of those books if you’ve finished *Jocelyn*. There’s *Nancy Meets a Nazi*. You haven’t had that yet, have you? I think you’ll like it. Some of Mrs Maynard’s own adventures when she and a few of the others escaped from the Gestapo in Tirol are described in it. Here it is. Now I must go. Don’t move about too much. You’ve got to go slowly for at least another week.’

Lois turned up after dinner, and Lavender, who was revelling in the adventures of ‘Nancy,’ told her what Nurse had said about the lessons.

Tall Lois smiled down very kindly on the child in the big chair. ‘All right. I’ll tell Bride, and I expect she’ll cart them along after tea. What are you reading, kiddo? Oh—that! It’s good fun, isn’t it? Jesanne and I read it when it came out. We have all Mrs Maynard’s books between us. Is there anything else I can get for you before I go?’

‘Nurse said she’d bring me a pencil and some paper, but I expect she forgot, ’cos she hasn’t brought it. Would you mind, please, Lois?’

‘Not in the least. Where’s your writing-pad?’

‘Oh, I don’t want that. It’s exercise paper I want, please.’

‘Your block, then. In your locker, is it? I’ll fetch it.’ And Lois went off, to return with the block of lined paper they all used for odd notes.

Lavender was not very sure what would happen if she used it for a story, but she decided to risk it, and when Lois had gone to gym, and Nurse, who was going to Armiford for the afternoon, and had popped in just to see that she was all right, had also gone, the girl pulled up the desk, and set to work on her first story.

She had made up her mind to place it in the Seychelles, of which she had gorgeous memories. She named her heroine ‘Susan,’ gave her a bungalow on Mahé, not far from the Trois Frères, a mountain of great beauty, and then set to work to cover her paper with ‘Susan’s’ adventures, which equalled those of Jo Maynard’s ‘Nancy’ in every way. She worked till Matron brought her tea, and when the tray had been taken away, went on again until the chiming of the clock reminded her that Bride was due any time now. Quickly, she hid the sheets she had covered with her sprawling, irregular writing. She felt shy over this first child of her fancy, and was minded to show it to no one at present. Later on, perhaps, she might let Mrs Maynard see it—it would depend if the lady showed any interest.

However, Bride was full of form news. She dumped down the books she had brought, and burst forth at once. ‘Oh, Lavender! What d’you think? We’ve got another new girl in our form—she’s just coming! They were bombed out, and as she was going to come next term, anyhow, her people wrote and asked the Head if she might come at once, and she said yes. She’s to be here tomorrow, and there must be something *awfully* funny about her!’

‘Why do you think that?’ asked Lavender, producing a box of chocolates her aunt had sent her. ‘Have some chocs, Bride—yes, do! I saved them till you came, so you must! Why do you think there’s something funny about the new girl? Do you know her name, or anything about her?’

Bride shook her head till her brown hair flew out on all sides. ‘Never heard it. We asked Steve, and she only laughed and said, “Wait and see!” I do think that’s such a mean thing to say,’ she added in injured tones.

‘Oh, so do I!’ agreed Lavender, who had never heard it until she came to school. ‘Tomorrow, did you say? What time? Oh, I wonder if they’d let me come down just *once* to see her. If they won’t, you’ll all get to know her before I do, and it’ll be awfully unfair.’

‘Ask the doctor when he comes,’ suggested Bride. ‘Oh, no, Lav! I won’t eat another one of your chocs. I’ve had three already, and they were sent to you; not me. I’m not going to be a greedy pig.’

‘You must! If you don’t want to eat them now, put them in your pocket and have them after prep. And take these for Anne and the rest.’ And Lavender, who, whatever her faults, was at least generous enough over giving, crammed Bride’s pockets full of chocolates.

‘I’ll have to put them in my locker till after prep, then,’ said Bride. ‘You know what a row Barbara Smith got into for having one little bar of butterscotch in prep the night before your accident.’

Lavender remembered. ‘All right. But you are to take them.’

‘Take what?’ asked a new voice at the door, and the pair turned round, Lavender exclaiming, ‘Dr Maynard! Oh, what fun! But Nurse isn’t here.’

‘Uncle Jack, how nice to see you!’ cried Bride. ‘Oh, and I wanted to ask if some of us could come and see Auntie Jo on Saturday, please?’

The doctor grinned as he replied, ‘No, my child; you may not. Auntie Jo is seeing no one at all for the next few days. Not even Robin.’

‘Why ever not?’ asked Bride disappointedly. ‘She’s being awfully—well, not invitingish this term. Gen’rally she has us lots of Saturdays, but she hasn’t had us at all. What’s wrong? Is it just you want to keep her all to yourself like Auntie Madge said about the Christmas hols? Or isn’t she well, or something?’

‘She’s well enough,’ he replied. ‘But your aunt, my good child, has suffered a sea-change—almost literally.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ pouted Bride. ‘What’s a sea-change? And how has she got it?’

‘Never you mind. You’ll know all about it in due course. I merely tell you now that if you saw her, you wouldn’t know her. She’s seeing no one, as I said before, until she recovers her normal appearance.’

‘I b’lieve you’re pulling my leg,’ declared Bride.

‘Word of honour, I’m not,’ he replied. But that was all he would tell them or any others of the girls. But after having refused to allow Lavender to go into school before the next Monday, and told Bride that she could bring the new girl up to San. to see Lavender, he strolled off to the staff-room, where most of the Staff were congregated, waiting for the prep bell to ring. They greeted him warmly, and told him to sit down and entertain them.

‘I’ve got to go off to prep in five minutes’ time,’ said Mary Burnett wistfully. ‘Tell me something to cheer me up, Dr Jack.’

‘Well,’ he said with a chuckle, ‘I don’t know if it will cheer you up or not, but you may be interested to hear that Jo has turned green.’

‘Jo has turned *green*! What on earth are you talking about?’ demanded Mary. ‘She’s turned *green*! *How* green?’

‘It’s a sad tale,’ he began with another chuckle.

‘It *would* be!’ declared ‘Bill’ with conviction. ‘What has Jo been doing this time? It’s months since she did anything very mad, so quite time that something happened. She’ll never outgrow that trait in her character, you know. When Jo’s an old lady of ninety-odd, she’ll be

doing things to make the hair of her great-grandchildren curl. Come on, Jack! Out with it! What is the latest?’

‘You may remember a frock she had in the summer—“lime-green,” she said the colour was. I don’t know, being a mere male. But I do know it was a very fetching affair, and suited her a treat.’

‘Oh, do get on!’ cried Mary. ‘I’ve got to go in a minute!’

‘Well, as you may also remember, the hot sun faded it in streaks. It certainly looked very patchy when she brought it out two days ago to see if she could alter it and make it into a semi-evening frock, as she’s beginning to run short, and the girls are growing so fast, their coupons don’t begin to supply all their needs, so she has to use hers for them.’

‘I suppose,’ said Miss Annersley, who happened to be present, ‘that Jo tried to dye the frock. But I must admit I don’t see how dyeing a frock could possibly turn her green—except her hands, of course,’ she added.

‘Ah, but then Jo can do such strange things,’ he told her. Then, seeing that Mary was really losing patience, he stopped talking nonsense, and gave them the true history of his wife’s latest mishap.

Having decided that the frock would dye, and she could then alter it—with the aid of her friend Simone de Bersac, once Simone Lecoutier—Jo had gone to Anna to ask her for some of the vegetable dyes which that worthy Tirolean made from various barks, leaves, and roots.

Anna had given her mistress a packet of powder, warning her to be careful to wear her rubber gloves when she used it, and to wear nothing that mattered while she was busy, as it was a ‘fast’ dye. It had to be mixed at least twelve hours before it was wanted, so Jo went to work and mixed it, refusing all her maid’s suggestions that it would be far better if *she* did the dyeing, and Mrs Maynard sat in the salon and wrote her book, or went on with her knitting.

Jo insisted on doing it herself, and having mixed her bowlful of greenish liquid, went to set it on a shelf in the pantry till the next morning—this was at nine o’clock in the evening, by the way. Naturally, the black-out was drawn, and when the young mistress tried to switch on the light, she found that the bulb was ‘off.’ Nothing daunted, she decided that she knew her way well enough about her own pantry to do without a light. She went boldly in, carrying her basin, and reached up to set it on a shelf a little above her head. What she did *not* know was that Anna had seen mouse-tracks in the pantry only that morning, and had promptly set the traps as soon as it was dark. Jo plumped her bowlful of dye firmly down on a trap, which went off with a ‘pop!’ that made her jump, and turned the bowl completely over. It was a small bowl, for Anna’s dyes were highly concentrated, and it came down on Jo’s head, fitting neatly over her hair, just like a cap.

According to the doctor, Anna had nearly collapsed from heart-failure when a parti-coloured creature dashed out of the pantry into the kitchen with a white pot cap firmly over her hair, and green flowing streakily down her face, and over her soft yellow frock—‘Trust Jo to do a job of that sort in an evening frock!’ observed Hilary Burn *sotto voce*—gibbering wildly—or so Jack Maynard vowed.

The net result of the whole affair was that Jo’s frock was spoilt, and the dye was wasted. Finally, Anna had only spoken the truth when she said it was ‘fast’ dye. When they had got the basin off Jo’s head, and slipped off her frock, she had set to work to sponge her face clear of the dye. She had sponged and sponged, first with hot water, then with cold. Then she had tried soap—soap of all kinds, from her own best toilet soap to the scrubbing soap Anna used for floors. Nothing had been the faintest use.

With a memory of a very old adventure, when the school, then in Tirol, had been taken to see the Passion Play at Oberammergau, and some of the Middles had created a sensation by playing at Indians, and decking themselves with oil-paint from Anne Seymour's cherished box, Jo had next sent Anna flying for turpentine, and mistress and maid had tried the effect of that. It was all to no purpose; and when the doctor got in from the darts match, which he had been umpiring at the Howell Arms in the village, it was to be met by a wife at whom he had first stared wildly, and then yelled at to know what she had done with herself during his three hours' absence.

When he got to the bottom of the story—and by this time, Jo was seeing the funny side of it, and frequently relapsed into helpless giggles as she talked, while Anna could only lament loudly—he had tried various medicaments of his own. He was no more successful than they. Finally, it had been decided that the only thing to do was to leave it to time and frequent washing. Meanwhile, Jo remained closely at home, and refused to see even her sister. The Triplets had gone the day before this happened to spend a few weeks with their Aunt Madge at the Round House, so they were saved from the shock they would have got if they had seen their mother with an emerald green face.

Such shrieks of laughter proceeded from the staff-room as Dr Maynard proceeded with his tale of woe, that the girls heard them, and wondered enviously what the joke was. But most of them never heard. Later—much later on—Jo shared the secret with a chosen few after making them promise faithfully that they would not give her away.

So Lavender, who had made up her mind to tell Mrs Maynard all about her accident, and get her help over the way she behaved to Joy, found that she must indeed stand on her own feet now. For the next morning, the telephone rang just after breakfast, and when the Head came to Prayers, it was with a beaming face. After Prayers, she announced to the school that Joey Maynard had had a son at six o'clock that morning—a fine, big baby, who was to be baptized Stephen; and Doctor Jack insisted that, as second name, he must be called 'Green'!

CHAPTER XIV

ENTER LILAMANI

'Has she come? What's she like?' demanded Lavender eagerly of Bride next evening when that young lady came along shortly after five to see her.

Bride shook her head. 'She hasn't come after all. *I* don't know why.'

'P'r'aps she never will come. Anyhow, come and sit down, and tell me all the news,' said Lavender cheerfully. 'Here's the chocs.—Oh, yes; you've got to have some. What's the good of chocs and things like that if you can't share them? Look, Bride; that's an almond, I b'lieve. And here's a coffee cream for me. I simply love them!'

Bride took the almond, and sat down. 'I don't think there's any news,' she said. 'Steve gave us a ghastly geog. lesson, all about winds, and how the way the world turns on its axis makes them go skew-whiff instead of straight. And some are constant winds, and some aren't. That's about all I can tell you about that. Elfie got into a row 'cos she wasn't listening, and when Steve asked round to see how much we knew, and asked her what was the difference between constant and seasoning winds, she didn't know. And then'—here Bride began to giggle—'she passed the question on to Dora, and *she* said the seasoning winds were called that because they blew from Ceylon, and brought smells of spices like the hymn says—you know: "What though the spicy breezes"—that one! It's Ceylon, I think.'

'Wasn't that right, then?' queried Lavender, hunting through the chocolates to find another cream.

'Ceylon was; but the smells had nothing to do with it, and Steve nearly *ate* Dora! And then we found she wanted monsoons, so *that* was all right 'cos Mollie Carew came next, and she knew all about them from her cousin that used to live in India—that dark girl in Lower Sixth, Clare Danvers. But Steve was in a real bait over it all, I can tell you.'

'Isn't there anything else? If you want to know about the monsoon, I can tell you a bit,' said Lavender.

'So you can! You must have seen them. I know that some of it's rain, and some of it isn't, and that's all. Do tell me something. Steve's given us a question about it. Here's my prep book.' Bride fished in her blazer pocket, and brought out a small note-book, very much the worse for wear, and read from it, "'How many kind of monsoons are there? Give the seasons at which they occur.'" There's one about the constant winds, too, but I can do that. I got all in a mix over the others.'

'You get monsoons in India and China, and a few places like that,' said Lavender. 'There are two kinds—wet and dry. The wet monsoon blows from April to October, more or less, and the dry monsoon the rest of the time. Is that what you want?'

Bride, scribbling madly, nodded. 'Thanks ever so. I don't want to get into a row if I can help it, and Steve really was awful this morning. Of course,' she added, 'it may have been 'cos she caught Barbara Gow and Primrose playing noughts and crosses almost first go-off. Silly asses! They might've known Steve would be down on them. Order mark each, and as that makes the third they've both got this week, bed instead of the Evening; and the Sixths are giving it this week. It's a play, I think.'

'I wish I could come,' said Lavender longingly.

‘Well, can’t you? Won’t they let you if you coax a bit, and promise to go straight to bed when the play’s over without a fuss?’

Lavender shook her head. ‘No; I’m sure they won’t. But I *am* coming back into school on Monday,’ she added, brightening up.

