

GAY *from* CHINA *at the* CHALET SCHOOL



ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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GAY FROM CHINA
AT THE
CHALET SCHOOL

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By
ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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To
My Dear Mrs Way
with Love

CHAPTER I

JACYNTH MAKES A FRIEND

Jacynth sat in the corner of the railway carriage, and looked out at the bustling platform with eyes that were partly frightened, partly bewildered. Today she was to set off for boarding-school, where Auntie, by means of hard work and even harder saving, was managing to send her for the next four years. If she did really well, then she might have a chance of the Thérèse Lepattre Scholarship, and could hope to go on to Oxford and ‘collect a B.A.,’ to quote Auntie. But it would all be very different from anything she had hitherto known. Miss Kendal’s little private school at the end of the long road where they lived had taken only twenty-two girls at its best, and there had been only poor old Miss Kendal and her niece, Miss Doris, to do the teaching. Since Miss Kendal’s death six months ago, Miss Doris had kept the eight or nine girls who had remained at Ivy Lodge going for a time. But she wanted to give it up in any case, and go to join a sister who lived in Wales. So when the time had come, Auntie had said firmly that Jacynth needed much better teaching than she had been getting, and it must be boarding-school.

‘Why?’ Jacynth had wanted to know. ‘Couldn’t I go to the High at Newcastle and travel daily as Anne and Margaret Harper and the others do?’

Auntie had shaken her head. ‘No; I’m afraid that won’t do.’ Then she had told her niece something which Jacynth had not known before. In another month, Auntie was to go to hospital for an operation. It was one from which it would take her a long time to recover, and while she was away, Meldon, their house, was to be closed. The furniture would be warehoused, and Auntie said that it was possible that Meldon might be let for the year. ‘But when that’s over, the doctors all say I shall be able to walk again,’ she concluded. ‘So you see, girlie, it *must* be boarding-school. And if you go there, then it will be much better if you stay there for the rest of your school-life. We’ll send away for some prospectuses, and while I work you can read aloud what they say, and we must choose the pick of the lot. So will you go and ask Miss Doris if she will lend me that book of hers which has all the best schools in it and we’ll select a few to write to tonight? I’ll take an hour or two off to do it. Think of the fun we’ll have deciding!’

Then Auntie had picked up the Fair Isle jumper she was knitting for Mrs Armstrong, the Vicar’s wife, and began to be very busy counting, so Jacynth could do nothing but go and get her cap and coat and run up the street to Ivy Lodge to ask a busy Miss Doris for the book, which had been handed over with a brisk ‘Keep it, my dear. I don’t want to see its cover again. I’m going to try to forget all about schools for the rest of my days. I’ve had *my* share, and no mistake.’

Well, it *had* been fun going through that book, and choosing to which they would write. A good many that sounded quite thrilling to Jacynth had been rejected by Auntie with a firm ‘Too dear, my child! It won’t run to it, much as I should like to think of you as a Roedean or a Cheltenham College girl!’ Others, to which Jacynth had turned as being much cheaper, were also turned down, and for that very reason. Finally, they had written to five, and it was from these that her new school had been chosen, partly because Auntie knew someone who had once been there for a year when the school had not been in England at all, but on the Continent; and partly because of the Thérèse Lepattre Scholarship, which was awarded every

three years to the girl who was best all-round in the Sixth. It was a magnificent scholarship, giving its recipient three years at Oxford, Cambridge, or the Sorbonne in Paris, and further making an allowance of eighty pounds a year to the winner for current expenses. None of the other four schools gave such a scholarship.

Jacynth had made up her mind that if work would do it, the scholarship should be hers. The one difficulty was that she had been at such a tiny school, and she was afraid that she would find herself very much behind other girls of her own age, even though Auntie had spared two hours every other night to teach her history and French and Latin. They had struggled with algebra and geometry as well in the last six months, and while Jacynth attacked problems, and tried to get theorems and other tricky affairs into her head, Auntie had gone on with the knitting by means of which she added to her tiny income. Jacynth knew now that the reason why that knitting had always gone on had been so that Auntie could send her to a good school when she was fourteen. She had learnt that on the evening of the day when she had first heard what was going to happen. The news only made her the more determined to try tooth and nail for the scholarship. She must repay Auntie for all she had done ever since the sad day when they had laid a tiny motherless and fatherless baby in Auntie's twenty-two-year-old arms, and she had promised to do the best she could for her twin sister's child. There had been no one to help, for Auntie and Mummy had been orphaned three years before, and Daddy's own father had been killed in the last war, and his mother had died of the shock when he was a boy of sixteen. Daddy had been in the Navy, and he was lost at sea the week before Jacynth arrived in the world. Mummy had followed him when her little daughter was only two days old, and Jacynth and Auntie had been all in all to each other ever since. Now, Auntie was left at home, directing the activities of Mrs Herring who came in daily to 'do' for them, and she herself was in the train at Newcastle, where she had been taken by kindly Mrs Harper, their doctor's wife, and where she was waiting for that lady to return from a quest to find out what changes there were.

Jacynth had reached this point in her thoughts when the door of the compartment was flung open, and a schoolgirl floundered in, clutching a bundle from which protruded a tennis racquet and an umbrella. Behind her came a big schoolboy carrying two cases, which he heaved up to the rack, while the girl, having put down her burden, jumped out again and warmly embraced an older, very dark girl, who had two tinies by either hand, though she released them with a quick, 'Look after Nan, Bobby!' before she flung her arms round the schoolgirl. 'Gay, darling, you'll be all right, won't you? It's a horrid journey with all those changes; but Miss Annersley said that you'd be met at Stockport, so you'll only have to manage as far as that by yourself.'

'Ruthans, you old fusser!' retorted the girl. 'Of course I can manage. I'm not a baby now.' She turned to the boy, who had jumped out and was standing beside them. 'You lucky object, Mike! Five more days before *you* go back! And then, you're much nearer than I am, and you don't have to leave till the afternoon. I do wish we weren't so far away. Why ever didn't Tommy make a fuss about it, Ruth?'

'A lot of use that would have been!' retorted Ruth in her turn. 'I can just see the R.A.F. people listening to him! "Please, my kid sister-in-law's school is right in the west, and it's too far away. Could you move me somewhere nearer?" They'd only have said, "Who do you think you're talking to?" and that would have been that.—Oh, I beg your pardon!' This last to Mrs Harper who had arrived, armed with a couple of magazines and the information that Jacynth

would have three changes—Leeds, Stalybridge, and Stockport; and they might turn her out at Shrewsbury.

‘I wish I could have taken you myself,’ she sighed. ‘But I simply can *not* spare the time, now that Ian and Jean are both down with chickenpox.’

‘I can manage,’ said Jacynth sturdily. ‘Honestly I can, Mrs Harper. Don’t worry. And if it’s not too late when we do get there, I’ll ask someone if I can send a wire to Auntie, and she’ll ring you up. You’ll—you’ll let me know how she gets on, won’t you?’ she added in a voice that *would*, shake, however much she tried to keep it steady.

Mrs Harper nodded. ‘I’ll write every week. Don’t be afraid. And now I’m afraid I must run or I shall miss my train, and there isn’t another for an hour and a half. Goodbye, Jacynth. Have a good term, and don’t try to work too hard.’ She suddenly smiled. ‘I wish I had to say the same of my own two scaramouches. Oh, before I forget, the Doctor sent you this with his love.’ And she slipped an envelope into Jacynth’s hand before she kissed her warmly, and with a final ‘Goodbye’ turned and scurried off down the platform to seek her own train to Starforth at the opposite end of the great station.

At almost the same moment, Jacynth heard her fellow-traveller exclaim, ‘Here’s Tommy at last! Well, old thing; got Cerita safely in?’

‘Well and truly bedded down,’ replied the tall officer in R.A.F. uniform, slipping an arm round the girl’s shoulders. ‘She’s in the top van next to the engine. There are two together, so don’t make a mistake and hunt wildly through the wrong one. You move out in about three minutes, so you’d best take your seat now. Goodbye, old lady. Have a good term, and see if you can’t manage a trifle better report than last term.’

‘I’d like to have seen some of *your* reports!’ retorted the girl as she returned his kiss. ‘Goodbye, Tommy. Look after Ruth and the babies. And send me a line once or twice, won’t you? Bobby, goodbye, sonny. Kiss me, Nannette precious. Don’t forget Auntie Gay, will you? Mike, old thing, goodbye. Hi! I shan’t poison you!’

‘Well, go on and get it over,’ grunted her brother, presenting an unwilling cheek for her kiss, which was given lightly. Then she turned to the other girl, and flung her arms round her. ‘Ruthans darling! Take care of yourself. I do hope there’ll be no raids this term. It’s been peace perfect peace lately, but goodness knows how long that will last.’

Ruth hugged her close. ‘Goodbye, little sister. There’s the loudspeaker warning all non-travellers away, so you must get in. Be good, and have a jolly term, Gay; and don’t forget to let me know if your chum Gillian can come to us in the summer. You’ll have to share a room, remember.’

Gay nodded as she released herself and got into the compartment. ‘I know. We shan’t mind that, though. And you’ll love Gillian. Goodbye, everyone—goodbye. Your card will arrive some time the day after tomorrow, so don’t worry till that’s over. You know how long it takes for letters.’

A porter slammed the door after her, and she leaned out of the window still talking, as the train began to move, slowly at first, then quickening till at length they swept past the end of the long platform, and, with a final wave, she turned round to find her seat. As she did so, her eye fell on Jacynth in her corner, very conscious of her new brown uniform with the brown felt hat bearing the flame and brown hatband with the school badge in the centre which was the same as the one Gay’s own hat bore. Her eyes widened, and she dropped into her seat exclaiming, ‘Hello! A new girl! What fun! I’m Gay Lambert—Who are you?’

Jacynth went red. 'I'm Jacynth Hardy,' she said shyly. 'I saw your hatband at once. I say, does it really take as long as that for letters to come?'

'Every bit as long,' said Gay decidedly. She cast a glance at their fellow-travellers—two naval men, an elderly lady already reading, and a W.A.A.F. Gay sat down with a bump, and pulled off her hat, revealing a mop of corn-coloured curls cut short over her head in a manner reminiscent of the famous painting of 'Bubbles.' Jacynth thought she had never seen a prettier girl. Eyes of periwinkle blue sparkled under long dark lashes; a generous mouth smiled, showing a dimple in one cheek; her brows, as dark as her lashes, were crooked with a fascinating effect of humour; her firm little chin was deeply cleft. Jacynth cast a fleeting regretful thought to her own straight black hair and smoke-grey eyes, which seemed so ordinary beside Gay's vivid colouring. Then she turned to the subject uppermost in her thoughts. 'Please, would you tell me something about the school? We had the prospectus, of course——'

'Oh, that!' said Gay scornfully.

'Well, it's all you do get about a new school as a rule,' said Jacynth. 'A chum of Auntie's was there for a year when it was in the Tirol; but that was years ago, of course. And then she lives in London, and you don't get much through letters. Her name was Gipsy Carson. She must be as old as Auntie now, and Auntie's nearly forty. I don't suppose the school is much like it was then. She left when she was eighteen, and that's a good many years ago.'

'It is rather,' agreed Gay. 'Well, this is only my third term. Before that I was at Exeter High for a bit. But Tommy—that's my brother that was on the platform just now—was stationed near there, and Ruth, his wife and my cousin, likes to be near him if she can. That's why we came to Horston. There wasn't any school there I could go to, and Tommy and Ruth don't like girls to travel daily; so they sent me to the Chalet School. A girl at my old school had gone there, and her people told them all about it, and said what a topping school it was. So they shoved me off, and am I glad! It's a jolly good school, Jacynth, and so you'll find.'

'It's very large, isn't it?' asked Jacynth. 'The schools book said it had about two hundred and fifty girls.'

'About that, I should think,' agreed Gay. She rummaged in her coat-pocket, and produced a packet of chocolate. 'Let's have some of this. And I'd put that envelope you're hanging on to in your case, if I were you. What is it—an address or something?'

'I don't know what it is. Mrs Harper gave it to me from the Doctor,' explained Jacynth. 'She had to bring me because Auntie couldn't.'

'Well, look at it, and then put it away,' advised Gay. 'You might lose it if you keep it in your hand like that. I expect we shall fill up at Durham, you know. That's the first stop, and it isn't so far away.'

Jacynth opened the envelope and peeped inside. A ten-shilling note! How good of the Doctor! The pink flooded her pale cheeks again, and her eyes shone. 'It's a tip,' she said. 'How—how decent of him! I must put it in my purse.' She produced her new purse, which contained two half-crowns and a pound-note as well as her ticket. With this extra ten shillings she felt quite wealthy, for she had never had so much before. Gay, whose own note-case held two or three pound-notes, as well as a couple of ten-shilling notes, guessed what was running through the younger girl's mind, and felt suddenly sorry. She had never known what it was to lack money, for her brother was very lavish, and her sister-in-law could always be counted on for anything extra. A soft light came into her blue eyes.

‘That’s jolly good,’ she said. She held out the chocolate. ‘Have a bit—yes, do. I’ve got heaps. We’ve been saving all the holidays so that Mike and I could have some to take back to school. Mike’s my twin, the lad who heaved my cases about just now. We’re nearly sixteen.’

‘I’m just fourteen,’ said Jacynth as she took the chocolate. ‘It must be gorgeous fun to have a twin. There’s only Auntie and me at home.’

Gay chuckled unexpectedly. ‘We had another girl last term who had only an aunt too,’ she confided. ‘She *was* the limit! I expect you know *of* her, though.’

‘“Know *of* her?”’ repeated Jacynth. ‘What *do* you mean?’

‘She’s Lavender Leigh—the “Lavender Laughs” series—*that* girl.’

‘Lavender Leigh! *No!* Do you really mean she goes to the Chalet School? Why, Auntie and I’ve read all the books. We got them out of the library as they got them in. I loved them, and so did Auntie. I think they’re *thrills!*’

‘Lavender was one if you like,’ said Gay with a laugh. ‘Oh! how much she thought of herself when she first came to us! Of course, she’s a lot different now. No one could bear her at first. But she’s quite changed, and my chum, Gillian Culver, says she thinks she’s got the makings of quite a good sort. I think even Joey was a bit bothered what to make of her at first, and it isn’t often Joey’s floored, I must say.’

‘Joey?’ repeated Jacynth.

‘Joey Maynard—Lady Russell’s sister. The school’s hers, really, you know. Miss Annersley is Head, but Lady Russell owns the school. Joey went to it, of course, and was there till she grew up. Then, or so I’ve heard, she went back for a term to teach. She’s always been mixed up with it. And now that she’s married, she still belongs, somehow. Gillian said last term that she didn’t think Joey would ever *really* leave the school even if she lived to be a great-grandmother! She has four kiddies—triplet girls, and Stephen, who arrived halfway through last term. Oh, and she writes books, of course. You’ve heard of Josephine M. Bettany?’

‘Josephine Bettany who wrote *Nancy meets a Nazi* and *Gipsy Jocelyn!*’ gasped Jacynth. ‘Do you mean that she was at the Chalet School? Shall I really see *her*? I’ve loved her books for ages, and I *have* those two. Auntie gave them to me for birthday presents. D’you really mean it, Gay?’

‘Rather! As for seeing her, Joey always has the new girls to tea on the first Saturday of term so that she can get to know them. And she’s often up at school too. It’s on a hill, you know, and Joey lives down in the valley, in the village—well, just outside, anyhow. Of course you’ll see her! What do you expect?’

‘And—and has she *really* got triplets?’

Gay nodded. ‘Len, Connie, and Margot. They’re three and a bit, and little pets. The people who were at school when they were born say that at first they were so much alike that scarcely anyone knew them apart. But now Margot’s hair is turning fair, and Connie’s is going to be black. Jo has black hair, you know—and black eyes too. Connie’s are brown, just like brown pansies. At first the babes had red hair, but it’s changing. It’s just as well really. They’re demons for mischief, and you can just imagine the fun they’d have had if they’d stayed alike.’

‘Oh, I can!’ Then Jacynth turned to another subject. ‘What about Lady Russell? Has she any children?’

‘Yes—three. David is thirteen, Sybil is ten, and at school with us, of course. Josette, the baby, is nearly five, I think. Sybil is a picture for looks—the prettiest kid I’ve ever seen. She’s a bit stuck on herself, though; bound to be, I suppose, seeing her mother’s who she is, not to

Speak of her aunt. And then her father is Sir James Russell—the Sir James Russell. He got his baronetcy last year for his services to medicine. There are cousins of theirs at the school too—Peggy and Bride Bettany. Their father is Lady Russell's twin brother, and he and Mrs Bettany are in India with the youngest two of their family—they have six; those two, and Peggy's twin, Rix, who is about fourteen, and Jack who is Sybil's age. The boys all go to the Cathedral School at Armiford, though Peggy told me Rix is off to Winchester next term. Here's Durham. Now watch the rush.'

Gay had prophesied truly. By the time the train left Durham, it was packed. But at Darlington, which was the next stop, a good many people got out, including all those in their own compartment. The two schoolgirls hoped for the best, but five other people came in before the train started, so they were disappointed. However, as Gay pointed out, that was bound to happen on a main line. Jacynth pulled out some chocolate biscuits Mrs Harper had given her, and they were amiably sharing them when she suddenly thought of something that had puzzled her about her new friend.

'Gay,' she said. 'Who is Cerita? Is she a dog?'

CHAPTER II

CERITA

At Jacynth's question, Gay turned a wide-eyed glance on her, and then burst into shrieks of laughter, much to the amazement of the other people in the carriage. Jacynth flushed. Gay saw her, and stopped the laughter at once, though it was an effort. 'Oh, my dear! Do you really think a school could take one's pets at the present time? Though I believe they did in the dark ages—that means Tirol,' she added. 'Cerita isn't an animal of any kind—neither dog, nor cat, nor pony—nor—nor chameleon. She's my 'cello. Cerita the 'Cello. Don't you see?'

'O-oh! Yes; I see,' agreed Jacynth. 'But—do you mean to say you can play the 'cello? Oh, how lovely! What a lucky girl you are!'

'You wouldn't think so if you had to work for Mr Manders,' said Gay ruefully. 'He's fearfully strict. The least little mistake in bowing or fingering sends him off like a Chinese firecracker. He's a very good teacher, of course, and I can feel I've really gone ahead since I had him. But he does demand work—and then work, and then *more* work. I practise two solid hours a day, and if it weren't for the Head, he'd insist on six at least, I'm sure. But I've got to pass School Cert. before anyone will let me specialise in anything. They all say so. They've let me off science, which is just as well. I'm no good at it, and if there *is* a mad mistake to be made, you can bet your bottom dollar I'll make it. So it's really a very good thing they've let me drop it before I blew up the whole school. But apart from that, I have to do my full syllabus, only I'll take maths instead of science. You've got to have one or the other for a full cert., you know.'

'Would you—would you—some time—play to me?' asked Jacynth wistfully. 'I do love music so, and I love the sound of a 'cello.'

Gay laughed. 'Of course I will. But I warn you, I'm no Thelma Reiss or Suggia. But I do love Cerita. There are only five of us who learn the 'cello at school—Monica Marilliar, one of our prefects, is one. She began three years ago. She's pretty good, though she isn't exactly mad about it. Jesanne Gellibrand is another, and there are two beginners, Primrose Day and Anne Harrison. Jesanne is really good—pounds better than either me or Monica. But then, she's learnt for years. If you're so keen, why don't you ask your aunt if you can learn? I could give you a few tips now and then. I believe you'd do quite well at it. You've got hands like mine—see!' She spread out a hand with a wide stretch, and strong but sensitive fingers. 'Yours is a bit smaller, of course; you're younger. But you've got the stretch all right. Practice would soon make it flexible. Ask, Jacynth; do!'

Jacynth shook her head slowly. Her grey eyes had glowed at the suggestion, but the glow quickly died. 'I couldn't.' She looked at Gay doubtfully. Then she made up her mind to confide fully in this jolly, friendly girl. 'You see, Gay, we're awfully poor. It's going to be all Auntie can do to give me four years at the Chalet School. I'm going to have a shot for the Thérèse Lepattre Scholarship. If I could get that, I could go to a university and get my degree. Then I'd have a chance of a good post in a high school. But if I don't, I don't know what I'll do. Go in an office or something like that, I suppose. We can't afford any extras at all. And anyway, I'll have to work hard. I've only been to a tiny private school up to this, and though Miss Kendal made us work, and I do know what she taught us, and Auntie used to coach me at nights too, I feel certain I'll be behind other girls of my age.'

Gay flushed. 'Oh, I don't expect so,' she said quickly. 'And even if you are, our staff do get you on. Even I've gone ahead since I've been at the Chalet. If you're going to slog for all you're worth, you'll soon catch up with the rest if you really are behind them. But I don't think you will be. But I see what you mean about extras, and Mr Manders' fees are fairly hectic, of course.'

'And there'd be the 'cello too,' said Jacynth earnestly. 'I'm sure they're awfully dear. Auntie's giving me so much, I couldn't ask her for anything more—'specially not just now,' she added, her eyes misting over.

'Why not just now?' asked Gay curiously. Then she added hastily, 'Don't tell me if you'd rather not, Jacynth. I don't want to poke and pry.'

'I know that. I'll tell you, because I know it's just being—friendly makes you ask.' And then Jacynth told her tale as quickly as she could. 'So you see,' she finished with a little choke, 'it's all a bit difficult. I know Auntie will be all right in the end, but a year's a long time.'

'It is,' agreed Gay. 'But it'll be marvellous when it's all over and she can walk again. How long is it since she was an invalid?'

'Seven years. It was a cycling accident. A bus caught her front wheel, and she was flung off against a wall. Her spine was fractured, and she broke one or two other things. They couldn't operate then; she was too ill. And then the doctors wanted her to wait till something joined up again on its own. But it didn't exactly do it—or didn't do it right. I'm not very sure. So now she has to have the operation. Dr Harper suddenly met an old friend of his who was at Bart's with him, and he's a great surgeon in America now. He came over to work in one of the hospitals here with the troops. Dr Harper told him all about Auntie, and he said he'd done two or three cases like hers in America, and he'd like to see her. So he came. I didn't know about it. Mrs Harper had asked me to spend the day with them, and she took me and Anne and Margaret and Ian and Jean to Newcastle for the day, because Auntie didn't want me to know about it till I had to. Mr Bristow told her that he could put her right—or very nearly right. But it would take at least a year. But if she would agree, he could get her into a—a—an or-something hospital, and there'd be nothing to pay, because he'd do the operation himself as a thank-you to Dr Harper for something he had once done.'

'I see.' Gay was silent after that for a minute or two. Then she nodded. 'Of course you couldn't worry your aunt about the lessons just now. Well, never mind. I'll play to you sometimes, and something may turn up yet. You never know. Here's Harrogate. Leeds after that, and our first change. Miss Slater, our maths mistress, is meeting us at Stalybridge, so we'll be all right there. What have you got in the way of luggage?'

'Just my night-case. My trunk went in advance a fortnight ago. So I'll be able to help you if you need it.'

'Thanks very much. I shall need it all right. I've those two cases, and Cerita. She's in the guard's van, in a wooden case. If you could manage one of *those*,' Gay cast an upward glance at the rack, 'then I shall be quite comfy and tra-la. Where's my hat and gloves? We'd better be getting ready. I want to fasten my rug et cetera to one of the suitcases. Got any string about you?'

Jacynth had not; but after some rummaging, Gay produced a couple of lengths, and the pair of them contrived to tie her 'rug et cetera' to one of the cases. They also tied in Jacynth's almost forgotten magazines, and then they pulled on their hats and gloves, and when the train reached the New station at Leeds they were first out and racing for the van.

'This one!' gasped Gay; '—nearest the engine, Tommy said. You sit on the cases while I yank Cerita out, will you? There she is, at that end. I can see her. But how on earth am I to get at her?' And she glanced ruefully at the heap of mailbags and the small forest of bicycles that parted her from her 'cello.

'Here's a porter,' said Jacynth, as a hefty-looking girl in porter's uniform came up to them. She turned Gay out of the van with a good-humoured, 'Come out o' that, luv! What is it—a bike?'

'No; my 'cello; over there,' said Gay.

'Well, Aa'll see tiv 'er. You get out an' wait.'

Gay jumped down from the step, and the girl proceeded to heave mailbags, cases, and parcels to one side as carelessly as if they were mere featherweights. In due time she reached the bicycles, and wheeled out half a dozen whose owners were clamouring for them. Then came Cerita in her wooden case, and Gay clutched her happily. She was an awkward burden, and they had to go across the bridge and to the far end of another platform. Luckily, they had half an hour to wait, and they managed it quite comfortably. Gay even found time to make a dive for a refreshment room, whence she emerged with two brimming cups of boiling-hot tea which they drank gratefully, for so much chocolate had made them thirsty.

'Here's the train. What shall we do with the cups?' asked Jacynth in dismay as the engine, whistling deliriously, hurtled alongside the platform. 'There isn't time to take them back, is there?'

'Shove them into that waste basket. Some one will see them and collect them all right,' said Gay, setting the example. 'Can you manage all that, Jacynth? Then you bag a carriage and two corner seats if you can while I bed Cerita down in the van.' She left Jacynth to obey her, and departed for the van, cheerfully lugging her unwieldy treasure with her, rather to the amusement of two or three people watching.

Shy Jacynth managed to get the seats, and put Gay's case down on one while she sat down in the other. Gay appeared five minutes later, flushed but cheerful, and plumped down after she had contrived to put her two cases on the rack. The next moment the compartment was invaded by a family—father, mother, aunt, grandmother, and five children, one of them a baby who sat on his mother's knee and stared solemnly ahead of him. Auntie lifted the next smallest on to hers, and the remaining three squashed in between their elders. It was a tight fit, but the train was rapidly filling up, and there were no other places to be had. A small boy of eight sat between Jacynth and Auntie, who was next to Grandma. The others squeezed into the opposite seat, leaving Mother and the baby to take the last corner.

They were just settled when the engine began its whistling again, and once more they were on the move. Gay, who was very much crowded, gave a wriggle, nearly upsetting the twelve-year-old girl sitting next her, and Grandma's eye was fixed on her somewhat grimly.

'When I was a young girl,' she said, 'I gave up corner seats to my elders and betters, and sat in the middle—aye, and thankful that I had a seat.'

The two granddaughters exchanged glances and giggled. Gay and Jacynth went red, but when Jacynth showed signs of getting up, Gay leaned forward. 'You stay where you are,' she said in a stern undertone. 'We got here first.'

'But—but—I don't mind not having a corner, Gay,' stammered Jacynth.

'I mind for you. They're probably getting out at Bradford or somewhere near, and we've hours of train journey yet. You stay put. And what about having a look at those mags. of yours? Shall I get them out? Right!' And Gay got up, fished till she had pulled the magazines

out from the rugs, and handed one over to Jacynth, keeping the other for herself. Jacynth thankfully buried her hot face in the pages of hers, but Gay kept glancing up from the girls' paper she was reading, and presently caught the eye of the girl next her. That young lady had been glancing enviously at the page she could see. Nothing if not friendly, Gay shoved the magazine in her direction. 'Like to share?' she asked amiably.

Before the young lady could say anything, Grandma had taken a hand. 'Ethel Thirlbeck, you stop coveting,' she ordered. 'Oh, I saw you, looking at the young girl's book. Keep your eyes to yourself.'

'It's all right—*really*,' said Gay hastily, for poor Ethel was scarlet at this attack, and no one else seemed to dare to brave the old lady, though Mother murmured, 'There now, Grandma. Let Ethel be, do!'

'It's not all right. How do *I* know what sort of rubbish you're offering her? Our young girls are brought up in a respectable manner, and don't read trash as some are allowed to do. Let me see that thing of yours.'

Gay meekly handed over the magazine. She told Jacynth afterwards that the old lady was so fierce she dared do nothing else.

Grandma paid no heed. She looked it through from cover to cover, and then handed it back. 'Lot of trash!' she snorted. 'When *I* was a young girl I only read the *Sunday Companion* and *Good Words*. And *then* my father tore out the serial first. He said that novels taught young girls all sorts of foolishnesses; and he was right too! Those were a great deal better days, and the young knew how to behave, and respected their elders. The world's changing, and sadly not for the better.'

'Now, now, Grandma,' said Father. 'I'll lay your father said the same thing about you and your sisters. You pipe down a bit; and if the young lady likes to share her paper with Ethel, well, she can. Go on, Ethel, love. And thank you, young lady.'

Much to the amazement of the two Chalet School girls, Grandma did 'pipe down,' though she gave such a snort that Gay wondered if she would break a blood-vessel. Ethel shared the paper, and there was silence for the next ten minutes, broken by Auntie's saying pettishly, 'I wish you'd sit still, Stanley! That's three times you've kicked me. I'm sure Baby there can teach you how to behave, and he's nearly eight years younger. I'm black and blue.'

Grandma looked up. 'You change places with him, Amy,' she commanded. 'Stanley, you come here. *I'll* see you don't kick anyone. Sit down, and keep your feet still, boy. Here's a peppermint for you—Ethel, Maud,' to the schoolgirl members of the family, 'take a peppermint, and pass the bag to the young girls too. Take one, each of you. Settle your stomachs, and save you being trainsick, they will. A lot better for you than all that rubbishy chocolate young people eat now.'

Jacynth, who had been feeling in her pocket for the packet of chocolate she had there, started guiltily, and took the peppermint. Gay did the same. Grandma might give way before Father; but for all that, he was the only one who did not stand in awe of her. Grandma was pleased, and she was also chattily inclined. 'How far are you going?' she demanded of Gay.

'To Armiford,' said Gay. 'Our school is outside—about fourteen miles out, near a place called Howells. It's only a little village—' She stopped, for the entire family, with the exception of the baby who was now asleep, was staring at her.

'Howells?' burst out Ethel. 'Why, that's where we're going! Dad's bought a business there, and we're just going there now.'

‘The shop?’ cried Gay. ‘Is Mrs Parry giving up, then? I never knew she was. She’s not leaving Howells, I hope?’ anxiously. ‘We all love Mrs Parry-the-shop. We get our sweets there as a rule.’

Father beamed. ‘Well *now!*’ he exclaimed, giving his knee a great thwack. ‘Fancy that! Oh, your Mrs Parry isn’t leaving the place. She’s going to live with her son who’s lost his wife, and left two little bairns.’

‘I know,’ said Gay soberly. ‘Mrs Evan Parry died in February when the baby was just a year old. He has Maile Court, and I heard some of the prefects wondering what ever he would do with Gladys and little Evan. I’m glad their granny is going to them. She loves them, and she’ll make them very happy.’

‘Let’s hope she brings them up to be a good man and woman. That’s better than all this “being happy” there’s so much talk about nowadays,’ put in Grandma. ‘There wasn’t any of it when I was young. Children were made to be obedient and truthful and respectful, and there wasn’t all this gadding about after pleasure. Well, and so we’ll be seeing you in our new home? I’m going to take my turn at serving in the shop, you know. I was never one to be idle, and my daughter here will have enough to do, looking after the house and the children. What’s the place like? I asked Alfred when he came back from seeing it, but he’s no hand at telling a body anything she wants to know. “A village with a big church at one end, and the shop and the post-office all in one. A pretty bit of country.”’

‘Well, so it is lovely country,’ agreed Gay. ‘The school is really about two miles out of the village, and up a hill. The village itself has a lot of old cottages. And there’s the school and the church at one end, and the Vicarage is there too. But there are a good many bungalows and modern houses at the other, and one or two fine old bigger places. Then there are a good many farms about. I think that’s all.’

‘H’m! Any of those picture-houses, eh?’

‘No nearer than Armiford. There are four there, though—and a good bus service on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Only about two in and two out on other days, though.’

‘Well, that’s a good thing. Any chapels? We’re Chapel, we are.’

‘I don’t think so. We have our own chapels at school, and only go to the village church for special occasions. It would be too far to go on a wet Sunday for the Juniors,’ concluded Gay rather confusedly.

‘I don’t hold with Church. Too much getting up and sitting down for a body of my age. And a lot of bad little boys looking like cherubs and seraphs in white pinafores, singing and all. I don’t hold with it at all.’

Mercifully, before Gay could think of something to say to this, the train began to slacken speed, and she jumped up exclaiming, ‘This is Stalybridge. Hurry up, Jacynth, and help get the cases down. I’ll have to fly to the van for Cerita. Miss Slater doesn’t like to be kept waiting.’

In the bustle, Grandma’s remarks were forgotten, and they had just time to say goodbye to the family before they had to jump out, and Gay, leaving Jacynth in charge of the cases, raced along to the van to rescue Cerita. Meeting Miss Slater, a pleasant young lady of twenty-five or six, and the three or four other people who were with her, and scrambling for places in the train to Stockport, prevented their seeing where Grandma and her descendants got in; and there was so much for Gay to discuss with the newcomers that she forgot all about that redoubtable old lady, though she took care of Jacynth as efficiently as ever.

CHAPTER III

A REAL TRAGEDY!

The Chalet School had opened this term in a distinctly unexpected way. A week before the end of the holidays, Joey Maynard, the 'Joey' of Gay's chatter to Jacynth, was busy washing out frocks for her small daughters when the telephone rang.

'You go, Rob,' she said to the very lovely, dark-eyed person who was squatting on a low stool, polishing silver. 'I'm up to the elbows in soap.'

Robin Humphries chuckled as she pulled off her gloves. 'It's more than that. If you'd said up to the shoulders it wouldn't have been far off the mark!' she retorted as she left the kitchen. She was back again in three minutes with the information that it was Lady Russell, and Jo must go herself.

'Oh, hang!' said Jo aggrievedly, removing her hands from the lather, and holding them under the tap. 'Why couldn't Madge give you a message?'

'You'd better ask her,' suggested Robin as she sat down to her work again. 'She sounded badly agitated. I can tell you that much.'

Jo wiped her hands dry, and departed. She returned in five minutes, a startled look on her face. 'Madge is coming down at once. We've got to stay in till she comes. Something *awful* has happened, but it isn't any of the children, she says. You'd better finish up with that, and go and make yourself fit to be seen. That overall of yours looks as if you'd done a whole spring-cleaning in it,' she reported. 'Where's Anna, d'you know?'

'Gone to the shop with the children, to get their sweet rations. Fill the kettle and put it on, Jo. If Madge is cycling, she'll want tea when she comes. I'll run and change, and see to laying it while she tells you the worst. I do wonder what's happened?'

'So do I. I wish Daisy was back. She's such a help. All right, Rob. I'll leave tea to you—though what there is barring bread-and-butter and jam, I don't know,' she added as she hung the kettle up on the big hook over the fire, and then began to bundle her washing into the outer kitchen. 'Open a tin of apricot, will you? Madge loves that.'

'All right. Leave that to me, and I'll clear it off. Anna can rinse these things out when she gets back. I'll tell her to give the children their tea, shall I? If Madge has come to discuss something awful, you won't want them about.'

Jo nodded. 'It might be as well. They're all ears these days, and they come out with things just when you don't want them to. If what Madge has to say is private, then we certainly don't want them at hand. Besides,' she added, 'I don't believe in small girls hearing all that's going on. I'm keeping my trio children so long as they *are* children. And the same for Stephen when he's their age—and any others that may happen along. I've no use for little old men and women.'

On this note she departed, and Robin, after clearing up the kitchen, laid tea for three in the pretty drawing-room, and then ran upstairs herself to change into an afternoon frock, and tidy her black curls which were twisted into a low knot on the nape of her neck. By this time, she had heard the sound of a bicycle bell at the top of the lane, and she hurried downstairs to open the door. Lady Russell came scorching up the drive, she bounded off her bicycle, pulled off her cap and coat and gloves and tossed them down on the old settle in the hall, and then,

turning to her sister who had reached the foot of the stairs, cried in a voice full of tragedy, 'Oh, my dear! The most ghastly thing has happened!'

'So you said over the 'phone,' returned Jo calmly. 'Come into the drawing-room, and Rob will bring tea. Then we can settle down and discuss whatever it is in comfort. I can see it *is* something awful,' she added. 'Your hair's coming down, and you've got a lovely smudge right across your nose. It doesn't suit your elusive beauty, my dear.'

'Oh, Jo!' Her sister began to laugh. Then she stopped, and with a sob in her voice, she added, 'This is the most awful thing that has ever happened to the school. I can hardly believe it, even now. But it must be true, for Jem spoke to the hospital himself, and got full particulars.'

'Full particulars of *what?*' demanded Jo. 'Madge, I'll shake you if you go on like this! Here, Rob! You scoot and make tea! And Madge, come in and sit down, and I'll fix your hair. Give your face a rub with your hanky. Now come along, and not another word out of you till the tea comes. You look every which way, and it isn't at all becoming, not to say proper, in the wife of Sir James Russell.' But her hands were very gentle as she guided her sister to a chair by the bright fire, and then pinned up the loose, curling ends which had slipped from the big 'bun' Lady Russell wore down on her neck.

Nearly wild with curiosity, Robin hurried with tea, and ten minutes after Madge Russell had entered the house, they were drinking it, and she was telling her story to a pair of horrified auditors.

'You know that Hilda and Nell and Jeanne de Lachenais went off to Cornwall together for a week after Easter?' she began.

Jo nodded. 'Rob and I have had cards from all of them. Nell Wilson wanted to go to Devon to see about some business arrangements with that cousin who has her cottage. And Hilda wasn't well all last term, and Jack told her she ought to have a change,' she said, alluding to her husband who, like Madge's husband, was a doctor. 'But Dollie Edwards joined them a couple of days ago, for I had a card from her telling me so. What has happened, Madge?'

'The most dreadful thing! They were coming as far as Exeter by bus, and halfway down some steep hill or other, the steering broke, and they ran into a high stone wall, and the bus overturned. Mercifully, there weren't many people in it. Some men were working not far away, and they heard the crash, and rushed to the scene. They were able to get everyone out before the fire could do much harm. But the driver was killed, and the conductress is very badly injured. And, worst of all for us, Hilda was hit on the head. She hasn't recovered consciousness yet, and they don't expect it for another day or two. Dollie Edwards has a compound fracture of the right leg—they had to operate as soon as they got her to the nearest hospital. Jeanne got an arm broken in two places, and a bone in her ankle, and sprained the other wrist. Nell Wilson has a broken leg, and sundry bruises and scratches. She's the least badly hurt of the four. She didn't lose her senses, and she put the hospital on to Jem, and they rang him up as soon as they had found out what was wrong with them all. They're anxious about Hilda Annersley. I think they're afraid of some pressure, and may have to trephine. But they won't do anything for a few days yet. Jem is going down to St Arvan's, which is where they are, at once. Luckily, he can be spared for a day or two from the San. We shall know more when he's seen how things are.'

'It's bad enough from your account, in any case,' said Jo, as she poured out second cups of tea. 'Which of Nell's legs is broken—the one where she hurt her foot years ago? Well, that's

one blessing. That foot still gives her trouble when she's tired. If the other leg had to be a bit weak as well, it *would* be hard lines. And Dollie's is a compound fracture, you say? Isn't that rather a lengthy business? But Hilda is worst, of course. Madge,' her face and voice were very troubled, 'they—they aren't afraid——'

'They won't say. Even Jem doesn't seem to know. But, of course, it's mainly on Hilda's account that he's going. St Arvan's is only a little country town, and it's only a cottage hospital, but it was the nearest. If it's going to mean anything so serious as trephining, they'll have to take her elsewhere—Exeter, or Plymouth, I believe. But, Joey, do you see what it's going to mean?'

'I do.' Robin spoke for the first time. 'It's only a week to the beginning of term, and not one of them will be fit to do anything for weeks and weeks—not even Miss Wilson. Don't you see, Joey? When we begin again we shall be missing the Head, the senior mistress, the senior languages mistress, and the Head of the junior school.'