‘Oh, good! P’r’aps the new girl will have come by then. Well, I must go, now. I’ve got twelve lines of rep to learn for Bill for talking on the stairs, and I want to get it done before prep if I can.’

‘Take some more chocs with you, then. Look, Bride; this is another coffee cream; and here’s chocolate ginger. Don’t you like that? And a toffee?’

Bride accepted the sweets under protest, and then went off to struggle with the first three verses of Gray’s ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard,’ while Lavender curled up in her armchair, and gave herself up to memories of her trip to India the year before war broke out. It had been a delightful trip in many ways, for they had landed at Bombay, then passed on to Kashmir where she had had a wonderful time. While there, they had met a Kashmiri family—father, mother, and little daughter a year or two younger than Lavender. The Kashmiri child and the English one had made friends. Lavender, thinking back, remembered the little Lilamani, with her silky dark hair, and big, dark eyes set in a little face as fair-skinned as her own. The mother, a frail lady, had spent much of her time on her cushions, and the two children had been together a great deal in Miss Leigh’s charge.

‘I loved Lilamani,’ thought Lavender. ‘She was always so sweet, and so gentle. I wonder where they all are now?’

The entrance of Nurse to see her to bed put a stop to her dreams, but after she had had her supper, and the light had been switched off, Lavender lay remembering the loveliness of Kashmir and its flower-filled valleys, the soft laughter and musical voice of little Lilamani, until she fell asleep, and dreamed it all over again in her sleep.

On Monday, she came down at the usual time, and went in to breakfast with the others. She was welcomed by Bride and Mollie and Anne with joy; and some of the rest spoke to her. Joy Bird, on the other side of the table, kept aloof, but Lavender was not upset by this. She did not like Joy, and would not have cared if she had never seen her again. As for Joy, that young person kept stealing glances at the new girl, and wondering if she had *really* meant what she had said about not telling, or if it would come out sooner or later. Joy had wondered about this ever since that interview, and the strain and worry of it were affecting her badly. Her friends complained that she was always snappy with them, and lost her temper for the least thing. On the whole, though neither Lavender nor Joy would have believed it, it would have been far better if the Head had heard the true story.

After breakfast, Lavender was sent to her form-room with orders to keep out of draughts and not run about, or she would tire herself, and that would mean going back to San. As she did not want that, she sat down at her desk, having got the books from her locker for the morning’s first two lessons, and waited for someone to come in and talk to her. The first person to turn up was Primrose Day, who came over, and sat down on top of Lavender’s desk in a chummy way.

‘Are you really better?’ she asked. ‘What did it feel like, being under all that snow? Weren’t you *terrified* when you felt yourself falling?’

‘I was scared all right,’ admitted Lavender. ‘And it felt like nothing on earth under the snow. I tried to shriek, and I got my mouth full of it. It was icy cold, and it made one of my teeth ache. Then I couldn’t breathe, though I did try to get the snow off my face. And that was

all. I went to sleep then, and when I woke up, I was in bed in San. and Nurse was giving me some hot milk. I hate hot milk, too. But I s'pose I drank it all right.'

'I'll bet you did,' said Primrose with great feeling. 'Nurse never lets you off any mortal thing.'

'Hello, Lavender!' Dora had come in. 'All right again? Wasn't it awful when you felt yourself all buried deep like that?'

Lavender replied amiably; but when she had answered the same question put in varying forms at least five times more, she was tired of it, and said so. 'I've told you all it was horrid. I'd rather not think about it.'

'Rather not think about what?' demanded Bride who came in at that moment.

'About the fall and everything.'

'Well, you're not to, either. The Head grabbed me just now, and she said we weren't to talk about it. Anyhow,' added Bride, 'Mollie is just bringing the new girl, so we'll have something else to think about. I saw her going along to the library with the Abbess, so it must have been for that.'

'Oh, do you think so? What fun! I'm dying to see her, and to know why she's come at such a funny time in the term,' said Primrose, who was a feather-headed young thing. 'It's the fourth week of term, so it isn't even half-term, and it does seem weird to start a new girl now.'

'It *might* have been a row, of course,' put in Dora with her head on one side. 'I don't see how it can, though. Mollie doesn't get into rows—or not much. And it's just the start of the week, anyhow.'

'Oh, it'll be the new girl, I expect. As for why she's come now, I expect her people have just evacuated, and they couldn't get her here sooner,' said Anne Montague. 'Oh, there's first bell, and I haven't got any books out yet! What's second lesson, does anybody know?'

'Latin,' half a dozen voices told her; and she was in the middle of trying to unearth her *Ora Maritima* when the door opened, and Mollie Carew came in with a small, slight girl at her side.

'Hello, everyone,' said Mollie cheerfully. 'This is the new girl—what did the Head say your name was? I didn't quite catch it.'

'Lilamani,' said a soft voice, and Lavender lifted her head from her efforts at memorising the third declension, and looked straight into the big, dark eyes of the only friend she had ever had until she came to the school.

Away went book, scribbler, and pencil! Inkwell nearly followed them, as Lavender sprang to her feet with a cry. 'Lilamani! You've come *here!*'

The newest new girl stared for a moment. Then the colour rushed over her sensitive little face, and she, too, leapt forward, catching at Lavender's hands, and babbling soft, hurried speech in words quite unknown to the girls. Lavender replied, but haltingly, and then began to laugh. 'It's no use, Lilamani. I've forgotten nearly all my dialect. Have you forgotten your English? And *how* did you come to come here?'

Lilamani shook her head. 'No; I have not forgotten,' she said in slow, careful English. 'And I come here because my mother has been ill—oh, so ill! We left Kashmir, and went to France, to the south, for it was all sunshine there, we were told, and there were great doctors who would make her better. And then the war came. Then the Italians came to Mentone, and it was all very hard. There was so little food, and my mother grew worse. But at last, they let us come to England, and now they have taken her to a place in the mountains, and I am sent here. But it is so cold, and we shiver so always.' She shivered as she spoke, despite the warm room

and the thick blazer over her woollen blouse and tunic. ‘But the great doctor who brought us here says that he hopes she will get well soon, and I must not be troubled, but must do lessons here, for I have lost so much.’

‘It’s the San. she’ll have gone to,’ said Bride. ‘Was it Uncle Jem—my Uncle Jem—who told you? If it was him, then she will get better. He always knows. But where did you and Lavender get to know each other?’

‘It was when I was in Kashmir like I told you about the monsoons on Friday night,’ explained Lavender rather confusedly. ‘I love having you here, Lilamani, but I’m so sorry your mother is ill.’

‘Is that really your name—’ began Anne Montague. Then, as the second bell sounded, ‘Oh, hang! There goes the bell!’

There was a wild dash to seats, and Mollie pointed out a spare desk to Lilamani, who sat down, so that when Miss Stevens, a little late, and rather flushed with her hurry, appeared, she came into a most orderly form-room, where everyone rose to her feet and chanted in unison, ‘Good morning, Miss Stevens!’ in the most approved style.

Roll-call was taken, and then, as Prayer-bell went, the girls marched out, parting at the end of the long corridor, some to go one way, some another. Lavender pulled Lilamani with her, and after Prayers, they came back to the form-room, where they were speedily plunged into an arithmetic lesson from which the little Kashmiri emerged with the knowledge that at least she could go on with this form. Latin, which she had never done before, she must take with Upper Second like Lavender, who, however, had been improving the shining hours while she had been in San., and Mlle Berné was moved to tell her that if she went on as she was doing, she would soon be able to work with her own form.

‘But do not work too hard just yet, Lavender,’ she added. ‘Now you must go back to San., and rest for what is left of the morning. This afternoon we shall see you at needlework, I hear. And you may stay down till after tea if you are not too tired. You will like that, *n’est-ce pas?*’

‘Yes, thank you,’ replied Lavender. However, she could quite well have done without the needlework lesson. Miss Leigh did exquisite sewing, and loved it; but Lavender was always bored with it, and had done very little before she came to school.

The day passed smoothly; so did the rest of the week, and when Saturday came, Lavender was allowed to wrap up and go for a brisk, short walk with her own form, since the snow, which had begun again the day after her accident, and fallen at intervals ever since, had stopped, and seemed likely to remain so for a few hours. They did not leave the grounds, but they had a good time in the paddock, and when they came in, Lavender looked as they had not seen her since her arrival. Her cheeks were pink, and her eyes sparkling. Even her hair seemed less lank than before. As for Lilamani, she seemed to have slipped into her place very easily, and, except when she fretted for her mother, to be very happy among them.

‘In fact,’ said the Head as she sat at coffee with the rest of the Staff after lunch, ‘everything seems to be going very nicely. By the way, Jack Maynard rang me up this morning, and he says Jo wants Daisy and Rob to go down this evening. They are to stay till tomorrow night. It’s freezing hard, so the roads should be quite possible. I asked him what they would do if it snowed again before tomorrow, and he says they’re to take their books so that they don’t waste time. Robin has Higher Cert., and Daisy School Cert. in the summer, so they can’t lose anything we can help.’

‘What did he tell them about Half Term?’ asked ‘Bill.’

‘The whole lot are to go down to Plas Gwyn. It isn’t for another fortnight, and Jo will be up and about then, so that will be all right.’

‘How wildly thrilled Robin and Daisy will be,’ observed Miss Slater. ‘I know they’re all dying to see the new baby. Still, he can’t be the excitement the Triplets were. *One* new baby is quite an ordinary affair. But Mrs Maynard’s Triplets are the only ones I’ve ever known myself.’

The Head grinned at the memory of the arrival of Jo’s small girls. ‘It was certainly a thrill when she accomplished it. I don’t think I’ve ever known the school more joyfully excited before or since—and I’ve been connected with it for a good many years now. Bill, do you remember the cable that went to India to the Dick Bettanys?’

‘Bill’ chuckled. ‘Do I not! Madge always vowed that someone would think it was a Nazi message from some Fifth Columnist.’

‘What was it?’ asked Miss Slater curiously, for she had been at the school only two years or so, and was often at sea when the older members of the Staff recalled various events in the career of the school.

‘“Triplets at Les Rosiers. All shes,”’ repeated ‘Bill’ with another chuckle. ‘That was the term that Frieda Mensch was married to Bruno von Ahlen; and Rufus, Jo’s beloved St Bernard, was returned to her after having Heaven knows how many adventures. The term before we left Guernsey, too.’

‘Not quite, ma chère,’ put in Julie Berné. ‘We had the Easter term at Sarres as well. Jo came across here in the Easter holidays.’

‘I ought to know.’ ‘Bill’ spoke more soberly. ‘Shall I ever forget that awful journey across the Channel! At one time, I thought it was all up with us. It didn’t matter so much about me. I have no one in particular to grieve if I’d gone. But a good many folk would have been plunged into bitter woe if anything had happened to Jo and her babies; or Frieda; or Nigel Willoughby—it was in his yacht that we crossed—Blossom Willoughby’s father, Slater. Blossom,’ she added, ‘is her father over again, so far as character goes, if all I’m told be true. Her looks come from her mother, and I must say she’s scored there. But whenever I see Blossom Willoughby looking angelic, I begin to shiver, and to wonder what evil deed of hers I shall hear of next.’

‘Poor Blossom!’ said the Head, laughing. ‘It isn’t as bad as all that. Well, I must send for Robin and tell her that she and Daisy are to be ready for Jack Maynard at half-past six. He’s coming for them in that wonderful contraption of his, made of an old bath-chair, an aged tricycle, and rope. I warned him what would happen if he tipped either of them into a ditch on the way to Plas Gwyn, and he was most offended. He thinks that weird affair is better than any car that ever—’

‘“Pawed haughtily the ground,”’ finished up Miss Wilson for her. ‘That is the result of having built it himself. Mercy! Is that a bomb?’

She might well ask. At that moment, there was a terrific explosion which made the windows rattle, the pictures swing violently, and flung the coals from the grate on to the hearth. It was followed by two minor crashes, and shrieks rose from all parts of the school. Then, even as the startled Staff sprang to their feet to go rushing off to collect their flock and hurl them to a place of safety, there came, the sound of flying feet, and Elizabeth Arnett and Monica Marilliar burst into the room, with no regard at all for either manners or decorum.

‘It’s all right, Miss Annersley!’ cried Elizabeth breathlessly. ‘It isn’t a bomb! It’s only that Blossom Willoughby, Bride Bettany, in fact the whole of that gang, including Lavender Leigh

and Lilamani’—no one in the school could ever remember Lilamani’s surname, let alone pronounce it, and they all avoided it with one accord—‘brought snowballs into the back hall, and put them on the lid of the radiator there. As it was boiling hot, the sudden coldness of the snow had a-er-bad effect on it. The lid was flung to the far end of the hall, and is cracked right across. It caught that tall cupboard where the art models are kept, and knocked it over, and I don’t think there’s a model left whole. The floor is in a mess with plaster of Paris—the door burst open when the cupboard fell—and melting snow, and ash and coal. But we put out the burning coals, and no one is hurt, though the whole gang are scared badly. But it’s all right!’

‘And that,’ said Miss Annersley an hour later when the scene of the deed had been viewed, its authors severely scolded and sent, weeping bitterly, bedwards for the whole of the weekend, and everyone else calmed down, ‘that is what our head-girl describes as, “It’s all right!”’

‘Well, in one sense she is right,’ said Miss Wilson judicially. ‘No one is hurt; and though the lid of the stove is cracked, and we don’t seem to have even *one* art model left whole—may I be there to see Herr Laubach’s face when you break the news to him!—there’s no very bad damage done. Even the scorches on the floor can be put right in a few weeks with planing and staining, and hard polishing. It *might* have been worse!’

The Head looked at her speechlessly. ‘Is *that* all you can find to say?’ she said when at length she had found her voice.

‘Bill’ returned the look, and suddenly collapsed and laughed till the tears ran down her face. ‘Oh, Hilda *dear!*’ she cried. ‘Don’t go all tragedy queen over it! It’s very wicked of them, but they’ve got a nice punishment, for they’ll miss tonight’s show, and judging from all I’ve heard, the Fifth have got something extra special in store for us. And apart from that, you’ve condemned them to polishing the floor, and paying for the damage from their pocket-money. I don’t think that particular sin is likely to be committed again in this school. You forget about it now, and send for Robin as you were going to when it occurred, and tell her what Jack said, or neither she nor Daisy will be ready for him. Then, while you are gone, I’ll make a nice cup of tea, and we’ll have a quiet little time together in my study.’

The Head gave it up. ‘I certainly ought to let Robin and Daisy know, for it’s nearly four. As for you, Nell Wilson, I believe you’ve enjoyed it.’

‘Of course I have. And Jo will revel in it! You send for Rob, and then come along to me, and I’ll smooth your ruffled feathers for you.’

‘All very well; but I don’t see why we should all be startled out of ten years’ growth just to give Jo a new episode for one of her books,’ grumbled Miss Annersley as she prepared to follow the advice. ‘As for Herr Laubach, he’ll be here on Monday, and if it keeps fine, I’m going to Armiford for the day. There are several things to see to, and I must make the most of it, so I shall leave at half-past nine, and don’t expect to be back till four at soonest. So *you* can tell him what’s happened. I hope you enjoy it!’ And without waiting to note her friend’s reactions to this piece of generosity, she departed to the library and to send for Robin to tell her that the embargo on Plas Gwyn was lifted so far as she and Daisy were concerned.

CHAPTER XV

LAVENDER HAS ANOTHER ADVENTURE

‘Rob, what’s the matter with Jo?’

Robin Humphries looked up from the stocking she was darning into the troubled face of Daisy Venables. ‘So far as I know, there’s nothing wrong. What’s bothering you, Daisy?’

‘Why,’ said Daisy, crossing her ankles, and dropping to the floor at Robin’s feet, ‘the baby is ten days old, and none of us have been allowed to go near Plas Gwyn yet, though everyone says that Jo and he are as fit as can be. Auntie Madge had me on the ’phone just now, and she says she’s not seen Jo, though she saw the baby, and he’s a lovely boy, like Joey, and like Uncle Dick, too. But *why* isn’t anyone seeing Joey?’

It was Robin’s turn to look worried as she replied, ‘I don’t know. I don’t understand it any more than you do. I saw Jack yesterday, and I asked him when we could see Jo, and all he said was, “You’ll see her when she wants to see you. I don’t think that’ll be yet, my child.” I asked him what on earth he meant, but he wouldn’t say. I do wish we knew what has happened! And why, under the sun, is he insisting that the baby’s second name is to be “*Green*”? There isn’t such a name in the family that I know of.’

A sudden idea came into Daisy’s head. ‘Rob! You don’t think Jo’s got bored with us, now that she has her own babies, do you?’

‘Talk sense! She’s had the Triplets for two years and four months, and she never showed the faintest signs of being bored with us at any time.’

‘I know. But—you remember that awful time in the autumn when—when——’

‘When we were afraid Jack was dead? Yes; I know. But what has that to do with it?’

‘Well, it made a difference in Jo. She *has* changed, Rob—you know she has! I just wondered if—perhaps—she—well, had grown away from us a bit.’

Robin shook her head. ‘She’s changed; you’re right there. But Jo will never grow away from us. Besides, we’re both getting older. I used to be just an adoring baby where Jo was concerned. Nowadays, I do try to help her, and not take everything. And you’re the same. No; whatever has happened, it isn’t that, so don’t worry about it. Why, Daisy, darling!’ For Daisy had suddenly laid her head down in the prefect’s lap, and begun to sob. ‘Daisy! Don’t cry, dear! What *can* be wrong with you?’

‘It’s just—it’s such a relief to hear you say that,’ sniffed Daisy. ‘It came into my head a few days ago, and I’ve been thinking about it ever since. If such a thing were to happen, Rob, I don’t know what I should do. Jo is so—so *special*, somehow. Auntie Madge is a darling; but—well, she has her own children, and dozens of other things to think about.’

‘So has Jo, if you come to that,’ said Robin.

‘I know. But the Triplets aren’t like Sybil. Sybs hates having cousins so much older than she is living with them. And then she’s always been such a picture, and you know what idiots some folk are! When she was at the Sonnalpe the crowds of visitors that used to say—and quite loudly, too, so that she couldn’t help hearing!—“Oh, what a lovely child!” Or, “Just look at that exquisite little face!” The only wonder is that she isn’t more of a trial than she is. And, of course, she was baby for so long. Josette isn’t four till the summer, and Sybs is five years older.’

'I know,' agreed Robin. 'There's a lot in what you say. All the same, Sybil can be unbearably rude sometimes, I know. She's got to learn to get over her vanity and her jealousy. But Madge loves you and Prim very dearly, Daisy. And I know she loves me, too.'

'Yes; but because of Sybs, she daren't show it—or not much. I was jolly thankful when it was arranged that Prim and I were to live with Jo. I can't tell you how sorry I've been for Bride and Peggy, many a time. And Jo knows what Sybil is, and told me once that that was one reason why she had us with her. And that makes it all the queerer that we haven't been allowed to go and see her—and the baby, too,' Daisy added as an afterthought. 'I'm dying to see him!'

'Oh, well, if we can't see Jo, we certainly shouldn't see the baby. Jo wouldn't allow anyone but herself to show us her son.' Suddenly Robin began to laugh. 'Oh, it is so funny! I can remember the time—not very many years ago, either—when Jo vowed that she never would marry. And here she is, not only married, but with a large family of four!'

'I seem to remember something about that, too,' said Daisy. 'She used to say that every family ought to have a nice, old-maid aunt, and she was going to be it in *her* family. She hasn't gone very far about it, has she?'

'Robin, the Head wants to see you.' Enid Sothern had popped her head in at the door.

'Do you know why?' asked Robin with a startled air.

'She didn't say anything; but I should imagine it's about your Half Term arrangements. If you can't go to Jo, you've got to go somewhere. I expect the Head wants to discuss it with you. There'll be Daisy and Primula and the McDonald twins to think about, too, won't there?'

'Not go to Jo's for Half Term?' cried Daisy, getting to her feet. 'Oh, I never thought of that! And we can't go to the Round House, for the boys have Half Term the same week-end, and I know Rix is bringing a friend with him, and David, too. Auntie Madge will be full up without us added.'

'I'd better go and find out what *is* going to happen,' said Robin, rolling up her stocking and laying it in her basket. 'I'll let you know when I get back, Daisy. Where will you be? Will you wait here for me?'

Daisy glanced round the tiny room which was Robin's study, and nodded. 'I've got a page and a half of *Les Pêcheurs des Perles* to finish. Is your dicker anywhere round? All right, then; I'll get on with it while you're gone. Don't stay all day, will you? Tell the Abbess you've got an important engagement, and ask her to hurry up.'

'Yes; can't you see me doing it?' retorted Robin at the door. 'If you're all that anxious to see the Head in a bait, you can do it yourself.'

'She's sent for you; not me,' Daisy pointed out, as she took down the big Gasc dictionary from the bookshelves. 'Even for the joy of seeing her face when I told her that for you, I can't barge in uninvited, can I?'

Robin laughed, and went out, and Daisy settled down to work. Ten minutes later, she was disturbed by the sound of flying feet, and then Robin bounced in, breathless with laughter. She flung herself down in the big armchair by the side of the tiny fireplace, and burst into such shrieks of mirth that Daisy jumped to her feet in some alarm.

'Rob! What is the matter with you? Stop it, you mad creature, or you'll be having hysterics! If you don't,' she added warningly, 'I'll throw water over you.'

With an effort Robin controlled herself, sat up, and mopped her eyes. 'Oh—*oh!* Jo has done it this time and no mistake!'

'*What* has Jo done? Something mad, to judge by you; but what?'

‘She’s—she’s——’ Robin choked again. Then she got herself in hand, and wound up, ‘She’s dyed herself green!’

‘Dyed herself *green*?’ Daisy repeated in bewildered tones. ‘What *do* you mean? How could she dye herself green?’ Then, ‘Oh! Is *that* why Jack is talking rot about the baby’s second name being “Green”?’

Robin nodded. Oh, dear! I’m aching! But it’s true, all right; and that’s why none of us—not even Madge—not even Polly who’s staying in the house—has been allowed to go up to her room. The Head says that Jack says she was the most awful sight he ever saw. Her face was green in patches—Anna and she tried everything they could, and, of course, the stuff has run in streaks. Nurse has been using some weird cream for it, and it’s practically all clear now. But Jo vowed she was going to be *non est* until she looked less like the wild man of the woods. The baby’s arriving when he did made it easy for her. Jack rang up this morning to say that he is coming for us—you and me, that is—at six tonight, and we’re to take as many books as we can in case the snow comes on again, and stay there for the week-end. He’s bringing The Monster for us, if you please!’

‘I suppose he’s run out of petrol,’ said Daisy, wiping her eyes, for she had been laughing till she cried. ‘Oh! *How* like Jo! I wonder if they really have got all the stains off?’

‘Sure to, or Jo wouldn’t let us come. Oh, before I forget, we’re to tell no one about it. The Head says Jack made her vow to forbid it, or we couldn’t go till Half Term. I promised for both of us, so don’t babble to Beth and Gwensi, will you? I know you tell them everything.’

‘Not quite everything. It’s hard lines, though. They would love to hear about it. Still, I suppose Jo would want it kept dark. All right, Rob, I’ll say nothing. But if we’re to be ready by six, I’d better go and get my things together.’

‘You’ve got nearly everything there. You’ll only want your books.’

‘And my tooth-brush and tooth-paste. I can’t go without those!’ retorted Daisy. ‘And there’s the wee coat I’ve been knitting for the baby. I finished it this afternoon just before the explosion. By the way, I suppose we can tell all about *it*, can’t we? She’ll love it!’

‘She certainly will. Oh, yes; we can tell her about that. Won’t she chuckle, though! It ought to remind her of her own mad doings.’

‘Or Corney’s! Or no; the nearest I can think of to it are those saffron cakes Joyce Linton manufactured her first term at school. D’you remember, Rob? Jo nearly wept over it at the time.’

‘Evvy Lannis caused a nice little burst in the science lab once, too. Well, you’d better go and collect all you want. The bell will ring for tea soon, and there won’t be much time after that,’ said Robin, glancing at the pretty little Dutch clock on the mantelpiece. ‘It’s just four now, so it’ll take us all our time to be ready, and Jack hates to be kept waiting.’

Daisy jumped up, and picked up her books. ‘I’m off! Oh—your dicker! Where do you keep it—here?’ She rammed the thick book into the shelves into the first available space, and raced off, while Robin went to put the book into its proper place, laughing: ‘How like Daisy! A French Dic. all among the maths and science! She *would*!’ Then, having sorted out her own books, she piled them neatly on the table, strapped them together, and after a final glance at the shelves to make sure that she had missed nothing she was likely to want, she strolled off to seek her own friends and tell them the news.

Daisy, meanwhile, was rushing up to her dormitory to seek her sponge-bag, the little coat she had knitted for Jo’s son, some handkerchiefs, and, last of all, her books. She had to go to the Fifth Form-room for those, and found there her chums, Beth Chester and Gwensi Howell.

They bewailed her going, for the three were close friends, and there was a certain amount of truth in Robin's remark that Daisy told them everything. Remembering what a tale she might have given them if it hadn't been forbidden, Daisy kept the conversation on the subject of the baby, which was nearly the cause of her undoing, for Beth remarked casually, 'I expect you'll find out why Auntie Jo wants to put "Green" into his name. It has a weird sound, though I don't think I like it—"Stephen Green Maynard"! It isn't a bit pretty!'

'I think it's Jack's idea, not Jo's at all,' said Daisy. Then, as she remembered what Robin had said, jumped up. 'Well, I must strap my books together.—Oh, I can't. There's the bell for tea. Well, after will do. It's only half-past four, anyhow. Heaps of time yet. Come along, you people.'

After tea, thanks to the efforts of her friends, she got everything together, and departed with Robin and Jack Maynard at six o'clock in high feather.

Meantime, Matron, having consulted the bath-lists, went along to the dormitory where Lavender, Bride, and Julie and Nancy were repenting of their sins at leisure and in bed.

'Lavender Leigh, I see you are down for a hot bath tonight,' she said. 'You had better get it over before the Juniors come upstairs. You are in bathroom Seven. You'll have to run the water for a little before it gets hot. Megan tells me that something has gone wrong with the pipes, and though it is warm enough, it takes a little time to flow through. Go along now, and be quick about it, please.'

'Yes, Matron,' said Lavender meekly. She turned out of bed, put on her dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, picked up her towels and sponge-bag, and went off to the bathroom. Arrived there, she found that Matron was quite right. The water flowed icy cold at first, and only heated up very gradually. Leaving the waste-pipe open for a minute or two until it heated up, Lavender went back to the dormitory to get her loofah which she had left behind, and found that the others had come up and were changing for the Evening. She was at once embroiled in a discussion as to what it was the Fifths had prepared for the rest of the school, and became so interested in the talk, that she forgot all about her bath until Julie Lucy said, 'Had your bath yet? Was the water really awfully cold?'

'Oh my goodness! I forgot all about it, and it's been running all this time! If Matey catches me, she *will* be angry!' cried Lavender in dismay. She caught up her loofah, opened the door, and peered out. No Matey was there, so she slipped out, and made for the bathroom with all speed.

Bathroom Number Seven was on a kind of little half-landing by itself. This was at the end of the corridor, and was reached by two or three steps down a flight of stairs which led to the kitchen premises, where a door, generally kept locked, barred the way. The corridors were all very dimly lit with blue-tinted bulbs, for they had big windows, stretching nearly from floor to ceiling, and the black-out material was not as heavy there as it was at the windows in the various rooms. Apart from that, only one bulb in three was ever switched on nowadays, the Head having issued a ukase to that effect after the appeal of the Government for fuel saving. It was quite enough, for the corridors were empty and quite straight, and the girls knew their way about them well enough. Lavender hastened down the long passage, clutching her loofah, and hoping that no one in authority had discovered that the bath-water had been running all this time. So absorbed was she in this hope, that she heard nothing, and therefore got a terrific shock when she plunged down the steps into ankle-deep water which was hot enough to draw a wild yell from her.