Joey stared at her with dropped jaw. 'My—only—aunt! What a calamity! Madge! What on earth are you going to do about it? If it had been only one of them; or even two! But all four! Who *can* act as Head? There isn't anybody. Slater's a dear, but she's only twenty-six or so. Mary and Hilary are no older. They're old girls, of course, and do know us and our traditions inside out; but I don't believe they could handle the organisation side. Could you possibly take it on yourself? That would be best, of course.'

'Oh, Madge, *do!*' cried Robin. 'We might be able to manage then.'

Madge Russell shook her head. 'Can't be done. The family's having an extension in September, and I couldn't do it. Jem would never hear of it.'

'Why ever didn't you tell me before?' demanded Jo.

'It wasn't necessary. You know now, anyway. But you can see that it means leaving *me* out of the count. No; the only thing I can do is to wire to the agents and get what I can. It should mean only half a term, for Nell will insist on coming back as soon as possible. So will Jeanne. But we must try to get substitutes for the first half, anyhow.'

'I suppose there isn't anyone of the old staff we could get, is there?'

'Well—who? Mollie Maynard in New Zealand; Con Stewart in Australia——'

'What about Carty? Couldn't she come? She's in England.'

'The baby's only five months old. And she has Margaret and Susan as well. She could hardly manage with Margaret as she is, poor kiddy.'

'I'd forgotten that,' confessed Jo. 'Poor Carty! She's had a tough row to hoe. Is there no hope that Margaret will improve?'

'She *is* improving; but it's slow. I had a letter from Carty last week, and she said that the doctors say that, provided Margaret has no setback, she should become normal by the time she is thirteen or fourteen. But she has to be kept very quiet and have as few changes as possible. That's why Susan has never come to us, though she's seven now. Margaret must be nearly ten. It was a horrible business that accident! Margaret was such a bright, bonny child before it happened.'

'I never did hear exactly how it did happen,' put in Robin.

'It was five years ago. They were coming home from their summer holiday by train. Margaret was leaning against the carriage-door, and it wasn't properly fastened. She was flung out and rolled down a steep embankment and was badly injured. The shock seems to have affected her mind, and Carty told me that they can't leave her alone at all. Sometimes she's quiet and listless for days. Then she has outbreaks of the wildest mischief when she does

anything that comes into her head. But lately she seems to be improving. She doesn't stay quiet for so long, and she's begun to ask for picture-books, and talks about the pictures quite clearly. I know they have never dared to leave her alone with Susan; and Carty says she hasn't even seen the baby yet. She has her own rooms where she and Susan play together, and they have a special nurse for her. It's a mercy they have enough for that sort of thing. If it had been Mollie Maynard or Con Stewart, it would have been even more dreadful. But you can quite see that her mother can't leave her, can't you? No; we must get someone to teach senior English and act as Head, at any rate until June. Nell may be able to come back to us then, and she could take over the organisation. And, Jo, isn't Simone coming back soon? I thought perhaps she could be responsible for senior maths, and Miss Slater could take over the juniors. We shan't have Dollie Edwards at all this term. That would be two places filled—filled from people we know, I mean. I'm afraid we must get someone to take on the science too.'

'If Stephen weren't so dependent on me, I could have taken over the English myself for a few weeks,' began Jo. But she was instantly squashed by the other two.

'Oh, Jo! You couldn't!' cried Robin. 'Who would look after the girlies? Anna couldn't run the house and see to them by herself. And it strikes me I shall be needed at school rather badly this term.'

'Jem wouldn't allow it, anyhow. And you've Jack to consider as well,' added her sister. 'You couldn't possibly do it. And in any case, do you mind explaining how you imagine that you, of all people, could see to the organisation? It needs a tidy mind for that sort of thing, my child.'

'Well, you needn't be so crushing!' complained Jo. 'After all, I do run my own house, and it's not too bad. But of course I can't do it. I see that. As for Simone, she's due back on Friday. Thérèse is a year old now, and she could quite well come here during the day and be with my own flock. And with André in the Middle East, Simone won't have him to worry about. But oh, I don't like to think of a stranger at the head of affairs! Hilda Annersley has run the school for eight years now; and before that, she was with us for three. She's one of the foundation stones really. Still, I suppose there's nothing else to do. It's a pity Matey couldn't take over. She's been with us even longer, and she knows the place inside out.'

'I suppose Miss Denny couldn't do it?' asked Robin thoughtfully.

Madge Russell shook her head. 'She's a dear and would do anything she could to help. But it would be cruelty to animals to ask that of her. You know how she hates responsibility of that kind. I'm going to ask Julie Berné to take over all the French; and we must get someone to come for Latin. I think it might be best to try to get someone to come two or three days a week for that. But, of course, the important thing is to get someone to take over the headship pro tem., and at this late date I'm afraid it's going to be a very difficult matter.'

'What on earth will you do if you can get no one?'

Madge made a gesture of despair. 'Heaven knows! I've been wondering if it would be as well to advertise locally as well as applying to the agents.'

'I should, I think,' said Jo thoughtfully. 'There might be someone retired in the vicinity who would take it up for the time being, until we see how Hilda gets on. Indeed, if Nell Wilson comes back soon, she could take over. But then you would need someone else to carry on with her job. Hilda may not be fit for months to come after such an accident.'

'Very well,' said Lady Russell decidedly. 'I'll wire the agents at once, and send an advertisement to all the local papers. Can I use your 'phone, Joey? It isn't four o'clock yet, so the offices won't be closed.'

‘By all means. But you’d better scribble down some ideas first, hadn’t you? Get some paper and a pencil from my desk, Rob, there’s a dear.’

Robin went off, and presently came back with paper and pencils, and after a good deal of argument they got something that suited all three. Then they went out to the hall and sent off the wire first, and then the notices to the *Armiford Times*, two Birmingham papers, and a Cheltenham one.

‘And now we’ve got to wait,’ said Jo. ‘Come on back and have some more tea, you people. I’ve had only two cups so far, and I want a third. And none of us has had anything to eat worth mentioning. Come along, Madge. Rob’s opened a tin of your favourite apricot jam.’

They went back, and while they made up for lost time Jo questioned her sister till they knew as much as either she or James Russell did. The call from the St Arvan’s Cottage Hospital had come through at one o’clock, and the Matron who had rung up had been able to tell him little more than they already knew. The really serious case was Miss Annersley, and they could say very little about her for the present. Miss Edwards had stood the shock of the operation well, but it would be many weeks before she could be moved, and even longer before she would be fit for work again. The other two had come off comparatively lightly, but even so, Miss Wilson must remain for at least a month where she was. An old injury had rather complicated matters for her. And Mille de Lachenais was suffering great pain, and her temperature was running very high at the moment. It was quite clear that not one of the four would be able to return before half-term, if then.

‘We shall know more when Jem comes back,’ said his wife. ‘Oh, I hope Hilda will be all right! It would be so terrible—’ Her voice failed. Jo took her up sharply. ‘Of course Hilda will be all right! Oh, not for some time, I dare say. Severe concussion isn’t a thing that you can recover from in two or three days—or two or three weeks for that matter, either.’

‘When does Jem go there?’ asked Robin, who had been sitting quietly as was her wont while the other two talked.

‘He went at once—or nearly at once,’ returned his wife. ‘He rang up the San. to make some arrangements, and I made him eat some lunch. But he left before I did. He said he would go straight there, and ring me up as soon as he knew more about the whole thing. In the meantime,’ she added, ‘my family has been left to its own devices quite long enough. I must get back and see what wickedness they have perpetrated while I’ve been gone. Joey, I’ll ring you as soon as I get any news myself. I don’t know when that will be. I’ve no idea how long it will take Jem to get there. It may not be before midday tomorrow, or even later.’

‘Well, even if it’s after midnight tonight, mind you let me know as soon as you do,’ said Jo, rising with her. ‘Come and see the children for a moment or two before you go. They came back about ten minutes ago—I heard them. I thought they’d have been rushing in here.’

‘I left a note on the kitchen table for Anna, telling her to keep them in the nursery and give them their tea,’ said Robin.

‘I might have guessed it. You think of everything, don’t you, Rob?’ And Jo gave her sweetest smile to the girl she called her adopted sister before she led the way up to the nursery where Anna, a pleasant-faced Tirolean of her own age, was presiding over tea for the three small daughters who were Jo’s pride and joy, while her bonny son lay chuckling in his cot. At sight of their mother and aunts the trio set up a shout of glee, and scrambled down from their chairs, to run for kisses and hugs which were liberally bestowed.

‘How they are growing!’ said Lady Russell. ‘They’re going to be tall, Joey. And Stephen seems to develop new beauties every time I see him.’

Jo laughed as she picked up her son. 'He's the image of Jack, isn't he? I'm glad, for none of the girls is like him. Margot is going to be her Granny Maynard over again; and Con is the picture of *you*. She might be your own daughter. She's far more like you than either Sybil or Josette. As for Len,' she cast a smile at her eldest daughter, 'I don't know who she resembles. She has her Papa's colouring, but otherwise she isn't like either of us, or anyone else in the family.'

Madge Russell laughed. 'She's your own image for features. I'm thankful to see, though, that she isn't the white-faced creature you were at her age, Jo. What a little misery you did look with your great black eyes and black hair, and white cheeks! Len's are regular roses.'

'Was Mamma like vat?' asked Len. 'But she isn't now. She's pwetty.'

'I'm glad there's someone to think so, precious,' laughed Jo. 'As for the likeness, I can't see it myself. They're a healthy-looking crew, however, and that's what matters most, doesn't it, Margot?'

Robin, who had been listening as usual, suddenly sighed. 'Well, no one can say any of them resembles me, even if they do call me Auntie.'

'Oh, vey do!' said Con, lifting big brown eyes to the speaker's face. 'Mrs Evans-ve-Silken-Purse said ve uvver day vat I was like my *two* aunties, an' no one could say any differwent. Weally she did, Auntie Wob.'

Jo tucked Stephen under her arm. 'Well, I must attend to this young man's wants. I'll see you off, Madge, and then, girlies, when you have finished tea you may come down to the drawing-room, and we'll play till bed-time. Did you get the sweeties you wanted, by the way?'

'On'y choco,' said Len sorrowfully. 'Mrs Pawwy-ve-shop hadn't no uvvers. I like toffees best. But she says she's busy 'cos ve new ones is comin', an' she hasn't no time to pick an' choose.'

Jo was too much engrossed to heed this. 'I'll see you small folk in half an hour,' she said. 'Anna, make a good tea yourself. And then, when they come down to me, you can have a couple of hours off if you like.'

'Anna's got a young man,' she told her sister as they went downstairs preceded by Robin. 'It's Tom Evans from Haylings. I'm glad. He's a very decent fellow, and earning good money. Only, if they get married soon, I don't know what on earth I'm going to do without Anna. By the way, I hope you observe how much your nieces take in nowadays. Anna told me Mrs Evans had said that, but I'd no idea that those monkeys had heard anything.'

'Oh, all children are like that when they get to that age,' returned Madge. 'Sybil was awful, as you ought to remember. She picked up everything I didn't want her to get, and generally came out with it at the one time I wished she wouldn't. Have you forgotten how Jem held forth about that old Mr Wyman who suffered from duodenal trouble, and had brought it on himself because he *would* eat things he was forbidden to touch? Among other things, that husband of mine said that the old pig deserved all he got because he asked for it. Sybs never liked him—he would pinch her cheek and call her "little gel," and my lady resented it. Even at three-and-a-half, she had a very high opinion of her own dignity. The next time he tried it, she drew back—I can see her now with that touch-me-not air she used to put on—'

'Still does, on occasion,' said her aunt severely.

'Oh, I know. But she *is* better, Joey. Well, to end my story, she looked at him very severely, and said, "My Daddy says you're a pig an' ask for all you get. An' I agwees wif

him.” I could have sunk through the floor! She was in the room when Jem said it, but I’d no idea she was listening.’

Jo chuckled. ‘I’m taking good care mine don’t do that sort of thing if I can help it. That’s why I’m rather strict about keeping them to quarters now. When they’re old enough to realise what may be repeated and what may not, I’ll have them downstairs far more than at present. But for the next year or two, I hope to be able to keep them in the nursery. Goodbye, Madge! Don’t forget you’ve promised to let me know about those four as soon as you hear yourself.’

However, it was not till eleven o’clock the next morning that the news came. The three younger mistresses were making good progress, and were as well as could be expected. But Miss Annersley’s condition was very grave.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOL HEARS THE NEWS

'There's something queer about Miss Slater,' said Gay Lambert to Jacynth as they took their seats in the train at Shrewsbury, where they had indeed been turned out as had been prophesied. 'She's very cheerful, but she's putting it on. I wonder what has happened.'

Jacynth glanced across at the tall young mistress whose smiling face had attracted her. 'I don't know her, of course. I thought she was very jolly, and if the rest of the mistresses are like her, it must be a jolly school. Why do you think she's putting it on, Gay?'

'Because she's only smiling with her lips. When she's really like herself, her whole face laughs. But her eyes are quite grave.'

Jacynth looked at the mistress again as she sat talking to Amy West and Janet Lee, two people of ten or eleven. 'Ye-es,' she said. 'She does look rather grave about the eyes. What do you think has happened, Gay?'

'I don't know. I hope there's nothing wrong with Jo or Madame—Lady Russell, that is. They both mean rather a lot to us of the Chalet School.'

'I expect they do. I'm longing to see them both.'

Gay fidgeted. 'If only I dared ask her! But though Miss Slater is as jolly as she can be, you can't take any liberties with her—and she might think that was one. Oh, well, I suppose we'll know. It may be only that there's trouble at her own home. I hope not. She's rather a dear, Jacynth. You'll like her. And she *can* teach!'

At this point, Miss Slater made some remark to Gay, so the chatter dropped, and as Jacynth was also drawn into the conversation, no more was said on the subject. When they reached Armiford station, they found that two trains from other directions had also come in, and quite a crowd of girls went out into the station yard where the great omnibuses were waiting to take them out to Howells. Jacynth got a glimpse of Grandma and the family as she followed Gay into one of the buses, but the memory of them slipped from her mind as she sat there, squeezed in between Gay herself and another girl who was introduced to her as Marney Jennings. 'I rather think you'll be in her form,' observed Gay. 'Marney, this is Jacynth Hardy.'

Marney, a pretty girl of fourteen, talked amiably to Jacynth, which was as well, seeing that Gay was kept busy answering questions showered on her from all sides. Jacynth gathered that she was a very popular young person, and a good deal of a leader among her own set. Her opinion on various subjects was asked and listened to with respect. Two big girls, who, so Marney informed Jacynth, were prefects, sat at the far end of the bus, and kept order. Nicole de Saumarez came from the Channel Islands, so Jacynth learned, and she had been staying with blue-eyed Enid Sothern, who lived in Devonshire, close to the Cornish border. They talked together in undertones, and the new girl saw that they were looking very grave. The rest were cheerful enough, and most of them gave her a pleasant word or two, which was much more than she had expected. From her story-books she had learned that new girls at boarding-school were generally expected to be very *piano* at first, and not to look for much notice. She had yet to learn that at the Chalet School it was the proper thing to make new people feel at home as soon as possible.

They passed through the town, which was a quaint mixture of ancient and modern architecture, and turned down a narrow street, and then into a wide one, appropriately called

Broad Street. At the foot of this lay the Norman cathedral, but Jacynth got only a glimpse of it as they turned the corner into Bridge Street, and then swung round and over the Old Bridge which, so it was said, had been standing from Roman times. The buses rolled on up another wide road, with houses on either side, many of them big and standing in beautiful gardens. Then they passed under a railway bridge, and came out into open country where they whirled up hill and down dale, till at last they reached a broad drive with high wooden gates set open, and a pretty lodge at one side. Up this they went, and Jacynth saw that they passed by wide green spaces with tall copper beeches, clumps of elms, and stately lombardy poplars starring the landscape. Here and there, may bushes filled the air with a delicious almond scent, and at one point masses of rhododendrons gleamed with buds as yet tightly furled. Then they passed a second gate, and reached what she recognised as the garden proper. A great stretch of green lawn swept up to the house, and tennis courts were netted off at its foot. Nearer to the house were flower-beds filled with standard roses with spring cabbages growing between them. Feathery carrot-tops made a lovely contrast in others where wallflowers in blood-red, gold, and mahogany gowns added their sweetness to the air. And above all rose the great house, once white, but now weathered to gracious tones of grey, with wide open windows, and curtains of plain cream net drifting back and forwards in the breeze. The house stood on an embankment, and a broad stone terrace ran round it, fenced off from the grassy banks leading to the lawn by a palisading of low stone pillars. Leading up to the great front door were semi-circular steps, and tall, classical pillars with beautifully carved Corinthian capitals headed them. Jacynth gazed, her heart swelling as she took in the dignified beauty of the stately place. After living all her life in a little coal-mining town in the industrial north, where utility rather than beauty was the order of the day, she felt as if something in her was satisfied by the severe beauty of this mansion.

Gay noticed her expression, and nudged her. 'Like it?' she asked.

'It's beautiful,' said Jacynth gravely. 'I saw the photos, of course, but I'd no idea it would look like this. It—it reminds me of a great lady, somehow. Do you know what I mean? Someone who's grown old and doesn't mind being old, because she knows that even now she is beautiful.'

Gay eyed her curiously. 'That's rather good. I say, Jacynth, are you keen on essay-writing? I've heard lots of people try to say what they feel about it; but no one ever put it as neatly as that. You've got it to a T.'

Jacynth flushed. Gay had partly guessed her secret. But she only said, 'But it seemed to say itself. I didn't think it out, you know.'

'If things say themselves to you like that, our respected Head will love you from the word "Go,"' said Gay lightly. 'Here we are, so come along and get out. I'll take you to the library to report, and then we must find Matey and see where you're sleeping and what time she wants us to unpack. I wonder what other new girls there are this term?'

Before anyone could say anything, there was a shriek of 'Gay, my lamb!' and a slight, pale-faced girl with a thick bronze pigtail bumping on her shoulders raced up to them, and grabbed Gay eagerly. 'Oh, Gay! How topping to see you again! Had decent holidays? What's the new house like?'

Gay made a grimace. 'It's not too bad. Can't say I like the surroundings too much. Coal-mines everywhere, and you simply can't keep clean. I spent half my time washing my hands and face. Look here, Gillian, I've got to go and report and take Jacynth Hardy along with me. I shan't be long. Where'll you wait for me?'

‘Here. But listen, Gay! The Head isn’t here. Madame is in the library and receiving reports. There’s the queerest stories going about. I’ll tell you when you come out. Is this Jacynth? Do you come from Gay’s new home? Tell me later. You must go at once. You’ll like it here, I can tell you.’ She gave Jacynth a friendly smile, and then gave Gay a little push. ‘Go on and get it over, and come back quick. You’re in Five again, Gay. I’ll find out where Jacynth is while you’re reporting, and then we can hunt up Matey for your unpacking times. Hurry up! I want to talk this over with you.’

‘Come on, Jacynth,’ said Gay, slipping a hand through the new girl’s arm. ‘Madame taking reports? What a queer thing! She generally comes some time during the first day to see us and wish us a happy term. But I’ve never heard of her taking reports before. Down this corridor.’ And she led Jacynth through a wide hall, with suits of armour and one or two statues standing in niches, and down a passage to the left, where she paused before a heavily-carved oak door. At this she knocked, and a sweet voice bade them come in. Gay opened the door, still holding Jacynth’s arm in that friendly grip, and pulled her in. Jacynth found herself in a large room, the walls of which were surrounded by bookcases. Two big windows looked north, and a third faced east; but the room was relieved from any semblance of coldness by the rich bindings of many of the books and the beautiful carpet in warm tones of blue and orange which stretched over the whole floor. A bright log-fire burned in the grate of burnished steel, for though the day was sunny there was a distinct nip in the air; and now that evening was drawing on, the nip was more pronounced.

So much Jacynth saw. Then her eyes opened widely, for Gay was making a little curtsy before she said, ‘Madame! How jolly to see you here! And this is Jacynth Hardy who comes from not so far from where we live now. We travelled together from Newcastle, and I brought her along.’

‘Thank you, Gay,’ said the sweet voice she had heard before. ‘And did you have happy holidays, dear? You would find your new home a distinct change from Devonshire, I’m afraid. Are your cousins and the babies well?’

‘Quite well, and little Nan is talking nineteen to the dozen now. It’s such fun to hear her. I hope Josette is quite fit, and Sybil and David too,’ said Gay politely.

‘Yes; all quite well, thank you,’ smiled Lady Russell. ‘Sybil is here; and Josette is beginning in the new Babies’ class next week. So are Jo’s three little girls. You knew we were having a Babies’ class, didn’t you?’

‘Yes; I told Ruth, and she said she only wished that it was near enough for her to send young Bobby. He’s five now, and a perfect imp. I don’t know what Ruth will do with him next year when he has to go to school, for there isn’t anywhere he can go except the council school.’

‘Wing Commander Lambert may be moved before then,’ laughed Lady Russell. ‘There’s plenty of time yet, Gay. You were only a year in Devonshire, weren’t you? Perhaps he’ll be transferred to the aerodrome near here, and then he can come here. But now, let me speak to Jacynth. Are you very tired, dear? You’ve had a long journey. I’m glad you had Gay with you. She would look after you. I hope you’ll be as happy here as our girls always are. Let me see.’ She turned to some lists on the desk before her. ‘We’re going to try you in Four B. You can manage most of the work, I think; and someone will coach you in maths, which seems to be your weak subject. You haven’t done Latin at all, either. You can be thinking if you would like to begin it, or if you would rather take one of the modern languages instead. Gay will explain

to you, I'm sure.' She flashed a smile at Gay, who nodded. 'Of course I will, Madame.' Then she looked eager. 'Madame, may I ask you something, please?'

Lady Russell laughed. 'Is it very important? You look anxious, Gay. What is it you want to know, dear?'

'Please, Madame, are you coming to teach this term? Oh, I do hope so!'

The laughter died out of Lady Russell's face. 'No, Gay, though I may be with you at first rather more than usual. Don't ask any more questions now, dear. You will hear all about it in good time. For the moment, I think you had better find out where Jacynth is sleeping, and then take her to Matron to find out about unpacking. Tea will be ready in ten minutes' time. It's late today because so many of you people don't arrive till six. So you're all having high tea, and just bread-and-butter and milk at eight o'clock. Run along now, you two; and remember, Jacynth, if you come up against anything you can't understand, and Gay can't explain to you, come here and ask. That's what head-mistresses are for, you know. Now run along, both of you. A very happy term to you both.'

'Thank you, Madame,' said Gay. 'Come on, Jacynth.' But at the door she turned, and once more made her little curtsy before they left the room. When they were outside, she explained it. 'You see, the Chalet School began in Tirol where schoolgirls are expected to show little signs of special respect to grown-ups. All the girls curtsied there to the Head, and when they came over to England, they just went on with it. New girls sort of took it up, and so—there you are. We still do it. But what in the world can have happened? I thought at first that perhaps Madame was coming back to teach. I've heard some of the old girls who teach here now, like Miss Burnett and Miss Cochrane, say that her literature lessons were marvellous. She hasn't any babies now to worry over, because Josette, the youngest, is four. As long as Josette was only an infant, of course, you couldn't expect her to have time for the school—or not much.'

'Josette is a pretty name,' said Jacynth as she followed Gay upstairs.

'It's short for Josephine. Josette is called after her aunts, Mrs Maynard and Daisy Venables' mother, who was Margot. She's Josephine Margot. It had to be that, for Sybil is Sybil Margaret. Lady Russell is Margaret, though they call her Madge, for I've heard Mrs Maynard say it, and Daisy and Primula Venables and the Bettanys call her Auntie Madge. Here we are. This is Matey's room,' as they stopped before a door at the end of a long light corridor. Gay tapped gently, and a quick voice said, 'Come in!'

They entered, and Jacynth found herself confronted by a small, wiry woman in nurse's uniform so crisp that it crackled as she turned to greet them. As Jo Maynard had once said, 'Matey would get starch somehow, if she had to bag it from the royal laundry!'

'Well, Gay,' she said, holding out her hand, 'glad to see you back, eh? And this is——'

'Jacynth Hardy, Matron. We travelled together from Newcastle. We've just been to the library to report, and then Madame sent us up here to ask you for unpacking times. Gillian Culver met us, and told me that I'm still in Five. She said she'd look Jacynth up on the lists to save time.'

'Good!' said Matron. 'I'm busier than ever, so the more you girls help each other, the better just now. I'm glad to see you, Jacynth. I hope all your things are marked, and that you are a tidy person. Gay and Gillian can look after you, and tell you dormitory rules and so on. Now, let me see. You come to me after tea, and so do you, Gay. Monica Marilliar will take charge of your group. Give me your health certificates, please.—Thank you. Yes; that's all in

order. Now run along, both of you. I'll see you after tea—immediately after tea, please.' Matron turned back to her desk on the last words, and Gay pulled Jacynth out of the room.

'No change there—not that I ever expected to get any. Matey never talks. Or, rather, she *can* talk when she likes. *Are* you tidy? I hope, for your own sake, you are. *I* am, because Ruth, my cousin, has never let me be anything else. But some people aren't. Matey talks all right then! And she's great fun out of school—says snappy things with a perfectly straight face, you know. But when she's on duty, she can be an oyster. Here's Gill, so we'll soon know where you are.—Well, Gill?'

'Number Five, same as us,' said Gillian. 'She's got Nine,—next-door but one to you. Mollie Avery is in between. And Frances Coleman on the other side. You'd better come and get washed, both of you. The gong will go in about three minutes. There's smoked codfish or scrambled eggs for tea. I met Megan and she told me, and neither of them will keep.'

They rushed Jacynth along to the dormitory, and as Gillian insisted on speed, she had little chance of taking in very much. She knew that it was a light room, with curtains besprayed with roses, and her bed had a rose-sprinkled eiderdown to match; but that was all. At Gay's behest, she hurriedly washed her hands and face, and ran a comb through her short, black hair, straightening the fringe that was cut across her brows. Then with one of the chums on either side of her, she was raced downstairs and into the dining-room, where they made her sit between them, and in the intervals of answering questions from friends and making a good tea, they contrived to introduce her to so many people that her head went round in effort to remember which name fitted which girl. After tea, it was up and off to unpack, which operation was overseen by a sturdy prefect whom Gay addressed as 'Monica' and who was, as she later told Jacynth, head of the games. Thanks to Auntie, all Jacynth's things were clearly marked, and Monica was moved to say approvingly, 'Good start, Jacynth! Frances Coleman, I hope you've managed to get all yours marked this term?' Frances, a big, untidy-looking person of Jacynth's own age, who wore big, round glasses, answered humbly, 'I *think* so, Monica. Nanny saw to my packing this time, as Hortense made such a hash of it last time.'

'Then it's probably all right,' said Monica kindly. 'If not, you'll have to do it on Saturday morning. There won't be time this evening, for we're all to go to Hall at half-past seven, as Madame has to get back to the Round House. Come along and we'll see.'

'*Madame!*' said Gay. 'But—where's the Head?'

This query was being repeated all round them. Jacynth gathered that everyone was amazed that Miss Annersley, the Head, had not yet appeared. Presently other discoveries were made. Miss Wilson—frequently spoken of as 'Bill'—seemed also to be missing. So was Mademoiselle, and so was a Miss Edwards, known to the school as 'Teddy.'

'What *can* have happened?' asked Gay of a select group of Number Five.

'Perhaps they've all got married,' suggested Mollie Avery sentimentally. She was promptly squashed. 'What rot! Is it likely? Not one of them has ever worn a ring that we've seen! Don't be an ass, Mollie!' This last from Gay. Mollie took it good-temperedly. 'Oh, well, I was only guessing. Someone else have a shot and see if you can do any better.'

'P'r'aps they've all got mumps.' This was Frances Coleman's effort, and was greeted with shrieks of laughter.

'What a joke it would be! Can't you *see* Bill with huge mumps at each side! She couldn't very well be sarcastic then!'

'Couldn't she just!' retorted Gay. 'Bill could be sarcastic anywhere.'

‘They were having a trip somewhere together,’ put in Beth Chester, a very pretty person of sixteen, who seemed to form a trio with the Daisy Venables of whom Gay had spoken, and a small dark girl of the same age, who was addressed as Gwensi. These three, Gay, Gillian, Mollie, Frances, Jacynth herself, and two other girls—Lavender Leigh, who had not yet arrived, and an Irish girl, Doreen O’Connor, who was fifteen, and, Jacynth gathered, in the same form as Gay and Gillian and Frances—made up the dormitory. Beth was head of it, but she seemed to do nothing without her friends, and Gay had already told Jacynth that they did everything together. Now Beth looked round at the others, and added, ‘They may have been held up somewhere. You know what travelling can be like today. I expect that’s it.’

‘But,’ objected Daisy, ‘the Staff always come back the day before we do. And the Head and Bill are generally here a week beforehand.’

As Daisy was Lady Russell’s niece, this was treated with the respect it deserved, and the little group of schoolgirls became uneasy, even Jacynth catching the infection. However, they could but wait till half-past seven, when the great bell rang through the house, calling everyone to Hall, and they trooped downstairs, taking advantage of the first day’s abeyance of rules, and talking among themselves.

They took their places in Hall, an enormous room, as it seemed to Jacynth, with polished parquet floor and walls papered with a beautiful wallpaper in heavy satin stripes. Rows of chairs were ranged across it, and there was a dais at one end, on either side of which were much shorter rows where big girls of seventeen and eighteen were already taking their places. Gay informed Jacynth that those were the prefects, and one very tall girl, with thick red hair brushed straight back from a clear-cut face, and swung in a heavy plait round her head, was Elizabeth Arnett, the head-girl. But there was little time for chatter. The last girl came in, and almost immediately the mistresses followed. At the very end of the procession came Lady Russell, her sweet face very grave. They took their seats behind the central stand on the dais, Lady Russell standing at it, and when all were in, she held up her hand for the complete silence that was hers at once. Leaning on the desk, she said quietly, ‘Girls! a calamity has befallen us. Four of our mistresses have been involved in a terrible accident which has cost the lives of three people who have nothing to do with the school. The driver of the bus in which they were was killed on the spot. The conductress and an old man have since died of their injuries. For some days there was great reason to fear that Miss Annersley, our head-mistress, would also die. Thank God that fear seems to be at an end. But for a very long time we must do without her. She has suffered serious concussion, and only a very grave operation has overcome the worst of her injuries. She is still very, very ill. All danger is not yet ended, but her doctors now believe and hope that she will recover, though it will be very slow. Miss Wilson, Mademoiselle, and Miss Edwards, who were also with her, are all more or less badly hurt. Miss Wilson we hope to have here before the term ends. Mademoiselle, too, may be with us. Miss Edwards, who received more dangerous injuries than either of them, will not return till September, though we may hope to have her back then. You see what this means? Four mistresses who all hold important positions in the school have been hurt. This is examination term, and your work must not suffer if we can help it. Mme de Bersac, better known to a good many of you as Mlle Lecoutier, is coming to take up her old post as senior mathematics mistress, and Miss Slater will take Miss Edwards’ place as head of the junior school. Mlle Berné has agreed to take over all French in the school, and we are fortunate in having the services of another old mistress, Miss Durrant, whom one or two of our elder girls may remember. Miss Durrant was with us in Tirol, and left us to marry. Now her husband is with

his ship, somewhere at sea. She has no home, for that was bombed during the terrible raids on Portsmouth. She has also no other ties, for her one little daughter was killed in the same raid that destroyed her home. She read an account of the accident in a local newspaper, and at once wrote, offering her services. She will take over the English classes which Miss Annersley generally teaches. But she has begged to be excused the organising work which was also Miss Annersley's. So we have arranged with a Miss Bubb—Lady Russell's eyes swept round the girls as she uttered the name; but all were too horror-stricken at what had overtaken them to smile—'who was formerly a High School mistress, but who retired some years ago, to act as head-mistress pro tem. Miss Bubb, who is a brilliant classical scholar, will undertake the senior Latin. My sister, Mrs Maynard—Joey to most of you still, I know—will come up three mornings in the week to take junior Latin.' She paused here, and there was a little sigh round the room. When she went on, her voice was brighter. 'Now, girls, I know I need not ask you to be good to Miss Durrant—Mrs Redmond, as she now is. But I do ask you to give Miss Bubb all the loyalty that you have shown Miss Annersley, Mlle Lepattre, whom a good many of you must still remember, and myself when we were Heads. We may hope that Miss Annersley will return to us in time. Until then, stand by Miss Bubb. She won't have an easy task. I do not think there has ever been a girl in this school who knew her who did not love Miss Annersley. She has been with us eleven years, and is as much a part of the school as you still count Joey—or myself. Miss Bubb is a complete stranger. She knows none of our traditions. She may sometimes seem to you to be ignoring them. But she is taking up this work because she feels it is her duty during war-time to help where she can. Also, remember this—that it is good for all of us to be stirred up occasionally, for we are liable to sit complacently in a rut, and desire nothing else. That is good for no one. Miss Bubb will come to us on Saturday. I look to you—*all* of you—to give her a real welcome, and to show her by your behaviour what high ideals we have always set before us, and how well you people try to live up to them. One last thing: pray for Miss Annersley that she may recover. She needs all our prayers. Now we will have our Peace Prayer, and then you must go to supper. Kneel!'

CHAPTER V

MISS BUBB

‘Correct me, anyone, if I am wrong, but didn’t it strike you that our beloved proprietress isn’t any too happy about this Miss Bubb?’ It was Miss Phipps, the Kindergarten mistress, who spoke. The place was the staff-room, and the time was ten o’clock on the evening of the first day of term. The last girl had arrived, and all were now safely in bed, and the Staff, who had been hard at work all the day, felt it their due to relax for a little. Coffee had been made and handed round; those who smoked were smoking; everyone sat or squatted or perched, just as she felt inclined. In short, it was a scene that would have startled most of the girls if they could have seen it. Hilary Burn, once head-girl of the Chalet School, and now its physical-training mistress, chuckled as she surveyed it, and Mlle Berné, a vivacious Parisienne, heard her, and demanded to be told the cause.

‘I was just thinking how very different we all are off duty and on duty,’ explained Hilary as she bent to light her cigarette at Miss Slater’s lighter.

‘Bother you, Hilary Burn!’ cried Miss Phipps, exasperated. ‘Who cares what we look like at present? I asked a question, and I should like an answer.’

‘You won’t get it from me. Not qualified to give it,’ retorted Hilary.

‘I didn’t expect it from you. Simone Lecoutier, you’ve known Madame as long as any of us. What do you think? Is she happy about Miss Bubb or isn’t she? If she is, why the earnest request for loyalty from the girls?’

Simone, slight, marvellously trig and neat, the same age as Jo Maynard, and one of her closest friends, smiled. ‘I’m not Lecoutier any more. My name is de Bersac if you’d only try to remember,’ she remarked. ‘As for Madame, I agree. It is not like her to make such an appeal. She has always trusted us.’

‘It doesn’t look too well,’ agreed Miss Slater from her seat on a pouffe. ‘I suppose she’s had to take anything she could get at this late date, and this Miss Bubb isn’t exactly our cup of tea. What do we know of her?’

‘Ex-high-school mistress, and something out of the ordinary in Latin,’ said Mary Burnett, another old girl, now history mistress. ‘There’s one consolation. She’s not likely to get across me, seeing how totally different our subjects are. I should think you’ll be the one to suffer most if she’s that way inclined, Julie, my love.’

Mlle Berné grimaced at her. ‘You are not very comforting, my dear Mary. Where is Matron? She might know something. She would be sure to see this Miss Bubb when she came to be interviewed.’

‘That’s an idea!’ Miss Phipps jumped up from the corner of the big settee where she had been curled up. ‘I’ll go and fetch her, and we’ll see if we can get anything out of her.’

‘I doubt if you will. You’ll have your trouble for nothing,’ Hilary called after her. ‘Matey never does talk, and you know it as well as I do.’

‘Well, anyhow, she ought to be coming, or her coffee will get cold. I’ll just tell her it’s poured— Oh, *here* you are, Matron! I was just coming to tell you the coffee was getting cold,’ as the door opened, and Matron herself walked in, crisp and brisk as ever, though she had worked as hard as anyone. She dropped into an arm-chair, took her coffee from Mademoiselle, and heaved a sigh of relief.

‘Tired?’ asked Mary Burnett. ‘They seemed to me to be as good as usual.’

‘So they were; better, in fact. Lady Russell’s statement sobered them a good deal. They are all very fond of those four, and they were upset to hear how ill Miss Annersley still is. I’d no trouble with them. But first day is always rather heavy for me, and this was no exception.’

‘Matey, do you know anything about our Head pro tem.?’ asked Hilary.

‘I’ve seen her, if that’s what you mean. She stayed to lunch the day she came for interview.’

‘Then you can tell us something about her.’

‘Thank you. I may have my faults, but I’m no gossip.’

Hilary left her perch on the back of the settee, and came to squat before Matron. ‘Matey, it isn’t gossip. But what Madame said tonight is worrying us rather. We all know how hard it is to get staff nowadays. To have to find someone to take over the headship at almost a moment’s notice must have been hair-raising, and, I’m rather inclined to think, can only have given a sort of Hobson’s choice. If we knew something about this Miss Bubb we’d have more idea how to handle the girls. Madame didn’t say anything to us beyond telling us her name and qualifications, and *those* are all one could ask, I know. But what about herself? How is the school going to take her? Madame must expect something queer, or she’d never have said that.’

Matron sipped her coffee slowly. ‘Yes; I see what you mean. The only thing that’s worrying me is this. What I can say may prejudice you all, and that would be unfair. After all, it’s not an easy thing to take up such a post at such short notice. And it’s only pro tem., as you say, which won’t make it any easier.’ She stopped, and glanced round at them all.

‘Having said so much,’ said Hilary slowly, ‘I think you ought to go on. It’s leaving us rather up in the air, but with a distinct bias against her.’

‘I suppose so,’ agreed Matron reluctantly. ‘Well, what do you want to know?’

‘What is she like, to start with?’ asked Miss Phipps. ‘What does she look like, I mean?’

‘She’s fifty-seven, for she said so. She gave up teaching ten years ago, when she came into a legacy. Since the war began she’s been very active in the W.V.S., or so I gathered. But she felt that she should be doing other work, and when she saw Madame’s advertisement in a Birmingham paper, she applied for the post. There were only three other applications, and the agents hadn’t anyone suitable. Miss Bubb was the best qualified of the four. There was a very nice Miss Lawrence, but she was sixty-nine, and hadn’t been teaching for fourteen years. She had a private school of her own, and retired when she had saved enough. I liked her, and I’m sure the girls would; but I doubt if she could have managed the organisation. A Miss Brown would have been no use at all. She had been a private governess, and had no idea how to handle a place like this, though she was very pleasant too. The other applicant was no use at all, either. She was doing what she called supply work in the county, and she had no qualifications whatsoever. I can’t think why she applied for the job. She owned that she had never taught children older than eleven, and knew nothing about either Latin or science, though she said she was very keen on nature study. I’m afraid that wouldn’t go very far with our Certificate and Higher people.’

‘I expect she thought there might be a chance as teachers are so few and far between,’ suggested Hilary. ‘But I agree there wasn’t much choice.’

‘Well, but what about Miss Bubb?’ urged Miss Phipps. ‘Tell us about her. She’s the one we’re really interested in.’

Matron considered. 'Well, so far as looks go, she's young-looking for her age, very decided in manner, and not, I should say, the sort of person given to compromise. I got the impression that with her it was "yes" and "no," and nothing further could be said. She speaks well, has quite a flow of language, and well chosen too. Her voice didn't appeal to me, but there's nothing really unpleasant about it—no accent, or colloquialisms, I mean.'

'Then why did you not like it?' asked Mlle Berné, who had been listening with keen interest. 'Is it, perhaps, harsh in tone?'