At once doors on every side were flung open, and figures in various stages of undress appeared, demanding to know what had happened. But Lavender had got her senses back. She guessed that in some way the waste-pipe had fallen, and while she had been gossiping in the dormitory, the bath had filled up, and then overflowed. Whatever would happen when it was found out, she had no idea; but she wasn't going to leave it like that. She was in one big row already; and there would certainly be another about this. Let her do what she could to lessen the effect. So she plunged forward, getting wetter and wetter in the process, and reached the bath.

The room was full of steam, for the hot water, when it had come, proved to be almost at boiling-point, and she found it far too hot to be comfortable. Still, she did not lack courage, so she steeled herself to bear it, reached forward for the handle of the waste-pipe to pull it up, and promptly took her fingers off it, for it felt red-hot. But she knew now that it was as she had left it, and the pipe was open.

By this time the noise had attracted Matey and two or three of the Staff to the scene, and Matey's expression as she saw the cataract flowing down the stairs when she flashed her torch on to it was something the girls recalled with much glee during the next few days. Hilary Burn, who was among the Staff, and who, having come up late, was in the act of changing her stockings when she heard Lavender's yell, and so was bare-legged, hitched up her dressing-gown, kicked off her bedroom slippers, and ventured into the flood. She gasped at the heat of the water, but, like Lavender, she pressed forward to the bath, where she found a small, bedraggled figure sucking its fingers, and sobbing loudly.

'Pull up the waste-pipe, child!' she cried, as she reached for the hot-water tap, and turned it off.

'I h-have,' sobbed the wet person beside her, 'b-but it's ou-out!'

Miss Burn stooped, picked up the child, and lifted her through the flood which was still pouring downstairs, though it had ceased to gather volume when the tap had been turned off. She set her down at the top of the stairs, where Matey promptly took charge of her, and went off to the dormitory with her, leaving the Staff to investigate for themselves.

Meantime, the water, which had been piling up against the door at the foot of the stairs, now oozed out—the door was a close-fitting baize one—and was found by one of the housemaids as she carried along the trays with cups for the cocoa and coffee, the school's preferred supper drinks. Her shriek when she stepped into chilly water—it had cooled off on its way—with smart slippers and thin, silk stockings, brought Megan from the kitchen, and the Staff, busy with the bath, could hear loud ejaculations in Welsh floating up. They were too busy to pay much heed to them, for though the waste-pipe was up, the water showed no tendency to run away in the bath itself, and it was soon clear that the only way to dispose of it was to lift it out with buckets, and cast it out of the window.

'Switch that light off and go and get me two buckets,' said Hilary Burn. 'I'll do it. Slater, you might pull back the black-out, and open the window. Luckily, it's a bright moonlight night, so I can manage. The rest of you keep out of this. I'm wet already, and Slater will have to change her stockings, anyhow, by the time she's got the window open, so leave it to us—Good Heavens! *What's that?*' as a crash sounded beneath them.

'The ceiling below, I should think,' said Miss Slater practically. And so it proved. When, at long last, they had got rid of the mess, it was found that the waste-pipe outside had frozen heavily, and even the water pouring on to it had not been enough to thaw it properly. The damp had brought down the ceiling in what had been the butler's pantry, and two plates left

on the table by a careless maid had been smashed to atoms. Supper was an hour late, and the two Fifth Forms bemoaned a spoilt Evening. Last, and to Lavender worst of all, the author of all the excitement was removed from her cubicle and sent to San. for the next few days. With the fear of pneumonia before her eyes, Matron refused to take any risks, so no sooner had she got back into school than Lavender was out of it again. But she was cured for evermore of gossiping when she should have been in her bath!

CHAPTER XVI

HALF TERM AT JOEY'S

Half Term came with a bright, sunny day, the March wind blowing white galleons of clouds across a blue sky, and the snow, which had been melting steadily for the last week or so, now lying in mere patches, while the grass, as Daisy Venables said, seemed inclined to perk up a little, and early spring flowers ventured timid heads above the earth in the borders. It was late for Half Term, but the weather had been so bad up till then, that the folk responsible had decided to leave it until it was possible for the girls to get out. Some people would have to leave during the morning; but those who came from the county—and there were a good many of them—would not go away till after dinner.

‘And, strictly speaking, I’m inclined to wish I hadn’t said we could have Half Term at all,’ said Miss Annersley at Staff tea on the previous afternoon. ‘It’s a short term, as we shall be breaking up early in April, but they’ve all been tied so closely to the house all this term, that I feel they need it. They’re getting so frachety!’ And was promptly embroiled in an explanation of her last word with Mlle Berné, who did not know it.

‘How many are staying?’ asked Miss Burnett, who was going to spend the week-end with Miss Burn, and so was free from Half Term duty.

‘I don’t believe anyone is,’ said the Head in rather startled tones after a minute or two spent in thinking it over. ‘The Lucy children are taking five others home. The Chesters are having Gwensi, as well as Blossom Willoughby. The Ozannes are taking a regular party—almost all those in Upper Second who haven’t anywhere else to go. Lady Russell has invited two, though where she’s going to put them she doesn’t know, as the boys are bringing friends home too. Joey—and if she hadn’t had Polly Heriot with her, I should have refused—is having her own trio, the McDonald twins, Lavender, and Lilamani. And Stephen is only a month old now!’

‘What about the Seniors?’ asked ‘Bill’ thoughtfully. ‘You won’t get rid of me, you know, Hilda, for I made no plans, and I’ve nowhere to go. My cousin’s three are indulging in whooping-cough, so I can’t go there.’

‘Jesanne Gellibrand is taking everyone in the two Sixths who can’t go home. The Dragon House is a huge place, and they haven’t billeted anyone on them because it’s so far from any school or village. They offered to take old people, I know, but the old people didn’t like it. They said it was so quiet, and they hated all the creakings and rustlings at night. So it was no use, for they wouldn’t stay. We are quite as far as I like to be from the high-road, but the Dragon House drive is nearly three miles long, and then they’re six miles from the village. And they couldn’t take it over for a school, because Mr Bennett had had almost every inch of available ground ploughed up for crops as soon as ever the war began. There is no room anywhere for playing-fields. Jesanne told me that even the tennis-courts are planted with vegetables; and they have the two big lawns in front of the house for potatoes. Then the people from Medbury and round about have invited others. Gillian Culver, who comes from Hampshire, is off with someone. No; there won’t be a single girl left.’

‘And that’s a record—for here, anyhow,’ said Hilary Burn. ‘What about the two Linders, though?’

‘Going to Gisela Mensch at the other side of the mountains.’

‘Then,’ said Miss Wilson, ‘that *must* be everyone. How did Jo come to ask Lilamani, by the way? She’s never met the child.’

‘I believe Lavender begged Robin to ask if she might share her bed.’

‘You know,’ said Miss Slater who was winding wool, ‘that Lilamani babe is helping our Lavender enormously. They are very fond of each other, and I think Lavender feels that she must look after Lilamani because she’s so small and frail, and so utterly unused to our life here.’

‘Lavender is improving very much,’ agreed the Head. ‘She’s not the same child as she was. What was that tale you brought me about frocks, Matey?’

Matron laughed. ‘You remember the fuss we had at the beginning of term over Lavender’s frocks? Well, it seems she found out that, apart from her uniform, and *one* frock, Lilamani had nothing. They lost nearly everything in France, of course. So Lavender came to me yesterday to ask if she might have three more of her dresses for Lilamani. She was badly upset when I told her that, in the first place, we couldn’t let her give her things away like that without her aunt’s permission; and in the second place, the frocks would need alterations. Lavender is more than a head taller than Lilamani, and, thin as she is, her frocks would fit where they touched on that child. But I was glad to hear her, I can tell you, thinking about someone else besides herself. Oh, she’s made great strides this term!’

‘What *have* you done for Lilamani?’ asked Hilary.

‘I had a dress-length of blue woollen material that I’ve had by me for three or four years. It was a present, and I never really needed it, so I never got it made up. I’ve contrived a little frock out of part of it for the child. Frau Mieders did most of the sewing, and she’s embroidered it, so it will make a nice little afternoon frock. Then I *did* let Lavender give her a set of undies. That young woman is fitted out like a little princess and she could quite well spare them. I don’t suppose Miss Leigh would really make any trouble about it. Lavender seems to do what she likes with her aunt. But I couldn’t exactly go to the extent of three frocks. Before we know where we are, we’ll be landed with even closer clothes rationing, and then she would need all she has.’

At that moment there came a tap at the door, and then Elizabeth Arnett entered, looking both amused and worried.

‘Yes, Elizabeth? Do you want me?’ asked the Head, getting to her feet.

‘Yes, please, Miss Annersley. I’m sorry to trouble you,’ went on Elizabeth, ‘but Lavender telephoned a wire to her aunt to ask if she might give Lilamani some of her clothes as she has so few of her own. The answer has come—it’s “Yes”—and she wants to know if they can go to Matron after school and choose them.’

‘She did—*what?*’ demanded Miss Annersley with excusable astonishment.

Elizabeth suppressed a giggle as she replied, ‘She ’phoned a wire to her aunt, Miss Annersley.’

‘She ’phoned a wire to her aunt? But how on earth did she manage to do that? She surely didn’t go to the library?’

‘N-no; but she waited till the coast was clear, and Miss Dene had gone out,’ said Elizabeth with a glance at Rosalie Dene, the Head’s secretary, and herself an Old Girl of the school, ‘and then she used the office ’phone. She says she left a shilling beside it to pay for the call.’

‘Then *that’s* where the shilling came from that I found on top of the bookcase!’ exclaimed Rosalie. ‘I couldn’t account for it, for I was sure I hadn’t left it there myself. I concluded one

of you people,' she cast a look round the Staff who were fighting manfully with their laughter, 'had been in. I meant to ask who it was, but I forgot. What a nerve!'

Miss Annersley bit her lips. 'I must go and see the young lady about this. Matron, when will it be convenient for you to have the pair of them?'

'Not till after tea,' said Matron briskly. 'They may come then. But I hope you'll make it clear to them what a sin they've committed—or rather Lavender has committed—in using the 'phone like that. I never heard of such a thing! What will that child think of next?'

'She meant it well,' pleaded Elizabeth.

'I know that,' said the Head, with a smile at her head-girl. 'I shall tell her she must never do such a thing again, and let it go at that. It's too near the holiday for me to be very angry. Very well, Elizabeth; I'll come. Thank you, dear.'

Elizabeth withdrew, and the Staff burst into wild shrieks of laughter as the sound of her footsteps died away down the corridor. Even Rosalie, indignant as she was at this invasion of her own room, giggled over the enterprise Lavender had shown.

'What shall you say to her, Hilda?' asked Miss Wilson.

'Oh, not much. After all, the intention was good. But of course she must realise that she can't take liberties of that kind at school. Better get the frocks out, Matey, and have them pressed. They'll be crumpled after being in her trunk all this time. And—one word! Try to guide their taste. I don't think that that vivid blue affair you described to me, for instance, would suit Lilamani in the least.' And with this, the Head left the room, and went down to the library where a half-scared Lavender was waiting at the door.

The Head administered a mild scolding about the iniquities of using the telephone without leave, and then asked for the wire. It was 'reply paid,' and read, 'Of course darling. Do just as you like.'

Lavender tendered another shilling. 'Please, Miss Annersley, I forgot about paying for the reply, so will you take this if it's enough. If it isn't, will you tell me? I've heaps of money, 'cos Auntie sent me a pound note two days ago for pocket money for Half Term.'

'This must stop,' thought the Head. 'I thought Miss Leigh understood that Lavender was to have the usual shilling a week like all the rest, and no more without special permission.' However, she left it for the moment, and merely thanked Lavender, and said it would be all right. Then she gave her Matron's message, and got a promise from her that she would not use the telephone again without leave, and sent her off to break the news to Lilamani.

That little person amazed her impulsive friend by stoutly refusing to accept the gift at first. 'Matron has made me the dress I showed you, and I have the white muslin mother gave me. It is so kind of you, Lavender, but please, not,' she said.

'But why?' asked Lavender. 'I have five put away, and I'll outgrow them before I can wear them, 'cos it'll be summer frocks next term, so they'll be no use. Oh, do take them, Lilamani; please do! I *want* you to have them.'

Lilamani possessed all the pride of her race, and it was only with great difficulty that Lavender coaxed her into agreeing; but after expending all her eloquence, and finally resorting to tears as Lilamani persisted, the elder child at last got her way. Lilamani would take the frocks as 'a love gift,' and Lavender promised she would not do such a thing again.

After that, they waited with what patience they could till after tea, when Matron was interviewed, guided their choice as she had promised, and they at last went away with a dull crimson, a soft apricot, and a silky brown, all of which would suit the little Kashmiri well.

Lessons next morning were more or less of a farce. The girls were too excited about the holiday to pay much attention about what they were doing, and only the serious Sixths and Upper Fifths, with the prospect of exams in the summer to drive them on, did any real work. But finally the bell rang, and they were dismissed to change, ready to leave as soon as dinner was over, and to lock their week-end cases. Then came dinner, and after dinner Dr Maynard appeared with a car, and packed his mob of chattering girls into it. Robin sat in front with Lilamani on her knee, and the rest crowded in behind. The cases were piled on the luggage carrier, and they were off, hooting a loud farewell to those left behind. On the way, they met and passed the Round House car and one or two others, but when they turned out of the avenue, except for army lorries, the road was clear till they swerved round into the narrow lane near the end of which Plas Gwyn stood. Then they rattled up the drive in fine style, and at last reached the house.

The door was flung open as they came, and Joey Maynard, surrounded by three wildly-yelling small girls, was there to welcome them.

‘Where’s the baby?’ screamed Daisy as she rumbled out.

‘In his crib, of course, asleep at this hour. For goodness sake be a little quieter, all of you, or you’ll wake him up,’ replied his mother as she returned Daisy’s hug. ‘Primula darling, you haven’t grown a scrap even after all these weeks. Twins, there’s a letter from Shiena waiting for you in the lounge.’ Whereat the Highland twins gave a united cry and fled to get their prize. Their grown-up sister Shiena was in the W.R.N.S., and they had had no letter at school this week. Jo grinned as they went, and turned to Robin. ‘Well, my Robin? So it’s still down, in spite of what you said last time you were here!’ And she pulled at the thick curls Robin wore fastened with a clasp at the back of her neck.

Robin laughed. ‘You made such a scene when I suggested putting it up, I thought it had better wait a little. But I *am* eighteen now, Jo. It’ll have to go up in the holidays, you know.’

‘Not it! You can wear it in the fashionable long bob.’

‘Yes; and I can see the Head letting me! Either you have a real bob, or it’s tied back, or put up as long as you’re at school. Besides, it would be an awful nuisance all over my face like that. No, thank you, Jo! If you won’t let me have a bob again, it’ll have to go up. You can take your choice.’

Jo laughed and released her to the hugs of the Triplets, while she turned to welcome Lavender and Lilamani. ‘Lavender, dear, I’m so glad to see you. It’s well to be seen that the Chalet School suits you. What a colour you’ve got now! And this is Lilamani? I’m so glad you could come, dear, and I hope you’ll manage to have a good time.’ She kissed Lilamani very tenderly. Bad news of the child’s mother had come two days ago from the big Sanatorium on the other side of the mountains. She had had a relapse, and the doctors feared that her strength was too little for her to make a recovery. Her little girl was not to be told at present. That was her own earnest request. But Jo knew from her husband that it was very unlikely that the Kashmiri woman would live to see Easter. If that happened, then Lilamani would be very lonely, for it was impossible to get her back to her own people in India. She must stay where she was, and that would be among aliens.

Lilamani looked up into the delicately-cut face with its sensitive lips and beautiful eyes, and wondered no more that Lavender had such a love for this tall, dark person who had welcomed her so sweetly.

‘It is good of you to ask me with Lavender,’ she said shyly.

‘Oh, Lavender wouldn’t be half so happy without you,’ was the prompt reply. ‘Now come along in, all of you, and I’ll show you your rooms. Len, Con, Margot! Come along and find bedrooms, girlies!’

The Triplets left Daisy and Robin, and came running. They were pretty little girls, with their mother’s features and fine skin; but *not*, as Jo pointed out with triumph, her colouring. Where she was pale, with a soft pallor that flushed up at the least thing, her daughters had pink cheeks that spoke well for their health. Len, the eldest, had dark-red hair turning to a warm brown, with grey eyes; Con, who came next, was very dark, with deep brown eyes, and hair that was going black; little Margot was fair, her wavy locks being golden, and her eyes turquoise blue.

‘Who is Baby Stephen like, Auntie Jo?’ asked Primula.

‘The image of his papa,’ returned Jo with a grin at her husband.

‘That’s a libel on me!’ he retorted. ‘I don’t set up to be a movie star, but, hang it all, I’m not as featureless as all that!’

‘Stephen isn’t featureless. He has the dearest little nose, and his eyes are going to be grey like yours and Len’s. I won’t say anything about his mouth at present. It’s rather on the large side,’ admitted Jo, who always prided herself on being able to view her children impartially. ‘But his ears are dreams—just like yours and dear Granny Maynard’s.’

‘When can we see him, please?’ asked Lavender. ‘I’ve never seen a very new baby, and I do so want to hold him if you’ll let me.’

‘Of course I will! Even the girlies have nursed him for a minute or two—sitting in a chair, of course. If I can trust them, I can trust a girl of your size. Now here’s your room, Lavender and Lilamani. I’ve put you together, so it makes a bit of a scrum, I’m afraid, but you can manage for a few days, can’t you? There are so many of us, you see, that it makes rather close quarters. Pop your things away, and change your shoes, and Primula will come for you in a few minutes. She’s with Daisy, next door. That’s Robin’s room across from yours, and mine is in front of it. The night nursery opens out of that, for we must have the children where we can grab them at once in case of a raid. The day nursery is next door to it, but has its door opening into another passage. This is the queerest old house, with corridors and steps in every direction, as you’ll find. Miss Heriot, who is staying with us, is opposite the night nursery, and another friend of mine, Mrs O’Hara, is behind her. She has her little Donal with her, too, but today they’ve gone up to the Round House for tea, and won’t be back for an hour or two. I’ll show you the house presently.’

With this, Jo went off to see to the McDonald twins, who had a dainty green and white room along yet another passage, while not far from them was the one kept for their sister Shiena. The McDonalds had come from one of the Outer Hebrides which had been taken over by the Government for the duration of the war, so had no home of their own apart from Plas Gwyn, where warm-hearted Jo had made them very welcome. And there was also a schoolboy brother who was invited to Plas Gwyn for the Easter holidays, though he had spent his Christmas with a friend. Archie McDonald was with his Air Force squadron in Egypt, and Hugh, the sailor, had been drowned in the previous autumn.

Above these rooms were several large attics, three of which Jo had fitted up as a little flat which had been occupied by one and another of her married friends at different times. Anna, her faithful Tirolean maid, had another; and the rest were store-rooms of various kinds. Jo took the two visitors all over the house after they had all met in the lounge, and then led them, last of all, to her own room, where a cot stood beside the open window.

'Here's Stephen,' she said proudly, stooping down and lifting out its occupant. 'There! Isn't he a size for just a month old? He's to be baptized tomorrow, and you're all coming into Armiford with us for it. It should have been done before, but we decided to wait. What do you think of him?'

The two Juniors bent eagerly over the big baby she held in her arms. He was as rosy as his sisters, and the eyes he opened to their gaze were blue as Margot's. He had no hair, or so they thought. But Jo held him up against the light to show them the fine, fair down that covered his head.

'Not much like the girlies,' said their mother. 'They had mops of the loveliest dark red hair. But, as you see, not one of them is going to be really red. It's a bit of a disappointment in one way, but just as well in another. I was glad when their eyes changed, too. Of course, *I* knew them apart; but other people mightn't, and they'd have had *lovely* fun impersonating each other! They're quite handfuls enough without that.'

'Oh, how tightly he grips!' cried Lavender, who had slipped a finger into one little fist.

'All babies do that. *I* say it's a remnant of the monkey ancestry with which we are supposed to be saddled. What d'you think of him, Lavender?'

'Oh, he's a duck!' said Lavender ecstatically. 'Oh! Mrs Maynard! May I *really*?'' For Jo had put the baby into her arms.

'I said you might. Don't drop him; that's all I ask.'

Lilamani looked up. 'What is his full name, please?' she asked shyly.

'Stephen John. Oh, I know my husband talked some rot or other about "Green," but that was only a rag. Stephen is after Grandpapa Maynard, and John for Papa. He'll be Stephen, of course.'

'Unless you shorten it and make it "Steenie,"' suggested Daisy, who had come into the room with the others.

'I'd like to catch anyone doing it! Just let me hear you call him that once, Daisy Venables, and I'll—I'll call you "Maggie"!'

'You dare! Well, there's one thing; if you ever call me "Maggie," I'll retaliate with "Josie"!' And Daisy wound up her speech by a horrible face.

Much to the amazement of her guests, Jo promptly outdid it. When she had brought her features back to their proper arrangement, she remarked, 'Don't set my son such a bad example. And it's time Lilamani held him for a bit. So give him up, Lavender. It's a mercy my babies are all fairly placid about being handed about, isn't it?' she added as she took the baby from Lavender and handed him over to the enraptured Lilamani.

'They never get a chance to be anything else,' put in Robin, who had followed Daisy into the room with an arm round Primula Mary and the twins at her heels. 'I remember how you used to deal out the girlies as if they were playing-cards. And I expect you'll do the same thing with Stephen.'

'You are most insulting! And it's good for children to be accustomed to strangers. Then they don't get fits of silly shyness later on. Hello, Twins! Want your turn at holding him? Well, you may have it, and then you can all hop downstairs and leave me to give him his tea. It's very nearly time.' And Jo glanced at her watch as she spoke. The next moment, she uttered an exclamation of annoyance. 'Bother! The wretched thing's stopped!'

Robin began to laugh. 'Oh, Jo! It wouldn't be yours if it didn't! I seem to remember, as long as I've known you, that your watch was either stopped, or being mended, or just come back from being mended.'

Suddenly Jo's face became sad. 'I know,' she said slowly. 'Poor little Herr Goldberg!'

'I expect you forgot to wind it,' said Daisy hurriedly, for the memory was one of the saddest they had of beautiful Tirol. 'You'd better try.'

Jo tried, and found that the watch had run down. She set it right while the twins were having their turn at nursing Stephen, and then turned them all out of the room, bidding Robin ask Anna to bring tea in, and promising to be down very shortly herself. 'And then we'll discuss our plans for the week-end,' she promised as she shut the door on them.

CHAPTER XVII

A LITTLE COOKERY

On the next day, they all went into Armiford for Stephen's baptism. He himself was very good on the whole, only crying a little as the cold water was poured over his brow, and the salt touched his lips. The real sensation was caused by his eldest sister.

Jo had been very doubtful about including the little girls in the party, but gave way in the end so that faithful Anna could come. Besides the family from Plas Gwyn, there were Frieda von Ahlen, Stephen's godmother; Sir James and Lady Russell from the Round House, and all their children, as well as the four young Bettanys; his godfather, Captain Lucas, who was Jack Maynard's captain, and who had obtained four days' leave unexpectedly, so was able to act himself; and Jo's visitors.

'Mercifully, that was all! And, for a wonder, there wasn't another soul in the church but ourselves,' said Jo, recounting events later on to a select audience of Chalet School Staff who had come down to Plas Gwyn for coffee and gossip. 'Also, Father Edmund is an old dear, and understands children; but I could have sunk through the floor at the moment.'

The three tiny girls, little pictures in their scarlet coats, close-fitting scarlet hoods, since the day had turned out grey and chilly, and long brown gaiters, had been put near the font, with Robin in charge, Daisy to help her. Lady Russell was behind them, Josette clinging to one hand, and Sybil on the other side. The rest of the children were opposite in a big bunch, and Peggy Bettany was overseeing them. Frieda gave the baby to Father Edmund at the right moment, and he, practised in holding infants, took the small man deftly. Stephen was quite good until he felt the salt on his lips, and the touch of the cold water dashed across his forehead. Then he yelled lustily. The next moment, Len, the eldest of the Triplets, had rushed from her place, crying, 'You mustn't hurt my bruvver. You mustn't hurt my bruvver!'

The doctor and his wife were too far from the Triplets to do anything about it, and Robin and Daisy each grabbed at one of the pair who remained. But Anna was at hand, and when had Anna ever failed her beloved mistress in any way? She reached out as the child hurtled past her, caught her in strong arms, and drew her away with more speed than gentleness. Len at once burst into tears, an example her sisters showed signs of following; but Robin laid a linger on Con's lips which forbade a sound, and Margot saw it, and winked away the tears filling her own blue eyes. Meanwhile, Anna, standing conveniently near the doors, yanked Len through them, and her howls were deadened as they swung shut.

Father Edmund went on calmly with the service, while Jo, as scarlet as her daughters' coats, stood with downcast eyes, and the rest of the grown-ups tried more or less successfully to smother their laughter.

When it was over, and they were all in the sacristy to have a word with the old priest, a soothed Len having been brought back by Anna, he bent down to her with a smile.

'Do you know, lassie,' he said, 'the very same things were done to you and your sisters when *you* were baptized. Why did you think I would hurt your brother? Such a bonny wee man as he is, too!'

'I foughted you was hurting him,' said Len, quite unabashed.

‘Most babies cry at the touch of the water, dawtie. I didn’t harm him, I only made a little Christian of him. Now wait and we’ll see if I can find something nice for all you little people.’ And he crossed the sacristy to the door leading into the presbytery, to return presently with a big box of chocolates.

‘Oh, no, Father Edmund!’ cried Jo. ‘You mustn’t give away your sweets to the children. They get plenty as it is. I’m sure that was a gift.’

‘A kind parishioner sent it to me for Christmas,’ he said, beaming on the small fry as he opened it and showed the assortment within. ‘I don’t eat sweets myself, so I keep these for the younger members of my flock. Now, Helena, my wee lamb, take one of these, and forget all about it. You will be good the next time you come into Jesus’s Own House, won’t you?’

Len, rather overawed by the use of her full name, took a chocolate, and he passed the box on to Con, and then to Margot, and then to the rest of the children. He knew most of them by name, for he often paid a visit to Plas Gwyn; but Lavender and Lilamani were new to him. He demanded their names, and Jo gave them, explaining that the pair belonged to the Church of England.

‘No matter,’ he replied. ‘The blessing of an old man won’t hurt anyone.’ And he gave his blessing to them all. Then they had to make a move, for someone else wanted him. Jack Maynard asked him to come out to them as soon as he could manage it, and see how his latest little Christian was going on, and then they left.

‘What a dear old man!’ said Lavender when they were safely packed into the Russell’s big car. ‘I do like him, Robin.’

‘Everyone likes Father Edmund,’ replied Robin with a smile. ‘Oh, Len! What a naughty girl you were!’

‘Foughted he was going to hurt Stephen,’ said Len sturdily. ‘Nobody mustn’t hurt him, ’cos he’s so little, Auntie Wob. Mamma said I must help to look after him, ’cos I’m ve oldest.’

‘Yes; but you might have known Father Edmund wouldn’t hurt him,’ scolded Robin gently. ‘And you *do* know you must be good in church.’

‘I’m sowwy about *vat*,’ returned Len, ‘but I did fink he was hurting Stephen, and nobody mustn’t do *vat*.’

Robin laughed, and gave it up as a bad job. Sybil, sitting on Daisy’s knee in front, turned round. ‘*I* didn’t do such things when Josette was baptized,’ she said with her most superior air.

‘You were three years older than Len is now,’ retorted her mother. ‘And if you were good at Josette’s christening, it’s a good deal more than you were the first time I ever took you to church. Do you remember how you threw your collection penny at the collector because you didn’t like his beard, and nearly gave him a black eye? *I* haven’t, I can assure you!’