'No; I wouldn't say that. I suppose it's the result of hearing Miss Annersley's. Hers is so sweet, and deep. Miss Bubb's is rather hard, very resonant, and highly pitched. However, that's something we can't alter.'

'What about work? Has she any fads, or didn't you get there?'

'She's a keen worker, I gathered. She rather pooh-poohed out-of-school activities. Said that girls came to school to learn their lessons and pass exams. I don't think she'll actively interfere with anything we do; but, on the other hand, I don't think she'll take much interest.'

The Staff exchanged looks of dismay. The Chalet School had a good many outside interests; and while work was not interfered with, the girls gave a big proportion of their spare time to working for the Sanatorium at the other side of the mountains, as well as supporting sundry missionary societies. There were two large Guide companies, as well as a company of Rangers, and a Cadet company. The Juniors had two big Brownie packs, and the school, as a whole, was keen on Guiding. Hobbies were encouraged, and there was a Hobbies Club which met once a week in the evening. In addition, three or four concerts were given each term, Lady Russell arranging for well-known vocalists and instrumentalists to come down and perform. The school also went in largely for gardening, each form having its own big bed where they grew fruit and vegetables. Miss Everett, the gardening mistress, was a graduate of Swanley, and held a B.Sc. as well, having read pure science for her degree. Certainly, if Miss Bubb disapproved of outside interests at school, she was the very last person to be Head of the Chalet School.

'But surely no one could expect the girls to spend their time on lessons only!' exclaimed Mary Burnett. 'One reason why we always did work so hard in school hours was because we had so many other interests to give us relief.'

'Thank goodness it isn't the Christmas term!' said Hilary Burn gloomily. 'She'd throw several fits over having to give up so much time to the play.'

'Bill will be here next term. It's only for this, and, mercifully, it *is* the summer term,' put in another Kindergarten mistress, Gillian Linton, who, like Simone, Mary, and Hilary, was an old girl of the school.

'It's also exam term,' replied Simone de Bersac. 'Will she expect the girls to put in much extra work. I expect she'll want to have very good results to show, won't she?'

'If she tries that on, I shall have a word or two to say,' said Matron briskly. 'Health comes before anything else, and I'm not going to have the health of the school played with, even if it means that the whole lot of them fail, and fail badly. If there's any talk of extra work, I shall put my foot down at once. And if that won't do it, I shall send for Dr Jem and see that he stops it. We've too close a connection with the San. for any nonsense about that sort of thing. So you needn't worry about that.'

The Staff looked relieved. Many of the girls had one relation at the big Sanatorium where Sir James Russell and the clever doctors of whom he was the head were making wonderful cures in the dread disease, tuberculosis. The Chalet School was very closely linked in every

way with it, and ever since the establishment of the two, great stress had been laid on the care of the girls' health. As Sir James had once said, 'Catch the children young, give them the best foundation you can by regular hours, plenty of milk and other building foods, long hours of sound sleep, and plenty of fresh air, and you can do a lot towards eradicating this horrible thing in the rising generation. Don't let 'em have too much excitement, but give them any amount of interests. Prevention is better than cure, any day.' And the school was planned with an eye to all this, and the Staff knew it.

'No one could stand up to both you *and* Sir James, Matey,' said Hilary. 'Have you any idea how she stood with regard to games and gym?'

'She said she supposed some games were a necessary part of modern school-life, but she hoped she would not be asked to sacrifice exam results to school matches,' returned Matron with a grin. 'If she shows signs of interfering there, however, again the doctors will have something to say. You've no need to worry, Hilary.'

The Staff sat silent. They could not ask Matron the question they were all dying to ask—'Will Miss Bubb leave us and trust us to carry on as Miss Annersley always has; or will she interfere in our departments?' That was going too far. Yet it was a vital question with them all. Mistresses in a school know just the difference between joy in their work and the hard drudgery it can become under a Head who interferes continually.

Mlle Berné got up. 'Will anyone have some more coffee?' she inquired. 'No? Then I think I will ring to have it cleared away, and go to bed, now.'

'Don't ring. Jill and I will carry the things to the pantry,' said Hilary, jumping up. 'Well, Matron, you've told us a good deal, and, to a certain extent, relieved our minds. For the rest, I suppose we can only wait to see what time will bring forth. There's one thing certain—this is not likely to be an uneventful term so far as I can see.' And with this she began to collect the cups and pack them on the tray. Gillian and Miss Phipps came to help her, and the rest of the Staff watched them in gloomy silence which was broken by Simone de Bersac.

'Well, I must go to bed. By the way, I wonder what Miss Bubb's feelings are with regard to babies in school?'

'No one could expect you to leave Thérèse anywhere,' said Mary Burnett warmly. 'In any case, it's Madame's own arrangement that she should be here with you, so I don't see what anyone else can say.'

'I wish she'd been able to find someone to take over the science,' sighed Simone. 'I must say I don't quite see what the Certificate people who were taking it are going to do. Weren't half of them doing biology?'

'Six were,' said Hilary as she went to the door with a trayload of china. 'I could help them with anatomy, but not much else. And my time-table's pretty full, anyhow. Should I suggest the anatomy to Madame?'

'I think I should if this last person she's going to see tomorrow proves to be no use,' said Matron. 'Of course, she may do. You'll have to wait. Madame will be with us at eleven, she said, and she'll let us know then. She's worrying about the science.'

'I don't wonder. Perhaps we could find someone who would do the botany and chemistry side of it. I did a special course in anatomy because I was so keen on the remedials and massage and so on. It wouldn't take me long to work it up again.' And she departed with her burden.

The Staff said good-night, and separated after that, but each of them was very curious about Miss Bubb. Nor were the girls less so. At first they were too much shocked by the news

of the accident to give much thought to the new Head; but next morning, when they had had time to get used to the idea, they turned to the subject of Miss Bubb.

‘Why did Madame say all that to us last night?’ asked Gay as she pulled on her stockings. ‘I mean, can’t she *trust* us to play up? You might have to talk to the babes; but surely not to *us*! After all, most of us are getting on now.’ And she heaved an elderly sigh.

‘How ancient that sounds!’ said Beth Chester with a grin. ‘How old are you, Gay—ninety—or is it only eighty-nine?’

Gay laughed. ‘It’s nearly sixteen, and you know it. But sixteen *is* getting on when you’re at school. I was thinking about the people who are under thirteen. In any case, it’s rather awful having to have a new Head the last term of the year. I say, do you think Miss Annersley will be back next term? I thought Madame spoke rather as if there were a doubt of it.’

‘I thought so too,’ said Gwensi soberly. ‘Daisy, do *you* know anything?’

They all turned to bright-faced Daisy Venables, who, by virtue of being Lady Russell’s niece, was generally supposed to know more about things than most people. She shook her head. ‘I don’t know a thing more than you do. I’ve been away all the hols, and only came back yesterday morning—just in time to get my things together. Jo was up to the eyes in work. Veta and her family are coming back again for the summer, and Jo was making arrangements for them. I had the McDonald twins to see to as well as myself and Primula, for Robin was up here doing something or other, and didn’t get back till after tea. But I’ve got some news for you. Beth knows, of course, and Auntie J. said I might tell those of you who know Nan Blakeney.’

‘Nan Blakeney?’ repeated Mollie Avery. ‘That pretty girl who lives with the Lucys and is Aunt to Julie and the rest of the crowd? What about her?’

‘She’s going to marry her nice naval officer in June. Julie is to be a bridesmaid, and so is young Blossom Willoughby. And as it will be in term-time, Mrs Lucy is asking the entire school. Won’t it be fun? They’re to be married in the Cathedral because Nan’s father was a great chum of the Dean’s son. The reception is to be in the garden at the Lucys’ house. It’s a gorgeous big place, so it ought to be lovely. As it would be so difficult to get waitresses to look after people, Auntie J. is bagging some of us to do it.’

‘Oh, good! That will be fun!’ cried Frances. ‘It will make a nice break, too, for you exam people. I do hope it’ll be a fine day. It would be awful if it rained and they had to have it in some stuffy hall or other.’

‘It would, rather,’ agreed Daisy, as she fastened her Guide badge in her tie and twisted round to see that skirt and blouse were neat at the back. ‘Well, I’m ready. Jacynth, don’t forget to strip your bed and throw up your curtains before you go down. Ready, Bethy? Then shall we depart?’ And the three Seniors strolled out of the dormitory, leaving the others to scramble over the rest of their dressing.

‘We make beds and tidy up after brekker,’ said Gay to Jacynth. ‘Then we shall have a walk as it’s first day, and Prayers at half-past nine. After that, half-hour lessons to get prep and so on ready for next week. This afternoon we have games tests for teamwork. Do you play cricket or tennis?’

‘I’ve never played cricket, and only a little tennis,’ replied Jacynth. ‘I don’t think I’m much good at games, really.’

‘Then we must coach you,’ replied Gay promptly. She herself was a bright and shining light at tennis, and fairly good at cricket. ‘I’ll help you with tennis. I’ve done a good deal, for we all played in China——’

‘In *China!*’ gasped Jacynth. ‘Did you say *China?*’

‘Haven’t I told you yet? And knowing you all this time!’

‘It’ll be “all this time” with a vengeance if you don’t hurry up,’ interrupted Mollie Avery. ‘There’s the first bell, and you haven’t thrown up your curtains. Leave *China* till after brekker, Gay, and come on—do!’

On the word, Gay hurled the curtains that made her cubicle over the iron rods on which they were hung, and Frances kindly showed Jacynth what to do with hers. Then, with a final look round to see that all was as it ought to be for Matron’s eagle eye, they left the dormitory and went down to breakfast.

The rest of the day went as Gay had said. Jacynth found that she had been put into Lower Fourth for the time being, and was delighted to realise that in most subjects she ought to be able to hold her own. Her mathematics were her weak point. She was up to the form in arithmetic; but well below them in algebra and geometry. Mme de Bersac promised her a little extra coaching twice a week, and told her that, in the meantime, she must work with Upper Third, but promised that if she made headway, she should be promoted to Four C by half-term. Jacynth vowed to herself that she would do it, and made up her mind to ask Gay to help her. She was, therefore, very disappointed when that young lady pealed with laughter at the very idea, and informed her that she had far better ask someone else to do it.

‘I’m a dud at maths,’ she said. ‘I always was. In *China*, when we first went, Ruth tried to teach me, and I nearly drove her silly. Try Mollie Avery. She’s a nib at it, and I’m sure she’ll give you a helping hand.’

Mollie, tackled later by Gay herself, agreed cheerfully. ‘It helps you with your own, and rubs up your back work,’ she said. ‘I’ve got School Cert. next year, and if I could get a distinction in maths, Dad would be thrilled. I’ll help you with pleasure, Jacynth. Just trot your difficulties along to me, and I’ll explain them as far as in me lies.’

Over games, Jacynth met her Waterloo. She was sent to the Juniors’ nets to be initiated into the mysteries of fielding, batting, and bowling, along with Lavender Leigh, who knew as little about it as she did. Tennis, which came after tea, was little better. She had a fair idea of scoring and her service was fair; but her returns were wild, and she missed the ball more often than not. Monica Marilliar, who was watching her and three new Juniors, groaned at all of them.

‘You’ll all need any amount of coaching before you’re the faintest use to anyone,’ she told them ruthlessly. ‘Jacynth Hardy, if you’d keep your eye on the ball, you’d manage better. As for you two, Ann Morell and Susan Lane, isn’t it?—you must put a little more weight into your service. At present, you don’t even get as far as the net. And Wendy Robson, you sky your balls far too much. Well, that will be all for just now. Run along and get into your blazers. You’re hot, and the wind’s not exactly warm. You don’t want to start the term with bad colds, you know.’

The next day found the whole school agog. Miss Bubb was expected to arrive at midday, and they were all anxious to see her. After breakfast and bedmaking, Guides followed, though, as Frances Coleman explained to Jacynth, they generally had mending from nine to ten, and Guides at eleven.

‘But as we’ve just come, no one can have any mending yet,’ she said. ‘Are you going to be a Guide?’

‘Yes; Auntie said I might, and wrote to Miss Annersley about it,’ replied Jacynth. ‘I always wanted to join, but our church Guides met at six in the evening, and it was more than a

mile away, so Auntie didn't like it for me.'

'It wouldn't be nice to turn out in the dark in winter,' agreed Frances.

'Horrid, I should think,' added Gay, who had kept to her first resolve to look after this particular new girl, and was to reap her reward that afternoon when the new girls and anyone they chose to take with them were told to go to Plas Gwyn for tea with Joey Maynard. There were seven other new people besides Jacynth, only one of them being in her teens, and she was a very shy member of Lower Fifth, who had chosen Beth Chester, also a shining light of that form, as her 'friend.' The rest were Juniors of twelve and under.

'I wonder which Company it'll be?' added Daisy Venables, as she finished her bed. 'There; I'm ready now. Frances, do dust properly. Matey will send you back to do it again if you don't. You ought to know that by this time. Jacynth, put your brush and comb away, and straighten your towel.' Beth, the head of the dormitory, had been summoned to a Court of Honour as she was a Patrol Leader, so Daisy was in charge.

The culprits did as they were told, and then Daisy shooed them from the room, and they all went downstairs to Hall, where a good many people were already waiting for the Guiders. Others joined them, and before long Hall was full. But at the first sound of the whistles everyone fell silent, and sprang to attention. The next blasts saw them running to join their companies, while the new girls huddled together in corners and looked at them enviously.

It was an exciting meeting for them, and Jacynth was delighted when she found herself assigned not only to the same Company as Gay, but also to the same Patrol, of which Beth was Leader, while Gwensi Howell was Second. Daisy Venables was moved from the Patrol to become Leader to the Swallows, whose own had become a Ranger at the end of last term, together with her Second. The Swallows were all twelve-year-olds, so it was felt better to have an older girl in charge. Daisy had had her sixteenth birthday in March and was well qualified for the post. She had only one more badge to win for her All-round Cord, and hoped to gain that this term. Mollie Avery was appointed as her Second. Indeed, as Jacynth found, there were a good many transfers, for quite a number of the eldest Guides had passed to Rangers, while some of the Rangers went on to the Cadet Company, which was now seventeen strong. The smaller girls were not present, as the Brownie Packs used the big Kindergarten to relieve numbers.

Gay undertook to help Jacynth with her tenderfoot tests, and after some drill all together under Miss Burn, the Companies parted, the Chalet School Second Company marching away to the park for work in tracking, while the First, in which Jacynth was, remained for country dancing.

'It isn't the same with the Head not coming to see how we're getting on,' grumbled a small, dark girl who was addressed as 'Fiona' by the rest. 'I hope this Miss Bubb will be keen on Guides ass she wass.'

'P'r'aps she isn't,' suggested a brown-haired, bespectacled damsel.

Shrieks of horror arose at this. 'Bride Bettany! What an awful thing to think!' cried Lavender Leigh, who was in the same Patrol and a great chum of Bride's. 'Why ever shouldn't she be? Most people are.'

'Not all,' retorted Bride. 'Don't you r'member that Scobie House the hockey Second played last term? They said their Head didn't approve of Guides at all. They were awfully surprised when they heard we had them.'

What Lavender would have said to this was not known, for at that moment the whistle went again, and they had to spring into rank and stand at attention for dismissal. After that,

they went for their 'elevenses' of cocoa and biscuits, and then the bell rang to summon them to Hall to meet Miss Bubb.

There was wild excitement as they lined up in their forms, and then marched smartly down the long corridor and to Hall. But the prefects were all there, and very much on the alert, so they had to control themselves. They took their places on the long green forms, and sat down, waiting. The prefects went to their own seats at the side of the dais, and the younger mistresses who had come in sat down on the dais. Presently the others arrived, and then, amid a silence that could be felt, the door at the top of the room opened, and Lady Russell, accompanied by a tall stranger, entered. She was followed by an equally tall, very dark girl, at sight of whom a quick smile went round. But nobody made a sound. The entire school was on its best behaviour to greet its new Head.

Lady Russell mounted the dais, and came forward at once. 'Girls!' she said, 'this is Miss Bubb, who will be here for the present to help us in Miss Annersley's place. I am going to leave her to you for ten minutes. Then Miss Denny will take her to show her over the school, and I am coming back to make an announcement I think you will like to hear.' And she withdrew on the words, leaving the new Head and the school staring at each other.

Miss Bubb came forward. 'Good morning,' she said in a slightly metallic voice that rang through the hall. 'I hope you and I will be good friends, and that we shall work together well during my time here.'

So far, so good. The school was not enamoured with her appearance. Miss Annersley was tall and slender, with a clear-cut face, round which dark-brown hair waved crisply. Her eyes were grey and keen, but very kindly, and she had a ready smile that lit up her whole face. This stranger was grey-haired, and aquiline of feature, and her eyes were a cold blue. She was broad-shouldered, filling the ample folds of her M.A. gown well. There was an air of decision and confidence about her which impressed the girls, and they felt overawed by her, as they never did with Miss Annersley. She looked round at them all, and then remarked in her incisive voice, 'So you have Guides here? I had not realised that your Companies were so strong. I suppose,' with a frosty smile, 'that you are all very keen. Well, we must not let Guides interfere with our schoolwork, of course. Still, as you seem to meet on Saturdays, perhaps there is no need for me to worry.'

Nobody spoke, of course; but several young faces showed their owners' thoughts. Miss Bubb left Guides, and went on to other things. 'It will not be too easy for me to pick up all threads in one term. But I shall do my best, and later on I shall hope to have things well in hand.'

'Good lack! How long does she think she's come for?' muttered Gay to Daisy, who was sitting in front of her.

'Shut up!' retorted Daisy in the same low tone. 'Later, my child!'

Gay did 'shut up,' but mainly because Miss Burnett was glaring at her. Miss Bubb continued: 'We must try to get good Oxford results, and this will mean hard work. It is always hard when you have to begin with someone new in the examination term. Still, with steady concentration, we shall do it. I'm afraid I must ask all the Higher and Schools people to give up much of their outside interests this term, and think only of lessons. But it is not for long. In eight or nine weeks the examinations begin, and when they are over you have the long summer holidays in which to have your fun. You know the old adage, "Work while you work, and play while you play." We must try to exemplify it here. And now, that is all I have to say to you for the present. I should like to see the head-girl, the Games prefect and Games

Committee, and the Guiders, later in my study. And on Monday I shall hope to be able to go round all the class-rooms and get some idea of what your work is like. Then we shall see.'

She stopped speaking, and Miss Denny at once came forward and led her off. She judged that it might be as well to get the new Head away before there was an explosion. But the school was left saying to itself: '*Well!*'

CHAPTER VI AT JOEY'S

Miss Burnett dismissed the girls as soon as Miss Bubb and Miss Denny had had time to leave the corridor. The Guides and Brownies went upstairs to change. The rest retired to their common-rooms. As most of them were new girls, they found very little to say. They were not sure what to say about the new Head's speech, for they were still too new to the school and its traditions to know how far Miss Bubb was departing from the latter. One by one the rest came down, and before long there was a regular hum. Into the Middles' common-room irrupted the girl who had come in with the Staff. She looked round hurriedly and singled out Jacynth at once.

'You must be Jacynth Hardy. I'm Mrs Maynard. You're coming to tea with me this afternoon, and, in the circs, I'm taking you off for lunch as well. Who's coming as your friend?'

'Gay Lambert. She has been so good to me,' said Jacynth shyly.

Mrs Maynard nodded. 'She would! Gay from China is always kind. No, you folk,' to the rest who were surging round her, 'I can't attend to you now. I promise to come up on Monday or Tuesday, and then I'll see you. But just remember this: give a chap a fair deal. You can't hope to judge anyone by one speech and a ten-minutes' view. Hold your horses for a few days and be fair.'

'But, Joey,' said one, Barbara Henschell, 'what does she mean about games?'

'You know as much as I do, my child. Didn't she say she wanted to see the Games Committee and some other people? I expect you'll know more after that. In the meantime, I'm just putting up a notice for my sister. She was rung up when she left the room and had to fly. Josette has upset a kettle of boiling water over herself, so my sister fled. She wrote the notice out before she left, and gave it to me. Go and look at the board. Come on, Jacynth. Go and get your things on, and tell Gay to do likewise. I'm off to collect the rest of the crowd.' And Mrs Maynard turned and sped from the room, followed by a throng of girls, all eager to see the notice-board.

Jacynth followed, but she raced upstairs to find Gay and tell her to get ready. She found that young lady still in gym knickers, with her frock in one hand, holding forth to the rest, who were not much further on.

'If that's what we've got to put up with till the Head comes back, all I can say is that most of us look like having a thin time of it!' she was proclaiming. 'Beth! You've said nothing. What do you think about it?'

'Nothing—as yet,' replied Beth, who was tying the big bow at the nape of her neck. 'You folk had better hurry up and get dressed. We don't know what comes next. Didn't Madame say she wanted to see us again?'

'She's had to go because Josette had scalded herself,' said Jacynth.

The girls jumped. They had not noticed her entrance. 'Did you say Josette has scalded herself?' demanded Daisy. 'Oh, poor Auntie Madge! That's the second accident in the family since Easter. David fell out of a tree and broke his collar-bone. He's not going back to school till it's properly knit. If Josette's scalded, she'll have a bad time.'

‘And Mrs Maynard said she had to put up a notice on the board before she left,’ went on Jacynth. ‘That’s all I know. But, Gay, Mrs Maynard came to the common-room, and she says we’re to go to lunch with her as well as tea, and I was to tell you to get ready at once.’

Gay gave a squawk and began to wriggle into her frock. ‘Find my shoes, someone—there’s a dear! Jacynth, get your things on, and buck up! Oh, thank you, Frances!’ as that young lady produced her shoes. ‘Now, if you could find me a clean hanky I might be on time. Ready, Jacynth?’

Jacynth, who was pulling on her hat, nodded. ‘Quite.’

‘So’m I!’ Beth Chester had taken the message to herself, and was at the door in search of the new girl with whom she was going. ‘I’ll meet you folk in the avenue. Are you taking your ’cello, Gay? Auntie Jo always likes it.’

‘S’pose I’d better.’ Gay followed her to go to the music-room where Cerita lived, and Jacynth followed Gay to help if she were needed.

In the long drive they found Jo Maynard with her flock of Juniors, and tall, lovely Beth talking quietly to the new girl with whom she was going. This was a sixteen-year-old person named Meg Farrant, the daughter of an elderly professor. Her mother was an invalid, and Meg, who had been brought up with governesses, had been a real home bird. But a wise aunt had interfered, and the result was that Meg, old for her age, shy and retiring, and unaccustomed to crowds, found herself pitchforked into a big school among a lot of girls who talked a language she did not know, and whose interests seemed so widespread that she felt appalled. She had been put into the same form as Beth, Daisy, and their chum, Gwensi Howell, and the three, being kind-hearted girls, as well as trained to the Chalet School traditions of friendliness and helping new people to feel at home, had looked after her with a vigour that Meg felt. She had scarcely known which of the three to ask to come with her; but Daisy had settled matters by saying, ‘I’m coming in any case. Unless I’m wanted for a match I always go home for the week-end after Guides. And Gwensi is coming with me. Ask Beth if you want one of us.’

As Jacynth, and Gay, hugging Cerita, joined them, Daisy and Gwensi came round the other side of the house, wheeling their bicycles, and Jo nodded.

‘That’s the lot, isn’t it? Come along, then. You two can set off, and tell Anna to expect us by the next bus, Daisy. Come along, you folk. We must hurry if we don’t want to miss it.’ And she led the way with Ann Morell and her chosen friend, Primrose Day, on either side of her. The rest formed into line, shepherded by Beth and Meg, and they set off at top speed. Jo had method in her madness. She had gone from Hall with her sister, but while Lady Russell had been at the telephone, she had slipped in at the back, and had heard enough of the new Head’s speech to convince her that Miss Bubb might try to stop the girls coming to her if she knew about it.

‘I don’t like her one little bit,’ she had thought as she laid her plans rapidly. ‘I’ll take the girls off at once before she can throw a monkey-wrench into the works. Me for the ’phone!’ And as soon as she had heard her sister’s news, she had rung up Anna, her faithful factotum, and warned her to prepare lunch for eighteen extra people. In reply to Anna’s cry of horror, she had said, ‘Make scrambled eggs. Take two packets from the store cupboard. I’ll send on Daisy and Gwensi to help you. There’s any amount of rhubarb in the garden. Stew a huge dish of that, and make a quart of custard—or two quarts if you like. We’ll be down presently, and then we can lend a hand with laying the table. Don’t worry, and don’t panic! We can do it all right!’

Mercifully, Anna was accustomed to her mistress, and once she had hung up, she turned to with a will. Daisy and Gwensi arriving well before the rest came to the rescue and gathered rhubarb and prepared it, while she mixed the eggs and cut big slices of bread for toast. Jo's triplet daughters crouched round the kitchen fire with toasting-forks, for Jo meant them to grow up useful, and they could toast bread quite well with a little overlooking. When the big party arrived, Jo sent Beth to get extra leaves for the table, and Meg and Gay with her to help in carrying them. She set Jacynth to sorting out knives and forks and spoons; put two of the Juniors to fetch glasses and jugs of water from the pantry, and by one o'clock they were sitting round the big table, rather crowded, it is true, but all very jolly and friendly, even shy Meg having found it impossible to remain bashful in such an atmosphere of merriment. The scrambled eggs disappeared in no time, and the rhubarb and custard followed them. Then Jo called on everyone to help with the clearing away, and by the time Anna had her spotless kitchen to herself again the shyest new girl could not have remained shy any longer.

The triplets and Baby Stephen had been kept to their nursery for the meal, but after it was over, Jo went upstairs to attend to her son's wants and invited all the new girls to go with her.

'You must see my family,' she said. 'Daisy, put a match to the drawing-room fire. What a horrid day it has turned out!' as she glanced out of the window against which rain was now beating heavily. 'We'll have to amuse ourselves indoors. I'm glad you brought Cerita, Gay. We'll have some music later on. And what about a game of Sardines to start off with?'

The shout that greeted this might have startled anyone less accustomed to schoolgirls than Anna. She shrugged her shoulders, and with a muttered remark about 'these English babies,' went on with the sock she was knitting. Jo laughed, a clear, sweet peal of laughter that, so Jacynth decided, went well with her speaking voice. Jacynth had always loved music passionately, though she had talked little of it, even to Auntie. Life had been so difficult, and there was not even a piano at Meldon House. It was best to say as little as possible about it. Here, where music was made a feature of the curriculum, the child was beginning to feel as if a bird imprisoned in her heart till now was being set free. Jo's beautiful voice filled some need in her. Now her laughter was added.

'Give me time to see to Stephen and get him put down for his nap,' her hostess was saying. 'You can come up to the nursery, you seven new people, and meet my daughters. They'll want to play, of course. Come along! You others, lay the table in the drawing-room ready for tea. Then Anna can have a little peace. We won't be long.' And she swept off the seven newcomers upstairs, along a winding passage, round a corner and down another passage. Here, she opened a door on to a gay room, with primrose walls, decorated with a wide dado showing all the well-known fairy-tale people; it had green lino on the floor and yellow and orange wool rugs. The nursery furniture was white-painted wood, and someone had painted nursery-rhyme characters on the backs of the chairs so that one chair was known as Miss Muffett, another as Jack Horner, another as Boy Blue. A big old-fashioned arm-chair had a cover of dark green besprinkled with oranges and lemons stencilled all over it; the black-out curtains over the cream net ones were treated in the same way. Over the mantelpiece hung a copy of the Andrea del Sarto 'Madonna della Sedia,' and Raphael's sweet little 'Sistine Madonna' was on the opposite wall. In between, hung copies of 'Cherry Ripe,' the 'Blue Boy,' 'The Age of Innocence,' and some of Margaret Tarrant's lovely child-studies. It was, as the girls all said, a beautiful room.

Squatted on the floor before a big dolls' house were three little girls who jumped with shouts of 'Mamma!' as Jo entered. They raced across the floor to her, and she dropped on her

knees with open arms, and hugged them as they tumbled over her.

‘My precious girlies! Come and say “How do you do” to some more girls. Have you been good, darlings? Did you all eat up every scrap of dinner? Even the spinach, Margot? Good girl! Mamma is very pleased with you. No spills, Len? Isn’t that splendid! And did my Connie remember to fold up her feeder? That was right, pets. Now come here.’ Jo got to her feet, the little girls still clinging to her, and called the girls in. ‘Come along, you folk! Here is Len, the eldest of my large family. This is Connie, and this Margot. And here,’ she turned to a day-cot, set near the window, ‘is my son, Stephen.’ She lifted out the splendid fellow, and he promptly hid his face on his mother’s shoulder. Jo took no notice. She kissed the back of his neck, and then turned to Len. ‘Len, will you look after Mamma’s visitors while she sees to Stephen. That’s all right, then. Stephen and I will vanish for a few minutes. Show them La Maison des Poupées,’ and she passed through another door with her baby, leaving the schoolgirls standing rather shyly, Meg at the back of the little group.

Len was quite equal to the occasion. ‘Would you like to see La Maison des Poupées?’ she asked, ‘or shall we play ve musical box? Please sit down. Mamma didn’t say your names. Will you tell us?’

There was a little silence. Then Jacynth came to the rescue. ‘This is Meg Farrant,’ she said, looking at the Senior. ‘These are Ann Morell and Susan Lane; Wendy Robson, Jennifer Bell, and Margaret Benn. I’m Jacynth Hardy.’

‘What are your forms?’ asked Margot, the youngest of the trio.

‘I’m in Lower Fifth,’ said Meg, bravely helping Jacynth. ‘Jacynth is in Four B—isn’t it, Jacynth? Oh, Three A for some things? I see. I don’t know about the rest.’ And she looked doubtfully at the Juniors.

They told the little girls their forms, and then Len took the lead again. ‘It’s a nice school. We’re coming to ve Babies’ Class next term. Mamma did say vis one at first, but she’s goin’ to teach at ve school, so we must wait.’

‘Can wead alweady,’ put in Margot with a toss of her golden waves.

‘An’ count up to twenty,’ added Connie, who had stayed silent till then, as they found later on she often did. She was the thoughtful member of the triplets, Len being the leader, while Margot had inherited her mother’s impulsiveness, and often had to be rescued from trouble. But Connie thought before she spoke or did anything, though her thoughts were frequently hair-raising in their results. She was the dark one, with black hair, deep-brown eyes, and cream-and-roses skin, where her sisters were pink-and-white. All three were delightfully pretty, and none of them knew what shyness was. They chattered fluently to the visitors, only tripping up on their R’s and TH- sounds, though Connie made valiant efforts to overcome her difficulties.

Jo came back presently, with a sleepy, well-satisfied baby, laid him in his cot, and covered him over. Then she turned to the others. ‘And now for a game of Sardines! May you three play? Yes, of course you may. Be careful on the stairs, though. We don’t want any weeps. Come along!’ And with a final glance at her son, who was now slumbering peacefully, she led the way downstairs, where they found a leaping fire in the drawing-room, and the rest ready for a wild game of Sardines, in which the triplets joined with shrieks of glee. Jacynth secretly wondered how any baby could sleep through the noise they made, but there was no sound from Stephen. His mother slipped in to look at him once or twice, but always returned to nod and bid them go on. Jo saw her look on the last occasion, and told her laughingly, ‘My babies all learn to sleep through anything. They have to. With three sisters, not to mention Daisy,

Primula, and Robin, and all the nieces and nephews who come here constantly, they soon get accustomed to noise. The girlies were trained to it at two months; and Stephen could sleep through a thunderstorm and an air-raid combined by the time he was six weeks old.'

When he woke, they stopped playing. Jo sponged his face and hands, put a fresh frock on him, and brought him down to the drawing-room, where he rolled happily about among the cushions. Jo called for music, and led the way to the piano. There she played for Daisy to sing in a high, sweet soprano, and accompanied Gay, who played her 'cello with a feeling and execution that amazed Jacynth, and made her long to be able to do the same. Then there were choruses in which they all joined, the little girls piping in quite tunefully.

'Now you, Jo!' cried Daisy when they had finished a rousing 'John Peel.' 'Yes; you must! Sing "The Fairy Pipers" to start with.'

'Hand it out, then,' said Jo resignedly. 'Who's going to play for me?'

'We want Rob. Why on earth did she stay at school?' grumbled Daisy from the cabinet where she was hunting through songs. 'She doesn't generally.'

'The other prees wanted her,' replied Jo, taking the song. 'Bethy, can you do it? Daisy gets wild when she accompanies, and I'd rather stand to sing.'

Beth shook her head. 'Not me! I'm worse than Daisy.'

Jo glanced round, and Meg said, 'I think I could manage it, Mrs Maynard. I'll try if you like.'

'Good! It's easy enough. I can't think why Daisy and Beth always shy at playing accompaniments. Can you see there?'

'Yes, thank you.' And Meg sat down, and began to play with a sure touch and capable following of the singer which quite startled the others; while Jo nodded gratefully. Then she sang, and the house was filled with the golden music of her voice. She had a mezzo-soprano, very carefully trained and having something of the almost unearthly sweetness to be met with occasionally in a boy's voice. By request from Beth, she followed her song with Cyril Scott's 'Blackbird,' and her effortless cadenzas filled Jacynth with a deep desire to be able to do the same. The rest were impressed, but she and Meg were the ones who showed real appreciation, and after she had sung again, this time Liza Lehmann's pathetic 'Hebrew Lullaby,' Jo turned to the elder girl, saying, 'Thank you, Meg. You accompany nearly perfectly. Where did you learn? It's a joy to sing to your music.'

Meg went pink, but she said, 'My father sings, and I've always accompanied him. He is very strict about it, so I've had to learn to do it as well as possible. It was lovely playing for you, Mrs Maynard, and you have a lovely voice. Do you ever sing at concerts—big ones, I mean?'

Jo shook her head with a grin. 'Don't you think I've got enough to do with my house and family? I married very young—after always saying I never meant to marry at all! The girlies came along a year or so later. I've had no time for concert work, apart from school, I mean. Now, I'm more tied than ever. Besides, it would be very strenuous training.' She turned to Jacynth. 'Fond of music, Jacynth?'

'I love it,' sighed Jacynth. 'How I'd love to sing like you—or play like Meg or Gay. But I couldn't. I've never learnt at all.'

'You'll learn a certain amount now, anyhow,' said Jo. 'Everyone does at the Chalet School. You wait till Plato gets hold of you!' This with a wicked smile.

'Who's Plato?' asked Wendy Robson curiously.

‘The school’s respected singing master, my child. He’s very good, so take my advice, and make the most of your lessons. He’ll be a bit of a shock in some ways, I expect; but he *can* teach. He took me on for three years; and then I had Signor Dolci for a year. That was in Tirol. I haven’t had any lessons since, worse luck. When Stephen is a little older, I’m seriously thinking of going on with my training if I can manage it.’

Tea came in then, and the talk ceased. But after tea, Jo set them all to playing games, and went upstairs with Stephen again, taking Meg with her. It was her practice to try to have a little private talk with every new girl at these parties, and she had often been able to help a newcomer in one way or another. On this occasion, she sent for Jacynth when Meg came down, and that young lady ran upstairs to the big nursery, full of curiosity as to why Mrs Maynard wanted her, and already deeply in love with her hostess.

Jo was bathing her son. As the door opened she looked up with a smile and a hasty, ‘Come in and shut the door, Jacynth. I don’t want Stephen to catch a cold. That’s right; now come here and tell me what you think of the school up to date.’

‘I like it very much,’ said Jacynth, squatting down on a low stool.

‘That’s splendid! You know, Jacynth, I was the first Chalet School girl when my sister began it in Tirol. It’s the dearest thing on earth to me—after my family, of course; and I do want to feel that all other girls are as happy there as I was. That’s one reason why I always have new girls to tea with me. I want you all to feel that you have somewhere to come to if it’s necessary. Sometimes things happen that you can’t talk to the actual school people about, and it’s useful to have someone outside that you can discuss them with. My sister would be the right one, really, but she’s further away and even busier than I am. So if things get beyond your management, ask leave to come to me; or grab me when I’m at school, which will be easy this term, as I’m coming up two days a week to teach. Tell me about them, and if I can help you, I will.’

‘That’s very kind of you,’ said Jacynth.

Jo shook her head. ‘No; it’s only the fair thing to do.’ She lifted Stephen out of his bath, rolled him in a big towel, and began to pat him dry. ‘Just think, Jacynth. I have three girls of my own. I shall want them to be happy at school too. I must help other people’s girls. And now, tell me about your home a little. You come from the north, don’t you?’

Before she left the nursery, Jacynth had told Jo the main points of her life. She had even let this friendly, understanding person into the secret of her anxiety about Auntie, and Jo had shown a grave sympathy which was somehow comforting. When Jacynth went downstairs to send Wendy Robson up, Stephen was in his nightie, and she had got the feeling that if she were in any trouble she could come here and find help and consolation—which was exactly what Jo was aiming at.

By six o’clock they had all been there, and then Jo called for Gay. ‘I’ve just tucked Stephen in,’ she said, when Gay’s charming face appeared round the door. ‘I want to be sure he goes off, so I’m going to tidy up. Everyone having a good time?’

‘Topping as usual,’ said Gay. ‘Let me help, Mrs Maynard. Where do the dolls live?’

‘In that cupboard—all but those three. They go to bed with the girlies. Thanks, Gay. And now, dear, what news from China?’

Gay’s face clouded over. ‘No news. We haven’t heard for months now. I know it’s hard to get letters through; but I can’t help worrying a little.’

‘When did you last hear?’

‘In February—just after Stephen came. Tommy says it’s silly to worry. The plantation is right up-country, and nowhere near where the Japs have been bombing. But one can’t help wondering, all the same.’

Jo dropped the books she had been collecting, and came to put an arm round the slim shoulders. ‘I know, Gay. I wish I could help you, child.’

‘But you do, just by being interested enough to ask,’ said Gay quickly.

‘Not much, I’m afraid. Look here, I’ll ask my brother-in-law to see if he can hear anything, shall I? He might be able to get hold of something. And, Gay, remember how long it takes for letters to come, in any case. It was bad enough before. Of course, it’s a good deal worse now. The chances are they have been lost. You’ll hear soon, I expect. Meantime, keep your chin up, girlie. And come here if it gets too hard and there’s anything I can do.’

Gay nodded. ‘I mean to be tremendously busy this term. If I’ve got lots to do, I shan’t have time to think and fuss.’ Then she asked something which made Jo jump. ‘Mrs Maynard, do you think I’m really good at the ’cello?’

‘I think you’re extremely good for your age,’ said Jo when she had got her breath. ‘Your bowing is excellent, and so is your phrasing. After Jesanne Gellibrand, you’re miles and away the best in the school.’

‘Good enough to teach, do you think?’

‘Teach? Do you mean, to teach yourself, or to be taught?’ asked Jo, puzzled.

‘To teach someone else. Could I begin someone, do you think?’

‘I don’t see why not, especially if it’s someone who doesn’t know much about music. Gay, what are you getting at?’

‘It’s the new kid—Jacynth Hardy. She’s mad about the ’cello. But she told me that they were poor, and her auntie couldn’t afford lessons for her—and, of course, Mr Manders does cost the earth, I know. Then there’d be the ’cello, and you can’t get a ’cello for nothing.’

‘Not if it’s going to be a good one—and not even a cheap one, nowadays.’

‘No; and Mr Manders says it’s no use working on a poor instrument. It ruins your ear, for one thing. But what I thought was I’d start Jacynth if she’d agree, and let her practise on mine. She could put in two twenty-minutes a day without too much of a shove, and she’d be making a beginning, anyhow. Later on, things might change, and then she could go ahead. I’m sure she ought to be good. I’ve played to her once—and this afternoon. Did you see her face?’

‘I saw all right. I wondered at the time if she’d learned. Then she told me something about how they are situated. But, Gay, she tells me she wants to try for the Thérèse Lepatire, and she’ll have to work, as she’s behind in a good many things. Do you think she could manage ’cello on top of that?’