Sybil subsided, duly squashed, and the party reached Plas Gwyn in peace. Jo had arranged a tea, and Anna had contrived a cake of marvellous appearance, with a dear little white cradle on top, which so thrilled all the small folk when they were allowed to peep at it before going to their own tea in the nursery, under the care of the Russell nurse, Rosa, that the girls, at least, talked of little else. The boys, as became their manhood, were properly scornful about it, though they speedily made away with their share of the big slices that came upstairs from the lounge after it had been cut. Later on, though, Rix Bettany and the chum who was spending Half Term with him were discovered trying to find out what it was made of. Joey rescued it from their handling with a shriek. She had had experience of Rix’s curiosity before this, and did not want the dainty thing destroyed sooner than she could help.

‘I only wanted to see if it was sugar or not, Auntie Jo,’ protested her eldest nephew. ‘I wouldn’t hurt the thing.’

‘Wouldn’t you just! I know how *your* finding out how things are made generally ends!’ retorted Jo. ‘It’s plaster, if you must know, and very fragile. It’s got to last, too. I might need it again, and I’d never be able to get another if this wretched war goes on. Now you hop off to the woodshed, and mess about there if mess about you must! Trot, you boys!’

But Sir James shook his head. ‘It’s time we all got home,’ he said. ‘Josette’s eyes are nearly shut,’ and he smiled at his younger daughter, ‘and we’ve a little way to go. Besides, there’s probably half a dozen calls for me by this time. Off you go and get ready, you people. It’s past six now, and will be nearly seven by the time we get home, if it isn’t after.’

The party speedily cleared, and Anna abstracted the Triplets and hustled them off to bed, while Jo, free at last, turned to the schoolgirls.

‘Well, how did you enjoy it?’ she asked, smiling.

‘It was lovely!’ said Fiona McDonald. ‘Wasn’t Len funny, though?’

Jo groaned. ‘I might have known something of the kind would happen if I let those babes come. But I knew Anna badly wanted to be there, and there wasn’t anyone else to leave with them, as Simone’s Thérèse has had that bad attack of croup, and she had undertaken Frieda’s little man as well. I couldn’t ask her to take my girlies on top of all that. Well, now I must go to hear their prayers. Tomorrow is Sunday, so I think we’ll just have a quiet day. But you can be making plans for Monday while I’m gone. All I ask is that you’ll remember that I promised you should be back at school by six, so don’t think of anything likely to make you any later.’

She went off, Stephen across her shoulder, and the schoolgirls crowded together, and chattered eagerly. A good deal was ruled out by the time of year, of course. Also, their distance from Armiford was another stumbling-block in view of the petrol shortage. But when she came down, having seen her entire family safely into bed, they were ready for her.

‘If it’s fine, a walk, please,’ said Daisy, who had been deputed to announce their plans. ‘Then, after lunch, *could* we try to make cakes or something like that? Anna wouldn’t mind for once, I know.’

‘Who’s going to provide the ingredients?’ demanded Jo practically.

‘We are ourselves, of course. We can get what we want when we’re out in the morning. We can go through the village. Of course, if we can’t get currants or raisins, we may have to come down on you——’

‘What a hope! I expect Anna used the last for Stephen’s cake.’

‘Oh, well, we could get prunes, I should think, and they’d do as well.’

‘Well, on condition that you clear up all your mess and leave nothing at all for Anna to do, I’ve no objections. But that must be clearly understood.’

They promised to clear up all their mess, and so it was left. Jo then proposed paper games, always a favourite pastime with the family, and before long they were busy with a series of the most libellous ‘Consequences.’ The new girls had never played the game before, and as it went on, they were so overcome with laughter, that Jo brought it to an end in a sudden fear lest they should grow hysterical. The arrival of Anna with steaming cups of chocolate and big buns took its place, and after this, the younger members of the party were sent to bed—or, rather, to their bedrooms. Ten minutes after they had gone up, such a noise floated down the stairs, that the mistress of the house shot up to find out what was happening and to calm her son who, rudely awakened like this, was yelling with a vim that spoke well for his lungs.

‘You bad girls! You’ve wakened Stephen!’ shrieked Jo to make herself heard above the din of the pillow fight she found in progress. ‘Off to bed all of you, or I’ll bring a cane round when I’ve got him off!’ And she vanished into the night nursery where his cot had been moved, and where she found her small daughters clustered at the door in giggling excitement. Jo shook her head at them, waved her hand, and said, ‘*Bed!*’ very sternly.

They were all brought up to be obedient, so they scrambled into their little beds without a murmur, and sat up, watching their mother with bright eyes as she lifted her son from his crib, and cuddled him into quietness. Meanwhile, the noise on the landing had ceased with almost uncanny suddenness, as she noted.

She got Stephen to sleep, tucked up the Triplets, and switched off the light after an admonition to her daughters to stay where they were until the morning. Then she left the room, closing the door softly behind her, and stood for a moment on the landing, listening. She knew well enough that her Half Term guests had not gone to bed, but she wanted to know where they were. A low, murmurous voice told her, and she went softly to the door of the twins’ room, and listened. As she had expected, the whole party were there, and Fiona, story-teller-in-chief to the Juniors at the Chalet School, was well away on a marvellous tale of the Jacobite hunting.

‘He crept into the cave,’ said Fiona’s voice, that could thrill her listeners to tears or laughter as she chose, ‘and looked roundt ass well as he couldt, for it wass fery dark, and couldt not make a light lest the redcoats shouldt see and come and findt him. There wass a heap in a corner and ass he stole forward to see what it wass, he heardt a deep groan——’

Cr-r-reak! Jo had leaned incautiously against the door, and the hinges needed oiling. A chorus of shrieks arose, as the story-teller and her audience all jumped violently, for they had turned the light off, and there was only the glow of the little fire Jo had told Anna to light in all the bedrooms as a Half Term luxury to light up the room. Jo slid in, shutting the door behind her, and snapped on the light, to be greeted by a crowd of blinking individuals, who stared at her with mouths open for another yell.

‘*Please* be quiet,’ she implored. ‘I’ve just got Stephen off again, and though he’s bound to get used to sleeping through most things, I do want to break him in gently. Fiona, you bad girl, what scarey bogey-tale are you telling now?’

‘It issn’t a bogey-tale at all,’ said Fiona. ‘It iss the tale of how Malcolm McDonald that wass our great-great-great-grandfather escaped from the redcoats when they were searching for him eferywhere. There wass a heafy price on his head, but none wouldt petray him,’ growing more and more Highland as she went on, ‘and he escaped to France in the endt; but not until he hadt hadt fery many atventures, andt hadt nearly peen caught. If he hadt, he wouldt haf peen hanged, andt so he knew. Put hiss sweetheart that was Shiena Graeme safed him, andt helped him to get away, andt later on, she went to France, too, and marriet him there. When their son wass ten, andt there were three little girls ass well, they came pack——’

‘All right—all right!’ said Jo hurriedly. ‘You can go on for another half-hour, since it is Half Term, and tomorrow is Sunday; but you must pack off to bed after that. It’ll be half-past nine by that time. No; I won’t stay, thank you, Fiona. I’ve got sundry odd jobs to do before I get off to bed myself, and I’m tired now. Lavender, you’re the oldest. I trust you to see that at half-past nine everyone goes to bed. Good night, you people. Don’t forget what I’ve said.’

A chorus of good-nights answered her as she left the room to steal back to the night-nursery to listen to see if the yells which had greeted her appearance among the girls had roused her family. But all was still, so she left them, and went downstairs to give Anna orders

for the next day, and see to the preparation of supper for the doctor, who had been called to the Sanatorium shortly after her sister and brother-in-law had gone off with their family. Jack had rung up an hour ago to say that he hoped to be home by ten; but if he were not, she herself was to go to bed and not sit up for him. He had his key and could let himself in. Jo was accustomed to such things, since she had lived in a doctor's household for years now, so she despatched Robin and Daisy bedwards when she had finished up; sent Anna off, too; put the guard in front of the dining-room fireplace, where she had made up a fire with coke so that her husband should find warmth when he came in as well as his meal; set the coffee-pot on one hob to keep hot, and departed herself, peeping in at all the doors as she went, and spending a little time in the night-nursery with her son who needed her by this time.

Next day was passed quietly. It was gloriously fine, so they all went for a long walk in the morning. In the afternoon they read, and in the evening they played quiet Sunday games till an early bedtime. The real fun began on the Monday, when the girls set off after breakfast, taking biscuits with them, after Anna had been warned what she might expect in the afternoon. She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. She had small faith in their cookery, and turned to and made buns once they had gone. They had assured her that she need not trouble about tea, for they would see to it, but Anna believed in being prepared for anything.

One o'clock brought the whole party back, rosy, fresh, and laden with parcels. They had not been able to get currants or raisins, but they had invested in half a pound of prunes, so they were well satisfied, especially when Jo presented them with a box of dates after lunch; and after telling them all to get into the overalls she had put out for them, sent Anna out with the pram, herself removing her daughters for a walk, and giving the rest the run of the kitchen. Just before she left, a telephone message came to summon Robin to the Round House, where an old chum who had left the school in the previous summer, had turned up on her way to the north and was spending a few hours before continuing her journey. Happy-go-lucky Jo told Daisy to take charge and to see that no one but herself attended to the oven. Then she left them to it quite happily. Robin was far more worried than her adopted sister at the idea of leaving such a band of scaramouches alone in the kitchen; but she wanted to see Vicky McNab, and Jo seemed quite sure the others would be all right, so she went, too.

'What shall we make first?' asked Lavender eagerly when Robin had gone and they were alone.

'Fruit cake first, or it'll never be cooked in time,' said Daisy firmly. 'Where's the cookery-book? Right! Now let's see!'

Before long, they were hard at it, beating egg-powder with milk, stirring the dry ingredients together, and enjoying themselves thoroughly, while Anna's neat kitchen began to look as if a threshing-machine and a cyclone combined had passed through it. Daisy issued orders, and the rest did as she told them, Fiona carefully greasing enough tins to bake cakes for a school treat. At last the mixture was ready, and they took it in turn to put it into the big tin, a spoonful apiece until only the basin was left. This they scraped, eating the scrapings with enjoyment, especially Lavender, who had never done such a thing before, and Lilamani, who knew nothing at all about it, and was thrilled over the whole thing.

'A quick oven for the first half-hour,' said Daisy with authority, 'then we lower the gas once the mixture is heated through, and let it bake. Give me the tin, Fiona. Lavender, if you want to try waffles as you said, see if you can find the waffle-iron. It should be somewhere in that cupboard over there. Do you know what it looks like?'

Lavender, who had seen one in Canada, had a hazy idea of it, but it was a very hazy idea. After she had presented the head cook with a gravy-strainer, a skillet, and a flat-iron shoe, that young woman had to come to the rescue, what time Lavender hunted for the recipe.

‘Isn’t it hot!’ said Primula, wiping her brow with a sticky hand, and not improving her appearance thereby. ‘Shall I open a window, Daisy?’

‘Yes; you might,’ said Daisy absently as she knitted her brows over her recipe. ‘All right! I think we can manage this. Get the flour, please, Lavender, and weigh out a pound.—Oh, bother! There’s the door-bell! Who is the tidiest of us to answer it?’

She herself proved to be the one, so while she went along the hall to take in the bread, Primula finished opening the window, and Lavender weighed her flour carefully. Daisy was kept a few minutes, thanks to the breadman’s having brought only the usual supply, while she knew that Jo wanted at least two more loaves. By the time she came back, the little girls had added bicarbonate of soda, and then, as they turned to put it away, the spring breeze, coming in through the window, whipped over a couple of pages unnoticed by any of them, so that when Lavender bent again over the book she found that yeast was the next thing. Luckily, the McDonalds knew it when they saw it. As the recipe only said ‘a little yeast,’ they decided to be on the safe side, and put in a good ounce! Salt followed, and the rest of the ingredients, including, quite by accident, a heaping spoonful of baking-powder. When Daisy at last returned, having got what she wanted after a heated argument with the man, they were stirring in warm milk to make a batter, while Fiona once more officiated with grease-proof paper and dripping on the waffle-iron.

‘Yes; it looks all right,’ said the head cook after she had put her burden into the bread-bin. ‘Are you *sure* you put in the bi-carb?’

They said they were; but just to be safe, she added another teaspoonful in a little of the milk, and at last their batter was ready.

‘I’ll pour it in,’ said Daisy, ‘as Jo said I was to see to the oven myself.’ She glanced round. ‘I say! There’s a good deal of a mess, isn’t there? What’s the time? Twenty-past three! Mercy! We shan’t have time to make anything more. We’ll just get going with this, and then we’ll have to clear up. Anna would have a fit if she saw the kitchen like this!’

‘We’ll start putting the things away, shall we?’ suggested Flora.

‘Well, you might. Then we can see where we are. Prim, you see to that, will you, please? You know where things stay.’

Primula nodded, and while Daisy carefully filled her waffle-iron, she led the way to the pantry with the flour, while the twins followed, bearing the margarine-dish, and a tray filled with spice-tins; and Lavender and Lilamani brought salt and sugar. Daisy shut her iron down, peeped into the oven at the cake which seemed to be browning nicely, and then turned down the gas—she had left it at full blast for at least ten minutes longer than she should have done. That done, she saw to the clearing away of what was left of their ingredients, and then produced a broom and began to sweep, having sent the twins to lay the table for tea in the lounge.

‘I say, this waffle seems to be rising rather much,’ said Lavender, who, having been ordered to keep out of the way till the floor was swept, had gone to the stove to look at her own concoction.

Daisy glanced up, gave a shriek, and threw down her broom to come to the rescue, for the ‘waffle’ was indeed rising, and in a way that would have alarmed a far more experienced cook. Not knowing what else to do, she jammed the cover down again, and then returned to

her sweeping. When that was done, the cover had risen again, and Lavender's mixture showed signs of throwing it right back.

'What a rummy thing!' said Daisy in worried tones. 'I never knew Anna's waffles do it. They're generally less than half the size of this.'

'P'r'aps it's a recipe she's never tried,' suggested Lilamani, and Daisy leapt at the explanation.

'I expect it is. There's one thing, they'll be as light as feathers. I wonder how long they should be cooked? Does the book say, Lavender?'

'"Bake till a light golden-brown,"' read Lavender from it. 'It's not golden-brown yet, Daisy. Should we leave it a minute or two longer?'