‘I thought of that. You know how they all say that it doesn’t do you any good to slog all the time. I know if Jacynth started she’d want to work, and I thought it would sort of make a break for her from lessons.’

‘That’s true. It’s a good idea if she’ll agree.’

‘Well, do you think I’d be good enough?’

‘I don’t see why not. You’ve been well taught yourself. But what about School Cert.? Aren’t you taking it this term?’

‘No fear! Not till next year. I’m well up on some things; but my maths always make Miss Slater tear her hair.’

‘You have my sympathy,’ said Jo solemnly. ‘Mine used to make Miss Leslie swear. You don’t know her? Oh, she was in Tirol. She left to be married.’

‘I see.’ Gay was not interested in Miss Leslie. ‘Well, you really do think I could give Jacynth a start. I’d like to do it if I could. I like the kid, and even if I didn’t, one does sort of feel if one can give someone a shove up one ought to. I’d help Gillian if I could, but she’s not keen. Anyhow, she’s my own age and my chum.’

‘And a young person with opinions of her own,’ added Jo. ‘I quite see that it mightn’t work with her. Jacynth is another cup of tea. Try her, Gay. She’s very troubled about her aunt, and she’s going to go tooth and nail for the Thérèse Lepattre. I think you’re right and it would do her good to have another interest. You can tell her I said so if you like.’

‘Oh, thanks awfully. It might turn the scale.’

‘I don’t know about that. But it might help.’ Jo looked at Gay doubtfully.

‘What’s wrong?’ demanded Gay.

‘I was just wondering if you’ll be able to manage it. Oh, I don’t mean from the point of view of your capability. I think you could manage the first lessons easily. But—well, things will be rather different this term.’

‘With Miss Bubb, you mean? I know that. But our free time *is* our free time. So long as we don’t make nuisances of ourselves, nobody ever bothers with us much. We are trusted.’

Jo said no more. But she wondered if Miss Bubb was likely to continue the old ways, and trust the older girls as freely as they had always been accustomed to.

‘Oh, well,’ she thought, ‘if things get really bad, someone will talk to Madge and she’ll put her foot down. I won’t say anything more.’

It was a wise decision. When the girls returned at seven o’clock, they found the whole school in a ferment. Miss Bubb had told Hilary Burn and the Games Committee that for this term it was her wish that no one who was taking any sort of public exam should be included in any of the teams. They must have their usual gym lessons and games practices, of course; but they must not play in either the First Eleven or the two tennis Sixes.

‘Then who’s going to play for the school?’ Hilary had demanded rather blankly. ‘I don’t want to boast, Miss Bubb, but we have gained rather a reputation while we’ve been here. I’m not very sure how far such an edict affects the forms as a whole; but I’m sure most of the two Fifths are in for School Certificate. The Sixths are most of them busy with either Higher or music and art exams. That would leave the burden of the teams on the shoulders of the Fourth Forms. They’re good on the whole, but they haven’t the staying powers of the older girls. It’s not to be expected.’

‘I’m afraid, however, that you must manage with them,’ replied Miss Bubb calmly. ‘I see by the lists that there are four girls in Upper Fifth who have no examination; and seven in Lower. Perhaps,’ with a smile, ‘you can make up your teams from them. For your sake, I hope so. But we cannot risk examination results for games. Thank you, Miss Burn. That is all I wanted to see you about now.’

Thus dismissed, Hilary could only leave. But she told her views of the new Head, with considerable freedom, to such of the Staff as she could find, and they agreed with her. As for the school at large, when *they* knew red-hot rebellion woke among them. It was certainly not going to be a peaceful term!

CHAPTER VII

A DEPUTATION TO MISS BUBB

‘It’s the limit! It’s outrageous! The woman must be quite mad!’

‘No; only mad on results,’ said Gillian Culver seriously. ‘Don’t rave like that, Gay. It won’t do any good, and someone might come along and hear you. You’d get into a row, and where’s the good of that?’

‘I don’t care! Someone ought to do something about it. We shall lose all our matches, for who is there left out of the Fifths and Sixths to play?’

‘Not many,’ admitted Gillian. ‘There’s Lois Bennett and Jesanne Gellibrand——’

‘Oh no, there isn’t! Jesanne’s taking Final in ’cello this term. Miss Bubb’s idea knocks *her* out, just as much as it does Robin Humphries and the Triumvirate. Besides, Lois isn’t much good at cricket, though she’s first-rate at tennis. I don’t believe we could get together an Eleven—not one that would be any use for matches, anyhow.’

‘Well, there’s you and me. We’re fairly useful—especially you.’

‘Tosh! I can bat a bit, and my fielding’s not too dusty. But you know what my bowling’s like. You’re the only one left who can bowl, and you can’t go on throughout a whole match, and you know it.’

‘There’s Enid Sothern. She’s not doing anything this year. And Monica herself. What a blessing she got her matric on Schools last year! That gives us two of the team, anyhow.’

‘Enid’s game is really tennis. She’s last man in the Eleven. And how can she give proper time to both? And I’m better at tennis than cricket. I *am* in the Second, but you’re the only Fifth Form shining light left there. Floppy Williams isn’t even in the Second; and Floppy’s tennis is a legend. Jocelyn Redford is doing a piano exam; and so is Lorenz Maïco, so that knocks them out. And Nancy Hatton and Terry Prosser have Art exams. And who is there in even Upper Fourth who could do match work—First Eleven match work, I mean? Monica had better scratch all our First Team matches, for we shan’t have any First Teams at all.’

‘Monica won’t do anything of the kind. We may lose all our matches, but to scratch the lot would be letting the school down in public, and she won’t do that.’

Gay remained moodily silent. She could find no answer to this. Gillian slipped an arm through hers, and pulled her round. ‘We don’t want to wander beyond the shrubbery, so let’s turn. Gay, I don’t see what we can do. Miss Burn has been to the Head again this morning, I know. I heard Monica telling Robin Humphries so. Miss Bubb refused to listen to her. She said that exams were more important than games except for the two or three who are taking up P.T., and she would stretch a point and allow those to play, but that was all.’

‘Then she’s quite mad! Oh, they’re important all right. I never said or thought they weren’t. But so are games. We’ve got a quite good reputation, but if we mess up things, as we shall do if this silly idea goes on, we shall lose it, and then no decent school will either challenge us or accept our challenges.’

‘Perhaps Madame will do something about it,’ suggested Gillian.

‘They won’t want to worry her. Josette is quite bad; it was a nasty scald, poor kiddy, and no one will want to bother her if they can help it.’

‘Well, Jo then.’

‘I doubt if she can. She’s only Madame’s sister. She has no authority over the Head. Oh, why did Miss Annersley get herself messed up in a bus accident?’

‘At least she’s come through the op.—that’s something to be thankful for, for she easily might not, you know.’

‘It’s enough to give her a bad relapse if anyone tells her what’s going on here,’ said Gay gloomily.

‘Perhaps Mately might do something. She’s awfully keen on exercise.’

‘I know she is. But everyone is getting ordinary practice, so I don’t see how she could interfere. It’s the extra practices that are being sat on. And nobody could do First Team work without them, Gill.’

‘No; that’s true. Then I don’t see what we can do,’ said Gillian helplessly.

‘Nor do I. Oh, it’s going to spoil the whole term! That woman shouldn’t be at large!—Well, what’s wrong *now*?’ for Daisy Venables had come racing up to them, her blue eyes sparkling with anger, her face flushed.

‘I was looking for you two. Come on! There’s a meeting of the two Fifths in the bowling-green at once. We couldn’t find you before.’

‘But what’s gone wrong?’ demanded Gillian.

‘Wait till we get there. You’ll hear fast enough then!’ was the unsatisfactory answer.

The two followed Daisy, greatly wondering, to the old bowling-green with its walls of hornbeam, where they found the thirty-odd girls who made up the two forms. No need to ask if something was badly wrong. The whole atmosphere reeked with fury. As Daisy returned with her convoy, Beth Chester swung round and greeted them with some irritation.

‘Where on earth have you been, you two? We’ve been waiting for you.’

‘Sorry; but we didn’t know there was to be a meeting,’ explained Gillian, not giving Gay a chance to answer. ‘What’s it about?’

‘What’s it about?’ Beth stopped and choked. ‘If you’d used your eyes, you would have seen. There’s a notice up on the board to say that no one under Sixth is to go beyond the playing-fields and the garden without special permission. In other words, we’re to be treated as if we were Juniors!’

Gay uttered a howl of rage. ‘What next, I wonder? We’ve always been trusted. Does this—this *ape* think she can come and upset all our arrangements just as she likes?’

‘She seems to!’ Welsh Gwensi spoke, her accent more and more Welsh as she went on. ‘Do you see what that means? We’ve always had the freedom of the whole place, and gone where we liked within the boundaries. Now, if we want to go up the hill, say, or across to the coppice, we’ve got to ask leave. Just like the Babies! I won’t do it! This is my home!’

‘Pipe down, Gwen,’ said Daisy hastily, for there was no saying what Gwensi might say next, now that her temper was roused. ‘Oh, we’re not going to sit down under it! Don’t think that for a moment. It’s an insult to us, and we’re not going to put up with that. But losing our heads won’t get us anywhere. We’ve got to keep cool.’

Daisy might say ‘keep cool,’ but she did not look like it. No one, in fact, had ever seen easy-going Daisy look so angry before. Now she went on quickly: ‘We’ve got to put a stop to this. Everyone above Four A has been able to go where she likes in the grounds, and it isn’t likely we’re going to sit down under an order of this kind. But raving isn’t going to help us.’

The girls were angry, but most of them saw the sense of her words. The furious comments ceased, and Daisy, balancing herself on the back of a garden seat, spoke earnestly. ‘We can’t

have this sort of thing going on. For one thing, it'll let us down with the rest of the school, and we can't have that. The question is, what can we do?"

There was a blank silence. They were all ready to criticise the new rule, but nobody had any idea how to counter it.

Gwensi spoke first. 'We can refuse to obey it,' she said.

'Yes; and we can take all that would be coming to us if we did that, too!' retorted Daisy. 'Have a little sense, Gwensi. I know you're boiling mad, but it's no use going off like a squib over it.'

'Well, then, suggest something better!'

'We might send a deputation to Miss Bubb,' said Frances Grey, a quiet girl of sixteen, who was noted for her science work.

'What do you propose the deputation should say?' demanded Beth.

'Why, that we have never been kept to quarters like this, and it may make difficulties with the Juniors if it's begun now,' said Frances.

'It *might* work,' said Daisy doubtfully.

'Not it!' Gay spoke with emphasis. 'It's no use saying that. She'll only think what a poor, weak lot we are if we have to rely on that sort of thing for keeping the babes in order.'

'Say it isn't done here, not to trust Seniors.' This was Gillian's proposal.

'That might be better. After all, she can't very well come into the place for two or three months and expect to be allowed to overturn all our laws,' agreed Beth.

'She's doing enough as it is,' observed Janet Scott. 'After all, she is Head for the time being. Heads seem to have unlimited power.'

'Not here!' There was finality in Daisy's tone as she spoke. 'The final court of appeal is my Aunt Madge. Only, I don't want to bother her if we can help it. Josette's really very rotten. It's a nasty scald, poor baby—all over her tummy, and down one leg. I know they're anxious about her. I should think this will teach young Sybil to be a little less cocksure in future. Auntie says she is very sorry; but Uncle won't let Sybs go home till half-term. If she hadn't been messing about with the kettle, Josette couldn't have run into her, and then it wouldn't have got spilt. Josette stood on Sybil's foot, and she shrieked and dropped the kettle. It fell on the poor baby, against her chest, and upset all down her tummy. Rosa wasn't there—she was in the poultry-yard—and Sybil had no more sense than to drag Josette up to the bathroom, and take her clothes off, one by one. By the time she'd finished, her vest was sticking to her, and Sybs just yanked it off—and half the skin with it. If it hadn't been for that, she wouldn't have been so bad. It's all Sybil's fault.'

'Then I'm sorry for Sybil,' said Janet soberly. 'It must be awful for her to know that she's caused her little sister so much pain.'

'Oh, it's upset her. She isn't like herself just now at all,' said Daisy. 'And Uncle Jem being so furious about it makes it a lot worse. He doesn't usually lose his wool over things. If there's any ticking-off done in that family, it's generally Auntie Madge who has to do it.'

'Well, if they're anxious like that about Josette, we certainly can't bother Madame with our troubles,' said Mollie Avery. 'I hope the poor kid will get better soon. A scald can be such a nasty thing!'

'It's nasty all right this time,' agreed Daisy. 'Well, what about it, you people? Do you think the deputation idea will do?'

'We'd better try it, I suppose,' said Gay pessimistically. 'I don't believe it'll work the oracle, though. Still, it's the best we can do at the moment.'

‘Who’ll be the deputation?’ It was Frances again.

‘You can wash *me* out!’ Gwensi spoke emphatically. ‘If she said anything I might lose my temper, and you all know what happens then.’

‘Yes; you’d better keep out of it,’ agreed Daisy. ‘But you really ought to try and sit on it, Gwen. You do such mad things when you’re in a rage. Beth must go, of course—she’s Upper Fifth prefect. And, Gay, you are form prefect for Lower, aren’t you?’

‘Yes; but I’m not going either unless you say I must. I might be as bad as Gwensi. Better send Gill instead. She doesn’t get into wild paddies.’

‘You’ll have to go for a deputation. But you’d better keep at the back and say nothing unless you’re asked,’ said Beth.

‘Well, I might do that,’ agreed Gay. ‘Who else are you sending?’

‘Daisy ought to be there. What about you, Jan?’

‘I don’t mind coming; but don’t make it too big. Three from each form should be ample.’

‘Too many, I should think,’ said Frances. ‘You and Daisy for us, Beth, and Gay and, say, Gill—as Gay says, she’s a calm thing—for the Lower Fifth. Now, what are you going to say?’

‘As little as possible. But try to make her see that that sort of thing isn’t done here,’ said Gwensi heatedly.

‘And supposing she *won’t* see it?’ asked Beth.

‘Oh, don’t ask me! I know what I should do; but it wouldn’t be much help.’

‘You’d go off in a tearing rage and tell her just what you thought of her,’ said Daisy. ‘No; I agree that wouldn’t be much help. We’d better scribble it down first. We must know what we’re going to do, or we shan’t get anywhere. She likes logical statements—or so she says. Let’s be logical.’

‘If you can! Here’s a notebook, and my pen is somewhere.’ And Janet hunted through the pockets of her blazer. ‘Here you are. Jot it down, Beth, and then get it into your heads.’

It took them some time to draw up a statement that suited them all. The first one was voted ‘too mild.’ The second one, to which Gwensi mainly contributed, was so fiery that no headmistress would ever have listened to it. Finally they got something that they agreed would ‘do.’ The deputation studied it, and then consulted their watches. From time immemorial it had been the school’s right to go to the Head between five and seven in the evening if they wished to see her. It was now just ten past five, which gave them twenty minutes, for prep began at half-past and, although it was not yet a week since Miss Bubb’s first appearance, they had already learnt that she regarded all school-hours as sacred.

‘Are we tidy?’ demanded Daisy, pulling her pigtails over her shoulder and examining them anxiously.

‘Quite. Gay’s wig looks a little woolly. Here’s my comb, Gay. Smooth yourself, do!’ And Frances handed over her pocket-comb.

Gay combed out her rampant curls and refastened her slide. Then the four, feeling very self-conscious, made their way to the house, and the small sunny room which had been put in order for Miss Bubb. Lady Russell preferred to keep the library sacred to Miss Annersley and herself, but the Head pro tem. must have an office, so this little sitting-room had been prepared for her.

She turned in some surprise when, in answer to her quick ‘Come in!’, four Fifth Form girls entered. ‘Beth, Daisy, Gay, and Gillian?’ she said. ‘What do you want?’

‘We have come as a deputation from the two Fifths, Miss Bubb,’ said Beth. ‘We have come to ask you to rescind your new rule about no one under the Sixths being able to go

where they like in the grounds. It has always been a Senior privilege, and we feel that—that to cancel it will make a difference to the Juniors and Middles. Everyone has always looked forward to Senior privileges when she reaches one or other of the Fifths.’

Miss Bubb leaned back in her chair. ‘In what way do you feel it would make a difference to the Juniors and Middles?’ she inquired, a sarcastic inflection in her tones that made Beth flush up angrily.

‘In every way,’ said Daisy quietly, seeing that her friend was too annoyed to answer. ‘You see, Miss Bubb, our privileges are the custom of years. The Seniors had them when the school was in Tirol, and when it reopened in Guernsey five years ago they were continued. I am afraid everyone will feel it if you change a state of affairs that has continued so long.’

‘Did no one ever point out to you, my dear Daisy, that repetition is bad construction?’ asked Miss Bubb, the sarcasm in her voice becoming more apparent. ‘Please try to avoid it, or I shudder to think of your English results.’

It was Daisy’s turn to flush angrily; but she held her tongue. Beth took up the tale again. ‘We are not asking for anything new, Miss Bubb,’ she said earnestly, ‘—only for a continuation of what has always been.’

‘Indeed? But then, I am afraid, I cannot agree that it is either wise or necessary. I may say that I expected that you would object; but in this case I am afraid you must bow to my ruling. I do not approve of girls of your age having so much freedom. You are still only children, and while you are children you must be under rule. If you wish to regain your privileges, your course is obvious. Work harder, and gain your removes into the Sixth Form. And now, enough of that. I wish to ask you something.’

She paused a moment, and the deputation, seething with fury, waited for what was to come. ‘I wish to know,’ she said in a rather different tone, ‘if it has also been your custom to interrupt your head-mistress between the hours of five and half-past?’

‘Five and *seven*,’ replied Daisy gravely. ‘My aunt was always ready to see anyone who wished it at that time when she was Head. Mlle Lepattre carried it on; and so has Miss Annersley. We have all always known that if we wanted the Head we could come to her then.’

‘Really? Well, I am afraid I am going to make another innovation. I am a very busy woman, and I cannot hope to get my work done in reasonable time if I am to be disturbed in this fashion. I had already seen two Juniors and one of the Middles before you came. This must cease. Gay Lambert, as you go, call in at the office and ask Miss Dene to come to me. You may go, girls.’

There was nothing for it but to go. Gay called in at the office and gave the message to the Head’s secretary, a fair, pretty girl of the same age as Jo Maynard, and an old girl of the school. Rosalie made a face to herself as she rose from the typing she was doing to go to her new mistress. She had been working hard all day, and had another two hours’ work before her before she could hope to finish. Miss Annersley had always been considerate of her secretary, and insisted that, as a rule, she must stop work at six. But Miss Bubb seemed to regard a secretary as someone always at her beck and call. This was Thursday, and every night of the week Rosalie Dene had had barely time to change for the eight o’clock dinner. On two nights she had had to go back to her office to finish after dinner.

‘This is getting to be too much of a good thing!’ she thought as she picked up her notebook and pencils. ‘If Josette weren’t so ill, poor baby, I’d fire in my resignation to Madame. As it is, and considering all things, I’ve just got to put up with it. But oh, how

thankful I shall be when Bill gets back. At least she'll see there's no nonsense. None of the rest of us are old enough to do anything at the moment.'

By this time she was at the door of the study, so she went in, and was requested to put up a notice to the effect that, for the future, the head-mistress could only be seen on special request, which must come from the form-mistress of the girl entering it.

Meanwhile, the deputation got itself back to its peers just in time to say 'No good at all!' when the bell rang for prep, and they all had to go in and bottle up their feelings for two long hours. But once those came to an end they let themselves go, and before bed-time the two forms were ripe for revolt. Only Janet's Scots common sense and Gillian's firm pointing out that rioting would not help them in the least kept them from breaking out into open rebellion. It was well for them that Welsh Gwensi and impulsive Gay were not their only leaders. Daisy backed up Janet and Gillian, but that was only because of the anxiety at the Round House over her little cousin. She frankly owned that if her aunt had not been so worried, she would have done nothing to calm the rising fires.

'Then that's one good thing coming out of poor Josette's accident!' said Janet tartly. 'Stop it, you people. To have us all on the carpet would be just about what she would enjoy, I should think. You don't want to give yourselves over to her like that, I should hope!'

They did not, so once more they bottled up their wrath and tried to work off some of their excitement in dancing. But most of them went in to Prayers in a sadly unprayerful state of mind. Miss Bubb read the Prayers for the Protestants in her usual somewhat hard voice. The Catholics had their own Prayers in the Kindergarten with Hilary Burn in charge, so fared better. Miss Bubb was casting about in her mind to see how this state of things could be altered. She felt that the whole school should be together. As it was, if she had anything to say, she had to wait for the Catholics to join the rest in Hall. She realised that she must go carefully here. She might be able to ride roughshod over most of the school's traditions, but this was a more serious thing. She knew that Miss Wilson, the science mistress, was a Catholic, and always took the girls, and she wanted to make the change before that lady could return. She had about six weeks in which to do it, and she fully intended that it should be done. The last report on Miss Annersley had said that the invalid was going on well, but that it would be some time before she could be moved, and much longer before she could return to school. Miss Bubb determined to seat herself firmly in the saddle for that period at least. It was even possible that Miss Annersley might not be able to take up her work again. In that case, who would be so suitable to hold the post as the one to whom should be due the brilliant results of the exams? Miss Bubb felt she would not at all mind returning to harness if it could be as Head of the Chalet School. She was very sorry for poor little Josette's accident; but she could not fail to see that it gave her such a chance as normally she could not have had to establish herself firmly. What she did *not* realise was the power in the land that Lady Russell's sister was. So far, she had barely met Jo, and as she knew that that young lady had four small children, she felt that she need not be reckoned with. But Jo had no idea of being left out, and was already laying plans which would go far to neutralise the new Head's.

CHAPTER VIII

A FEW LETTERS

(From Jacynth Hardy to her Aunt)

‘MY DEAREST AUNTIE,—I was so glad to get your letter and hear that you are safely in the nursing home. What a good thing that Dr Harper was able to find someone to take over the house and furniture so quickly. That will save even sending it into store, and you told me that that would cost a bit, but you are saved that much now. And then the rent will help out too. I think it’s simply splendid, don’t you?’

‘I like school so much. Everyone is so kind and friendly here. I am in Lower Fourth for most things, but have to do algebra and geometry with Upper Third. I’m ever so far behind my own form there. There is a Four C, but that, as Gay Lambert says, isn’t quite Fourth, and it’s rather more than Third. If I get on, Mme de Bersac, who teaches us, has promised that I shall join them for maths at half-term. And then, if I work hard, I shall be up to the rest by the end of term. She’s a dear, French, and small, and so neat-looking, with a smooth black head, and lovely dark eyes. She’s going to give me special coaching twice a week to help me. Isn’t it good of her? She has the darlingest little girl—just a year old. Her name is Thérèse, after Mlle Lepatire who used to be Head at one time. She was a cousin of Mme de Bersac’s, but she died just after the war broke out. Daisy Venables, who is a niece of Lady Russell’s and knows all about the school, told me all this. Thérèse lives at school with her mother, so we see quite a lot of her out of school-hours.

‘My form-mistress is Miss Slater, who generally teaches maths. But she has taken on Head of the Juniors, as four of the mistresses, including Miss Annersley the Head, are still in hospital through that accident I told you about in my last letter. Miss Slater is very nice, and we all like her.

‘We have a Head pro tem., as Daisy says. Her name is Miss Bubb, and she isn’t nice at all. She’s trying to upset all the old school ways, and the girls detest her. They would let Lady Russell know, but her youngest little girl, who is called Josette, has had a dreadful accident. Sybil, her eldest girl, upset a kettle of water over Josette somehow. Sybil is dreadfully miserable about it. I am so sorry for her.

‘I told you about Gay in my last letter. She is still as kind as ever and helps me every way she can. It is sweet of her, for everyone likes her and wants her to be with them; but she never forgets me. She and I have the loveliest secret. You shall know all about it when the holidays come. It’s a surprise for *you* and I’m sure you’ll love it. I’d like to tell you about it, but Gay says I must wait a little yet. I do hope you’ll be pleased when you know.

‘I’m working hard, but Gay makes me go for strolls with her; and if she sees me looking worried, she says, “Come along and tell me all about it. If it’s anything I can’t show you, I’ll find someone who can.” And she does. I’m getting on really well, and I do feel it is so much easier to learn here.

‘Oh, Auntie, it *is* good of you to have sent me here, and I will try to do well to repay you for all you’re doing for me. The only thing I want to make me absolutely happy is to have you quite well again, so mind you go at it as hard as you can. I’m longing to see you and have a good talk with you, but we must wait till the holidays for that. It’s nearly time to stop writing, so I must finish. Heaps and heaps of love, darling, from your own JACYNTH.

‘P.S.—Please give my love to the Harpers, and couldn’t you ask Mrs Harper to send Margaret and Anne here? They’d love it, I know.’

(*From Gay Lambert to her Sister-in-law*)

‘DARLING RUTHANS,—How are you all? This is going to be a sickening term. Or perhaps it won’t be so bad when Bill gets back. But that won’t be till half-term at soonest, worse luck! If I could even hear her ticking me off with every scrap of sarcasm she’s ever used to the whole school, I’d rejoice. And as for seeing the Head—well, I think we’d all go batty with delight, for the thing we’ve got to take her place is the absolute edge! Her name is Miss Bubb, and it just suits her! She’s upsetting things that have gone on here ever since the word “Go.” We’re all boiling, and if she does much more, I should think there’ll be trouble of the worst kind all round. And the worst of it is we daren’t say anything to Lady Russell as we’d do ordinarily, for Josette—I told you about the poor babe when I wrote before—is still very ill, and they’re very anxious about her. So we can’t bother her with our troubles.

‘The Bubb’s latest is to say that all written prep must be shown to the mistress or prefect in charge. You can imagine how much *anyone* likes *that!* They’ve to go through it, and if it isn’t decently written, or spelled, or expressed, it’s got to be done over again. I heard Rob Humphries holding forth about it to some of the other Sixths this morning in Break. It takes a lot to upset Robin, but she really was letting off steam. I may say that this does not apply to the Fifths. We are supposed to be old enough to do our prep properly. But if any girl gets less than forty-five per cent. of the total marks, she has to go to the Head. This morning, there was a young procession outside the door of her study. She’ll be kept busy if this goes on. I may say it’s fifty per cent. for us and the Sixth. Luckily, no one has dropped below that yet; but you never know.

‘The Bubb teaches Latin. She *would!* But I’ve been as good as gold, and spent ages over my prep for her, like everyone else. None of us is going to give her the faintest excuse for hauling us over the coals. Not that she needs one! She makes them up if she wants them! She had a few things to say about my writing the other day. I’ve gone back to *script* for her; she can’t find fault with that, anyhow. Well, my dear, I can’t think of any more to say. Besides, we’ve got a ghastly exercise on the deponent and semi-deponent verbs, and it will take me ages to do, for I’m not dropping below fifty per cent. marks if I have to look up every word and every rule of grammar to get it! Much love to you all,—GAY.’

(*Robin Humphries to Nan Blakeney*)

‘MY DEAR NAN,—Your wedding is going to cause a rumpus here! You may have heard of the awful calamity that has befallen us, and how our Head is still very ill, and likely to be so for some time. Of course, we had to have some sort of Head, for Miss Wilson, who would normally have taken her place, was also in the accident. *She* is to come back at half-term; but I don’t know how much she’ll be able to manage. So we got a substitute—a Miss Bubb who used to be a High School mistress but retired some years ago. My dear, she is the *last* person to have come here. She puts work before everything else, and objects to things that have gone on here for years. And the worst of it is we can’t appeal to Lady Russell as we might have done, for Josette, her youngest, is very ill, poor baby, and she can think of nothing else at the moment. Joey is keeping a weather-eye open, and as she comes up three mornings a week to take junior Latin and some literature, I think she won’t let things go too far. But Joey is young—only twenty-four—and she can’t do much in the way of interference. It will mean appealing to Madge in the end, I know, and we’re all anxious to keep off that until Josette is better. But things really are coming to an awful pass. The entire school is boiling up, and I *know* there will be a fearful explosion before long.

‘“But what has all this to do with my wedding?” I hear you say.

‘Well, just this. Miss Bubb has elected to say that only some of us may attend as representatives of the school; *and none of those taking any public exam!* Do you see what that means? Practically the whole of the Upper school will be out of it, for nearly all of us are doing something. Young Julie has Grade II of the Associated Board, and she was found in tears after she heard that statement, for she thought it would finish things for her. But Miss Phipps went to Miss Bubb and explained that Julie is one of your bridesmaids, so the creature has relaxed enough to say that in that case she will give Julie the time off. But it’s no use for any of the others. Do you wonder that I say there’s going to be a rumpus? For no one is going to sit down under all this. If it were the only thing, we might have put up with it, though we’d have growled, of course. But it’s only one of many. Just listen to this, Nan! [*A page and a half omitted.*]

‘So, you see, it’s simply everything piling up together. The school is quiet on the whole, so far, but there’s a feeling underneath. We can’t take hold of anything; but we know it’s there. We have to keep a tight hand on everyone, the Middles particularly. But *things are going to happen!*

‘Well, my child, I’ve written you a terrific letter, and I must stop and darn a hole I’ve just noticed in my heel. Aren’t stockings awful nowadays! Write to me, and tell me what you’d like for a wedding present. Love,—ROB.’

(From *Joey Maynard to Miss Wilson*)

‘MY DEAREST BILL, OTHERWISE NELL!—For Heaven’s sake get back as soon as you can! And *don’t* be surprised if you find this letter full of exclamations. I daren’t write down exactly what I feel. The paper wouldn’t stand it, and the Postmaster-General would have me run in for arson! But if ever Madge made a mistake in her life, she’s done it now! And we can’t bother her at the moment. Josette is a shade better, poor kiddy. They think the scalds are going on well; but the shock has been

very bad, and she's still frighteningly weak. Jem says that if she weathers another week she'll pull through. And for it to happen now, when we wanted Madge to be as free from worry as possible! I think Sybil has had the lesson of her life. I was raging when I heard what she'd done; but no one could keep on, she's such a poor little bundle of misery. Even Jem—and he was wild with her for days—has had to come round and forgive her. Madge, needless to state, did so almost at once. And that made Sybs weep harder. She's had a bad time of it.

'But what I really set out to say is you've got to come back to restrain our latest if you possibly *can*! She's upsetting everything, and no one has enough authority to put a stop to it. Matey keeps an eagle eye on the girls from the health point of view, but she can't make that an excuse for insisting that the girls shall go to the Head between five and seven every evening if they want her for anything. That's one thing the lady's trying to put down. If Miss Bubb really objects to it, they could come to you if you were here. Also, you might be able to see that she stops overworking Rosalie Dene. The poor kid hasn't finished till eight one night since school began—and it's been going a fortnight! As she starts at nine, and has only dinner-hour and tea-time off, it's a lot too much. Rosalie isn't too strong, and if it goes on, she'll be ill. I saw her yesterday for a few minutes, and she told me that if it weren't for Josette she'd send in her resignation. She doesn't want to do it. She loves the school, and has always been happy here; but she says herself she can't go on like this. She's getting a *ten-hour* day! I'm sure any trade union would stand on its hind legs and howl if they knew of it!

'Again, the lady has forbidden any exam girl to play in the teams. That means leaving matches to the Fourths for the most part. What price our chances against some of the schools we play? But again, it's not a thing Matey can very well urge as being against health, so she has to lie low. Hilary Burn came and inveighed to me about it. It must have done her a lot of good to get all that off her chest; but it hasn't helped anyone else. And another thing, she's interfered all round with the Staff duties. No one can get more than two hours off school except about once a month. She's insisted that the Fifths shall have practically the same kind of supervision as the Middles get, and *are* they furious! In short, I've never known the school so near revolution before. If you don't come, we shall be having a strike, or a lock-out, or something!

'Marjorie Durrant is back—very sad, but very brave. She came to tea with me today—Sunday—and she told me a very little about things. She has had no word from her husband for weeks, but, as she says, letters do get delayed nowadays. They may even be lost. She saved nothing from her home. About her little Elizabeth she never speaks. She did show me a miniature she wears of the child. She looks a sweet little soul, with such a jolly smile, and eyes like Marjorie's. When I gave it back, she said: "When they found her, they wouldn't let me see her, Jo. Perhaps it's as well." And that was all she did say. I was doubtful about showing her my own three, but she asked for them, so I called them down. She kissed them and held them rather tight. I hoped they'd not say anything, but Margot burst out with, "Why for does you hold me so close? You're choking me!" She would! When they had gone, Marjorie looked at me and said, "Oh, Jo! Thank God for your babies! But don't cling too much to them!"

‘I told her about last autumn. I hate talking of it, as you know; but I felt I owed it to her somehow. She listened without a word, and when I’d finished, she said, “Thank you, Jo. You always understood somehow, didn’t you?” I must stop. If I go on, I’ll howl!

‘Bill, you’ve got to come back—just *got* to! *I* can’t do anything. The fair Miss Bubb looks on *me* as a mere babe, not far removed from schooldays. The same applies to most of the others. And Marjorie Durrant—Redmond, I mean—has only come back for the time being. If you and Jeanne could return, even if you can’t teach, it would be *something*! At least you might be able to make the lady hold her horses a little. The two of you should be able to manage that between you. I’d back you up—we’d *all* back you up. . . . [*Later.*] Enter Grizel at that point, in a flaming temper. As you know, she has only had duty once a fortnight, as a good many of her lessons has to come out of the time when we are free—Have just noticed my grammar’s gone wrong. Never mind!—Miss Bubb has put her on to prep duty two nights a week, and dinner-hour for three. As she took lessons in her dinner-hour, she pointed out that she couldn’t do it; and was told that she must move the lesson to her tea-hour!! You can picture Grizel for yourself. She simply ramped! She vows she’ll hand in her resignation at half-term.

‘Well, Nell, this should have given you an excellent picture of what things are like. I hope you’re pleased!

‘Jem has just rung me up. Josette is stronger again. Her heart is steadier, and though he refuses to say anything definite, he has better hope of her now. But they’ve very nearly lost her. You can see why we’ve all studiously refrained from troubling Madge about school affairs.

‘How are Hilda and Dollie? Whatever you do, don’t give either of them the smallest hint of all this. It would be enough to give them bad relapses. You are different. You’ve had heaps of time to get over the accident shock; and anyway, you always were tougher than Hilda! Aren’t you on your feet again? Jem says you ought to be. The old idea of keeping people lying down till the break was completely mended is quite exploded now. He will look after you when you come back. So will Jack. So will all the lot of the doctors. But come! I never prayed so hard to you for anything in my life before, but I’m doing it with my whole heart. Come—*come*—COME! If you don’t, I doubt if there’ll be any school left for you to come to! And bring Jeanne de Lachenais too, if you possibly can. You’ll need all the support you can possibly get, for Miss Bubb is like a steam-roller. She just goes on, rolling over everything in her path. Or perhaps a tank would be a better simile. I know what she’s after! Such brilliant results in the exams that it’ll be hard to get rid of her. We all know that it’ll be months before Hilda can take up her work again, and this berth just suits the lady. She certainly teaches well. I’ll say that for her. And her personal discipline is a marvel. I believe she’d even have been able to keep Betty Wynne-Davies in order, and that’s saying something! But it’s not a *good* discipline. It’s too repressive. If you bottle things up too hard, something goes pop before long, and that’s what we’re all dreading. My last word to you is C-O-M-E! Even if you have to be brought on a stretcher! Love to everyone; and remember! Show this to Jeanne if you like; but don’t breathe the least hint of what’s happening to either Dollie or Hilda.—Jo.’

CHAPTER IX

'BILL' RETURNS

'Finished your work, Jacynth?'

'Er—no; not quite, Mrs Maynard.'

'Then suppose you get on with it instead of gazing out of the window as you are doing. If you people go on like this, we may have to whitewash the windows after all,' quoth Jo with a wicked grin as she turned again to Mollie McNab's Latin exercise.

There was an almost audible chuckle from the form. Miss Bubb's latest effort had been to ask Matron, who was in charge of all domestic affairs, to send to Armiford for a man to come and whitewash the lower half of the big french windows which lighted every class-room, as, she complained, the girls wasted far too much time looking out. Matron had declared that it could not be done, as the house was not theirs.

'It is only lent to us for the duration,' she said. 'There must be no alterations made on the structure. Those windows are all heavy plate glass. The chances are the whitewash would have to be scraped off in parts later on when Mr Howell returns, and that would scratch the glass. Madame would never consent to it.'

'Then I must see Lady Russell myself about it,' returned Miss Bubb.

'Lady Russell is seeing nobody until Josette is safe,' retorted Matron. 'Until then, I cannot give consent to any such thing. Besides,' she added, 'I greatly doubt if we could get any man out here for the next four or five weeks. And, in any case, Mr Howell *must* be consulted. He is somewhere in the Indian Ocean; but even Gwensi has had no letter for some time.'

If Miss Bubb had been wise, the matter would have rested there. But she sent for Gwensi to question her as to her stepbrother's whereabouts, and condescended to explain why she wished to know when she saw the sudden terror in the girl's face at her questions.

'So far as I know, your brother is quite safe, Gwensi. But I wish to have the windows whitewashed halfway up to keep the Juniors and Middles from wasting their time by staring out.'

'Whitewash the windows?' cried Gwensi. 'Ernest would never agree to that! The glass is old plate glass—some of it is eighty years old! He has often said that you cannot get such glass nowadays. And I don't know where he is. I haven't heard from him for ages.'

Miss Bubb looked annoyed. 'It would not harm the glass. It could be washed off later. Surely Mr Howell would not be so unreasonable as to refuse a simple request like that?'

'It wouldn't be unreasonable of him if it spoilt the glass,' retorted Gwensi. 'If it was properly done, it would take ages to get it off. Besides, no one has ever wanted it before. Miss Annersley never bothered about it.'

She received a well-merited rebuke for impertinence as a result, and then Miss Bubb sent her away. It was not in human nature—not Gwensi Howell's human nature, anyhow—to hold her tongue about this, and it was all over the school in a couple of hours. The school chuckled at Gwensi's version, and Miss Bubb was left to feel that she would have done better to leave things alone. It did not sweeten her temper nor make things easier for her; nor did it endear Gwensi to her, and as Miss Bubb was not above revenging herself for Gwensi's rudeness and indiscretions, the girl had a hard time of it in Latin lessons, greatly to the indignation of all the

rest of the two Fifths, with whom she was a favourite. Jacynth, very much with Gay, and heart and soul with her in most things, resented it too, so Joey's words had point.

At the present, she set herself to the exercise on the use of the subjunctive with which Mrs Maynard was plaguing her class, but her interest was only languid. It had been hot for the last two days, and Jacynth, working in such a way that she bade fair to outstrip the rest of her form in most subjects, felt tired and disinclined for work. Then she reminded herself that this was not the way to win the Thérèse Lepattre, and turned her attention once more to those awful subjunctives. 'O Caesar, we greet thee that we may be thy friends.' What *silly* things the Romans did say! 'Publius wished to know the ambassadors to Scipio lest they should treat him as an enemy.' Well; *looking* at it wouldn't *do* it! Jacynth picked up her pen and set to work in real earnest.

Meanwhile, Jo was listening as she pointed out Mollie McNab's mistakes with great firmness. In the staff-room across the hall was her small son. She could leave her little girls alone for a morning, but Stephen required her care at stated intervals, so she brought him with her, and he was put in his pram in the staff-room, where he usually had the place to himself, since free time for the mistresses was cut to a minimum this term. Out on the lawn, Simone de Bersac's year-old daughter was playing contentedly in her big playpen. A ground-sheet and crawling-rug had been spread; the sun was shining, and the tiny girl was a good little thing. Jo had volunteered to keep an ear open for sounds from her as well as Stephen, since Simone's first lessons this morning were with the Upper Fifth and Lower Sixth, whose rooms were at the far end of the building. Miss Bubbs strongly resented having to have the babies in school, but as it was Lady Russell's own arrangement, she could do nothing about it.

Suddenly, as she left Mollie to go to Roswitha Saxon, whose very fair colouring agreed with her Saxon name, Jo heard the sound of a car coming slowly up the avenue. 'I wonder what that is?' she thought as she pointed out an overlooked ablative absolute to Roswitha, who was *not* clever and hated Latin with all her heart. Two minutes later there was a tap at the door, and Gwladys, the parlour-maid, entered, a gawky individual whose club foot and extreme short sight had left her at the school when most of the other maids had gone. Gwladys had been kitchen-maid until her promotion, and it must be confessed that her manners were not those of a parlour-maid. Now she looked round and said with a sniff, 'Lady to see you, m'am. Where'll I put her? The liberry is free now.'

'For me? Are you sure, Gwladys?' asked Jo in some surprise.

Gwladys nodded. 'Yes. She's lame—walks with a stick. Said 'twas you——'

She got no further. With a hurried, 'Go on with your work, girls!' Jo had put her to one side and was flying down the corridor into the big, square hall where a somewhat tired-looking woman in the early thirties, with thick white hair curling round a clever, clear-cut face, was sitting on the big settle near one of the windows.

'Bill! Oh, Bill, you *precious*! I'm so thankfully glad to see you!' Jo flung herself on the visitor, and embraced her rapturously.

'But you expected me?' Miss Wilson put an arm round her old pupil and kissed her warmly. 'I wired to you two days ago. Haven't you had it?'

'Neither wire nor letter. I was beginning to worry. How are you? Can you walk yet? Where's Jeanne? Have you come to stay?' Jo's questions pelted out as fast as she could utter them, and Miss Wilson laughed.

'How like you, Jo! You always were a live mark of interrogation! Take me up to my room, and we'll have a pow-wow. By the way, what about your class? Or are you free just now?'

‘Oh, mercy! I’m supposed to be doing Lower Fourth Latin! Now what——’

‘Mrs Maynard? I thought you had a lesson at this time?’

Jo swung round at the voice. ‘Oh, Miss Bubb, this is Miss Wilson, our senior mistress. She wired to us, but it doesn’t seem to have come.’

Miss Bubb came forward, her lips compressed. She had no welcome for Miss Wilson, for she shrewdly guessed that that lady might put a spoke or two in her own wheel. She held out her hand with a rather chilly, ‘Miss Wilson? I understood you were not expected back till half-term. I am surprised to see you. I hope you are feeling better.’ Then she turned to Jo. ‘Who is with your form, Mrs Maynard?’

‘They are working by themselves,’ replied Jo. She turned to Miss Wilson. ‘Nell, I must get back to them. But it’s only ten minutes to Break. I’ll see you then. Meantime, I’ll leave you to Miss Bubb.’

‘Come up to my room if you want to see me, Jo,’ said Miss Wilson. ‘I must have a short rest before I face the others, even though I’ve just come from Armiford today. I spent last night at the Lucys’.

‘Very well. I’ll come up.’ And Jo, with a murmured ‘Excuse me’ to Miss Bubb, returned to her work with a singing heart.

When she had gone, Miss Bubb turned to Miss Wilson. ‘I’m afraid you are very tired. Do you think it wise to try to return so soon to work?’

Miss Wilson smiled. ‘Oh, I’m very much better. It is nearly five weeks now since the accident, and I’ve been up and about for the last ten days. They hope to remove the plaster-of-paris soon. Sir James Russell is coming to see me this afternoon. He met me at Armiford yesterday, and took me to Mrs Lucy’s. I’m glad to be back.’ Her eyes went contentedly round the big hall. ‘And I expect you’ll be glad to have some of the work taken off your shoulders. Lady Russell told me how you had come to the rescue, and she said how hard it must be for you. It was a noble effort on your part.’

‘Oh, I am managing very well,’ said Miss Bubb coldly. ‘Please don’t risk a perfect recovery on my account. It would be such a handicap if any lameness were left, would it not? Shall I ring for someone to take you to your room? I expect Matron will have it ready for you.’

Miss Wilson got up carefully. ‘Thank you so much, Miss Bubb, but I can manage for myself. I’ve worked the little lift many a time.’ Then she added laughingly, ‘Please don’t treat me as a guest or an invalid, for I really am neither. Joey Maynard calls me a foundation-stone of the school when she wants to make me feel my age—cheeky brat! And I hope to get out of my wrappings by the end of the week. Then it only means being careful for a time, and not trying to play games or race up and down stairs. I should not be tired now, but I had the journey from Exeter to Armiford yesterday.’

‘Indeed? I am sorry Mrs Maynard should be rude to you,’ replied Miss Bubb repressively. ‘But she is rather a self-assured young woman.’

‘Rude? Mrs Maynard is not *rude!*’ cried ‘Bill.’ ‘We are old and dear friends, Miss Bubb, and she knows she may say what she likes to me. I’ve known her since she was a schoolgirl of fourteen.’

‘I am glad you do not resent her familiarities, then,’ said Miss Bubb. ‘Well, I must not keep you. You will be glad to rest.’ And she walked away, leaving ‘Bill’ to look thoughtfully after her before making her way with the aid of a stick to the little lift which had been installed some years before ever the school was taken to Plas Howell. She entered it, shut the

gates, took it up, reaching the next floor just in time to open the door on Matron, who dropped the great bundle of sheets she was taking down to the laundry, and grabbed at her old friend.

‘Nell Wilson! I was never more glad in my life to see you! When did you come? And why didn’t you let us know we were to expect you?’

‘I can foresee that I’m going to be asked that question a good many times in the next few hours,’ said Miss Wilson resignedly. ‘I did wire, Matey, but it doesn’t seem to have arrived. Is my room ready? Well, come along and talk to me while you put clean sheets on my bed. That lot can wait, can’t it? Put it into the lift and leave it. The thing’s not in use at the moment.’

‘It’s not supposed to be,’ replied Matron, obeying her suggestion, ‘but Miss Bubb has a fancy for using it on occasion. Thinks it beneath her dignity to walk, I suppose. Come along! I knew you were coming soon, so I had your room put in order two days ago, and it only wants a duster and the bed-linen. How is the leg? I see you’re walking quite well.’

‘The leg is coming along nicely, thank you. But I’m a little tired with the journey yesterday. I spent the night with Janie Lucy. We tried to ring through to you, but your line was dead. Hasn’t Rosalie reported it?’ And Miss Wilson sat down in a wicker chair with a footrest, pulled out the rest and stretched out her leg with a sigh of relief. ‘Matey, I’ll tell you a secret. I’m not quite so agile yet as I gave Miss Bubb to understand just now, but I had such a letter from Jo that I felt I must come if I had to *crawl!*’

Matron paused in her work of taking folded blankets off the bed, and nodded. ‘I thought as much! I’m thankful! Things have been getting worse and worse, and the whole school, Staff as well as girls, is in a state of repressed revolt. It couldn’t have gone on. But things have been so bad at the Round House that we haven’t dared say anything to Lady Russell.’

‘Has Josette been so ill? Jo told me about the accident, and said she was rather badly hurt; but she never told me there was any real danger.’

‘She’s safe now, thank God! But they’ve nearly lost her. However, she is coming round at last. I saw her yesterday, poor mite. She’s shrunk to a mere scrap, and her poor little face looks all eyes. I could have cried to see her.’ And Matron, who was famed for all lack of sentiment, blew her nose fiercely.

‘She’ll soon make that up. Mercifully, children are as quickly up as they are down. How has it affected Sybil? Jo told me she was to blame.’

‘I’ve never known any child so subdued in my life. The doctor was furious with her. For some days he wouldn’t go near her or speak to her, and Madame couldn’t, of course. She wouldn’t leave Josette. The poor child nearly cried herself ill. I sent for her father in the end and told him plainly that if he didn’t do something about it, he’d have another invalid in the family. So he came to see her, by which time she’d fretted herself into a fever. Her temp. was 103 degrees when I took it, and I’d put her to bed. He forgave her on the spot, and talked very sweetly to her. I think she’s learnt a lesson that will last her for life. She’s a different girl now.’

‘I see. Well, I shan’t say anything to her, of course. I’m thankful the baby is safe. Poor Madge! It’s been bad for her.’

‘Especially just now,’ nodded Matron. ‘She’s been very brave, and borne up splendidly; but they’ve put her to bed for a few days now that all’s well. They have a nurse for Josette, so her mother can rest in peace.’

‘And thank goodness for that! Well, now, what is all this that Joey tells me?’

‘Just what, exactly, did Joey say to you?’

‘I’ve got her letter in my bag. You’d better read it. Here you are.’ And Miss Wilson took it out and handed it over.

Matron put down the last blanket, then sat on the edge of the mattress, and read through Jo's lengthy effusion. When she had finished it, she folded it up and handed it back to its owner. 'Now I understand why you came rushing here at full speed. After that, you couldn't do anything else.'

'You're right; I couldn't! Go and get those sheets, and then you can give me a minute or two. Jo will be up as soon as the bell rings.'

'Oh, she knows you're here, then?'

'Yes; Gwladys let me in, and I told her to say a lame lady wanted to see Mrs Maynard. Jo seems to have guessed, and left her Latin class to take care of itself while she fled to greet me. Miss Bubb landed into the middle of things. Matey, I don't think I like that woman!'

'You're not alone there! I've yet to meet the person who does. Thank heaven she can't interfere with me! Wait till I get the sheets and pillow-cases and then I'll give you a quick résumé.' And Matron vanished to the linen-room, whence she returned with what she wanted. As she closed the door, the bell rang, and Matron said, 'Jo will come up here now. Well, we can both tell you. Get your hat and coat off while I go and send for coffee for the three of us. Jo is free next period, as I happen to know, so we needn't hurry ourselves.'

But Matron returned and began to make up the bed as she talked. Gwladys brought the coffee; and still no Jo came flying up to add her tale to the account to which the horrified Miss Wilson was listening. It was the end of Break before she appeared, carrying her son, and looking as furious as anyone had ever seen Jo.

'There's your coffee,' said Matron, pointing to a little pan set on a gas-ring. 'I've kept it hot for you.'

'Thanks!' Jo handed her son over to Matron, got her coffee, and sat down, while Miss Wilson, after a curious glance at her, turned to Stephen.

'Why, he's been crying!' she exclaimed rather tactlessly. 'What's the matter, lad? Come to Auntie Nell and tell her all about it.' And she held out her arms for the boy, whose long lashes were still wet and who was still catching his breath in sobs. Nell Wilson cuddled him to her, and he snuggled into her arms.

'That,' said Jo in a hard voice, 'is what comes of having anyone like Miss Bubb at the head of affairs. She sent for me when the bell rang for Break, and wished to know why I had left my form. I heard Stephen crying, and tried to go, but she said that it wouldn't hurt him, and I must understand that, as long as I taught, I must put my work before all things. I told her that it was bad for him to scream like that—he was yelling his head off—and finally left in a hurry before she had said half she wanted to say. He wanted me, of course. The Staff were all trying to comfort him, but it was me he needed. For all that woman cared, he might have shrieked himself into a fit! But this finishes it. I'm going home, and I'm not coming back here till she's gone. I'm not having a salary, so I owe her nothing. She can manage the best way she can in future.'

'Jo! You can't do that!' cried Matron. 'Madame expects you to carry on and you can't let her down, even if you don't mind about the school.'

'Madge would never ask me to teach at the expense of Stephen's wellbeing!' retorted Jo.

'Well, at least give decent notice,' pleaded Matron.

'I tell you I'm not giving one other lesson here so long as she stays!'

Miss Wilson took a hand. 'Oh yes, you are, Jo. I've come to help out in answer to that really frantic letter of yours, and I need you. If you go off like this, you're letting *me* down.'

Jo's lips set. She had been really anxious about her son's screaming fit and the pathetic little chokes still coming from him kept her anger smouldering. 'I'm sorry, Nell,' she said stonily, 'but Stephen must come first. I'm his mother, and it's my real job. Teaching was only an extra.'

Matron cast a glance of despair at Miss Wilson. That lady shook her head slightly, moved the boy's position, and then said placidly, 'Jeanne, Dollie, and Hilda all sent their love to you. Hilda is still very weak, and she can't have more than one visitor a day, and that for only five minutes or so. But she is really going to recover. At first, you know, they didn't think she could live. Then they were afraid that even if she did it must be as an invalid. I shall never forget that awful night when she lay between life and death, and I knew quite well that no one thought she would see the morning. I knew I was very fond of her; but it wasn't till then that I realised how dearly I loved her. You've got Jack and the children, Joey; but Hilda and I are both singularly lonely people, and we mean a lot to each other. If I had lost her, I suppose I could have gone on somehow; but I'd always have felt that part of me was dead.'

Her words did what nothing else could have done—roused Jo from the bitter anger she was feeling. That young lady looked at 'Bill' in amazement, for it is safe to say that never had anyone before heard such a thing from the lips of self-contained, unemotional Miss Wilson. Jo put down her cup, and came over and kissed her friend. 'I'm sorry, Nell. I knew you were great chums, and more so since Con Stewart married and left. You must have had a ghastly time between anxiety and your own hurt.'

'Well, it's over now. But I know how much I value Hilda. I can't be grateful enough to God for leaving her here. And now that I know that in time she will be as well as ever, I feel that I owe Him more than I can ever repay. That's one reason why I came back when I got your letter. I felt it was something I could do, both for Him and for Hilda. The school is a very big thing in her life, and I knew she would want me to come to the rescue when things were as bad as you said.'

'I see.' It was all the comment Jo made; but she finished her coffee, and as the bell rang for the next lesson she got up. 'I'll leave Stephen with you two if I may. He's going to sleep, so he won't bother you. I must go; I have Upper Second for literature. Will you come down for lunch, Nell?'

'Oh, yes; you'll see me at Staff table—if you stay for it.'

'I'll stay today. I don't generally. But I can ring up Anna, and she'll give the children their dinner for once. We *must* have a chat, for you ought to be fully primed, and we must make some sort of plans to stop the rot.'

She departed on the last word, and Miss Wilson and Matron looked at each other and smiled. 'You've done the trick,' said Matron.

Nell Wilson coloured. 'Matey, keep what I said to yourself. You know how much I'm given to chatter as a rule. But I felt I must take strong measures. We shall need Jo's help.'

Matron laughed, and stooped to take the now sleeping baby from her. 'Give him to me and I'll tuck him up on the settee. I never talk, Nell Wilson, as you know. Now you must lie down on your bed for a little, and rest. This afternoon, we three will get together and see what we can do. Mrs Redmond will want to see you, too.'

Miss Wilson lay down on her bed and let Matron draw the eiderdown over her. 'I'm more tired than I thought. I was afraid Jo was going to be as good as her word, and then I didn't know what we were going to do. Thanks, Matey! Oh, it *is* jolly to be back again! I'm glad I came!'

‘For the matter of that, so will most folk be,’ said Matron crisply.

‘But not Miss Bubb, I’m afraid.’

‘Don’t worry about her till you’ve had a rest. See you later!’ And Matron, after a final glance at Stephen, left the room quietly. Half an hour later, she slipped in again, and stood looking at the sleeping Miss Wilson. ‘Bill’ was very white and thin, and there were lines in her face that had not been there the previous term. But she was back, and Miss Annersley would get well in time; and that was all that really mattered.

CHAPTER X

NEW EXPLOSIONS

‘Doing anything, Jacynth—anything special, I mean?’

Jacynth looked up as Gay’s bright face popped round the door of the Lower Fourth room. ‘Oh, Gay! I’m only trying to learn a few more vocabs. My Latin vocab is so short still. Here! What *do* you think you’re doing?’ For Gay had deftly snatched up her ‘Limen,’ and hurled it across the room into a handy waste-paper basket.

‘Stopping you getting a nervous breakdown or brainstorm or something. Don’t you *know* it’s mad to try and work all the time as you’re doing?’ scolded Gay.

‘But, Gay, I must! I’m far behind the others in words. Mrs Maynard is a dear, and makes all sorts of allowances for me; but you know what I told you. I must work if I’m to have even half a chance of the Thérèse Lepattre.’

‘You won’t have a quarter or a tenth of a chance if you carry on like this. No one can work all the time. Their brains get worn out. I’ve told you so dozens of times!’

‘Scores, or hundreds, even. But I can’t help it. I do so want to go to Oxford and get a degree, and then teach in a topping school like this.’

‘Swotting yourself blind and silly won’t help you one scrap. More likely send you to the nearest luney-bin!’ Gay sat down on the desk, and stared hard at Jacynth. ‘You’re beginning to look washed out. It would worry your auntie heaps if she saw you. She’s got to trust you to be sensible, and it’s not playing the game by her if you’re not. Besides, I want you.’

That was enough for Jacynth. She got up to rescue her ill-used ‘Limen,’ but she put it into her desk after pushing Gay off the lid, and then turned. ‘I’ll do anything I can. What’s wrong, Gay?’

‘I want you for a ’cello lesson. You haven’t had one for days, and I’m sure you need it. Come on, and let’s see if you can keep your bow from wobbling this time. I’ve got an hour, and nothing to do. Gill Culver has had a great, fat letter from that brother of hers she’s so chummy with. It’s typewritten—sheets and sheets of it. It’ll take her ages to read and then she’ll want to answer it at once. She always does. Mike and I are pally enough, but I never saw anything like the way Gill and Hawk think of each other! And they both write reams. Mike is worse than I am. I can quote his letters by heart, for they’re all alike.’ And Gay, leading the way to a spare music-room where Miss Cochrane had given her permission to teach Jacynth Hardy as much as she could of the ’cello in her free time, proceeded to repeat, ‘“Hope you are all right. I’m in the Second Eleven, Field in the deep, and wicket-keep, which is why Toffee Turner got his rag out over our chem. last week. We do rag the chap. Yours, Mike.” Toffee Turner is science master at St James’,’ she added. ‘Now that is about all I ever get out of Mike. But Hawk Culver goes on and on. Gill says he means to write later on. I shouldn’t be surprised!’

‘Why do they call him Hawk?’ asked Jacynth.

‘Because his real name’s Peregrine. And because he has a beaky face,’ explained Gay. ‘It’s handsome-beaky. There isn’t one of the Culvers who isn’t good-looking. Gill’s the plainest of the lot. Cherry, the second sister, is a howling beauty. I’ve stayed two or three times with them, so I know them all pretty well. They’ve a great-aunt living with them who’s a

tremendous sport. She says and does the maddest things, and they never know what she's going to do next. It makes life rather hectic, so Gill says.'

'It must.' Jacynth followed Gay into the room and shut the door. 'Oh, Gay, won't *you* tune for me? I never seem to be able to get her right.'

'No; you must learn to do it yourself. You'll have a 'cello of your own some day, and if you can't tune it, you'll be lost.'

'I can't see it happening—not for years and years, anyhow,' sighed Jacynth, sitting down and taking Cerita from Gay. 'Is the bow screwed up?'

'No; you're going to do everything yourself this afternoon. Come on; mind you get it tight enough, or you won't get any sound out of her.'

'I'm always so afraid I may injure something,' Jacynth turned the nut gingerly. 'Will that do?'

Gay tested the bow. 'Tighter than that, my child. Try again. Yes; that certainly is more like it. Now come along. Here's your A.' And she struck the note on the piano, and Jacynth drew the bow in a very wobbly, uncertain fashion over the first string.

'That's all right, isn't it? Now give me D, please, Gay.'

'No jolly fear! You've got to tune from the A. You know what it ought to be. Go ahead!' And Gay watched her pupil severely.

'It's all right too. Perhaps the others are.' And Jacynth tried the G string a little more happily. But G was down, and it took her quite a few minutes to get it right. Luckily, the C was in good order. She carefully settled herself in the proper position, and looked up at her teacher.

Gay produced her old Piatti, and opened it. 'Now then, long notes on the open strings first. Keep your bow straight, and try not to wobble.'

Jacynth drew the bow across the first string, and by dint of giving all her mind to it, produced a fairly steady sound, and Gay nodded approvingly. 'That's much better than last time. Now the D. Oh, *good!* Now the other two, and then we'll try these exercises. I say, Jacynth, you *are* coming on! You got quite a decent note then. You must have managed to practise quite a little, haven't you?'

'Twenty minutes every day,' said Jacynth, her grey eyes glowing at the praise. 'But that Number 3 is rather stiff, Gay.'

'It isn't easy,' admitted Gay. 'You'll soon manage it, however. Don't use up your bow so quickly. You get to the end of it before you do the end of the slurs, and then you're left with only the point or the nut to play with, and it can't be done. Try it again, and remember to let your wrist drop and carry the bow back when you're doing a down-bow. That's *much* better! Oh, *good!* You'll soon get on at this rate! If only you could have an hour a day, you'd soon be playing. You've a real gift for it, Jacynth.'

This was Jacynth's third lesson, and Gay had reason to be proud of her pupil. All the exercises on the first page were done, and fairly well done, all things considered. Jacynth's use of the bow was still uncertain, and she tended to let it slip out of the straight, producing some peculiar sounds when she did so. But already, when she concentrated on it, she could draw quite a good volume from Cerita, and her time and rhythm were good.

'We'll go on to the next,' said the young teacher at length. 'Now you learn to make the first notes. Jacynth, you look thrilled to the core!'

'Oh, so I am!' breathed Jacynth. 'I'm going to save every penny I can till I have enough to buy a 'cello for myself, and then I shall work when I have any free time. What do I do now,

Gay?’

Gay showed her how to place her thumb at the back of the 'cello's neck and press the string with each finger of the left hand in turn. She was quite a good teacher for her age, and Jacynth's excitement when she played her first little phrase correctly delighted her instructress.

'You must try to get half an hour at Cerita every day,' she was saying, when the door swung open and a well-known voice demanded, 'What is the meaning of this? What are you girls doing here? And why, pray, are you spoiling Gay's 'cello, Jacynth?'

Cerita would have gone to the ground, but Gay put out a hasty hand and steadied the 'cello as she answered, 'I'm helping Jacynth with the beginnings, Miss Bubb.'

'Indeed?' said Miss Bubb. 'But I thought Jacynth Hardy was to take no extras as she has so much to make up in her general education. If you have time to waste this way, Jacynth, I can give you some extra Latin with which to occupy yourself. As for you, Gay, you surely do not think that *you* are capable of teaching anyone, do you?'

At the irony in the tone, Gay flushed up, and Jacynth promptly rushed to the rescue with more speed than discretion. 'Gay's a jolly good teacher, Miss Bubb! And we only do it in our spare time.'

Miss Bubb's cold blue eyes took on an even colder look as she said, 'That will do, Jacynth. I will permit no impertinence. Nor from you either, Gay,' she added, seeing that young person open her lips to speak. 'Who gave you permission to use this room, pray?'

'Miss Cochrane said we might,' returned Gay defiantly.

'Oh? *I* have heard nothing of it. I am afraid, my dear Gay, I do not believe you.'

'I don't tell lies!' Gay was standing very erect, her blue eyes flashing at the idea of being called a liar. 'I went to Miss Cochrane and told her what we wanted to do, and she said we might use this room as it isn't often required, so long as we only used it in our free times. We haven't been in it *once* when we ought to have been anywhere else! It's our idea of amusement, and our free times are supposed to *be* our free times!'

No one could have blamed Gay for her anger; but her manner and speech were as impertinent and defiant as she could make them, and, equally, no one could blame Miss Bubb if she grew angry in her turn. But hers was the cold, still anger that can be very frightening. Her voice was very icy as she said, 'I told you I would permit no impertinence. You are too big to be so rude; but since you choose to behave like a baby, I shall treat you as one. Put that thing away, and then both of you go to bed for the rest of the day. The sooner you learn that I will not be defied, the better for you! Do as I bid you at once!' Only waiting to see Gay put her 'cello away, she turned on her heel, remarking, 'I shall speak to Miss Cochrane about this. If she really did give you permission, she had no right to do so without first referring to *me*. And I should certainly not have allowed it! Now go to bed as I told you, and don't let me find either of you here again without my permission. And for your rudeness, each of you will lose ten conduct marks. I will not allow you to speak to me like that!'

There was nothing for it but to go. Gay only waited till the Head had disappeared round a corner, and then she slipped an arm round Jacynth's shoulders and gave her a hug. 'Don't look so down, old thing! If we can't use the music-room, I'll take Cerita out to the arbour in the bowling-green, and teach you there. But she's an ass to talk like that. Miss Cochrane is head of the music now, and she can do as she likes about permission to use the music-rooms. Old Herr Anserl who was head before her always did, and I know she can. She'll let fly when she hears about this! I suppose we'd better go and find Matey and tell her we've been sent to bed.'

Matron scolded both girls for their rudeness when she had heard the story which Gay had to tell. She sent them off to the dormitory, telling them that she would send their tea to them, and they were not to talk. But inwardly she sympathised with them, though she could hardly say so. She knew that neither Miss Annersley nor Lady Russell would have made any trouble about it if they had been in charge; and she also knew that Miss Cochrane—Grizel of other chronicles of the school—would be furious at this infringement of her prerogatives. She went back to her own room where Miss Wilson was sitting reading, and prepared for a visit from the young music mistress, a visit which would be stormy to say the least of it.

She was right there. Grizel Cochrane happened to be out to tea; but as soon as she came in she was sent for by Miss Bubb and instructed to refer to her in future all questions as to the disposal of the music-rooms.

‘I should have forbidden any such thing,’ said Miss Bubb frigidly. ‘I shall be glad, Miss Cochrane, if you will understand once and for all that I am Head of the school at present, and I expect to be consulted in all matters concerning the school. You may go, and please do not let it occur again.’

Not trusting herself to speak, Miss Cochrane left the room, and made straight for Matron, whom she treated to an outburst which took both that lady and Miss Wilson some time to quiet. She wound up by declaring that she would hand in her resignation at half-term, and nothing on earth should persuade her to do otherwise.

‘But she’s only here for a short time, Grizel,’ urged Miss Wilson. ‘Do try to put up with her! Madame would be terribly distressed if you left.’

‘She’d soon get over it,’ returned Grizel. ‘I’m not such a very vital person as all that. But put up with such treatment I will not! Miss Annersley never interfered with me, and why should Miss Bubb? I doubt if the woman knows the difference between “God Save the King” and the Dead March from “Saul”! It’s no business of hers *what* I do with the music-rooms so long as I see that they are put to a proper use. If Gay Lambert likes to try her hand at teaching someone else the ’cello, more power to her elbow, say I! I thought it was very sporting of her when she came and asked me. This child, Jacynth, is wild to learn, but they can’t afford to let her have lessons, and Gay, who is a really generous kid, offered to give her what she could. I’ve not a thing against it; and it’ll do Gay all the good in the world. If they get to any sticky places she can’t deal with herself, she only has to ask Mr Manders. He’s got a spitfire of a temper, but he’s kind enough. I told him what Gay was trying to do when he was here last week, and he was delighted. I believe that with half a shove he’d offer to take Jacynth himself later on. He won’t do anything about it yet. *Why* should anyone, just because she’s got a prominent position as Head, try to spoil things for those two? It’s the cattiest thing I’ve heard of yet!’

‘I expect you feel a lot better for having got rid of all that,’ remarked Miss Wilson sympathetically. ‘Look here, Grizel, I’m sorry about Gay and Jacynth, though I must say they seem to have gone out of their way to give Miss Bubb a chance to punish them. Gay was really disgracefully rude, to judge from what she told Matey. And as for the ’cello lessons, you can trust them to find somewhere else to hold them. Take my advice, and turn a blind eye to anything of the sort. If Mr Manders is satisfied with Gay’s action, then that’s all that matters at the moment. And if Miss Bubb should forbid her to let anyone else play on that ’cello of hers, well, I have my father’s old one. I’ll send for it, and hand it over to you, and you can lend it to Jacynth.’

‘That’s jolly good of you, Bill, and it might help matters a little. Oh, Mr Manders is pleased about it. He says Gay does things and does them well, but half the time she doesn’t trouble to think *why* she does them. Now that she’s showing someone else, he says she’ll have to stop to consider, and that is just what he wants. *He* won’t interfere.’

‘Very well, then. I’ll send for the old ’cello and let you have it. It may be on the large side, but I don’t think so. My father was a small man, and had small hands. It ought to be the right size for Jacynth.’

‘Thanks, Bill. That’s a good offer, and one I won’t refuse. I’ll see that no harm comes to the ’cello.’ Grizel rose, soothed in spite of herself. ‘I’ll say no more at the moment; but if Miss Bubb tries any further interference, I really will hand in my resignation; so I warn you.’

‘And she means it,’ added Matron when Miss Cochrane had gone. ‘Heaven send Miss Bubb leaves the music alone after this! We don’t want to lose Grizel.’

‘We do not. Apart from the fact that she is an excellent teacher, I know that both Madame and Hilda like to feel that she’s where they can keep an eye on her. She has no home now that Mr Cochrane’s dead; and she’s done some wildly wrong-headed things at intervals all her life. I doubt if Madame would ever consent to letting her go, but we needn’t tell Grizel that.’

The next day, which was Sunday, passed over quietly. The school had its own two chapels: one, served from the big monastery fourteen miles away, for the Catholics; the other in charge of the chaplain at the Sanatorium across the mountains. Miss Bubb was, nominally, a Churchwoman, and on this morning the Catholic girls and Staff were delighted to have Miss Wilson again in their midst. The two parties attended their several services, and met again at about noon, when, since it was a hot day, most of them took deck-chairs and rugs to various parts of the garden, and sat or lay about, reading, writing letters, or talking quietly.

At dinner, Matron got up and informed the girls that as it was so hot, no one was to go for a walk. They would all stay in the gardens. Miss Bubb had gone to the Round House for lunch, Lady Russell having sent for her. Josette was recovering in good earnest now, and ten days in bed had revived her mother considerably. Jo had ventured to tell her sister something of what was going on in the school, and Madge Russell decided that a quiet chat with Miss Annersley’s locum tenens might help matters a little. Miss Wilson, who was still easily tired, though the doctors had taken her leg out of its plaster the day before, was having her lunch quietly in her own room, with Jo Maynard as her guest. Stephen was there too, and the triplets had been left at Plas Gwyn in charge of Robin and Daisy, who had gone home for the weekend. All seemed peaceful, even Gay and Jacynth having recovered from the trouble of the day before.

Matron promised the girls that if they liked to carry the things out they should have tea out-of-doors. It would be the first time that term, so everyone was delighted. They took their books and letters again, and Gay and Jacynth, having secured Cerita, slipped away to the old arbour at the end of the bowling-green and settled themselves for their own idea of enjoyment. They were joined later on by Gillian Culver, her letter to her brother now off her mind. Mollie Avery from Lower Fifth, Frances Grey and Marie Varick from Upper Fourth, and Peggy Bettany from Lower Fourth came along too, and they sat talking quietly.

Presently Jacynth asked Gay, ‘Gay, why do people sometimes call you “Gay from China”?’

‘Because that’s where I do come from,’ replied Gay promptly. ‘Oh, I was born in England; but we went to China to live with Uncle Tom Scudamore when Mike and I were only five. Tommy is his nephew, and was with him, helping on the plantation. My eldest brother, Paul,

became Uncle Tom's student, and Maurice and Basil, my other two brothers, would have done so too. Then my cousin Ruth went with us. She'd always lived with us, and was just like our sister. When Tommy married her, after we got her back from the bandits——'

'From *bandits*?' gasped Jacynth. 'What *do* you mean, Gay?'

'Just what I say. Bandits kidnapped her and took her away. I'll never forget those awful days. Tommy had tried to save her, but he got stabbed and it looked rather as though he was going to die at first. But he didn't. He always says he couldn't have died anyhow, until he knew Ruthans was safe. One of Uncle's men, Nan Tung, went off and rescued her and a Miss Pritchard, who was their prisoner too. When they got back, Ruth was rather ill; but as soon as she was better, she and Tommy got engaged, and then they were married quite soon after. Then the Japs started to make war on the Chinese, and Mummy thought Mike and I should have a year or two of English school. There was business connected with the plantation that Tommy had to come to see about; so when we were ten, he and Ruth came, and we came with them. We've been here ever since. Maurice and Basil are both in the Air Force. Paul has to stick by the plantation, because Uncle Tom needs him. When the war's over, Tommy and Ruth and we two will go back, I expect. I want to, anyway. I'm longing to see dear China again. And Ruth's dying to show the babies to Mummy and their uncles. Bobby was just an infant when we came, and little Nan—she's named after Mummy—wasn't born.'

'Tell us more about when your cousin was a prisoner, Gay,' pleaded Peggy Bettany. 'It sounds thrilling.'

But before Gay could either refuse or agree, Miss Bubb was in their midst, and a very angry Miss Bubb she was. She swept the group of laughing schoolgirls with her eyes, and singled out Gay.

'Gay Lambert, how dare you bring that instrument out here at all? Take it back to the music-room at once, and then go to my study and wait for me. The rest of you, go into the house, and sit down quietly in your common-room. I will not have this unladylike lounging about on a Sunday!' And she turned and walked off, leaving them gasping.

'Well!' cried Gillian when she had recovered her breath. 'What next?'

CHAPTER XI

WHAT *DID* COME NEXT!

Miss Bubb was furious. At the Round House, after a pleasant lunch with Sir James and Lady Russell, the latter had led her guest into the drawing-room, and over after-lunch coffee had tried very tactfully to give the lady some idea of the Chalet School traditions and customs of which she seemed to be falling foul. It was a difficult business. Madge Russell felt that Miss Bubb, M.A., considered that someone who had never even been to a university could know far less of how to run a school than she with her degree and long years of experience. In a general way, Madge agreed with this opinion. But the Chalet School was rather different from the average High School. Many things had to be taken into consideration which did not affect a High School. So many of the girls came from families of indifferent or even bad medical history. Again, while many of them would take up one profession or another, there were others who would be expected to go home when schooldays were ended. Music and art played a big part in the school's curriculum, and always had done. Allowances were always made for such girls, though it was a rule of the school that no one might specialise until she had reached the Fifth Form. Where it was possible, girls were kept to the full school timetable until they had reached the School Leaving Certificate standard, Lady Russell rightly considering that, however gifted one might be in any of the arts, a good general education was a vital necessity as a foundation for future work.

Miss Bubb regarded all arts as inferior. Unmusical herself, as Grizel Cochrane had shrewdly guessed, she considered that only those who were too stupid to pass school exams should be allowed to take up music. Art made a stronger appeal to her, and in Greek art she was something of an expert. But she had no opinion of anything more modern than Phidias or Apelles, though she condescendingly admitted that Michelangelo and Raphael must be considered as great. Unaccustomed to boarding-school, she had no idea of the great trust that was bestowed on the older girls, and she honestly thought that only Sixth Form should be allowed so much freedom as was given them at the Chalet School.

Her previous experience had been unfortunate. The school in which most of her teaching years had been spent had fallen on evil days until the arrival, two years before she retired, of a head-mistress whose ideas differed considerably from those of her predecessor. The latter had been satisfied if her pupils gained a high record in exam lists, and if discipline were strict. The girls, during her régime, had been kept very severely in order during school-hours. Out of school-hours, where she had no legal control, so long as they were not wearing their school uniform she did not trouble about their doings. Here, discipline was mainly exerted through the personal influence of the Head and Staff, and the girls were expected to be responsible for a good deal of it among themselves.

This fact Miss Bubb neither understood nor appreciated. To her mind, a mistress must be someone quite apart from the pupils, and the friendship that existed between many of the older girls and the Staff struck her as undignified for the Staff and bad for the girls, as giving them too high an opinion of their own importance.

It was all this that Lady Russell tried to hint to her new Head. Miss Bubb remained impervious to hints. Then, when her employer, in despair, resorted to plain speech, the lady was indignant.

‘I see what you mean, Lady Russell,’ she said at length. ‘But, forgive me, I have had far more experience than you. You have told me yourself that your practical work in the school lasted only a few years, since you married and had to give your time to your home. Believe me, I do know how to handle girls. I have found many signs of laxness that have shocked me, and while I am with you, I am doing my best to put them right.’

‘I scarcely think there is much laxness at the school,’ returned Madge, flushing. ‘I have full confidence in my Staff and the girls. I have always trusted them, and I have never found my trust abused.’

Miss Bubb smiled condescendingly. ‘Then I hope, Lady Russell, that you never will. And I also hope that you intend to give that trust to me. I can assure you that it will not be misplaced. I am only anxious to do my best for the school.’

‘I am sure of that.’ Madge’s inherent gentleness came up at once. ‘I know that you will have its welfare at heart. But the question is, Miss Bubb, that certain methods and ideals have always been ours, and I scarcely think it wise to attempt to change them—or at least, not so suddenly.’

‘But if I am Head, I must be free to impose certain ideas of my own on them. I can scarcely be expected to do otherwise.’

‘If it were a permanent post, I agree, within limits,’ said Madge. ‘But when I engaged you, I warned you that it was only temporary. The doctors are all very pleased with the way Miss Annersley is recovering, and hope that twelve months, at most, will see her back in her old place. Is it wise to try to make such great changes for such a short period?’

Miss Bubb was not gentle by nature, and this statement was a shock to her. She had gathered that Miss Annersley was in very bad case, and had made up her mind that it was unlikely, if not impossible, that she should ever again take up her old position. She had fully determined that she would remain if that were the case. Now there seemed an end of that hope. As a member of the W.V.S. she had no more authority than two or three other people; and she liked authority. She had wondered once or twice if she should use some of her capital to buy a school. But she was disinclined to risk part of her income in a speculation. This post was exactly what she had wanted, with no need to lessen her private income, and no question of risk to herself. Also, the Chalet School had gained a name in the scholastic world in the past two or three years in England, and it was a minor satisfaction to her to be able to say that she was at its head. The shock caused her to be more outspoken than she would otherwise have been.

‘If you wish your school to stand well in the scholastic world, Lady Russell,’ she said, tightening her thin lips, ‘I would advise you to pay attention to what I say. I know far more about its requirements than you can do, and I must insist that you give me a free hand. Otherwise, I shall be obliged to ask you to accept my resignation to take effect at the end of this term.’ Her manner added, ‘And *then* where will you be, with Staff of any kind so hard to find? Better give me my way.’

Madge Russell was one of the gentlest of women, but even she fired up at this. Perhaps, if she had still not been feeling the effects of the past fortnight’s anxiety, she would have worded her reply more quietly. As it was, she said crisply, ‘I think that would be the best solution of the problem. The school is mine, and I do not choose to have all the good work we have done undone to suit any single person! I accept your resignation. Miss Bubb. And now,’ she added, rising, ‘as no good purpose can be served by continuing this conversation, perhaps we had

better end it. I expect you will want to get back before the afternoon heat, so I will say goodbye. I think my husband has been called away, so I will explain to him when he returns.'

In the face of this sudden access of dignity—and Madge Russell could be exceedingly dignified when, as now, she chose—Miss Bubb had no alternative but to make her farewells, mount her cycle, and take her departure. But she was very angry. She scorched back to the school, arriving there in record time, and was greeted with the sight of Staff and girls sitting in groups about the great front lawn. It did not accord with her ideas, and, in her fury, she only waited to take her bicycle round to the shed before going to send them all into the house. On her way, she saw the Kindergarten, squatting in a big ring round Miss Phipps, listening while she told them a story. Miss Phipps had taken the precaution of making them change into their brown-and-white checked gingham, which were the summer uniform of the school, and which looked very fresh and crisp with their white collars and cuffs and their short sleeves. The girls wore the flame-coloured school ties with them, and belts of brown leather. They all looked very cool and dainty, and they were sitting quietly, their eyes fixed on pretty Miss Phipps, who had also changed into a cotton that would take no hurt from the grass. Into this happy circle Miss Bubb marched, her brow heavy with frowns.

'Why are you lounging about like this?' she demanded. 'And who told you to put on uniform? This is Sunday. Go into the house at once, and change back into your Sunday dresses, and then go to the Kindergarten and stay there till tea-time. I will not have this lax behaviour!'