'I expect so. There! That's the floor done! Get me the dust-pan, will you, Lilamani, and I'll sweep this mess off the table. Then we can wash it. And Lavender, you and Primula might be carrying the dirty things to the sink and we can wash up after that. What's the time now?'

'Half-past three,' replied Lavender with a glance at the kitchen-clock. 'We'll have to hurry. Shall we put the crocks into this bowl, Daisy?'

Daisy nodded. She was now busy sweeping the flour, date-stones, prune-stones, egg-mixture, milk, etc., into the pan. When Anna found her good brush later on all sticky and messy, she nearly wept; but by that time the cooks were all safely at Plas Howell, so could not hear her opinion of them.

By dint of hard work, they got the place more or less cleared up. It bore small resemblance to the spotless domain left by Anna two hours before, but it was tidy after a fashion. In between whiles, they had cooked the rest of the waffle-batter which, warned by what had happened to the first, Daisy doled out in very small dollops. Even so, those waffles were fatter by far than any self-respecting waffle ought to be. As for the fruit cake, having left it too long in a quick oven, Daisy had gone to the other extreme now, and had turned down the oven as far as she could get it. Still, by half-past four the cake had been in nearly two hours, and it was not such a very big one, so they hoped for the best.

'We'll have to eat it hot, though,' said Daisy. 'It'll never cool in time for tea. Or should we ask Jo if we can take it back with us and have it for tea tomorrow? I'll get Robin to ask us to her study. I think we'd best not broadcast it in case it isn't too good. I've never made fruit-cake all by myself before, though I've often helped at home.'

At a quarter to five Jo arrived with Anna, having met that good person on the way home, and by that time tea was ready, the kettle having been boiled up only three times before, as no one had expected her to be so late.

'Sorry I've been such a time,' said the mistress of the house airily, 'but we dropped in at Frieda's, and found Marie and Wanda there with their families, so we couldn't just rush off. Wanda and Marie wanted to see my son, and there was all sorts of news to hear. Is tea ready? Then come along. Anna, take the children up to the nursery and give them their tea, will you, please? Oh no, Fiona! They mustn't have waffles, though I'm sure they'd like them. But hot cakes aren't good for tiny folk. They must wait until they are bigger for that. But—what very queer-looking things. How on earth did you get them so—well, so *puffy*?'

'It's a new recipe,' said Lavender, half offended. 'They're *light*, anyhow!'

'They're that all right,' agreed Jo. 'You must have beaten them most thoroughly to get them like that. I've got a tin of maple syrup in my store-cupboard. I'll get it, and we can go all Canadian. What's the cake?'

‘Fruit cake; but it’s just out of the oven, so perhaps we’d better not cut it yet,’ said Daisy. ‘Can we take it back with us? I’ll get Rob to give us a party for it tomorrow in her study. We’ll send down your share with her when she comes on Wednesday.’

‘Oh—thank you very much,’ said Jo doubtfully; and Daisy bristled up very much as Lavender had done.

‘Don’t you want it? Then please don’t have it. I expect we can eat it.’

‘Of course, I want to taste,’ said Jo quickly. Not for worlds would she have hurt their feelings. ‘Only it looks so very rich. Just send a small piece for Jack and Anna and me to taste. You must keep the rest for yourselves. We don’t get fruit cake every day now, you know.’

Mollified, Daisy led the way to the bathroom, where the party cleaned itself in every sense of the word. Primula had even managed to get cake-mixture into her primrose fringe, and Daisy had to sponge it, so that she came to table looking unnaturally neat about the head. The syrup was waiting for them, and Jo, with a suppressed grin, advised them to be careful to keep it on the waffles as much as they could.

‘It’s rather runny,’ she explained. ‘Oh, take plenty. I’m sure—in Canada they *drown* waffles in it, don’t they, Lavender?’ Which was *not* what she had set out to say. Those waffles struck her as probably needing all the maple syrup they could get to make them go down!

Flora, who was frankly greedy about sweet things, was the first to sample them. Jo had provided forks to save sticky fingers, and the small Highlander took a big forkful. She munched it once, then buried her face in her handkerchief, and left the table without any explanation or apology.

‘It must be too hot,’ said Lavender, delicately balancing a small piece soaked in maple syrup on her fork. ‘Poor Flora! I hope she hasn’t burnt her mouth too badly.’ Then she tasted hers.

With more speed than elegance, she removed it from her mouth, and cried, ‘Oh—*oh!* What horrible stuff! It’s as bitter as can be! What *can* have happened to it?’

‘The bi-carb must have got into a lump in one place and you’ve got a mouthful. Hard luck, Lav!’ said Daisy, who had been helping with the cups and now prepared to try her waffle.

She behaved very much as Lavender and Flora had done. There was no doubt about it. Even with what Jo called ‘lashings of maple syrup’ those waffles were uneatable. The last lot of bicarbonate had been too much for them. Jo comforted them for the failure, and told them they should have a spare tin of the syrup she had to take back to school to make up. Then she advised some of Anna’s buns, which were as successful as that handmaiden’s concoctions always were, and tea ended just in time for them to get ready to catch the ’bus that passed the end of the lane at half-past five. They left the cake behind by Jo’s advice, that experienced lady assuring them that it should not be moved until it was thoroughly cooled. Next day, she made her husband sample it, and his verdict caused her to send it with the rest of the scraps to the near-by farm for the pigs. It was only half cooked, and Daisy had mixed her tins, and given it a double dose of cream of tartar instead of one of bicarbonate and one of the other. But they got their cake on the Friday when Robin went back for Friday’s lessons. Jo presented Anna with more dates and prunes, and begged her to make one for them, which Anna, being good-natured and forgiving, did, and they never knew what had been the end of their own creation. But it was a long time before any of them heard the last of the waffles at Plas Gwyn; and a doubly long time before Anna would agree to letting them use her kitchen for their own cookery again!

CHAPTER XVIII

LAVENDER TURNS UP TRUMPS

It was as well they had had that jolly week-end, for before the next Saturday a message came for Lilamani, and she was whirled off to the big Sanatorium at the other side of the mountains, and when she came back, it was to go to Plas Gwyn for the rest of the term. She was motherless now, and tender-hearted Jo offered to have her and see if her own petting, the companionship of the Triplets and Baby Stephen, and the sunny atmosphere of her home could comfort her a little. But after the first week, the child grew restless, and Lady Russell, experienced in small girls, advised letting her go back to school after all, even though there was only another ten days left of the term.

So Dr Jack took her up in his car, and Lavender was on the terrace to meet her. The weather had decided to behave itself for a while, and the last of the snow had gone. Spring flowers were tossing dainty heads to the spring breezes, and the spring sunshine made everything gay. Lavender, a very different Lavender from the girl who had come to school in snowy January, ran forward to clasp her friend as she got out of the car, and kiss her warmly. The grown-ups left them to it, and the elder child drew the younger one away, an arm round her waist.

‘I’m so glad to have you back, Lilamani,’ said Lavender, as she led the little Kashmiri round the house to the girls’ entrance. ‘I’ve missed you dreadfully, though Bride and the others have been dear to me.’

Lilamani looked up at her with mournful dark eyes. ‘I have no mother now, Lavender. And everyone is so far away.’

Lavender bent and kissed her again. ‘I know. You’re just like me now—no; not quite. You’ve got your father in Kashmir, and I haven’t any—only Auntie Sylvia. But she’s been ever so good to me, and everyone here will be good to you. And when the Head told me about—about your—mother, she said it was so much better for her, ’cos she’ll never be ill any more and she has been ill such a long time now. But you won’t be lonely, old thing, ’cos we’ll all try to make up to you, and you’ll go back home some day when old Hitler is beaten. Look, dear! Bride asked Matey if she could change cubicles so that you could be next to me. If—if it gets very bad at night, you just whisper my name, and I’ll come beside you for a bit.’

This was *not* what Matron had intended when she had agreed to Bride’s unselfish proposition to change her own cubicle with its big window for Lilamani’s which had none; and Lavender would be breaking a very strict rule and liable to all kinds of unpleasant penalties if she were caught, but the idea helped the child a little. Thereafter, for the next three nights, Lavender, when the lights had been switched off, and everyone had settled down to sleep, crept under her own curtain into Lilamani’s cubicle and sat on the side of the bed, petting her until she drowsed off to a quiet sleep. On the third night, she was caught by the Head, who, while understanding, told her that it must not go on, as she was missing her own slumbers as well as breaking rules. But by that time, school-life was helping the little Kashmiri as even life with Jo had not done, and Lavender was given permission to go in to tuck her up before lights-out if she did not linger. But even so, it was a sad end of term for Lilamani.

The rest, over-awed by her grief, rather held off at first. Then Bride came with an offer to sharpen her pencils. And the McDonald twins offered her three treasured postcards of the Outer Islands for the collection she had begun since coming to school. Various other little helps came, and Lady Russell proved to have been right. School was far better for her than even the happy home at Plas Gwyn.

Meantime, the term rolled rapidly to its end, and the last evening came, when rules were greatly relaxed, and the school rioted. Matron had them in batches throughout the day for packing; books were 'signed-off,' and then packed away in lockers and desks for the holidays.

In the staff-room, such of the Staff as were not on duty, stretched themselves at the end of a hard day's work, and prepared to 'hold an inquest' on the past term over their evening coffee.

'It's been a good term, on the whole,' said Hilary Burn as she flung herself down on the big settee. 'We've done well with such matches as we *have* been able to play, though I admit they aren't too many. Ten arranged, and only five played off! That's thanks to the weather. But we won the netball against Fairfields, and if they did beat us at hockey, it wasn't too bad. And we drew with Red Gables for hockey, and won the other two. No; it hasn't been at all bad. Next term——'

She was interrupted by groans from Miss Slater and Miss Burnett.

'This term doesn't end till tomorrow; and then we've got three weeks' holiday. For goodness sake don't start about *next* term tonight!' said the latter. 'All the same, Hilary, you're right. The exam people have got right through their syllabus for history, so that means we can take the whole of next term for revision. That's one blessing!'

'Wish I could say as much for their maths,' said Miss Slater. 'One thing, however, Lois Bennett ought to do brilliantly in it; and there are two or three others not so bad. Finally, I've managed to do every single report without having to get a fresh one because I've made some daft mistake, and then go round meekly and apologise to every other Staff concerned and get them to rewrite their remarks. I spoilt three last term, and the way I was cursed by one or two people made me wonder if I dare show my face this.'

There was a general laugh at this. Miss Slater's mishaps with reports had become proverbial with her colleagues.

'I think it has been a very good term, on the whole,' said Mlle Lachenais, who was officiating at the coffee-pot. 'We have had no epidemic, for one thing. For another, all our new girls have settled down, even the one for whom we had most fears. Lavender Leigh shows every sign of becoming a real Chalet School girl, and I, for one, never expected it.'

'She's had some sharp lessons to learn this term,' said Mary Burnett. 'I think her own gang have done more for her than anyone else, though.'

'Done more for whom? And *who* has done it?' asked 'Bill' as she came wearily into the room. 'Coffee, Jeanne? Oh, thank you! I could just do with a cup of coffee—several cups, in fact! I'm all in!'

'We're talking of our one and only Lavender,' said Hilary, while Mlle Lachenais poured out the coffee. 'Mary was saying that her own gang have done more for her than anyone else in the school. She's certainly a very different creature from the one who put all our backs up that first fortnight or so. I don't mind owning now that there were times when I felt absolutely murderous towards her.'

Miss Slater laughed up at her from the pouffe on which she was crouched before the fire. 'I'll bet you didn't feel it any more than I did! I could have slain her cheerfully. However, she

has pulled up a bit, and she does contrive to get a sum or two right nowadays. But she'll never make a mathematician, how ever hard she tries,' she added gloomily.

'You've got Lois Bennett, who seems to be a genius according to you, and that may do you,' Hilary told her. 'Give other folk a chance!'

'I've got something to tell you about that trio,' said 'Bill' as she held out her drained cup for more coffee.

'What trio?' demanded Miss Slater.

'Lavender, Lois, and Jesanne.'

'Lavender, Lois, and Jesanne? What on earth can a babe like Lavender have to do with two big girls like Jesanne and Lois?'

'It's this way. Jesanne asked Lilamani to go and spend the Easter hols with her, as the school is to be spring-cleaned, so no one wanted her. Jo can't have her—she's full up, now that Polly Heriot has come back from her visit to the Lannisises, and with all her own crowd; and the Round House is packed as usual. Lavender, I may tell you, was invited to go to the Marilliars at Medbury. She had accepted, and was looking forward to it, I know, for it seems that Mollie McNab had also invited Elfie Woodward and Anne Montague, since their people have been bombed out on the north-east coast, and it would have meant lodgings. Elfie and Anne have made quite an alliance with Lavender and young Bride, and as they aren't very far away, they had planned to meet during the hols and have a good time generally. They've been teaching Lavender to cycle, as you may have seen.'

'I should think I have!' interrupted Hilary. 'I was coming up the avenue the day before yesterday just before five, and heard wild yells. I leapt for the verge, and then dashed back. Lavender Leigh was careering down the drive on someone's bicycle, and tacking from side to side like a—like a crazy lugger, having lost all control. How ever she kept her balance, I *don't* know! I managed to grab the handle-bars and stop her before she rushed to destruction at the gates, which were closed. She fell off, of course, but she wasn't hurt. Neither, for that matter, was the bicycle, though it's a miracle. When I asked questions of her and that crowd, most of whom came tearing up shrieking like a lot of mad things, I found that someone had started her off along the terrace, and then some brainy child had called to her to try down the avenue for practice. I told them all exactly what I thought of them. You should have heard my flow of language!'

'I can imagine it,' said Mary Burnett feelingly. 'If that's the way young Lavender is going to disport herself about the roads during the hols, I should think there'll be a tragedy before next term!'

'Not it! There's a special guardian angel to look after kids like that,' said Hilary tolerantly.

'I should say he'll have his work cut out for the next three weeks.'

'Oh, no; he won't—at least, not unless the Dragon House people begin any tricks of that kind,' said 'Bill,' who had occupied the interval in draining her second cup of coffee, and now lit a cigarette, and looked her cheerful self again.

'The Dragon House? But I thought you said it was Lilamani who was asked there?'