Miss Phipps sprang to her feet, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright with anger at this summary disposal of their happy hour. '*I sent the children to change, Miss Bubb,*' she said. 'We have always done it in the summer. If it is warm enough, we have always been out-of-doors, and the gingham frocks are better for that than their muslins. The blame is mine.'

'Then, for the future, kindly remember that I do not permit it,' said Miss Bubb angrily. 'Take those children indoors, Miss Phipps, and kindly see that they behave in a ladylike way on Sunday at least.'

Little Betsy Lucy burst into tears, and two or three others followed suit. They were frightened by the Head, and they had done nothing wrong so far as they knew. Miss Phipps put her arms round those she could reach, and drew them away. 'Come along, pets,' she said. 'Don't cry, you five. I'll help you to change, and then I'll finish the story in the Kindergarten.'

Miss Bubb had not waited, which was as well. She would not have approved of Miss Phipps's petting. She stalked to the front lawn, and summoned Miss Burnett, the nearest of the mistresses. Mary Burnett came to her at once, wondering what was wrong. She was soon enlightened.

'Once for all, Miss Burnett, I expect you and any mistress on duty to see that after dinner the girls sit quietly in their common-room on Sunday. I am not going to have the lawn looking like Hampstead Heath on a Bank holiday!'

Anything less like the traditional Bank Holiday crowd than the quiet groups on the lawn and under the trees it would have been hard to find, and Mary Burnett flushed up in her turn. 'We have always done it, Miss Bubb,' she said as quietly as she could. 'It is the order of the Sanatorium authorities that the girls shall be out-of-doors as much as possible.'

'Rubbish!' Miss Bubb was far too angry now to measure her words. 'What right have the Sanatorium authorities to interfere with the school, pray?'

Mary opened her eyes widely. 'Has no one told you? The school has always been run in conjunction with the San. A good many of our girls have relations there. That is why some of

them are here. The doctors have always had a great deal to say in anything that affects the health of the girls. I was going to ask Miss Wilson to mention to you that if this weather continues we should be taking our classes out-of-doors.'

'Thank you, but I am perfectly capable of deciding such matters without either your help or Miss Wilson's!' returned Miss Bubb scathingly. 'I disapprove of outdoor lessons. The girls waste more than half their time staring out of the windows as it is. I can imagine how much work they would do if they were allowed to be outside!'

'Well,' said Mary bluntly, 'I hope you'll tell Sir James Russell and Dr Maynard so. They oversee all arrangements of that kind.'

Miss Bubb ignored this. 'Go and send the girls in as I told you,' she commanded.

'I am not on duty!' Mary was a placid person as a rule, but the Head's tone had been galling in the extreme, and she was not disposed to put up with it. 'In any case, Matron sent us all out. You had better see her first.'

Miss Bubb was too full of fury to speak. She swung round on her heel abruptly, and left Mary, who strolled back to her chair beside Hilary Burn and Mlle Berné, and sat down to give her friends an account of what had passed.

Unfortunately for all concerned, Miss Bubb's rage took her towards the bowling-green, with what results we know. Then she went to seek Matron, and that autocrat nearly came to blows with her over her latest order. It was a heated encounter, in which Matron won, for she put an end to it by announcing that she was going to ring up Plas Gwyn, since that was nearest, and ask Dr Maynard to come up and put the matter plainly before the new Head. And she marched off to do it at once, leaving Miss Bubb to go to her study, where she found Gay waiting for her, already in a ruffled state of mind. The scolding she administered to the young lady for taking Cerita outside at all did not improve matters. Gay, indignant at such treatment, 'answered back,' and was ordered off to bed once more.

Here, Dr Maynard gave checkmate, for he arrived just as a very rebellious Gay was being marched bedwards by a Miss Bubb who could scarcely speak for rage. He demanded to know what was wrong, since Gay's flushed face and overbright eyes struck him as unnatural. Miss Bubb told him curtly that she was sending the girl to bed for rudeness, and he vetoed it.

'On a hot day like this? Impossible! If she has been rude, I'm afraid you must find some other means of punishing her. Gay, you go to the garden and take your chair under a tree by yourself, and stay there. If anyone comes to talk to you, you can say you are to be alone. Perhaps a little solitude will help to show you that rudeness is not allowed here. Oh, and kindly apologise to Miss Bubb for whatever it was you said before you go. Come along; I'm waiting!'

Under the cold look of his grey eyes, Gay mumbled something that might have been taken for an apology, and then he sent her off. By this time, Matron had arrived in the hall, full of *her* story, and he listened patiently, and then gave judgment. 'So long as it is fine enough, the girls are to be out-of-doors all the time. That is a medical order, Miss Bubb, and I must ask you to see that it is carried out. And remember: in hot weather no girl is sent to bed unless she is ill. We have a fair number of delicate girls here, and all the régime is arranged with an eye to their needs. And while I think of it, I don't know if anyone has told you, but now that the warm weather has come, all lessons with the exception of science and art and music must be taken out-of-doors. Those girls learning stringed instruments will, of course, practise out-of-doors. That is understood. The girls use the shade of the big trees round the lawn and in the orchard for form-rooms. This is an invariable rule of the school.' Dr Maynard spoke sternly,

for Jo had unburdened herself to him the night before, and when Matron's telephone-call had come, she had said, 'You'll have to put your foot down good and hard, my lad, and *keep* it down. That woman is full of her own ideas, and she doesn't like ours one little bit. Don't you give her the smallest loophole, or she'll get out of the outside lessons. She's been making a fuss about the babes gazing out of the windows as it is. Gwensi can tell you all about *that!*' with her wickedest smile. 'Just ask her if you see her!'

In vain Miss Bubb protested; the doctor meant to have his way, and he sat there till she had reluctantly given him her word that all lessons should take place in the gardens and orchard unless one of the doctors sent word that they must not. Matron left them to it, and went to see about tea, smothering a chuckle as she left the room. For once Miss Bubb had met her match. Her most scathing speeches had no effect on Jack Maynard, who sat in his chair, meeting her snubs with imperturbable good nature, but sticking firmly to his point. In spite of the waste of time, Matron told herself that she had thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon!

Two days later, when she was still smarting over her defeat, Fate put an instrument of revenge on Gay at least in Miss Bubb's hand. A letter came to her from Ruth Lambert, asking that Gay might go home for the rest of the week.

'My husband is obliged to go abroad on important business,' wrote Ruth. 'Unfortunately, he is unable to spare time to come to the school to see Gay, so I must ask you to send her home, as there is a chance of his seeing our people while he is away, and my aunt will want the very last news of her youngest child. I am so sorry, but as Gay is not taking any exams this term it won't hurt her, and I know she'll work hard to make up for lost time when she comes back again. I have written to tell her, and asked her to bring as little as possible so that the journey may not be troublesome. If you will have her seen on the train at Armiford, a friend of ours will meet her at Birmingham, and bring her as far as York, where her twin brother will join her. We will try to arrange for someone to see her back and on to the train at Birmingham again.'

The rest of the letter, dealing with trains and times, Miss Bubb left for the moment. Taking her pen, she wrote: 'I am sorry to say that, in present circumstances, I cannot permit Gay to leave school. Since your husband is, as you say, unable to come here to see her, I am afraid she must be content with writing to you to give you her own news. I will see that her letter tells you all you would wish to know, and that it is posted at once. I regret the necessity; but am unable to deal otherwise with it.'

Then she sent for Gay, told her of Ruth's letter, and bade her sit down and write at once, telling her cousin that she was well, but in such disgrace for rudeness and impertinence that it was impossible for her to be allowed this treat.

Gay stared at the Head, the colour fading from her face. 'You—you mean I am not to go, though Ruth has told you why?' she stammered.

'Certainly I do. Girls as ill-bred as you do not deserve extra holidays. I should be lacking in my duty if I did not impress this on you. Your conduct has been disgraceful, and you merit an even severer punishment.'

Gay was white by this time. 'But—but Ruth has *told* you that Tommy wants to see me because he may see Mummy and she'll want to know the very last news of me!'

'Yes; and I am afraid it will grieve her deeply to hear what a naughty rude girl you are! But that is your affair. I only hope this will teach you a lesson. Now sit down and write what I told you at once.'

‘I won’t!’ flamed Gay. ‘I won’t write any such thing, and Madame would never ask me to—nor Miss Annersley! And you can’t make me, either! I *won’t* write such a thing to Ruth. I was rude, I know. But only because you were so nasty! And to do such a thing as this—no one would let you if they knew of it! It’s nothing but trying to get your own back on me because Dr Jack wouldn’t let you send me to bed on Sunday! That’s all it is, and it’s unfair and unjust! Write yourself if you feel like it, but *I won’t!*’ And before Miss Bubb could stop her, she turned and rushed from the room, slamming the door behind her with such force that the ornaments on the mantelpiece rattled and the window shook in its frame.

For a moment, Miss Bubb felt almost scared at the storm she had aroused. She almost thought of going back on her word for once. Then she reminded herself that to do so would be fatal where Gay was concerned—indeed, if it got about the school, where any of the girls were concerned. She deliberately folded her letter, enveloped and addressed it; then, ringing her bell, sent Gwladys, who answered it, to take it to the post at once. After that, she went in search of Gay, whom she eventually found at the bottom of the kitchen-garden, crying her heart out.

Miss Bubb had no mercy on the girl. She gave full rein to her tongue for the next few minutes, and finally condemned her to solitude for the rest of the week, forbidding her to speak to anyone, and telling her that she would be sent to sleep in sick-room until the Sunday. Gay made no reply. Only her lips closed firmly, and such a sullen look came over her face as no one had ever yet seen on Gay’s face. Feeling a little uneasy, Miss Bubb established her at a lonely desk at the far side of the lawn, saw that she had plenty of work to occupy her, and then called a Staff meeting and told the Staff that Gay Lambert had been so rude and defiant that she had condemned her to solitude for the rest of the week, and must request them all to say nothing to her until her punishment ended. The edited account she gave of Gay’s outburst rather horrified them all. Matron agreed to make up a bed for the girl in sick-room, and the rest of the mistresses gave her work to do for them. In the afternoon, she was sent for a walk with big Monica Marilliar, who was under strict orders not to speak to her. In the evening she was ordered off to an hour’s ‘cello practice. Then she was sent to bed after a meagre supper of bread and milk. Miss Bubb drew a breath of relief when she heard that she was safely there without another outburst, and turned her attention to the Sixth Form’s Latin verses.

CHAPTER XII

GAY DECIDES ON ACTION

‘Gill—Gill! Wake up, old thing! I want you!’

Gillian Culver rolled over on to her back and opened her eyes. She was only partly awake, and in her confused state she thought she was at home and Hawk, her beloved chum-brother, was rousing her. But how funny of him to call her ‘Gill’! At home, she was never anything but ‘Crumpet.’ Then, as she roused more completely, she knew that she was at school, and it was Gay Lambert who was standing beside her, whispering urgently, ‘Gill! I say! Do wake up, Gill, old lamb!’

Gillian sat up and surveyed her friend. ‘Where are you going?’ she demanded. ‘Why have you got your outdoor things on?’

‘S-s-sh! Don’t disturb the rest, whatever you do! Gill, can you let me have any money?’

‘Let you have any money?’

‘Yes; I wouldn’t bother you, but I’ll need every penny I can get. Could you lend me a little? I’ll tell Ruth as soon as I get home, and she’ll send you a P.O.’

Gillian was wide awake now. ‘We’d better go to the bathroom,’ she said severely. ‘Someone’s bound to hear if we go on whispering like this.’

Someone had already heard them. Jacynth, lying awake, miserable because Gay was in such trouble, had heard the hissing whispers, and as Gillian said this, she suddenly appeared between the curtains. At sight of Gay standing there, dressed in her hat and coat and gloves, a small case in her hand, and a very determined look on her face, she gave a loud gasp.

‘Don’t make a row!’ muttered Gay quickly. ‘I didn’t mean to wake you; you’d better get back to bed, Jacynth.’

‘Not till I know what you’re up to!’ was the instant retort.

‘Come on to that bathroom!’ Gillian was out of bed and getting into her dressing-gown. ‘If you’re coming, Jacynth, go and put on your dressing-gown and bedroom slippers. You’ll catch cold like that.’

‘It’s far too hot. I’m quite all right,’ murmured Jacynth.

‘Well, you don’t come with us if you don’t!’ Gillian sounded as determined as it is possible to sound when you are either whispering or muttering. As Jacynth wanted to see what was happening, she meekly obeyed, and then followed the other two on tiptoe down the corridor to a bathroom at the far end which was reached by two or three steps down, and which was known to the school at large as ‘Lavender’s bathroom’ because in the previous term Lavender Leigh had managed to swamp it with hot water, and there had been all sorts of consequences. The three girls slipped in here and Gillian drew back the black-out curtains.

‘It’s moonlight,’ she said in her usual tones, secure in the fact that no one could hear them here unless they shouted. ‘Gay, what are you going to do? Why are you dressed like that? And why do you want money?’

‘I’m going home,’ said Gay, desperation in her voice. ‘I’ve got to, and that old cat says I can’t. I simply *must* see Tommy before he goes, and send some special messages to Mummy and the rest. I don’t care what I may have done! She’s got no right to punish me that way! It’s punishing Mummy and Tommy and Ruth too. Besides, I didn’t do anything bad enough to

deserve it. I was rude all right; but she asked for it. And anyway, Dr Jack made me stay alone all the afternoon. That was enough!

‘But how can you go?’ asked Gillian. ‘They’ll only send down to the station to ask if you’ve been there, and wire to other stations along the line. Someone will find you—probably the police—and you’ll be brought back. It isn’t worth it!’

‘Oh no, I shan’t!’ said Gay. ‘I’ve thought it out, and I’m not going to Armiford.’

‘Then where *are* you going?’

‘To Medbury. I can get a train from there to Worcester, and from there I’ll go on to Oxford. I get to Newcastle all right from there.’

‘Your clothes will give you away,’ said Jacynth practically.

‘I’ve thought of that. When I get out of the park, I’ve got a blue beret I’ll put on, and my raincoat. I can tuck all my hair into the beret and keep it on all the time.’

‘My dear owl,’ said Gillian, ‘you can’t do it. For one thing, you won’t get a train much before seven if at all.’

‘Yes, I can. There’s a milk train leaving Medbury at six o’clock. I’ll get that. That’s why I’m starting now, for I must get to Medbury station before six, and it’s twelve miles, even if I can get a lift.’

‘Gay! You’re not to go asking anyone for lifts!’ said Gillian sharply. ‘You’ll promise me you won’t, or I shall go straight and fetch Matey!’

‘Don’t be so mad, Gill! I can’t possibly do it on my own arched insteps unless I do.’

‘Very well, then. I shall fetch Matey!’ And Gillian made for the door.

Gay caught her arm. ‘I’ve trusted you, Gill! You can’t let me down like that!’

‘Can’t I just? You give me your word you won’t ask anyone for a lift, and I’ll give you what money I’ve got and hold my tongue—and see that Jacynth holds hers—till tomorrow at six anyhow. But I won’t do a thing unless you promise!’

Gay dared not waste time arguing. It was half-past eleven, and that gave her just six and a half hours to do the very stiff walk from Plas Howell to Medbury station. It was not the distance so much as the lie of the land. Plas Howell lay well up on a hill. Medbury was right down in the hollow; and to reach it she would have to go up hill and down dale the whole way. ‘Very well, if nothing else will satisfy you. But I do think you’re mean! I shall be dead by the time I get there. I suppose you won’t mind if someone I know offers me a lift?’

‘If you really mean to do it, I’d advise you to keep away from anyone you know. Otherwise you’ll probably be brought straight back.’

‘I hadn’t thought of that. Thanks, Gill! I’ll avoid all my friends as if they had mumps and measles combined!’

‘I don’t know how you expect to get away with it,’ said Gillian.

‘Neither do I! But I’m having a jolly good stab at it! Don’t give me away till six o’clock tomorrow evening, either of you, will you?’

‘I won’t,’ said Jacynth. ‘And I can let you have a pound, Gay, if it’ll be any help.’

‘I shall get into an awful row for borrowing. Ruth will have seventy fits when she hears. But I’m not very sure what the fare will be, going that roundabout way, so I’d better have as much as possible. Thanks awfully, Jacynth. You’re a sport! And look here, you two. If anyone stirs up any fuss for you, say you’ll tell Madame or Jo Maynard; but nobody else. *They* will see I couldn’t do anything else. They’ve got some sense!’

‘It’s more than you have,’ grumbled Gillian. ‘All right. I’ll lend you thirty shillings. If you have that and Jacynth’s pound—sure you can spare it for a few days, Jacynth?—and what

you've got of your own, you ought to be all right for money. It can't cost more than about four pounds, even going halfway round England to get there, and you ought to have that and enough to buy some food as well. You had better stay here while I go and get the money. Where's yours, Jacynth?'

'In my purse in the hanky-box in the top drawer.'

'All right! Keep quiet, and I'll get it.' And Gillian slipped out of the room, noiseless as a ghost, and left the other two sitting on the edge of the bath, looking at each other. Gay suddenly threw an arm round Jacynth's shoulders. 'I say, Jacynth, if it's going to get you into a real row, not owning up if they ask you outright, tell them. I'd forgotten about the Thérèse Lepattre for the moment. You mustn't have a black mark of that kind, you know.'

'I've said I wouldn't say anything till six tomorrow night, and I won't,' said Jacynth sturdily. 'But if it'll make you happy, Gay,' she added as she caught the look in Gay's eyes, 'I'll say I'll tell Mrs Maynard. She's up for Latin tomorrow, so that will be all right.'

'Very well. But don't you risk the Thérèse Lepattre for me. You should have known nothing about it, really. I never meant to wake anyone but Gill.'

'You didn't wake me; I was awake already.'

'Then you shouldn't have been! What was wrong with you? Got a pain?'

'No; I just wasn't asleep.' But Jacynth's eyes gave her away. Gay stared in amazement. Then she did a thing few people had ever known offhand Gay do. She pulled Jacynth closer, and brushed a hasty kiss on her cheek.

'You little ass to worry about me! I was all right. I planned this all out after I went to bed. Don't you worry any more about me. And when Gill gets back, you must hop off to bed and go to sleep at once. Here she is!'

Gillian slipped back into the room, the notes in her hand. 'Here you are, Gay. And it's a jolly good thing for you that in all the worry of the various accidents no one ever thought of asking for our money for bank, or you'd have been done, my child. Jacynth, you hop off to bed. I'm going down to let Gay out and bolt the door after her, but we can't both go in case someone hears us, and then it *will* be the end!'

Jacynth said goodbye and went back to bed very reluctantly. She lay down, pulling up the bedclothes round her, for the nights still turned chilly as they passed, and she was shivering, partly with cold, partly with excitement. After what seemed to her ages, Gillian poked a head between her curtains, and seeing her wide-open eyes, came in and sat down on the edge of the bed.

'Gay got off all right,' she whispered. 'Try to go to sleep, Jacynth, and leave any talking tomorrow to me. But there mayn't be any. Even now I can't think how Gay got out of sick-room without Matey hearing! Good-night, old thing! Sleep well!' And she gave the bedclothes a pat and vanished.

As it turned out, the stars in their courses fought for Gay. Matron, who was seldom sick or sorry, woke next morning with a raging headache. She was too ill to attend to anything, and it was after nine o'clock before anyone thought of Gay. Then Miss Wilson, who was still not in school (though she intended to begin in the course of a day or two), suddenly remembered the young rebel, and slipped along to sick-room to see what she was doing. Sick-room was as neat and tidy as always. The bed was made, and Gay's pyjamas were folded up and in their case. Her brush and comb were on the dressing-table, and her toothbrush in the jar. She had taken very little, for she always kept necessaries at home, so there was no need. 'Bill' naturally assumed that someone had brought her breakfast and she had gone to her lonely desk at the

foot of the lawn behind the tennis-courts, and was working. Having plenty to worry about, the science mistress left it at that, and returned to her own room, where she was going over the anatomy work Hilary Burn had handed to her on the Saturday.

As a result, it was nearly one before anyone discovered that Gay Lambert was not in school. Then Matron, whose pain had worn itself to bearable proportions during the morning, asked where the girl was and what she was doing.

‘She’s at the bottom of the lawn, I believe,’ said Miss Wilson, who was with her. ‘I thought of her after Prayers, and went to sick-room, but she had made her bed and tidied up and gone. Don’t worry about her, Matey. She really seems to have been very rude, not to say impudent, and deserves a stiff punishment. We can’t have that sort of thing going on.’

‘Oh, I know. But I’ve been thinking things over this last half-hour or so, and it struck me that Miss Bubb skated very carefully over the reason for Gay’s rudeness. I’d like to know what caused such an outburst. Send someone to find the child, Nell, and send her to me.’

‘I’ll do no such thing. Your head’s still pretty bad, and you’re not fit to cope with a bad, defiant girl. I’ll see her myself, since I suppose nothing else will satisfy you. Rest quietly, and I’ll see to it.’

‘Well, as long as you do!’ And Matron turned her hot face against the cool pillow which Miss Wilson had just turned for her, and closed her eyes.

Miss Wilson left the room quietly, and went down in the lift, since Sir James Russell had vetoed stairs for the present. She found a small child taking a message to the staff-room, undertook to deliver it herself, and sent its bearer off to look for Gay and tell her to go to Miss Wilson’s room. Fiona McDonald trotted off, and ‘Bill’ bore the message to Hilary Burn in the staff-room, stayed talking to her for a moment or two about the school’s latest excitement, and then returned to her own room.

No one was there, and she was sitting, drumming her fingers impatiently on her desk, when there was a tap at the door, and Fiona came in, her big black eyes like saucers. ‘Please, Miss Wilson, I haf looked eferewhere for Gay, and I cannot find her anywhere. She iss *gone!*’

‘Nonsense!’ said ‘Bill’ in reply to this dramatic statement. ‘She must be somewhere about. Where have you looked, Fiona? And please try to speak better English while you are about it.’

‘At the bottom of the lawn; and in Lower Fifth, and in the labs and the art-room. But she iss nowhere!’

‘Have you tried the orchard and the kitchen-gardens?’

‘Yess, Miss Wilson.’

‘The bowling-green, and the shrubbery too? And the rose-garden?’

‘I haf been eferewhere. That iss why I haf pe—*been*, I mean!—so long.’

‘H’m! Well, thank you, Fiona. What lesson are you having now?’

‘Latin with Mistress Maynard.’

Miss Wilson hastily scribbled a few lines to Jo Maynard, and gave the note to Fiona to hand to her. ‘That is to ask Mrs Maynard to excuse you, Fiona. And listen, child! Say nothing to anyone about this till I give you leave.’

‘No, Miss Wilson.’ Fiona left the room with the note, and ‘Bill’ sat thinking deeply and frowning. Three minutes later, as she had expected, there came a tap at the door, and then Jo entered. ‘Bill! What does this mean?’ she demanded, waving ‘Bill’s’ note in front of her.

‘I wish I knew! Fiona McDonald seems to have looked in all the proper places for Gay Lambert, and can’t find any sign of her. If it were some of those monkeys, I should simply think it meant she hadn’t looked properly. But Fiona is a careful little bit of goods. I’m rather

tied with this leg of mine. Jo, I don't want to make a fuss until it seems necessary. Already we've had far too many for my liking. Will you give your form something to do and go and look yourself while I go and beard the lion in its den? I'll tell Miss Bubb I've sent you.'

'I hope you will. If she says any more to me about my work, I shall throw the nearest thing at her head, so I warn you!'

'Don't worry. I should imagine that if Gay is really missing, Miss Bubb will have too much to think about to trouble whether you leave your form to run riot or not. What I can't understand,' went on Miss Wilson, talking almost more to herself than to Jo, 'is why Gay should do such a thing. She's been punished before when she's deserved it, and she's never seemed to resent it. I should have said that, if there *was* a girl in the school who didn't know what it meant to be sulky, that girl was Gay Lambert.'

'If you ask me, there's a lot more behind all this than anyone's been told,' said Jo. 'However, I'd better go and see if I can find her. It's to be hoped no one sees me hunting, or there *will* be questions asked!'

'She's not in the orchard or near the lawn, so you needn't go there. And Fiona says she tried the shrubbery, kitchen-gardens, and rose-garden. Go and see if she's in the shelters in the hillside. And you might try that patent hiding-place of Gwensi Howell's in the hornbeam hedge. I'm going to see Miss Bubb. Have you any idea where she will be?'

'Latin with Upper Fifth, I think. That's under the limes at the far end of the lawn. Can you manage that far? Hadn't I better tell her to come to you? No use to upset yourself, especially when we may be in for some hair-raising excitement. If you ask me, Gay has run away; and I'd like to know exactly what lay behind this punishment of hers. I don't believe the kid was so much to blame as all that. You go down to the hall, and I'll send the Bubb in to you.' And Jo raced off in a manner more suitable to a schoolgirl than the mother of a family of four.

'Bill' took her advice, and went down again, to wait restlessly in the great, square hall in one of the window-seats. Secretly, she wondered if Miss Bubb would come, or if she would send a message to say that Miss Wilson must go to her, and it was with inward relief that the mistress saw the neat, compact figure stalking over the lawn towards the house. Jo must have made that message very urgent!

As a matter of fact, Jo had simply said, 'Miss Bubb, could you go to Miss Wilson in the hall? It's a very urgent matter that must be seen to at once.'

In the circumstances, Miss Bubb had felt obliged to go; but she made up her mind as she went to tell Miss Wilson pretty plainly that she was not to send any more such peremptory messages. However, before she could open her lips on the subject, 'Bill,' who guessed what was in her mind, got in first with an anxious 'Miss Bubb! Have you any idea where Gay Lambert is? She seems to have disappeared.'

'Disappeared?' repeated Miss Bubb. 'What do you mean?'

'She isn't to be found anywhere. I have already sent someone round to look for her as I wished to see her; but she is not to be found. Mrs Maynard has gone to see if she can find her. But if she can't, then, unless you know of her whereabouts, I'm afraid we've got to face the fact that she has probably run away.'

Miss Bubb flushed a dull red. 'What utter nonsense! Why, pray, should Gay run away just because she is undergoing a well-deserved punishment?'

Miss Wilson fixed her keen, grey eyes on the Head's face. 'Just what *is* the extent of her punishment, Miss Bubb? Is it *only* the week's solitude, or is there something more that we haven't heard?'

Miss Bubb flushed again. 'Why should you question me? You have no right!'

'I think I have in the circumstances. Girls don't run away unless something is badly wrong, either with themselves or the school. We have had only one girl who did anything so silly, and that was her own fault, and it occurred in Tirol. She was found, mercifully, and brought back; but she paid a very heavy price for her folly. It turned out well in the end, but none of us has any wish to have that episode repeated,' said 'Bill' sharply. 'Gay isn't in the least like Eustacia. She's a normal, healthy schoolgirl. Eustacia was what her training before she came to us had made her. A couple of years with us changed all that. But she is the only girl who has attempted to run away from us. As I said, Gay is an entirely different type. I know that, until this term, she has been very happy here. I can only think that something untoward has occurred. *What is it?*'

'It is my business and no one else's,' returned Miss Bubb angrily. 'Really, Miss Wilson, must I remind you that I am Principal here at the moment? I am not answerable for my actions to you!'

Miss Wilson looked thoughtfully at her. For so long she and Miss Annersley had worked together that it was quite a shock to hear her right to ask for explanations being questioned. However, she saw that she could gain nothing at the moment by pressing the point. She left it, and turned to something else. 'What are you going to do about letting Madame know?'

'Nothing, until I am sure that that naughty, troublesome girl has really done such a wrong thing,' said Miss Bubb. 'If she has, then of course Lady Russell must be notified. She will have to decide if she wishes Gay to return or not.'

'What do you mean? Eustacia, with no excuse for what she did, was not expelled; and I can assure you it will not come to that with Gay.'

Miss Bubb's lips thinned. 'Perhaps my report of her may have a little more weight with Lady Russell than you seem to think. *I can assure you* that if I am given any say in the matter, Gay Lambert will not return here.'

Nell Wilson was startled at the amount of venom in Miss Bubb's tones as she spoke. She wisely dropped the subject, and there was silence for a few minutes. The bell rang for the end of the lesson, but Miss Bubb stayed where she was. Inwardly, she was very much perturbed. When she had pronounced Gay's punishment, she had had no idea that that young lady would take matters into her own hands in the way she had done, and she was growing more and more uneasy as to what Lady Russell would say about her action in refusing the girl permission to go home at such an urgent call. Perhaps she should have granted it, and punished her in other ways. But she had been so upset that she had done the first thing that came into her head. At the time it had seemed an excellent way of teaching Gay a sharp lesson that she would not forget in a hurry. But who *could* have thought that any girl would be so thoroughly wrong-headed? Then Miss Wilson spoke again, and turned the uneasiness into positive terror, this time on behalf of Gay herself.

'If she really has gone, I should like to know when. I hope to heaven she wasn't so mad as to get off overnight. *Anything* may have happened to her, at that rate! The roads aren't any too safe with all the traffic. And—' Miss Wilson did not finish her sentence. She had no need. Miss Bubb looked at her, horror in her face.

'Surely she would not be so mad!' she exclaimed.

'I don't know. I think if Gay was really worked up she would go without a thought of danger. I wish Jo Maynard would come back! I don't like this!'

Miss Bubb's face suddenly cleared. 'I don't think she can have done that. I haven't heard that any door was found open this morning.'

'That wouldn't worry Gay. She'd get out by a window if she was really determined. The worst of it is,' went on Miss Wilson, 'Matron is so poorly, I don't want to speak to her about it if it can be helped. Gay was in sick-room. Matron says she felt this coming on and took aspirin last night to try to ward it off. She would probably sleep through any slight sounds Gay might make. But no; I went along this morning, and the bed was made and the room quite tidy. She must have got up early—it is light very early now—and gone off to get the seven-forty train to Birmingham. If she really can't be found here, we must ring up the station at Armiford and ask if she was seen. She couldn't go far; she wouldn't have enough money.'

'I can't find her anywhere,' reported Jo, suddenly appearing in the big doorway. 'There isn't a sign of her; and her raincoat and beret have vanished. Nell, what *are* we going to do now?'

'Ring up the station at Armiford, I suppose. I don't like doing it. It's not a good advertisement for the school. But we can't let that child go off in this way and sit still and do nothing. One thing; she couldn't get far on any money she may have.'

'Unless her sister enclosed money in the letter she got yesterday.'

'Had she one? I hope nothing's gone wrong at home! Miss Bubb, do you know anything about it? Did Gay come to you yesterday?'

Again the dull red flamed in Miss Bubb's face. 'Gay did not—' she began, when Jo suddenly interrupted her.

'Nell! I've just remembered—never thought of it before! Oh, what a *ninny* I am! Gay would have plenty of money! No one has bothered about bank. So far as I know, every girl has every penny she brought from home. We were all too much upset about you people to bother about it at the time, and I don't believe anyone has troubled since. I expect some of the babes would pay their money in as usual. But the older girls never troubled about it, I know, for Robin said something about it last night at home. It was Dollie Edwards' job, you may remember, so I don't suppose anyone else bothered about it. Shall I get the Staff together and ask them?'

'Yes; go at once! Send prefects to take the Babies and Juniors, and tell the mistresses to set work for the Upper forms and come here at once,' said Miss Wilson, taking the lead instinctively. 'This complicates things badly. If Gay had the money she usually brings, she should have plenty. She must be halfway to York by this time. Which way would she go?'

Jo thought a minute. 'Birmingham—York—Newcastle. If the young monkey's gone home, you're right. She must be well on the way to York.'

'We can't wire at the moment. It would frighten the Lamberts, and Gay couldn't get home much before six—if then. I don't want to worry your sister until we must. She's had more than enough this past month or so. You go and get the Staff and we'll see if Gay has money or not. If not, we must try Armiford. If she has, I'm afraid we can't do much at the moment.' Then, as Jo departed on her quest, she got up, and turned to Miss Bubb. 'Now, Miss Bubb, I'm convinced there's more in this than we know at present. What was in Gay's letter that might cause her to take such a silly step? You must speak now!'

Miss Bubb saw that she must. She was not devoid of common sense, although during the past few days she had allowed anger and disappointment to overrule her. She answered, 'Gay's people wanted her to go home for a few days as her brother is going away. I refused, in

view of her shocking behaviour. I felt that she did not deserve the treat. I suppose she has done this to—to pay me out.’

Nell Wilson could almost have laughed at the school-girlish ending. But her heart was too heavy for that. ‘Did Gay say where her brother was going?’ she asked. ‘It must have been urgent for Mrs Lambert to write for her.’

‘I believe somewhere to the Far East. There was some talk of his seeing their people, and they live in China, I believe.’ Miss Bubb spoke reluctantly, but she felt obliged to do it.

‘And you refused her permission? Miss Bubb, however naughty Gay had been, you had no possible right to take such a grave step. Madame would have agreed at once. Do you realise that Gay may never see her brother again? It’s enough to make the Lamberts take her away at once. You must have been mad even to think of it!’ Miss Wilson spoke with conviction.

‘How could I know she would do a thing like this?’ angrily demanded Miss Bubb.

‘That has nothing to do with it. You have done an indefensible thing and Madame herself will have to deal with it. But until we hear that Gay is safe I shall not let her know unless I think it absolutely needful. She is in no state to have such a shock as this.’

Remembering the delicate face and frail looks of Lady Russell on Sunday, Miss Bubb was forced to agree with this. She said no more, and when the Staff, full of curiosity, came in, she remained in the background, and left it to Miss Wilson to do the questioning. That lady soon got all she wanted to know. No one had even bothered about bank, and Gay must have had plenty of money with her. Miss Wilson bound them all to silence till she gave leave to speak, and sent them back to their classes. She herself sent off a wire to the station-master at York, asking him to look out for a schoolgirl of fifteen with golden curls, blue eyes, and wearing the school uniform which was described. Then ‘Bill’ herself sent Jo to Armiford with it, not choosing to expose the school’s trouble to the public more than she could help. At four o’clock the answer came. ‘No one of description on train.’

‘Bill’ made up her mind. The girls must be questioned. One of Gay’s friends might know something about it. She said so to Jo, who had remained at school, feeling that as Madge must not be troubled, she ought to stay. Jo pondered a moment. ‘Send for Gillian Culver and Jacynth Hardy,’ she said at last. ‘Gay and Gill are great chums; and Jacynth seems to be counting in with them since she came. They might know.’

So Gillian and Jacynth were called, and acknowledged that they knew Gay had gone off, but otherwise refused to speak till six o’clock. Jo fixed Gillian with a stern eye. ‘Well, you either tell Miss Wilson and me now,’ she said, ‘or you can come with me to the Round House and tell Madame. She’ll get it out of you all right! I don’t want to do that. She’s poorly just now, and oughtn’t to be worried, but if you won’t tell us, then we have no option. Which is it to be?’

‘What do you want to know?’ asked Jacynth.

‘Had Gay enough money to get home?’

‘Oh, yes; plenty! She must have had between four and five pounds.’

‘Which way did she go?’

Jacynth looked doubtfully at Gillian. That young lady nodded. ‘She said we could tell Mrs Maynard. I don’t suppose she’d mind Miss Wilson. She went to Medbury and took the milk train to Worcester. From there she was going on to Oxford, and then to York, in case you thought of Brum and rang up there or Armiford station with a policeman.’ Gillian spoke as if a policeman was a new kind of telephone, but everyone was too much in earnest even to smile, though Joey, retailing the whole thing to her husband that night, shrieked with laughter over it.

‘The *milk* train?’ gasped Jo. ‘Then when did she go?’

‘About a quarter to twelve last night. But I made her promise not to try to lorry-hop, or ask anyone for a lift, and she said she wouldn’t.’

The entry of Rosalie Dene put a stop for the time being to the inquest. She bore a slip of paper, and her eyes were wide with wonder. ‘A wire for you, Jo. From Gay Lambert at Leeds. What on earth is she doing there?’

Jo snatched it from her. ‘“Safe at Leeds with Grandma and Father. Reach home sevenish,”’ she read aloud. ‘Grandma and Father? What on earth does she mean?’

‘It’s those people we met in the train when we came!’ cried Jacynth. ‘Don’t you remember? We told you about them when you had us to tea. They must have picked her up somewhere, and she thought you’d like to know she had grown-ups with her!’

CHAPTER XIII

GAY ON THE RUN

When she stepped out of the side-door, which Gillian Culver promptly shut and locked behind her, Gay Lambert found herself in a silver world. Lawn, trees, bushes, and flowers were all awash in the moonlight. Overhead the moon herself sailed serenely across a starry sky. Scarcely a leaf stirred; the whole world seemed asleep. Gay got on to the grass, in case her footsteps should be heard, though there were mainly bathrooms at this side of the house. She slipped noiselessly over the dewy lawn, and cutting across it, came to the avenue by the tennis-courts. Arrived there, she turned and looked back at the great mass of the mansion.

'How clear everything looks!' she thought. 'I'd no idea it would be so lovely. And it's a full moon, luckily for me. It's nearly as light as day. I'll easily find my way to Medbury now.'

She turned in her tracks, and set off at a steady pace down the drive. The great gates were shut, and she dared not run the risk of rousing anyone in the lodge by opening them; but there was a little door in the high wall some distance down the road, so she got over the railing into the park, and raced lightly across towards it. If it were locked, she could climb the wall a few yards further on, where trees grew near. Gay was a champion tree-climber. But the door was only bolted, and she easily slipped the bolt and went out, pulling it shut behind her.

On the road she met nobody. She walked at the slow, steady pace which she knew she could keep up for some time without tiring, and was soon passing the church, built half a mile outside the village in the days when there had been a good many cottages round about. Here she climbed over a stile, and went through a couple of fields, passing the far end of the lane where Plas Gwyn stood, and coming back to the highroad at the further end of the village, thus cutting off half a mile. Then it was the road again for another five miles. Still she met nobody. Not even a lorry. Some girls would have been frightened at the loneliness and stillness, but not Gay Lambert. As a mite of five, she had not hesitated to beard the captain of the great vessel in which the family had sailed to China. She had been taken in a running carrio right down the steep, glassy streets of Madeira, and screamed with delight, her only grief being that she might not go again and again. In China she had had various adventures, none of which had ever found her afraid. It was scarcely likely that a lonely, moonlit road in England was going to upset her. She walked along steadily, whistling or humming softly to herself as she went. Overhead, watchful planes sometimes throbbed as they went on their lawful occasions. Now and then she heard owls hooting to one another. As she passed one field, green with springing wheat, she heard a terrified squeak as an unfortunate field-mouse felt the pitiless talons close on him. A dog barked as she passed a farm. But apart from these country sounds, she heard nothing until she had covered nine of the twelve miles to Medbury, and was beginning to feel both tired and hungry. Then her quick ear caught the steady rumble of motor transport, and she got off the road and climbed over a fence into a field while a convoy went through. When it had gone, she had reached the end of her field. She climbed back to the road, and went on, rather slowly now, for she was tiring. She had no food, for there had been no chance to get any, and she thought longingly of slices of bread-and-butter and a glass of milk. Perhaps she could get something at Medbury station. There might be a cabin there for the railway workers.

She glanced at her watch. It was four o'clock. The moon was sinking, and a fresh breeze was springing up. The stars were paling, and in the east the deep blue of the sky was turning to grey. Well, there was one thing: she ought to get a seat in the train all right, and then she would be able to rest for a few hours. She yawned deeply, and made the best of her way down the road, where a cold light was beginning to gleam over bushes, hedges, and the few houses she passed.

The church clock was chiming the three-quarters as she reached Medbury station and looked round hopefully for the cabin. It was there, and it was open. A couple of girl porters were standing by the little counter drinking coffee and munching sandwiches. Gay gave a sigh of relief, and made a bee-line for it. The woman behind the counter looked at her curiously as she asked for coffee and bread-and-butter, but made no comment. Gay drained the coffee in one long draught, and then tackled the big 'doorstep' she held.

'Could I have some more coffee, please?' she asked, holding out the cup. 'Oh, and *could* you sell me a couple of sandwiches? I've got a long journey before me, and I hadn't time to get anything.'

The woman handed her four of the sandwiches, but still said nothing, although she thought the more. Gay was wearing a disgraceful old raincoat and beret, and she had put on her heaviest shoes for the walk; but there was no mistaking what she was. Her highbred little face, graceful carriage, and clear, cultured voice all gave her away if she had had any hope of passing for a cottage girl. She paid for what she had had, and then turned to the station, feeling much better. She got her ticket to Worcester, and went out on to the platform, for the train was in. Arrived there, she glanced round, and her heart went with a thump into her shoes. Sitting in the one carriage the train boasted were two people she knew very well now, and there was no hope of escaping them. Grandma, at her window, was looking at her with recognition, and Father was already opening the door for her. How absolutely *awful!* Gay went across to them, prepared for anything, including being ignominiously returned to school and Miss Bubb's tender mercies.

'Well,' said Father as he helped her in, 'this is unexpected, Miss.'

'I know,' said Gay, sinking down wearily into the first seat. 'But I had to come. My sister wrote for me to go home, as my brother is going away soon, right to the East, I think, and Miss Bubb wouldn't let me go because she was angry with me. You see, I'd been very rude to her.'

'Eh, that's bad,' began Father; but Grandma interrupted him.

'Why were you rude?' she demanded. 'A young girl should never be rude to her elders and betters. What did you say? Why did you say it?'

Feeling that she might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, Gay told the story as flatly as she could, and they listened. Then Grandma nodded her head. 'Well, I'm ashamed of you—and you a young lady and all! *But,*' up went her cotton-gloved finger, 'whatever you did, she had no right to stop you going home when they sent for you like that. Alfred, you and me will look after the young girl'—she always pronounced it 'gel'—'and see her as far as Leeds. She come that road with us, anyhow.' Then she turned to Gay. 'My mother is very ill. She's getting on now—ninety-three next July fourth. She got my sister to write for me, and Alfred here is coming with me. Amy can look after the shop for a bit, and we've got a young girl in the post-office. Maud and Ethel can lend a hand, too, so their father can be spared for a few days. We'll see you to Leeds, and put you on a train for Newcastle. There'll be no post-office open that we can get to before Birmingham. If there's time, Father will go and telegraph to the school that

you're safe with us. Likely there's some that will worry if they don't hear where you are. If there isn't time, he'll telegraph from Leeds. Tell your sister we're going home next Tuesday. She can send you to us at Leeds, and we'll meet you and bring you back with us, and no need to trouble anyone. When did you last eat, eh?' She shot the question at Gay so suddenly that that young lady gaped at her like a stranded fish before she managed to reply, 'I had some coffee and bread-and-butter at the railwaymen's cabin before I got my ticket.'

'H'm! That's not what I'd call a breakfast, but I suppose it'll do for once,' commented Grandma, the lady from the land of solid meals. 'When we get our train at Worcester, I'll give you a couple of sangwidges and a sup of milk. We've plenty here. I don't believe in starving anyone, I don't!'

'I've got some sandwiches, thank you.' Gay showed them, and Grandma nodded again. 'I see. But I dessay you could drink the milk. Don't you fret. We'll look after you. And how did you get to Medbury, eh?'

'I walked,' said Gay, stifling a yawn with difficulty.

'Walked? Mercy me! It's twelve miles if it's a step! When did you start?'

'Just before twelve. I told you I'd run away. My chum let me out.'

'Very bad of her! You're both naughty girls, and if you'd had *my* father, he'd have taken a slipper to you when he got you home. Times aren't what they were, I can tell you!'

Feeling rather thankful on the whole that she would meet gentle Ruth at the end of the journey, and not an irate Yorkshireman, Gay said nothing. She could scarcely keep her eyes open, and she longed to go to sleep, but was afraid lest Grandma should think it rude of her. She handed her purse to Father. 'I only took my ticket to Worcester. Would you mi-ind—' her voice trailed off in a wide yawn that she was unable to suppress, and Grandma said, 'You're tired!' in exactly the same tone as she might have said, 'You've been shop-lifting!'

'I—I beg your pardon,' gasped Gay, scarlet between her efforts not to yawn and shame at being so rude. 'I—I didn't have any slee-eep——'

She was at it again. Grandma stood up, lifted Gay's feet, and swung them up on the seat. 'Alfred, you go and sit in other corner,' she commanded. 'The young girl's tired, and can do with a nap to Worcester. Give me that coat! There, love!' her voice was unexpectedly gentle. 'You put your head down and go to sleep. *We'll* see to you now.'

Tired Gay thankfully laid her head on the rolled-up coat, and was off before she knew where she was. Grandma spread a substantial raincloak over her, and then sat down, her eyes on the pale little face opposite her. She turned to her son-in-law. 'That woman! I'd like to *bite* her!' she ejaculated.

'Now, now, Grandma,' he said peaceably. 'Reckon her folks'll see to it when she tells them her tale. No need for you to fash yourself.'

'I hope they will.' Grandma sounded doubtful. 'What's a sister, though? She'll have little authority. I know what sisters are!'

'Well, you ought, and you with seven of 'em,' replied Father.

'I never took much stock in any one of 'em, either. Hannah's the best of the bunch! And *she* isn't all that much to boast about!' retorted Grandma, who had spent most of her sixty-six years in fighting with her sisters. '*I* was the only one that had enough spunk to say what I thought.'

'Not to your dad, I'll lay,' chuckled Father. 'I'm sometimes right-down sorry I never knew the old lad. He must have been a tartar, that one!'

‘He knew his duty as a father—which is more than I could say for some! “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” He never spoiled any of us!’

‘Oh, well, times have changed now. We spare the child and spoil the rod these days!’ And Father chuckled again at his own wit.

But Grandma was not to be snubbed. ‘More’s the pity!’ she told him. ‘If you took a stick to your young ones now and then, it’d be better for them!’

‘Now, Grandma, you’ve naught to complain of there. They’re good bairns, and none the worse for a bit of petting.’

‘*Petting!*’ Grandma snorted, and then sat silent for the rest of the way to Worcester, where she roused Gay gently enough, and between her and Father they got the sleepy girl into the Birmingham train.

At Birmingham they had to run for the Leeds express, and there was barely time to get into it before it left the station, so no wire could be sent from there. Gay shrugged her shoulders to herself as she squeezed into a seat between Grandma and a young soldier. Let Miss Bubb worry if worry she must! If there was much of a fuss, Jacynth and Gill would tell Jo Maynard where she had gone. And if Miss Bubb was moved to wire to Oxford, she would be badly out. Anyhow, Gay was not going to trouble herself. She opened *The Schoolgirl’s Chum* which Father had bought for her at Worcester, and read with chuckles of the adventures of Sally Rose, Florrie Fatman, Bidy O’Toole, and the rest of the girls who attended St Githa’s select boarding-school. Grandma fed her at intervals with acid drops, peppermints, and sandwiches and milk. She had had a good sleep, and felt quite fresh. And she would never forget that lonely walk in the beauty of the quiet night. That was something worth remembering. *And* the kindness of Grandma and Father! He looked what he was, with his good-natured smile and kindly blue eyes. But who would have expected such treatment from Grandma?

‘She’s a bit like a nut,’ thought Gay as she finished her story. ‘Hard outside, but awfully good inside. I like her! I wonder what her real name is? We never heard. I’ll ask her.’

The next time Grandma proffered her bag of peppermints, Gay took one, popped it into her mouth and said, ‘Thank you ever so. You *are* being decent to me! Look here; we never got your name. What am I to call you to Ruth?’

‘My name’s Rebecca Learoyd. We were all called out of the Bible. Hannah was the oldest. Then there was Samuel—Joseph—Martha—Abel—me—Deborah—Joshua—but he died as a little chap—and the last three were girls—Sarah—and Naomi and Ruth, the twins. They’re most on ’em dead now, but Hannah and Samuel and me and Sarah. And what’s your name?’

‘Really it’s Gabrielle Lambert, but I’m always Gay. My twin, Michael, and I were born on the feast of St Michael and All Angels.’

‘You two the only ones?’

‘Oh, no; I’ve three more brothers—Paul and Maurice and Basil. Ruth is really a—well—a cousin-sister-in-law. She was Mummy’s niece, and she married my stepbrother Tommy out in China when we were there. She’s a dear, and so pretty!’ added Gay, with a sudden memory of Ruth’s dark eyes, silky black hair, and lovely dark colouring.

‘H’m! Handsome is that handsome does! What will she say to this bad prank of yours, eh?’

Gay flushed. ‘She’ll be sorry,’ she said sturdily, ‘but she’ll know I couldn’t help it. I couldn’t let Tommy go off like that and not see him again. She’ll scold, I expect; but she’ll understand. Ruth always does.’

‘And what will that teacher of yours do about it?’

‘I’ve no idea. She’ll be furious, I suppose. She’ll probably send me to bed early for the rest of the term. That seems to be about all she can think up in the way of punishment,’ said Gay scornfully. ‘I’ll lose most of my conduct marks too, I expect. But I’ll have seen Tommy.’

‘I suppose she’ll have you back?’ suggested Grandma, eyeing Gay closely. ‘She may say she can’t have the responsibility of a young girl that gets out of bed in the middle of the night and runs away.’

‘Oh!’ Gay’s eyes filled with horror. ‘I never thought of that! But she couldn’t expel me just for going home to see Tommy when I mayn’t see him again for months and months!’

‘I’ve known some that could and would,’ returned Grandma grimly. She felt that Gay was not in the least sorry for her crime, and that a fright would do her no harm. She added weightily, ‘I don’t know that I’d like it myself.’

‘You wouldn’t have done such a thing,’ Gay flashed back at her.

‘Wouldn’t I? I’m no believer in pampering children. Young folk have got to be made to mind. If any of mine had done it, I’d have given them a lesson they wouldn’t forget in a hurry! I’m not *soft*—never was!’

Gay thought it over. ‘You’re not soft, perhaps. I think you aren’t,’ she said at last. ‘But I think you’d always try to be just. Miss Bubb doesn’t. I was rude all right, and if she felt like it, well, bed wasn’t a bad punishment. But she’d no right to try to stop me seeing Tommy.’

As this was what Grandma herself felt, she said no more. After all, it wasn’t her job to scold Gay. She offered her another peppermint—much to the disgust of a lady opposite who hated the smell and would have liked to say something, but didn’t dare—and then settled back in her corner again. When they renewed their conversation, Gay described something of life in the school, and also asked if she knew Mrs Maynard and her triplets.

‘They come in for sweets,’ said Grandma. ‘You mean she’s something to do with your school?’

Gay explained, and Grandma listened. Inwardly, she was deciding to write to Jo Maynard, but she wasn’t going to let Gay know that. Let her think she might be sent away from school! It ought to do her good. But Grandma meant to put in a good word for her.

At Leeds, where they were joined by Father, who had had to travel in another compartment, she saw that Gay had a good meal before catching the train to the north, and then the young lady was put in charge of the ticket-collector, who happened to be an old friend of Father’s, and she set off on the last stage of her journey, Father having promised to wire to the school for her.

Thus it happened that about the time ‘Bill,’ Jo, and Matron were trying to decide how much to let Lady Russell know of the latest affair at the Chalet School, Gay walked up the path of the pretty little house where the Tommy Lamberts were living. She descended upon Ruth in the drawing-room just when that lady was reading Miss Bubb’s letter with deep dismay, and said cheerfully, ‘Hello, Ruthans! Here I am! And where’s Tommy?’

CHAPTER XIV

MISS BUBB AT BAY

Two letters arrived for Miss Bubb on the Thursday of that week. One was written in Lady Russell's clear, pretty High School script; the other in an old-fashioned, pointed hand, on thin paper, with a fine pen. Miss Bubb opened it first, wondering from whom it could be. It was closely written, and crossed in the way that ladies of the 'sixties and 'seventies used to use—a maddening mode, Miss Bubb decided, as she surveyed the crowded pages with some dismay. But dismay changed to anger as she read on, and she ended by crumpling the sheets with an exclamation of fury, and tossing them into the grate. Grandma, having written to Jo Maynard and also to Ruth Lambert, had decided to make a good job of it, and addressed herself to the head-mistress. And she had not minced matters!

'DEAR MADAM' (she had written)—'I doubt if you know me, and I do not know you, and I do not wish to for many reasons. But I am writing to give you a piece of my mind, and let you know what sensible people think of your behaviour. It is a sin and a disgrace that you should be allowed to be at the head when you do not make proper use of your place. For all you knew, the young girl, Gabrielle Lambert, might have had a very unpleasant time. I am not one to back up the young in not minding when they are told, and I never pampered my own, nor my grandchildren at the present. But I do say that to act so that a child of fifteen is driven to wander about the roads during the night, more especial when there is a risk of air-raids, is to use your place badly. She was worn out when my son-in-law and me met her, and if she has had a bad illness, the blame is yours. I have written to her sister and told her so. I have also written to Mrs Maynard, who seems to have something to do with your school, and told her as well. I know Mrs Maynard quite well, being as she deals at my son-in-law's shop, and a nicer young lady I would not wish to know. I feel sure she would never approve of your behaviour, which is not that of a lady. If Miss Lambert was rude to you, as she has told me she was, then you should certainly punish her; but in a proper way. Keeping her from seeing her brother that she might never see again was not proper. No one knows what can happen with these nasty flying-machines.'—Grandma had baulked at the spelling of 'aeroplanes.'—'If Mr Lambert was killed while he was away, how would you feel then? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You were cruel to do it, and I don't blame the young girl.'—Grandma had warmed to her task by this time.—'I only hope she has taken no harm. My son-in-law and me are going to bring her back with us, if so be as her sister sends her to you again. I would not do it if she were mine, and so I tell you plain. If you go on like this, you will empty the school, and I do not think Lady Russell who owns it, so I am told, will like that. I do not know Lady Russell, and Miss Lambert tells me she is ill, so will not trouble her. But I am writing to Mrs Maynard, and she must use her own judgement. And I am warning you that I shall bring her to the school myself, and if I see so much as a sour look at her, I shall go to Lady Russell, illness or no illness. It is time someone put a stop to your capers.—Yours faithfully, REBECCA LEAROYD, Widow. You mind what I say.'

There is no denying the fact that Grandma wielded a fluent pen of her own. Miss Bubb wondered who on earth she was. The English was not all it should be; but the writing was unexpectedly pretty. She was not to know that in her youth Grandma had been first schoolroom-maid in the household of Lord Midgeley, and, later, lady's-maid to the young ladies, as they had refused to part from their 'dear Becky' until she left them to be married. Like the shrewd Yorkshirewoman she was, she had picked up all she could from them, deliberately forming her writing on that of the old-fashioned governess who had educated them. Lady Burt and the Hon. Alice Midgeley still wrote to their Becky at regular intervals, and visited her at least once a year, and she was proud of the connection. Hence the cause of Miss Bubb's mystification.

For a few minutes the Head sat silent, wrestling with the fury that possessed her at being taken to task in this way. When she could control herself again, she took up Lady Russell's letter and opened it.

'DEAR MISS BUBB' (she read)—'My sister, Mrs Maynard, came to see me last night, and she has told me what has occurred at the school with regard to Gay Lambert. As I think we had better discuss it in person, will you please come to see me at eleven o'clock this morning. Miss Wilson can take charge during your absence. She has frequently done it before, and as she will certainly have to continue during Miss Annersley's convalescence, she may as well begin at once.—Yours faithfully, M. D. RUSSELL.'

That was all, but Miss Bubb felt that it meant that her reign was at an end. She had known that Lady Russell must regard what had happened very seriously, but she had hoped to get that lady to visit her anger mainly on Gay, the author of all the trouble, to her mind. This note robbed her of that hope. She ignored the rest of her correspondence, and took out a letter which had come to her during the previous week. It was from an old colleague who had taken over a small boarding-school a few years back, and suggested that Mabel Bubb should join her as partner. It would suit Miss Bubb in some ways; but she was aware that Alma Weaver had a will of her own, and she would by no means be her own mistress. Still, half a loaf was better than no bread. She would be asked to invest a comparatively small amount of her own money, and as the school was prospering, she ought soon to make that up from her share of the profits. Judging by Lady Russell's letter, she might be asked to resign at once, and that would give her some time to make her arrangements, since Miss Weaver did not want her till next September. She made up her mind, and rang the bell. When Gwladys came, she was sent to ask Miss Wilson to come to the Head, and Miss Bubb then sat back, and read Miss Weaver's letter again.

A tap at the door roused her. She called, 'Come in!' and Miss Wilson entered, looking considerably happier than she had done forty-eight hours previously.

'Come in, Miss Wilson,' said Miss Bubb. 'I have had a note from Lady Russell, asking me to go to see her about that naughty child, Gay Lambert. I must ask you to take charge during my absence, which will, I hope, not be long. Indeed, I expect to return for lunch.'

'Very well, Miss Bubb,' returned 'Bill.'

'That is all, thank you. I must go and get ready.'

'Certainly,' said Miss Wilson, and left the room.

Miss Bubb picked up her letter, then hesitated. She stooped and collected the crumpled sheets of Grandma's diatribe. Better not leave that about for the maids to find. She went to her bedroom, changed her dress, and came down, wondering just how much longer she would be in this house. She thought that, on the whole, she would ask Lady Russell to free her at once. Get in first if she could, so that she could say that she had refused to stay.

This idea pleased her so much that she smiled as she went to get her bicycle, and was seen by Jacynth Hardy. That young woman promptly decided that Miss Bubb was going to meet Gay, and had planned a specially fiendish punishment for her, and went on to her geography lesson, dismay in her heart. Neither she nor Gillian had heard from Gay beyond the fact that she had arrived home safely, which Matron had told them, using the opportunity to add further details to the opinion she had already given them of their behaviour. Ruth Lambert had flatly refused to allow Gay to write, saying that she had done very wrong in going off as she had done; and as for Gillian and Jacynth, they were quite as bad, for Gillian at least should have known what a dangerous thing it was for Gay to be parading down the roads in the middle of the night.

'But nothing happened,' Gay had pleaded to her sister-in-law.

'That's no thanks to you!' retorted Ruth. 'No, Gay. You may not write to anyone while you're here. Remember what I say.'

Small wonder, then, that Jacynth was unable to pay proper attention to Miss Stevens' geography lesson, rousing that lady's wrath more and more till, on being asked to come forward and put in the Labrador current on the big blackboard map, she distinguished herself by printing it in as 'Labrador *currants*,' much to the amusement of everyone.

Meantime Miss Bubb had mounted her bicycle, and set off down the avenue. She turned along the highroad, pedalling along and imagining the coming interview, when she would squash Lady Russell by announcing that she wished to be released at once from her engagement at the school.

'If she thinks that Miss Wilson can manage all the work when she is still not completely recovered from her accident, she is making a great mistake,' thought the lady complacently. 'She'll find that she'll have to come to the rescue herself, I fancy; or let the school suffer. Well, I, for one, should not be sorry. And I'll write to Alma Weaver tonight and tell her that I'll join her in September. There's one thing! Alma will have no use for all the fancy touches they have here. It'll be an ordinary school, with the usual discipline. I shall fit in there much better. And we two were always good friends. We shan't quarrel about trifles.'

She had reached the path leading upwards through the wood to the Round House, so she had, perforce, to dismount and walk her cycle up to the house. There she was shown into the beautiful drawing-room by smiling Marie, who had been with Lady Russell from the time when, as Madge Bettany, she had begun her school on the shores of Tiernsee, the most beautiful lake of all Tirol. Marie had wedded Sir James Russell's servant, André Monier, and the two had remained in the service of the doctor and his wife, having their own rooms in whichever house the family occupied. The Monier babies had been among the earliest playfellows of the Russell children, and Greta, Jacques, José and Petit André had been brought by their parents to England when the Chalet School and the Sanatorium had been forced to leave Tirol after Hitler had marched into Austria. The Moniers had applied for naturalisation papers, but the war had prevented the matter being concluded. However, José and Petit André had both been born in England, so they, at least, could claim British nationality.

Marie left Miss Bubb with the information that Lady Russell would be with her in a moment, and went off to her own quarters. Miss Bubb sat down by one of the open windows, and looked round the room. It did not appeal to her, since she had little taste for the delicate colours, masses of flowers, and dainty prettinesses which Madge Russell loved to have round her. She sniffed at the beautiful old Sheraton furniture, and dismissed the cabinets of Chelsea, Bow, Spode and Wedgwood as 'useless claptrap!' Then the door opened, and Lady Russell came in, her delicate face unusually grave.

'Good morning, Miss Bubb,' she said. 'Will you sit down? Have you had your elevenses? No? Then coffee, please, Rosa,' to Marie's younger sister, who was the Russells' nanny and who had accompanied her to carry little Josette and lay her on a wide settee in a far window. 'I am sorry,' continued Lady Russell, 'but Josette wants to be with me, and just at present we are obliged to spoil her, I'm afraid.—Josette, say "How do you do?" to Miss Bubb, pet.'

Miss Bubb looked at the child. Josette had her mother's black curls and cameo-like features; but her eyes were speedwell-blue. She was very white and thin, poor mite, and there were still marks of suffering on her little face. The tiny hand she held out was clawlike, and Miss Bubb, after greeting her, said to her mother in an undertone, 'How ill she still looks! I am afraid she has had a bad time. I had no idea it was such a serious thing.'

'Oh, she's much better now,' said Madge Russell quickly. 'Of course, she was in a grave condition for some days, and the shock upset her heart. But she is much better now—well on the highroad to recovery. The doctors all say that in a year or so she will be as well as ever. But in the meantime we have to go slowly. No school for her for another year now!'

Josette, satisfied that she was with her mother, had picked up a picture-book and was looking at the pictures, and the low voices of the two ladies at the far side of the room could not reach her.

Miss Bubb turned away, and looked out of the window. Somehow, seeing that fragile-looking small child made her feel as if she could not say any of the very spiteful things she had planned to say on the way up to the Round House. She also suddenly felt something of what the parents must have suffered in Josette's accident.

'How can you ever forgive Sybil?' she burst out. 'I should hate the very sight of her!'

'Oh, no, you wouldn't,' returned Sybil's mother confidently. 'She is just as much our girl as Josette is. She meant no harm to her little sister, and if it had been only an accident, even my husband would not have been angry with her. She has broken her heart over the whole thing, poor little maid. The trouble was that she deliberately disobeyed orders. She has been forbidden to touch the kettle when it is hot. She chose to disobey that order, and our poor baby has had to pay for it physically. I think Sybil has paid quite heavily enough mentally.'

Rosa came in then with the coffee, and Lady Russell changed the conversation while she was in the room. When she had gone, and both were sipping their excellent coffee, while Josette had a mug of milk, the hostess said gently, 'Miss Bubb, I sent for you to ask for your resignation at once. I feel that, perhaps, you do not understand our methods here. I know they are not those of many schools. We are rather a specialised school, you see. As far as possible, we have tried to carry on the traditions and rules we had in Tirol, and we have found them answer well on the whole. This affair of Gay Lambert's is an exception. The girls are all trained to help each other in every possible way. It was with Mr Manders' full knowledge and consent that Gay undertook to teach Jacynth Hardy what she could of the 'cello. I think, perhaps, you did not know that. I am not excusing Gay's rudeness to you, and you were right to punish her. But that punishment should never have included the refusal of her sister's

request. That was really wrong. And it is that which makes me think that this is not the right post for you.'

Miss Bubb looked down. Then she raised her head. 'Perhaps you are right, Lady Russell. I don't understand your methods in the least. To me they seem far too lax. I have been accustomed to a very strict discipline and I have always found it answer well enough. I came today to tell you that a friend has asked me to join her in the boarding-school she has. We were colleagues at the same school for many years, and hold the same views. I shall join her in September, and I think I shall probably find her methods more suited to my ideas. I am sorry to leave you in the lurch,' she added, surprising herself by this statement.

'We are fortunate in having Miss Wilson, who has been with us for twelve years, and knows our theories and practice inside out,' said Madge. 'When I engaged you, it seemed unlikely that we could have her again before half-term, if then. But she has made rapid progress; and this morning I heard from Mlle de Lachenais, who proposes to return after half-term, and who hopes to be able to give some of her lessons, if not all. My sister will continue with the junior Latin; and as Miss Wilson can resume the senior science, and Miss Stevens has volunteered to give up her beloved Juniors for this term and take over all the geography, I think we shall be able to manage.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said Miss Bubb. 'Then, in that case, Lady Russell, I shall leave at the end of next week at latest. I may be able to go earlier, if that would suit you better.'

'As I am going to ask you to leave the school entirely to Miss Wilson and the rest of the Staff,' returned Madge, 'you must suit yourself as to that. And I wish to give you your cheque now. I am sure you did your best; but your ideas aren't ours. I do see that it was very difficult for you to drop into our ways at a moment's notice. But, Miss Bubb, may I tell you one thing I have learnt? It is that it is never well to introduce violent changes into a settled community. It is always best to go slowly.'

Conquered by Madge Russell's gentleness, Miss Bubb replied, 'Perhaps you are right. I will remember that, Lady Russell. But I ask *you* to remember that it is hard for someone who thinks things set on a wrong basis not to want to undo that wrong as quickly as possible if he—or she—has the chance. I may have been too abrupt. But what I did, I did for the best.'

'I am sure of it. Now, here is your cheque. I wish you every possible success and happiness in your new life, and hope you will find in it all you wish.'

Miss Bubb left shortly after that, and when she had gone, Madge discarded her very dignified manner and danced a jig in the middle of the drawing-room, rather to Josette's surprise.

'Well, that's the end of that!' she told her husband, who came in in the middle of the exhibition. 'And never again will I engage staff of any kind whatsoever at a moment's notice. I've done it twice, and each time it has been a flat failure! Remember that Matron we had before we got Matey, when Jo and her gang all developed an appalling habit of shrieking at the tops of their voices? She was one. This is the other. Never no more!'

'I'm glad to hear it,' he retorted. 'I've had a very stiff letter from young Lambert about the affair. He says that Gay will return on Tuesday in charge of some friends. He also requests that we shall take no further notice of her escapade. They seem to have ticked her off pretty thoroughly at home, so I'd advise you to do as he asks. I rather think they are a trifle anxious as to whether she will be taken back; but I can relieve his mind on that point. Gay deserved a good spanking; but she had a good deal of excuse. If you take my advice, you'll tell everyone

to ignore the whole affair, girls and all. That ought to make her feel small, and anxious to forget about it herself.'

'Right you are!' returned his wife. 'Orders to that effect shall be issued forthwith. And now, as I feel rather tired with the effort of remaining Lady-Russell-on-her-dignity, what about a short run as far as the San. with Josette? It would do her good, and it would rest me.'

He laughed. 'You do do mad things, Madge girl. I wish you'd try to remember that you are supposed to keep quiet for the present, and rest as much as possible. You've had a pretty stiff time, you know.'

'I'm quite fit, really. Don't fuss, Jem! I really will be good after this. Now I'm going to get ready and fetch Josette's things. You go and see to the car.'

Meanwhile, Miss Bubb, having gone through the wood, opened the envelope Lady Russell had handed her, and examined its contents. The cheque was for the full term's salary. Seeing that she had intended telling her employer that she meant to leave without further notice, she was rather surprised at this generosity. Lady Russell would have been within her rights if she had made it only for the half-term, for she knew that it was possible that she had done the school irreparable harm, and she had come on trial only. Thinking it over, she decided that she had got more than she deserved.

She left the school on the Monday when she heard that Gay was returning on the Tuesday. She had no wish to meet that young lady again. She passed out of the ken of the Chalet School, and they never heard any more of her.

Joey, on being told her future plans, grimaced violently. 'I'm sorry for the unfortunate school! Thank goodness she's gone before she finished us entirely! And now, Madge, you'd better keep *calm*—quite calm and quiet—for the next week or two. You've had entirely too much excitement during this whole term so far. Do try, my dear girl, to be placid and vegetate a while.' Which advice, coming from tempestuous Jo, left her sister quite speechless for the next sixty seconds!

CHAPTER XV

HALF-TERM

Gay arrived back on the Tuesday, shepherded by Grandma. Her air was half sheepish, half defiant. But the members of the school had had it well rubbed into them that no further notice was to be taken of her doings, so all she got from Miss Wilson when Grandma had marched her into the library, where that lady was established, was, 'Ah, Gay! So here you are again! Matron has tea waiting for you, so bid Mrs Learoyd goodbye for the present and run along quickly.'

Gay had been prepared for almost anything but this, and it took the wind completely out of her sails. She said goodbye to Grandma with the utmost meekness, and departed, greatly wondering what was going to happen. Grandma sat very erect in her chair, and eyed Miss Wilson firmly.

'What are you going to do to the young girl?' she demanded.

'Nothing,' replied 'Bill' sweetly.

'Nothing at all?'

'Nothing at all.'

Grandma said nothing for a minute or two. Then, 'Are you Miss Bubb?' she demanded.

'No,' replied 'Bill.' 'I am Miss Wilson. Miss Bubb was here temporarily only, and she has now left.'

'H'm!' Grandma was rather disconcerted. Like Gay, she had come prepared. She had meant to give Miss Bubb a good-sized piece of her mind, and now it was unnecessary. She did not know quite what to say.

'Bill' took the initiative. 'We have to thank you and Mr Thirlbeck for your kindness in looking after Gay,' she said soberly. 'We do appreciate it, Mrs Learoyd. Lady Russell will come down to the village as soon as she can to thank you herself. She has not been too well lately, and Sir James wishes her to remain quietly at home for the next few weeks. But I know she means to come to see you. We are all deeply grateful to you. Gay is too much of a child to understand the danger she risked, and no one will say anything to enlighten her at present. I don't think she is likely to run away again in a hurry. In the meantime, Lady Russell thinks that it is far better to take no further notice of it. When she has had her tea, I shall send for her and forbid her to speak of it to anyone. And everyone is forbidden to mention it to her. I gather that her home people were very angry with her and scolded her severely for taking the law into her own hands in such a fashion. Now we will forget it, at any rate for the present. Gay returns to her usual school life, and the matter *ends*.'

Grandma nodded. 'I reckon it's the best thing to do. Let her talk, and she'll end by thinking she's done something clever. Stop it altogether, and she'll feel she hasn't. Can you trust your young girls to obey?'

Miss Wilson nodded. 'Oh, yes; they won't talk now that they've been told they must not. But here comes Gwladys with tea for you. I am sure you could do with a cup, and one of Megan's famous light-cakes. I hope it's as you like it,' she added, pouring it out with an inward shudder for its blackness.

But Grandma eyed it with approval. 'That's a good cup of tea,' she said, removing the black kid gloves she had donned for the occasion. 'Thank you, Madam. I am a little thirsty.'

But I mustn't use your sugar. I've got my own.' And she produced a small box from her capacious bag, and sweetened her tea from it, despite 'Bill's' hasty protest that they could easily spare the sugar. 'I always say,' she went on, 'that there's nothing like a good cup of tea to put backbone into you. This one, now—I couldn't have made it better myself.'

She made a hearty tea. When it was over, she sighed, looked at the clock, and began to pull on her gloves again. 'I must be stepping now. I'm glad to have met you, Madam. I can see that you'll know how to handle the young girl. It's a load off my mind, I can tell you.'

'But you surely aren't going to walk to the village?' protested 'Bill.'

'No; but there's a bus passes in twenty minutes if so be it's on time. I'll get that, and be home in half an hour.' She paused. 'Madam, I like that young girl. I'd take it as a favour if you'd let her come to see us sometimes. She's a little lady, if she is naughty. And the other one that was with her the first time, too.' Which was Greek to 'Bill,' who had no means of knowing what she was talking about.

'Gay shall certainly come to see you if you wish it,' replied 'Bill,' smiling. 'She owes you a great deal. But who is the other girl?'

'She called her Jacynth—a heathenish name, to my thinking. *We* were all named out of the Bible. But folks have queer ideas of names nowadays. There's my seven granddaughters—I have seven altogether—and not a Bible name among the lot! The Thirlbeck girls are Maud and Ethel and Pansy; and the other four are Claudia, and Doris, and Irene, and Eileen. I've no patience with young folks nowadays!' And on this note she marched off.

'What an old warrior!' thought 'Bill' with a chuckle, as she carried the tea-tray away to the kitchen regions. 'Matey ought to meet her. Well, now to send for Miss Gay and forbid her to talk of her escapade!'

On the whole, Gay was very glad to get off so lightly, even if she did feel rather small over the whole thing. 'Bill' simply said to her, 'You are not to talk at all of your latest silly prank, Gay. No one is in the least interested or amused. You have acted like a silly little girl, but your own people seem to have attended to that matter, so we will say no more about it. There is nearly an hour's prep to go. You had better go to your form-room, find out what you have to do, and get on with it.'

As Gay remarked a couple of years later, all the guilt was taken off the gingerbread by this. She left the room feeling as if she were Lower Third instead of Lower Fifth—and a very poor Lower Third at that!

The only thing that happened was that no excuse was made for anything she had lost during the time, and she had to work hard to make up for it. As a result, she had little time to spare for anything. She contrived to give Jacynth a 'cello lesson, and commended her pupil highly for the progress she was making. With Miss Bubb settled, Jacynth had managed to give an hour a day to the 'cello which Miss Wilson had produced, and which was not much too large for her to manage easily. Moreover, 'Bill' had insisted on hearing what she could do, and after the ordeal was over, had remarked, 'Now, listen to me, Jacynth. I don't play the 'cello myself. My sister who died was the musical one in our family, and if she had lived, I believe she would have done very well indeed. I have no near relations who care about this instrument. I believe you do. You shall have the loan of it for the present, and Gay may teach you as much as she can. On the day that Mr Manders says you are good enough for him to teach, it shall be your very own. I will give it to you in memory of my sister Cherry.'

Jacynth's eyes were like twin grey stars. 'Oh, Miss Wilson!' Then her face fell. 'But Mr Manders will never have anything to do with me. We can't run to extras, you know. And I'm

getting lots, anyhow,' she added sturdily.

'Bill' smiled. 'Mr Manders is certain to want to know what Gay has done with you. He will probably ask to hear you play at the end of the term. He is very pleased that she is trying to help you, for, among other things, in doing so she is learning herself. If it is not too much work for her, he will probably leave you to her for another term or two. But, unless I am very much mistaken in my opinion of him, after that, and if you have made the progress I feel you ought, he will almost certainly insist on having you as a pupil. I know something about it,' she added, 'for though I have never played myself, I spent all my school and varsity years in a musical household, and I couldn't help picking up a good deal. It seems to me that you have gone ahead unusually quickly. Primrose Day, who has learnt for two terms, is not much further on than you. You shall be given proper practising times and places in the music timetable, and you must make the most of them. Now run along, and take the 'cello with you to the music-room.—And go and tidy your hair while you're about it,' she added. 'You look as if it hadn't had a brush or comb near it for a fortnight!'

Jacynth left the room, lugging the precious 'cello in its canvas case with her, and inwardly vowing to put in every spare moment at practice. How wonderful 'Bill' was! She'd show her how grateful she was by the way she worked at it. And her lessons, too, should be done well.

Alas for human proposals! Jacynth was fated to do little more practice or lessons either for the next few weeks.

It began about ten days after Gay returned to school. She had been unaccountably snappish the last day or so, and had nearly quarrelled with Gillian. She had quite done it with Beth Chester, who was as hot-tempered as her chestnut locks proclaimed.

'What on earth's wrong with you, Gay?' demanded Mollie Avery on the Saturday night when they were undressing after a pleasant evening spent in the garden. 'You're as cross as a bear with a sore paw. Aren't you well?'

'I'm all right!' snapped Gay. 'You mind your own business—atish-oo!'

'You've got cold,' said Daisy Venables, seeing that Beth was refusing to speak to Gay, who had 'cheeked' her right and left that morning. 'You'd better go to Matey for some quinine and cinnamon.'

'Shan't! And do mind your own bus—atishoo—atishoo—ATISHOO!'

'Who's that with a cold at this time of year?' demanded Matron herself from the doorway. She had been passing down the corridor, and had reached their dormitory just in time to hear Gay's last violent explosion. She came in, and pitched on the victim at once. 'Gay Lambert! Your eyes are streaming! What in the world have you been doing to get a cold like this? Let me feel your hand!' She grasped one of Gay's hands, and her face changed as she felt its heat. 'H'm! I see! Off you go to sick-room. Take your pyjamas and washing materials. The rest of you stay here, and wait to go to the bathrooms till I say you may. Beth, no one is to leave this room.' Then she went off, leaving them staring at each other.

Beth, a doctor's daughter, grasped the situation at once. 'It's something infectious—measles, most likely, as she's sneezing like that! We shall all be in quarantine. And it's half-term next week-end!' At which awful reminder they began to protest loudly and wildly.

'But I was going to Jo's for the week-end. Veta and her babes are there, and I'm dying to see them! Since she's been teaching up here, Jo hasn't let me go home so far this term; but she promised she'd have us all for half-term—the McDonalds, and Primula, and Robin, and me!'

'If it's anything like measles, Jo won't let you come within a mile of her—especially if she's got Veta's kids there as well as her own,' retorted Gwensi Howell. 'And *you* won't be

able to go home either, Bethy. We'll *none* of us be able to go anywhere—not if it's measles, anyhow!

But a bigger blow was yet to fall. Frances Coleman had been staring at Beth with a face filled with horror. Now she spoke. 'Nan Blakeney's wedding! We'd have to miss that! It's in a month's time, and if we have measles in the school the whole lot will be quarantined! You know how it can go on and *on*! I don't suppose we'll get anywhere at all for the rest of the term! Oh! How—how *awful* of Gay!'

That was the general feeling. Mollie Avery had been invited to spend half-term with her godmother, whose husband was Rector in one of the villages near by. Half-term coincided with the church fête, and Mollie had anticipated all kinds of fun, for her godmother was an indulgent lady, who spoilt her goddaughter up to the hilt. But even she would refuse to let loose a possible measles case amongst all the parishioners. Frances would have gone home, since she lived a little way beyond Cheltenham; but there were a small brother and sister there, and her mother would flatly refuse to run the risk of Frank and Cicely catching measles from their elder sister. Gillian, Jacynth, and Gay herself, had all been invited to go home with Jesanne Gellibrand, a Senior, whose home was less than twenty' miles away from Howells village as the crow flies, though it took two hours to get there by road. Jesanne was a great heiress, and the Dragon House was one of the show places in the district. It had not been taken over by the Government because it was so far from everywhere. Evacuees had been sent there at first, but had refused to stay. It was too difficult of access for a hospital or convalescent home, and, in any case, the National Trust would have stepped in, for it was a veritable treasure-house, with walls lined with amazing woodcarving and many other objects of art. Jesanne's old cousin, Sir Ambrose Gellibrand, who had left it all to her, had given it as a gift to the National Trust with the proviso that Jesanne and her descendants—'if any,' to quote Jesanne herself—should be permitted to live there so long as they combined with the Trust to keep it in order. There were many stories connected with it, including one about a lost staircase, and Jesanne had faithfully promised to retail them all to her guests during half-term. Now that would be at an end.

In short, Gay's running away was to have far greater and more far-reaching consequences than anyone had expected. Matron sent for the doctor next day, and he shook his head and refused to say anything for the moment. But the school must stay in quarantine for the present, until he could say definitely what it was she had. He scarcely thought it was measles; it looked more like epidemic roseola—'or German measles,' he explained to 'Bill,' who had listened to him with a long face. 'We must wait till the rash comes out; but I'm almost certain that's what it will be.'

'Good heavens! How long is the quarantine?' asked 'Bill.'

'Oh, about fourteen to twenty-one days,' he said cheerfully.