'So it was. But Jesanne, who knows that Lilamani and Lavender are by way of being chums, also asked Lavender to come to keep Lilamani company. Everything being fixed up with the Marilliars, Lavender declined at the time. Then she seems to have thought better of it. Dr Marilliar was over last night, as you know, to see the Head about a new child who is coming next term—another patient of his. Lavender and the rest had had a confab, and when

Mollie went to see him, she told him that Lavender had changed her mind, and if he didn't object, would like to go with Lilamani.'

'Good for Lavender!' said Miss Slater heartily. 'For it won't be a very cheery holiday for her. Lilamani is fretting badly for her mother, poor baby; and whoever is with her will have a good deal of woe to put up with, I'm sure.'

'So Lavender seems to have thought. Dr Marilliar told the Head when he explained to her that Lavender had said quite seriously that Lilamani would be lonely without her; and it would be rather hard on Lois and Jesanne to have a Junior always tacked on to them. But if *she* went, she could be with her, and try to cheer her up. How's that for a change?'

'I think,' said Mademoiselle, leaving the coffee-pot to look after itself, and joining the group round the fire, 'that it speaks well for Lavender herself. She has good stuff—is not that what you say?—in her, or just one term would never have made so big a difference. For I am very sure that the Lavender who came to us would never have thought of such a thing as the feelings of Seniors, even though her real love for Lilamani might have made her wish to be with her at this sad time.'

Miss Slater shook her head. 'No, Mademoiselle. Not even that could have done it then. I grant you Lavender would have been sorry for her friend; but she would never have given up a jolly holiday for one which must, as I said before, be none too happy.'

'Yes; I think you are right there,' agreed Miss Wilson.

'What did Jesanne say about the change of plans?' asked Hilary.

'Took it all as a matter of course. What a nice girl she is! And Lois Bennett is another. Jesanne told the Head when she was sent for that she and Lois had prepared to give up as much of their time as possible to making Lilamani happy if they could; but she knew that it was much better for her to have her own friend with her. After all, Lilamani is only eleven, and they are both seventeen. It's a big difference at that age.'

'So it's all settled, then?'

'Bill' nodded. 'Oh, quite. Jesanne intends to invite Bride and Co.—or as much of the Co. as she can get—to spend a long day at the Dragon House, but it'll be a very different thing from their being just over at Medbury. As the crow flies, the Dragon House isn't so very far from here; but to go by road is quite another thing. It means cross-country lanes, and the children couldn't be allowed to ride about the countryside every day. The road to Medbury is all high-road. But doesn't it just show what a lot of good the school at large has done Lavender?'

'It does indeed,' said Mary Burnett. 'And there's another thing. The kid is really happy here now, though at first I thought she was doomed to be wretched the whole of the first year. She made such a ghastly beginning, and then she was so puffed up over the "Lavender Laughs" books that she simply wasn't bearable.'

'Oh, she's soon learnt that no one can be the only pebble on the beach,' said 'Bill' tolerantly. 'That was the main trouble. Now, if only we could get rid of those awful curl-rag-made ringlets of hers, and get a little more flesh on her bones, she'd be quite like any other child who has led a normal life. But she's still terribly skinny, though her colour has improved, and she eats what's put before her with no more grousing than anyone else.'

Had the Staff, who agreed cordially with this statement, had second sight, they would have seen that the first of the two objections was being done away with as speedily as possible.

The Juniors were all packed, and had been turned loose by Matron with orders to amuse themselves and keep out of the way. Some of them went to the Junior common-room, some went to the gym. A select group, consisting of Lavender, Bride, the Ozannes, the McDonalds, Nancy Chester, Anne Montague, Elfie Woodward, Julie Lucy, Primula Venables, and Lilamani, congregated in the Lower Third, where they discussed coming joys, and hoped for fine weather. Presently, someone suggested a game of Tag, and they began. It was an uproarious game, all round the desks which should have been folded up but had been overlooked for the time being. Three times was Lavender caught by her floating ringlets, and when it came to the fourth time, she lost her patience.

‘Oh, bother my hair! It’s a perfect nuisance! I’ve a great mind to cut it off!’ she declared.

‘Tuck it into your blouse collar,’ suggested Bride.

‘It wouldn’t stay. Besides, there’s too much of it. It’d choke me.’

‘Then why *don’t* you get it cut?’ asked Anne.

‘I will! I won’t wait another minute! I’ll do it now!’

A half-horrified, half-gleeful chorus of, ‘Oo-ooh!’ greeted this statement. Then Bride, who possessed most of the commonsense of the gang, shook her head. ‘You mustn’t, Lav! The Head would be wild! And whatever would your Auntie Sylvia say?’

‘*She* wouldn’t care. She lets me do as I like. But the Head—’ Lavender paused. ‘I s’pose she’d be awfully mad?’

‘She would,’ declared Nella Ozanne with conviction. ‘But I’d love to see her face when you’d done it!’

Lavender tossed back a curl which had tumbled over her face. She was standing near a window, and it caught on a hook which was used for holding back the black-out curtain during the daytime. As Lavender jerked her head forward, it tugged sharply, and she uttered a subdued howl.

‘Ow! That hurt! Well, this settles it!’ And she dashed out of the room, leaving the others staring after her.

She was back in a minute or two, waving a pair of Frau Mieders’s treasured cutting-out scissors which she had taken from a drawer in the needlework room.

‘Lavender! You simply mustn’t!’ cried Bride. ‘You’ll get into the most awful row if you do!’ And she sprang forward to snatch the scissors from Lavender.

But that young lady was too quick for her. Seizing a handful of ringlets in one hand, she sawed them through with the scissors before Bride could reach her, and then stood holding them up with a triumphant air which nevertheless had a little fear in it.

‘*Lavender Leigh!* Oh, how could you! And you look simply *awful!*’ wailed Bride. ‘The Head will have fits when she sees you, and there’ll be an outsize in rows—I know there will!’

‘You’d better finish it as you’ve begun,’ said Vanna Ozanne detachedly. ‘No one will let you go about looking like that, you know—all short hair at one side, and all long hair at the other.’

Lavender used the scissors again, and the other side of her tresses fell. ‘I can’t do the back myself,’ she said calmly, ‘so I s’pose I’d better go to someone and get them to finish me.’

‘Well, don’t go to Matey whatever you do,’ warned Nancy. ‘She’s in a real bait just now, and she’ll be ten times worse if she sees you like——’

The door opened, and Miss Stevens came in to see to putting the desks up, ready for the morning. With her came Daisy Venables, Jesanne Gellibrand, and Lois Bennett whom she had roped in to help her. At the vision that greeted them, they all stopped, almost robbed of breath.

The Juniors were standing about in various attitudes of dismay and awed admiration; the desks and chairs looked as if they had been in a football scrum of the most violent kind and had come off the worst; and Lavender Leigh was standing near the door, a double handful of hair in one hand, and a pair of big cutting-out scissors in the other, while her head looked, as Lois said later on when retailing the history to a select coterie, 'like nothing on earth.'

Miss Stevens recovered her breath first. 'What on earth is the meaning of this?' she demanded. 'Lavender Leigh! Have you taken leave of your senses?'

'Please—I've only cut my hair off,' replied Lavender meekly, all the courage oozing out of her finger-tips as she met Miss Stevens's eyes.

'But—but *why*?'

'It was in the way.'

'What *will* your aunt say?' exclaimed Daisy. 'And it was so long and thick! She'll have fifty fits, won't she?'

Lavender shook her caricature of a head. 'Oh, no; she always lets me do as I like,' she told Daisy as she had told her crowd.

Everyone present knew this to be true. At the same time, none of the elders could condone such a procedure. In the end, Miss Stevens took the scissors and clipped the remaining long locks, and then marched Lavender off with them to the Head, where she had an unpleasant ten minutes. But it was the last night, and even such an outrageous piece of mischief was forgiven in time. Lavender was condemned to writing to her aunt and telling her about the affair herself. Then she was sent to Matron to be properly trimmed. As that lady was very busy, and correspondingly short-tempered, she gave her tongue full rein all the time she was at it, and it was a very subdued Lavender who finally escaped from her clutches and got to the supper-table late, where her shorn mop created quite a sensation.

After supper came bed, and though they rioted considerably, ten o'clock saw them all settled down with the exception of the two Sixths, who were still at it, clearing their common-room, and tidying up generally. As they worked, they discussed Lavender's latest, which had been duly described to the rest by Jesanne and Lois.

'Did you say you were having her to the Dragon House for the hols?' asked Jocelyn. 'Rather you than me! Still,' she added charitably, 'at least you won't have any chance of being dull, I should say.'

'Dad will be jolly glad to hear she's rid of all that mop,' said Monica. 'I've heard him on the subject once or twice. And as for dear Aunt Sylvia saying nothing, there, I rather think, Lavender has missed the bus. He suggested cropping her wig while she was still growing, and the good lady nearly threw a fit at the bare idea. Lavender won't get away with it this time, as she usually seems to do.'

'That will be a shock for her,' said Robin. 'I saw Daisy for a few minutes just before she went to bed, and she said Lavender was quite calm about that side of it.'

'Oh, well, it won't hurt her if her aunt does tick her off for it,' said Jesanne cheerfully. 'As for being dull, we—Lois and I—have planned so much for those two babes, that we're hoping Lilamani won't have too much time for fretting, and Lavender certainly won't have any for mischief.'

'That's all to the good. As for me, my time is going to be filled to the brim with babies,' laughed Robin. 'Jo and Jack have to go to Pretty Maids for a day or two after Easter. Stephen will go with them, of course, but the girlies will be left on my hands. Luckily, Polly will be there to help me. And I shan't have Rufus, for Jo is taking him with her. He's ten years old

now, and she says she means to have all she can of him. Besides, he never leaves her for long—hasn't since she got him back after that year and more they were parted when we escaped from the Gestapo. I sometimes wonder how much he remembers of it all. I know folk say that dogs don't think; but if that's really true, then Rufus is an exception to the rule, for he thinks as well as any human I know, and a good deal more than some.'

'Rufus's adventures would make a book. I wonder Jo doesn't write it some time,' said Monica thoughtfully. 'If he's ten now—well, dogs don't often live beyond twelve in these days. The Triplets will be only five or so if anything happens to him then, and they would forget him. Jo ought to do the book for them. Then they would know all about him.'

'That's a good idea!' exclaimed Robin. 'I'll tell her as soon as I get a chance. She couldn't do it just yet. She says as soon as she "gets turned round" she's going to write that book. Jesanne and Lois gave her. But after that, she might very well do it. Thank you, Monica!'

In passing, it may be well to mention that the book was duly written, for Jo greeted the idea with acclamation. But, so far as the Triplets were concerned, there was little need for it, for Rufus, the beloved St Bernard whom Jo had saved from a watery grave as a tiny puppy, and who was the faithful guardian and friend of the entire family, lived to be a very old dog, and the little girls were growing into leggy colts, with more than six years of school behind them, when his mistress came down one morning to find her beloved pet lying stretched out on the dining-room hearthrug, sleeping his last sleep.

At present, the Sixths shelved the question, and turned back to Lavender, who certainly had occupied the limelight at school almost as much as she had ever done it elsewhere.

'Isn't your dad pleased with the way she's got on?' someone asked Monica.

'Very! He says she isn't the same girl. She's lost her pasty face, and he says her nerves are steadier, and—Goodness me, child! How you startled me! I know it's the last night, but may I ask what on earth you want here?' And Monica surveyed the subject of the conversation with her sternest air.

'I only came to return the pencil Robin lent me this morning,' explained Lavender. 'I woke up suddenly, and remembered it. I thought I might forget it in the morning, so I was going to leave it on the mantelpiece with a note. Here it is, Robin, and thanks very much.'

'Thank you,' said Robin. 'But it's late now, so you'd better run back to bed. And lucky for you that Matey is heavily occupied. If she caught you, you'd get into trouble, last night or no.'

'And, faith, that'd be a nice end to the term for you,' put in Biddy O'Ryan. 'Tell me, Lavender, did ye ever get into so many rows when ye were travelling in the varied countries ye've visited as ye have this term?'

'I didn't get into rows at all,' said Lavender simply.

'Oi thought not. Well, Oi'm going up meself, so it's to your own bed Oi'll be seeing ye. Come along, now.'

But the best end came next morning after breakfast when Lavender bumped into Joy Bird, who sheered off with a startled look. Lavender suddenly made up her mind, and caught the elder girl's arm.

'Joy,' she said, 'I want to tell you that I'll never say a word about—well, about—you know what. And why I'm doing it is because I'm trying to stand on my own feet like Mrs Maynard told me to.'

Joy looked at her. 'Yes; I believe you mean it,' she said slowly.

'Oh, I do,' replied Lavender earnestly.

Joy also made a decision. ‘Then I’ll tell you that I’m sorry I did it. And—and—I’d like you to know first as you’ve been so decent over it. I was so upset about it all, that I made up my mind I’d work and try to get a really good report to take home. I’ve just been to the Head, and she told me I’d done so much better this term, I’m to be moved up to Lower Fourth next. My people will be ever so pleased, and it’s you that’s to be thanked for it.’

Lavender stared at her. Then she burst out laughing. ‘Oh, Joy! What rot! It isn’t me at all—it’s you yourself. I know that now. I do think Mrs Maynard is just the wisest woman I ever knew. Listen, Joy, I wasn’t a bit nice when I came here. I did think an awful lot of myself—travelling so much, and being in all those books. I know better now. Why,’ and Lavender looked very grave, ‘I even thought Bride was horrid; *Bride*, you know! But school has shown me better, and I’m going to try to be different. Well, a nasty girl like I was can’t really help anyone else to be nicer, can she? So, you see, it is awfully funny you should think getting your remove is owing to me. I think it’s the funniest thing I ever heard!’

And then those who were within earshot came tearing to find out what the joke was, for Joy had begun to giggle at the end of Lavender’s speech, and, laughing such a clear, ringing peal on peal of laughter, such as she had never sounded, even in the merriest of the ‘Lavender Laughs’ series, Lavender Leigh was laughing in the Chalet School.

[The end of *Lavender Laughs in the Chalet School* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]