'Jack Maynard! And Nan Blakeney's wedding takes place at the end of the month. And the exams begin the following week! Oh, I should like to wring Gay Lambert's neck!' wailed 'Bill.'

'I don't doubt it! In the meantime, Jo can't come up as usual. There are all the small fry to consider. And what about Simone's little Thérèse?'

'Thérèse has been kept pretty strictly to quarters. She's been cutting some teeth, and Simone kept her quiet. The girls haven't seen her for a fortnight. And Simone's room is right at the end of the east wing, away from the school altogether. Matey arranged it that way, so that Thérèse shouldn't disturb the girls and they shouldn't wake her. But Simone must keep

out of school for her sake. So that's Jo and Simone off the Staff list for the next fortnight at least. I suppose it'll be all right after that?"

"If Gay has it—which I'm pretty certain she has—then she will have infected the others during the past two or three days, I suppose. Yes; I think you may say that a month should end the quarantine. But we'll make it another week, just for safety's sake."

It had to be done. They could not be too careful with the girls. The Kindergarten and Juniors had very little to do with the older girls, so they were all to be moved to the west wing, and kept there with their own mistresses. It was possible that most of the Seniors would have escaped. But Lower Fourth to Lower Fifth were all to be watched closely, and kept apart from the rest. And Gillian and Jacynth, as Gay's special chums, were to be separated even from their own dormitory, as they were the most likely to have taken the illness from her.

The fiat went forth, and for the next few hours the Chalet School was turned topsy-turvy while the new arrangements were made. Jacynth and Gillian were sent to a spare room and forbidden to leave it till Matron had seen them. The Kindergarten were rooted out of their accustomed places and re-established in the west wing, and the baize-covered door between that and the rest of the house was locked and bolted. Certain parts of the grounds were set aside for them, and everyone was made to gargle with Dettol, have a bath and shampoo with Matron's pet disinfectant in the water, and given a dose of syrup of figs as a precaution. The same measures were taken with the rest of the school, of course; but, as Matron said grimly, more than likely it was too late for the Middles. By six o'clock the rash was well out, and Dr Jack was proved right. Gay had brought German measles into the school!

"Jolly unpatriotic of her!" Daisy had to say. "If she wanted any sort of measles, what's the matter with English ones?"

"I'm very thankful it isn't that!" retorted her Uncle Jack, to whom she said it. "I'd rather deal with half a dozen German measles epidemics than one of ordinary. At least you do know where you are with it!"

"Well, she's hashed up all our fun very nicely!" returned Daisy crossly. "I really should like to shake her. I suppose Prim's all right?"

"She's very well, so far. I don't think it's so likely to spread to the little ones. You people are the most likely candidates for it."

"Then it'll spoil our chances for School Cert. We shouldn't be ready to take that, should we, if we got it?"

"When, exactly, does it begin?"

"July 10th."

"And if you've been infected it should show about the middle of June. No, my child, you certainly *won't* be able to sit for it at that rate. Still, you might not get it. I should go on revising till we can see."

"I suppose we'd better. So we don't even get a holiday from work for this! I call it the *edge!*"

So school went on as usual until the Thursday. No one was anxious about Gay, who remained very miserable for a day or two. Then her temperature went down, her appetite came back, and her main anxiety was to be allowed to get up, as she was no lover of bed in the daytime.

But half-term was not in the least like itself. The various divisions of the school were kept apart, and the Staff, who were really very good, devoted themselves to amusing the girls as well as they could. Matron went round every morning to take temperatures and examine

tongues; and the same rite was performed at eight o'clock every night. Two big dormitories had been converted into additional sick-rooms, and anyone who was the least bit out of order would be transferred first to one; then, if the trouble proved to be German measles, they would be moved on to the other. However, nothing was likely to show itself just yet, and the girls were all agog to know how they would spend half-term.

It began with picnics for everyone. Each mistress removed her own form to some part of the very extensive grounds. They took sandwiches and little fruit pies with them—Megan and the kitchen staff had had a busy day of it on the Wednesday!—kettles, and bottles of milk. They lit fires in the most approved Guide manner, and boiled their kettles. Water was easy to get, for Armshire is a county of brooks, wells, and springs, and as long as the water was boiled, it would hurt no one. Then games were the order of the day. Lower Fourth had a thrilling time with tip-and-run, until they were all so hot that they begged off, and Miss Burnett let them sit down, and producing a typescript, read them a short story by their own special writer, Jo Maynard. Upper Fourth, in charge of Hilary Burn, and settled at the far side of the great park, organised sports, including a hectic obstacle race, where competitors had to hop for the first hundred yards, turn six cartwheels, climb up a tree where Hilary had tied some potatoes, and run for a hundred yards, each carrying her potato in her mouth. Then they had to run three times round an old tree-stump before putting the potato into a basket standing on top of it; do a frog's-march for fifty yards and back again, seize a potato from the basket and peel it—knives were on the ground beside the stump—and finally run the last hundred yards to pop their burden into a bowl at the winning-post. This very sporting event was won by Mary Burnett's sister, Peggy; and the other races were fairly evenly divided. Lower Fifth, in the grove at the back of the house, held a tree-climbing competition, which fell to Nancy Canton, who proudly boasted later that she had gone up all but five of the trees that formed the little woodland patch. Upper Fifth, with an eye to their dignity, organised a jigsaw competition, since all were keen and the school had plenty. They carried it on by pairing off, and then mixing two jigsaws for each pair. The girl who could get hers disentangled and finished first was to have a copy of Jo Maynard's newest book for a prize. The book would not be out till the autumn, but that made them all the more keen, for Jo had promised one of her own copies, so that whoever won would be first in the school to read it. The honour fell to two cousins, Hilary Wyatt and her Dutch cousin, Lysbet van Lange, who both shrieked 'Done!' at the same moment.

'Jo must give two copies,' said Joanna Linders, a German girl who, with her elder sister, Emmie, now training as a child-nurse, had escaped from Nazi Germany in the previous autumn.

'How pleased she will be!' chuckled Daisy. 'I'll break the glad news to her when I see her again.'

The two Sixth Forms picnicked together, and amused themselves with knitting, reading, singing glees, sketching or needlework, as became young ladies of seventeen and eighteen. As for the three miserable sinners, Gay, Gillian and Jacynth, who were in stricter quarantine than the rest, Mately felt so sorry for them that she established the last two on the wide terrace under sick-room window and allowed Gay, who was almost well now, to wrap a shawl round herself and sit at the open window and talk to them. It was a hot day, with no wind; German measles is never a serious illness, and Gay was almost fit enough to go out. But Mately was taking no chances. When she thought her patient had been there long enough, she brought her

in, gave her a book to amuse herself, and sent Gillian and Jacynth off to one of the tennis-courts for a good single.

Thursday, then, was quite a happy day. But when they woke up on Friday it was to the sound of wind wuthering mournfully in the trees and heavy rain beating against the windows. The Staff hastily convened a meeting in Miss Wilson's bedroom, at which they appeared in various stages of undress, and the result was a notice put up, before any girl was up, in each form-room. A special version of 'Mrs Jarley' would be shown to each division of the school, beginning with the Juniors at half-past two. The Middles' show came along at five, and the Seniors' at seven.

'How sporting of the Staff!' was the general opinion when the girls had read the notices.

'It must be a repetition of what they did years ago in Tirol,' said Robin Humphries. 'I wasn't there; but Jo was, and told me about it. Miss Stewart was Bonny Prince Charlie, and Matey was Florence Nightingale; and Bill was Mrs Jarley, all stuffed out with cushions. Jo said she spoke in a deep bass voice most of the time, and they couldn't recognise her for *ages!*'

'How gorgeous!' chuckled Monica Marilliar. 'But she won't be able to do Mrs Jarley this time, Rob. She'll have to take on something less strenuous. I wonder who *will* do it?'

'We shall see this evening. In the meantime, there's the gong for breakfast, and German measles or no German measles, I'm hungry!' And Robin led the way into the small form-room which had been turned into a Senior dining-room for the time being.

As for Middles, they were thrilled when they heard that their own show was to be in the big entrance hall; because, as their notice explained, there was a musicians' gallery at the far end, and Gillian and Jacynth could sit there and see the fun. Only Gay would be out of it, and the Staff were on the whole not sorry. After all, it was she who had brought German measles into the school!

After breakfast the girls made their beds as usual, then wrote letters and employed themselves with their various hobbies. The Seniors 'bagged' Hall, and spent an hour doing country dances. The Middles went for the gym and begged Miss Burn to show them various complicated 'stunts.' The Babies played all the good old-fashioned games in the Kindergarten. It was a very jolly morning. In the afternoon, while the excited Juniors enjoyed watching the antics of Mrs and Master Jarley and the waxworks, the two older sections of the school planned in their several rooms some sort of return for the mistresses. Tea was served to them at four, and when five came, the Middles had their turn. The Seniors had theirs at seven; and at nine the exhausted Staff were lying about the common-room in attitudes of complete limpness. But they had the satisfaction of knowing that they had filled in another cheery day for the school.

'And that,' said Mary Burnett as she discarded the beard and wig of dyed tow she had worn for William Tell, 'is just as well, considering what may lie before us in the near future.'

CHAPTER XVI

GERMAN MEASLES!

The rest of half-term passed off as well as the first two days had done, and when the girls began work again on the Tuesday morning, all declared that they had had quite as good a time as they had ever had.

'It really hasn't been too bad, not even for us,' said Gillian Culver to Jacynth as they sat in their lonely room, working together. 'Gay came out of it worst, poor lamb.' Then, as her companion made no reply, she turned and looked at her. 'Why, Jacynth!' she exclaimed. 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing! Let me alone, and get on with your work!' growled Jacynth.

Gillian stared at her again, and opened her lips to speak. Then she shut them firmly, and turned to struggle with the logarithm problems Miss Slater had set her. But she kept one eye on Jacynth all the same, and she soon saw that the younger girl was doing very little. Most of the time she was sitting tapping the table with her pencil and staring unseeingly through the window. In spite of the snub she had just received, Gillian tried again.

'Don't you feel well?' she demanded. 'Shall I ask Matey to come?' For she promptly jumped to the conclusion that Jacynth was sickening for German measles.

'No; I'm all right! I don't want *anybody*! You let me alone!'

Gillian returned meekly to her work, but those logarithms were enough to make Miss Slater's hair stand on end, for Gillian's mind was anything but on them. She was busy wondering what was wrong with Jacynth. Suddenly she had an inspiration. Jacynth had had two letters that morning. Gillian, as well as Gay, knew all about 'Auntie' by this time. There must be bad news of her!

'I'm just going to the staff-room to ask Miss Slater about this,' she said airily as she got up. 'I can't make head or tail of it.'

'You'll get into a row, then,' returned Jacynth indifferently.

'I'll have to put up with that. I'm getting more and more muddled, and I can't see the thing straight at all.' And Gillian slipped out, deliberately disobeying Matron's strict command that they were to stay where they were till ten-thirty, when they would have their Break away from the others. Jacynth paid no heed. She didn't even see the compound fraction on which she was supposed to be working. One of her two letters had come from Dr Harper, and told her that today Auntie was to have the dreaded operation. He had said that she was as well prepared for it as possible, and promised to wire the result as soon as it was over. It was against his own will that he had written; but Miss Leonard had insisted that he should. She knew that, with all the careful nursing she had had to fit her as far as possible for the ordeal, her heart was not as strong as they wished, and she felt that Jacynth should have some sort of preparation for what might come. She had herself written to Lady Russell, explaining matters fully. But Lady Russell was very poorly herself just now, and Sir James had insisted that all letters must wait for the next day or two until she was stronger again.

'There won't be anything that can't wait that time,' he had said, not knowing about Auntie. 'Here's the MS. of Jo's latest for you. Jack brought your carbon copy up last night. You just amuse yourself with that, and do no worrying about anything. Josette is pounds better

again. I'm taking her with me in the car to the San. this morning, so you've nothing to bother about. We'll be back for lunch, and she shall come up and have it with you.'

Thus adjured, his wife settled herself against her pillows with Jo's latest effort, and her knitting on the bedside table, and gave herself over to her young sister's gay story.

At the school, Gillian had raced along the corridors, poked her head into the staff-room to make her remark about Miss Slater true, and then went in search of Miss Wilson, feeling that that lady would be able to do something about Jacynth. She found her at last in her own room, where she tapped rather nervously at the door. It was an unheard-of thing for anyone to go to a mistress's bedroom; but Gillian felt it was a case for strong measures.

Miss Wilson's astonishment knew no bounds when, in answer to her 'Come in!' instead of Matey or one of the maids, as she expected, Gillian Culver's pale face, framed in chestnut locks, appeared round the door.

'Gillian!' she exclaimed. 'What does this mean?'

Gillian went pink. 'Please, Miss Wilson, I know it's awful of me, but could you come to Jacynth Hardy? I'm afraid she's had bad news of her auntie. She looks dreadful, and I don't know quite what to do.'

'Bad news of her aunt?' cried Miss Wilson. 'What do you mean, Gill?'

'Her auntie who's brought her up has to have a very bad operation. She had an accident, and hasn't been able to walk for years. But there's a clever surgeon who thinks he can put her right, only it's a very big thing,' explained Gillian rather incoherently. 'Jacynth had a letter this morning, and I'm afraid she's had it and it—it isn't—well, it isn't all right after all. She's awfully miserable. *Do* come, Miss Wilson!'

'Bill' reached for her stick. 'Of course I'll come. You run off and find Matron, only keep away from anyone else. Then you can go out into the Staff garden till I send for you. Tell Matron I should like to see her in twenty minutes' time, will you? Ask her to come to the library.'

Gillian said, 'Yes, Miss Wilson,' very properly, and left the room to go on her errand. Halfway there, she suddenly realised the enormity of her conduct, and only just checked a long whistle of surprise. She had broken all sorts of rules, and 'Bill' hadn't said a word!

Matron was a very different pair of shoes. 'Gillian Culver!' she exclaimed when Gillian appeared at the door of the linen-room where she was sorting out the clean bed-linen. 'What are you doing here, you naughty girl?'

'Miss Wilson sent me to ask you to please go to her in the library in twenty minutes' time,' said Gillian soberly.

Matron promptly jumped to the same conclusion as Gillian had done at first. 'Are you all right?' she demanded. 'Here! Come to my room and I'll take your temperature at once!'

'It isn't me—it's Jacynth,' said Gillian ungrammatically. 'And it isn't measles—it's her auntie.'

Matron gasped. 'What *do* you mean? Explain yourself, please!'

Gillian explained matters as far as she could, and Matron, by dint of questioning, soon got all she knew. She looked thoughtful as she listened. 'And Miss Wilson has gone to her? Very well; run along to the garden as you were told. I'll go to Miss Wilson. You'd better stay outside till we see.' Then she added, 'I beg your pardon for scolding you, Gillian. You were quite right to disobey in this instance. Now be off with you!'

'And that's the beauty of our Staff!' thought Gillian as she made her way to the pretty rose-garden which was the Staff's special stamping-ground. 'They are so fair. And if they

think they've been wrong they always say so. No wonder this is such a glorious school!

Left alone, Matron thought for a minute or two. 'Gillian may say it isn't measles; but I had my eye on Jacynth Hardy this morning. She was normal, but she didn't look quite right to me. I wonder if she ate her breakfast?' She turned back to her sorting, and finished it in double-quick time. Then she straightened her cap and went off to the library, where Miss Wilson awaited her.

'Come in, Matey,' she said. 'Well, I suppose you got the tale from Gillian? I'm sorry the doctor thought it necessary to let Jacynth know the operation is today. I'm afraid she's going to worry herself into a fever. However, it's done now, and can't be undone. But I want you to look at her. Her eyes look heavy to me, and when I asked her, she owned that her head ached a little. It may just be trouble over her aunt, of course; but, on the other hand, it's about ten days since Gay came down, and it's as well to be careful.'

'I thought she didn't look quite like herself this morning,' said Matron. 'But she was normal when I took her temperature, so I let it go. Where is she, Nell?'

'In the room she is sharing with Gill Culver. I sent her there, and told her to lie down till you came to her. Go and see her, and see what you think. I think myself that she's in for it. Jack Maynard will know. He's coming up this afternoon. I've just rung him up.'

Matron went to seek Jacynth, and a very brief examination told her all she wished to know. Jacynth was up a point or two. The rash had not yet come out; but then it does not always show in German measles. Matron left her, bidding her try to get a nap if she could, and went to prepare a bed in sick-room, where Gay watched her with keen interest.

'Matey, I do feel a pig!' she said, as she came to help with spreading sheets and blankets. 'I never meant this sort of thing to happen!'

'I don't suppose you did. All I hope is that the exam people don't get it. That would be the worst of all. But it isn't only measles with Jacynth. She's had news today that her aunt is undergoing that operation, and she's fretting about it, naturally.'

'Oh, poor Jacynth! I know she's been dreading it. You see, Matey, she hasn't anyone but her auntie. If—if—Oh, I could kick myself!'

'That won't do any good, Gay. Now, child, I'm going to send you to one of the other rooms for the present. Jacynth has been crying, and her head is aching rather badly, so I want her to be quiet. If she seems better later on, you shall come in and sit with her a little. Perhaps you can comfort her. But just at first, I'd rather she were alone. I hope she will drop off to sleep soon.'

Matron finished off the bed, escorted Gay to the second of the big dormitories prepared, and left her there with books, jigsaw, and a pack of patience cards, and went to take Jacynth to sick-room, where she soon put her to bed. Jacynth felt languid and heavy. Her head ached, and she was hot and shivery, both together. She had cried out the worst of her anxiety in Miss Wilson's kind arms, and only a dull, heavy feeling of trouble hung over her now. She was glad to lay her hot head on the cool linen pillow, and when Matron had tucked her in and darkened the room, she dropped off into an uneasy sleep, which worried that good-hearted tyrant when she looked in about noon and heard the child talking rapidly in her slumber.

'I'm afraid she's in for a bad bout,' she told Miss Wilson. 'I know German measles isn't anything much as a rule. Gay was never really ill after the first two days. Many children never feel ill at all. But Jacynth is a nervy, highly-strung child, and this worry isn't the best thing for her. What are we going to do about letting her people know?'

‘Nothing, at present. There is only this aunt, and obviously she can’t be troubled with it. If Jacynth has it badly, I shall write to the doctor and tell him. She gave me the letter to read, and left it with me, so I have the address.’

‘Then please copy it at once and burn the letter,’ said Matron promptly. ‘Jacynth has handled it, so it will be infected. There’s no mistake. She’s got German measles all right. I expect the rash, if it’s coming, will be out by tonight. But I hope Jack Maynard comes up soon. I don’t like her looks.’

‘Bill’ looked anxious. ‘Keep her apart from Gay, Matey. Shall we prepare another room so as to leave her alone?’

‘It would be better—for the present, at any rate. Warn the rest to keep watch on the others. Anyone the least off-colour must go to sick-room.’

‘Yes, of course. Gillian seems all right, at present.’

‘I’m inclined to believe she will escape. However, there are still four or five days to go before we can be certain.’

By the time Jack Maynard arrived at the school there were seven cases for him to look at, and he pronounced them all to be German measles. So far the exam people had escaped, and none of the Seniors was affected. Jacynth was going to have it badly, he feared. The rest were just not quite up to the mark.

‘And *that* will keep you busy, Matey!’ he told her with a grin. ‘You’ll have your work cut out keeping them in bed.’

‘Don’t worry! I’ll see they obey orders!’ she said grimly.

‘I’ll bet you will! You do bully those poor kids!’

‘All for their own good! By the way, Gay can go out now, can’t she, so long as she keeps away from the rest for the present?’

‘Oh, yes; do her good. There’s nothing wrong with her now. She ought to be back in school the week after next.’ Then his voice changed. ‘Any news yet of the aunt?’

‘Nothing so far. They weren’t going to operate till this afternoon, and it’s bound to be a long operation. I don’t suppose we’ll hear much before six. I hope it’s good news.’

‘The best will probably be that she’s come through it all right. They aren’t likely to know much more for a day or two. It’ll be a question of keeping her going till she’s over the shock, I expect.’

‘Can’t you come back about six and hear the news? If it’s bad—well, I’d like you to be on hand.’

‘If it’s bad, Jacynth isn’t to know for a day or two yet. Her temp.’s rising steadily, and she must have no agitation till we get it back to normal. I suppose you haven’t this Dr Harper’s telephone number?’

‘Nell Wilson probably has. Ask her.’

‘Right! I will. Well, I’ll leave them in your hands just now. I’ll come back about six if I can. Mind; Jacynth is to hear nothing unless she asks until I’ve seen her again. Just tell her there’s no news yet. But she probably won’t ask. She’ll be inclined to ramble. These highly-strung children are all alike.’

No news had come through when he turned up again at six; but five more suspects awaited him, and Matron was doubtful about three others. He examined the lot, said he thought they were all in for it, and then went to Jacynth. As he had expected, she was light-headed most of the time and took no notice of anything round her. He sat down beside her.

‘I’ll stay with her for a little. You go and get a rest, Matey. If this goes on, I’m sending a nurse in. I’ll wait and see what she’s like at eight.’

At half-past seven the long-awaited news came. Dr Harper put in a trunk call to the school, and asked for the Head. ‘Bill’ was in sick-room at the time, and she turned to the doctor anxiously. ‘Can you come too? I—I feel anxious. If it had been all right they’d surely just have wired.’

‘Get Matey, then. Jacynth mustn’t be left a moment.’

Matron came at once, and they raced downstairs. But Dr Harper had requested a six-minutes call. It was very little, really, that he had to say. The operation had been performed successfully, and if Miss Leonard’s strength held out, all would be well. But her heart was giving them anxiety. They were rung off then, but Jack Maynard put a call through to the doctor at once, and when they got him, told him of Jacynth’s illness, and asked him to keep in touch with them, and give them any news he could.

Dr Harper was horrified to hear how ill the child was. He promised to try to get through to them first thing in the morning with the latest news, but it struck the pair at Plas Howell that he had very little hope that his news would be good. Then they left the ’phone, and Jack went back to Jacynth again. At eight o’clock he rang up the big Sanatorium at the other side of the mountains and demanded a nurse. Matron had her hands full already, and Jacynth would need great care for the next day or two.

By the next evening there were twenty-three cases in the sick-rooms, and Jacynth’s temperature was still high. Her rambling told the people who watched her a great deal about her home, and what Auntie meant to her. Miss Wilson, sitting beside her, looked down at the flushed little face with grave pity. Jacynth talked of how necessary it was for her to work hard so that she could gain the Thérèse Lepattre; of her longing to learn the ’cello, and her determination to ask Auntie for nothing she could avoid; of her fondness for Gay, and of Gay’s goodness to her; of her deep anxiety over Auntie.

Dr Maynard came in quietly, and set about examining his patient. Then he beckoned the nurse to the window, and gave her brief directions, which set her hurrying about with a quiet swiftness. ‘Bill’ looked at them with dread in her heart, and he caught her glance.

‘Don’t look so worried, Nell. We’re going to do something to reduce the temperature; that’s all. Once we can get that down, she’ll be all right. Children are quickly down and quickly up, you know. Nurse will try sponging, and I’ve ordered an ice-bag for her head. And I think we’ll get rid of some of this mop of hers. It’s far too thick.’

An hour later he came to the library, where he had sent Miss Wilson to wait, and told her that their measures had been successful. Jacynth was cooler already; the temperature was beginning to drop a little, and she seemed inclined to sleep.

‘Thank God!’ said ‘Bill’ fervently. ‘I was beginning to be badly afraid.’

‘I didn’t like that temp. myself,’ he admitted. ‘However, I think she’ll go on all right now. By the way, I’ve got a drop for you. Mary Shaw and Jack le Pelley are down now. Aren’t they exam people?’

‘Yes; but I can’t fuss about them now. I suppose it’s as light as the other cases have been?’

‘Oh, yes; nothing to worry about. Mary informed me she felt “just plain mad.” However, her exam doesn’t come off for another four weeks, so she won’t miss anything. Jack won’t sit her School Cert., though. However, it doesn’t seem to worry her unduly. She informed me that she’d felt certain she’d go flat in arithmetic, so it didn’t really matter one way or the other.’

'Bill' laughed for the first time in two days. 'How like Jack! Well, it simply means she'll have to take it at Christmas.'

'Now it's getting late, and you've had a bad two days of it, so you can just go to bed and get a good sleep. That child will be all right now. I've told Mately, and she'll see you do as I tell you.'

'Jack! You really *are*——!'

'I dare say! I know what you are. Here comes Mately, and I'm off. I've seen next to nothing of my family lately, and Jo's beginning to kick. With luck, I ought to get two or three hours with her tonight.'

'They're all quite all right?'

'Not a measles among the lot! Good night, Bill! Mately, see that she does what she's told. I'll be up in the morning.' And he was off before any more could be said.

Next morning there was good news of all the patients. Jacynth was nearly normal, and had had two good sleeps during the night. There were no more cases, and those there were were so nearly fit that they were inclined to be rampageous. Matron dealt with them in her usual manner.

'Now that's enough! You'll either do as you're told and stay in bed till the doctor says you can get up, or I'll dose you all with Gregory and senna. Take your choice! Which is it to be?'

That settled them! They knew that Matron was quite capable of fulfilling her threat, so they settled down, and any further grumbling that was done was done *sotto voce*.

At midday Dr Maynard put in an appearance, and announced that if no further cases occurred by the morrow, the school was clear, and work could continue as usual. Then he asked for Miss Wilson in the library.

'What is it, Jack?' she asked fearfully when they were alone.

'I had another talk with Harper this morning,' he said. 'I'm sorry, Nell, but they're afraid Miss Leonard is going to slip through their fingers. In itself the operation promises to be a complete success; but her strength is failing rapidly. They are doing all they can. That American chap must be a wonder. Harper says that it's a miracle she has hung on so long. He gave me a few details, and I had a letter this morning explaining matters very fully. Jem has seen it, and he says it's amazing they've kept her alive as long as they have. But even Harper seems to be losing heart now. They say she's worked herself to death, trying to provide for the kiddy's future. No one knew. They rather kept themselves to themselves, you see. But I'm afraid it's just going to turn the scale against her. She's put up a great fight; and so have they. But—well, I'm afraid we must be prepared for the worst.'

'What about Jacynth? How much can we tell her? Nurse says she's been asking, but as *she* knew nothing, she quieted her for the time being. But that can't go on, of course.'

Jack thought hard for a minute or two. 'Harper will let me know how things go. For the present, until Jacynth is stronger, I shall tell you no more. If Jacynth asks, tell her that the operation seems likely to be a success, but her aunt is very ill and weak as it was such a bad one. I won't risk that temp. rising again. Let her get accustomed to the fact of her aunt's serious illness. It will help to soften things a little if Miss Leonard really goes under. Now I must go. Measles has broken out in the village. An old Mrs Learoyd—you know the people who took over the shop from Mrs Parry?—well, the old grandma has begun with it.'

'Grandma? That old warrior? Oh, good gracious!'

'Why? Do you know her?'

‘I had the honour of entertaining her to tea. She brought Gay back. They must have got the infection at the same time. What a joke! She isn’t bad, I hope?’

‘Well—at her age, even German measles isn’t a thing to be taken very lightly. But there’s no need to worry. The trouble is, she’s given it to her grandchildren—four of them down at once; and the baby sickening for it, or I’m much mistaken. And, of course, they’ll have infected the school. I foresee a busy time for the next few weeks. I’ve told Jo to keep our youngsters away from the village for the present, and sent word to Frieda and the rest. And you must keep to the bounds we’ve given for the past ten days or so. No need to start a new epidemic.’

The next day saw the end of the quarantine at school. There had been twenty-seven cases in all, of which Jacynth had been the only one to cause any anxiety. Her temperature was normal now, and she was very weak still, but gaining ground rapidly. Only Mary Shaw and the irrepressible Jack le Pelley were victims among the exam girls, much to everyone’s relief. That day also brought the last news of Miss Leonard. She had slipped away during the night, and Jacynth was now alone in the world. She was not to be told till she was much stronger, as the doctors feared the effect on her.

So ‘Auntie’ had slept for a fortnight in the sheltered graveyard of St Matthias’ church before her little niece knew that she had gone. Then, one sunny afternoon, when the patient was carried out to the Staff garden where the roses were blooming thickly, and the sun shone gaily, Jo Maynard came quietly to her, and placed a letter in her hands.

‘From Auntie!’ cried Jacynth as she saw the address. ‘When did it come?’

‘Ten days ago. Wait a moment, Jacynth, before you open it. I have something to tell you.’

Jacynth looked up into the beautiful black eyes, soft as pansies, and her face changed. ‘Auntie—auntie—’ she began.

Jo put an arm round her. ‘Ah, you don’t need me to tell you, do you, darling? Auntie has gone to join your mummy and daddy. She will never know any more pain, or sickness. And, Jacynth, she has trusted you to us. She wrote to my sister and told her so. You are ours now. But I understand that Gay has something to say in the matter too. Presently, when you want her, she will come to you. But though you must feel lonely now, and cry too, remember, darling, that for Auntie it is well. And never forget that we are yours just as much as you are ours.’ She bent and kissed the child, and left the garden, going round to the farther side, where her own little folk were playing happily. Jacynth, her letter clutched to her, tears raining down her face, felt the comfort even in those first moments of desolation, and realised dimly the tenderness that tried to take the bitterness from her first grief.

CHAPTER XVII

AUNTIE—AND GAY

It was some time before Jacynth could control her sobs sufficiently to let her open and read Auntie's last letter. Jo Maynard, sitting on the grass behind the hedge, within earshot, so that she could go to the child if it was necessary, became rather uneasy. But at last they ceased. She heard the rustle of paper, and knew that Jacynth was reading the last message.

Alone in the rose-garden, Jacynth smoothed out the well-filled sheets, and began to read slowly.

'MY DARLING JACYNTH,—If you get this, it means that I have gone to join the sister I loved better than anyone on earth—your mother. You will feel very sad and lonely, I know, my darling, for we have been everything to each other. But will you try to remember, Jacynth, that I am very tired, and if it were not for leaving you, I should be glad to go? The doctors have told me that they mean to operate tomorrow, so I am writing to you today to tell you what I have arranged for you. This is to be a long letter for I have the feeling that it will be my last, so I want to tell you everything I can to help you. Nurse says I must not tire myself, so I shall take all day over it. She will give it to Dr Harper tomorrow, and if I do not come through, it will be sent to you. For your sake, I hope that in a few days he may be able to burn it. For I don't want to leave you, my Jacynth, even though I am so tired.

'Now listen carefully, and try to understand, for I don't want you to have to worry about your future. We have lived so quietly that I have been able to put aside enough to keep you during all your school-years, and yet give you a tiny income of forty pounds a year after you are eighteen. If you win the Thérèse Lepatire scholarship you will get a university training, which is what we both want for you, I know. As it provides practically everything you would need for three years, you should be able to save most of that while you are at Oxford, and that would give you a few pounds in hand until you are earning. Try always to save a little, if it is only five pounds a year. You never know when it may be useful to have a little money you can get easily. Never get anything you cannot pay for *at once*. Debt is a terrible thing, and a millstone round one's neck. So go without if you can't pay for it. I wish I could have left you more. It may mean a struggle during your first earning years, and I did want to save you that. But try to do as I say, however hard it may be, and I know that, in time, life will be much easier that way. You have a good brain, and you have learnt to work well. I wonder what you will do? Is it to be teaching as you've thought? Or have you got fresh ideas now? Never mind, darling; whatever it is, do your best. But, Jacynth, don't try to do too much. When you begin to feel so tired that you only want to lie down and sleep, and sleep, stop working if it is possible. It may not be wise to say this at your age; but I may not have another chance, and so I must trust you to use your sense about it.

'Above all, be happy, and make all the friends you can. I like the sound of Gay Lambert so much, and Gillian Culver too. It makes me so glad to know that you have two such nice friends already. I hope you may be friends all your lives. I must

tell you that Gay's sister, Mrs Lambert, has been to see me. Gay seems to have told her all about us—or at least all that she herself knew. Poor Gay! I'm afraid she has been in deep disgrace over running away. Be kind to her about it. Mrs Lambert told me that she had given Gay her exact opinion of her, but it won't hurt her. They love each other so dearly, I am sure she would not resent it. Mrs Lambert tells me she wants Gay to bring you home for the summer holidays. The Harpers too will be good to you. They have been our best friends ever since we knew them. You won't be alone for friends, my Jacynth, and that comforts me so much when I think of tomorrow.

'I won't bother you with any money business. Dr Harper is your trustee, which means that he will see to all that for you until you are twenty-one. I have asked him to sell Meldon for you, so as to give you a little more money. He will tell you about the other arrangements later on.

'One last piece of advice, my darling. Whatever happens, keep close to God. When you grow up, you will meet people who scoff at Him and any belief in Him. Don't be led by them. He is *there*, whatever silly people may say. When things get very hard, He is the one help on which you can rely without hesitation. The most loving of human friends may fail us sometimes, but He never will. His plans for us may seem hard sometimes; but try to remember that He knows best, and that He loves us more than any human being can do. Things will come right in time, even if it seems a long time, if we will only trust to Him. I know that from my own experience. At this very moment I am relying on Him, and leaning on Him with all my weight. I couldn't write this letter to you so happily if it were not for Him.

'And now, my darling, I have said all I can think of. Pages and pages of loving words and pet-names couldn't make you any surer than I know you are that I love you. And I am getting tired, and they tell me I must save all my strength for tomorrow. So goodbye, my darling. God bless you now and always, and make you very happy.—Your own Auntie, MARY LEONARD.'

Jacynth slowly folded up her letter and placed it in the envelope, and then sat gazing over the quiet, sunny garden with tears in her eyes. Even to the last, Auntie had thought of her and for her. It must have meant a big effort for her to write such a long letter. Child as she was, Jacynth could see where the pen had slipped and trailed off, showing how the writer's hand had wearied. Of the business arrangements she took no heed. Later, she would go over them again. But now she only felt the love that had wrapped her round all her life till now. She shivered a little. She felt cold, and as if something had been taken away from her that had always kept her warm and safe. A little sob broke from her lips, and almost at once tender arms were round her, holding her closely. She hid her face against a loving breast, and gentle lips were pressed to the short black hair that covered her head.

'Jacynth, darling, try not to fret too much,' said Jo Maynard's beautiful voice. 'It would grieve Auntie so if she knows. She wants you to be happy, I'm sure. Doesn't she tell you so?'

'Yes,' sobbed Jacynth. 'But oh, I'm so alone!'

'Never alone so long as there is God, my darling. He never allows that. I learned that last autumn when we thought for very many days that Dr Jack had been drowned at sea and I was a widow.'

Jacynth lifted her head, to gaze with tear-brimmed eyes at the sweet face above her. 'I didn't know, Mrs Maynard.'

'No,' said Jo. 'We don't speak of it now. But I wanted you to know that God gave me strength for those days, and He will give it to you if you ask Him.'

'That's what Auntie says.' Jacynth lay quietly in the loving arms.

'Yes; I was sure she knew that Help. It's yours too, you know.'

Jacynth said nothing. She was very tired, but already she was feeling the comfort in Jo's golden voice and her tender clasp. After a while, when Jo was beginning to wonder if she had fallen asleep, she looked up again. 'Mrs Maynard, when I asked Nurse, she said that they had been told the operation had been a success. Did she tell me a lie?'

'No; in itself, the operation was quite successful. But your auntie was not strong enough to endure the strain. Her heart gave out. If it had been stronger, she might have got well.'

'Then I don't see why God couldn't make it just that much stronger. He knew she was all I had.'

'Yes; He knew. But it wasn't best for *her* that she should live. Don't you see, dear? Probably if she had, it would have meant more hard work, and she was so tired already.'

'Yes; she says that too.'

'You wouldn't have wanted that for her.'

'Oh, no! But, Mrs Maynard, I *can't* help wanting her, and feeling—' Jacynth stopped, a sob choking her again.

'Nobody expects you to do that, Jacynth. Of course you want her! *You* will be very lonely sometimes, for even friends can't take her place. But as time goes on, though the want won't finish, the pain will go out of your sorrow. Now, dear, you are very tired, and Gay wants to see you after tea, so I am going to take you in. You shall lie down and try to sleep for a little, and then Matey will give you your tea, and Gay shall come to see you. She has known about this for some days, and has been very unhappy about you. You'd like to have her, wouldn't you?'

'Yes, please.'

Jo helped Jacynth to the house, tucked her up, and drew the curtains so that the room was darkened. 'Now you will go to sleep, won't you, pet? And remember that Auntie is still with you in one sense. Our dead never really leave us unless we forget them. You won't do that.'

She turned to go, but Jacynth's hand on her arm stayed her.

'Please,' whispered Jacynth, 'I want to say thank you for being so dear and sweet to me. You've helped me a lot. I'll try to remember what you said; it's just what Auntie says too. I—I'd like to kiss you.'

Jo bent instantly, and Jacynth's thin arms went round her neck while she gave the kiss. Then she lay back again, and almost before Jo had left the room she was asleep, greatly to everyone's relief. She woke looking very white and sad, but at Matron's wish she ate the delicate wafers of bread-and-butter, and drank the milky tea brought to her. Half an hour later, the door opened, and Gay came in. Matron had drawn the curtains back, and the sun's rays, pouring into the room, made a nimbus of her golden curls. She looked half-shy as she came up to the bed, but there was real love in the kiss she gave. Then she sat down on the edge of the bed, still holding Jacynth's hand. 'Oh, Jacynth, I did so want to see you, but Matey wouldn't let me. It seems ages since we met.'

'I've wanted you too,' said Jacynth. 'I'm glad to see you again, Gay.'

'Gill wanted to come too; but Matey said one at a time was enough.'

'I'd like to see Gill. You two have been so good to me. Everyone has.'

‘Oh, not Miss Bubb!’ said Gay. ‘You couldn’t say *she* had!’ And raised a half-smile on the drooping lips.

‘Well, everyone but her,’ amended Jacynth. She looked at Gay bravely. ‘Gay, they gave me Auntie’s last letter to read this afternoon!’

‘Did they?’ Gay was not very sure what to say.

‘Yes. She says your sister went to see her. It was a dear thing to do. I’m so grateful, Gay. And Auntie liked her so much.’

‘Oh, well, Ruth is Ruth! I told her about you in one of my letters, and where your auntie was, and she said she’d go to see her and take her some flowers to cheer her up. She wants you to come to us for the summer hols, by the way. So do I, so I hope you’ll come. We’re going to Barnard Castle. I believe it’s a gorgeous place, near the moors too. You’ll come, won’t you?’

‘I’d love to. But—but, Gay, I don’t know whom I must ask for leave now.’ Jacynth’s eyes filled with tears.

‘Oh, don’t worry about that. I’ll ask Bill; she’s sure to know. Ruth said in her last letter that your auntie told her the Chalet School would look after you, so she must have written to Bill or someone. I expect they will see to you. And anyway, Jacynth, Ruth says that you must never feel you haven’t got a home so long as we’re anywhere round. You’ll spend your hols with us whenever you want to. Gill means to ask you too, I know. And Daisy says Mrs Maynard wants you as well. So you don’t have to worry about hols.’

‘It’s dear of you all,’ faltered Jacynth, ‘but I don’t want to be a nuisance to anyone.’

‘Who says you’ll be a nuisance? *I* never did; nor did anyone else! Look here, Jacynth, you’ve got to buck up and get better. You’ll be forgetting all your ’cello work, and you mustn’t do that. Mr Manders was asking how you were getting on at my lesson yesterday. He nearly swallowed me whole because I played so badly. I haven’t had much chance of practice, you see. Oh, and *did* you know Grandma got German measles too, and handed them all round the family?’

‘No; no one told me. Oh, poor old thing!’ exclaimed Jacynth.

When Matron came in five minutes later, she found her patient looking much brighter, though her eyes were very heavy. She chased Gay away with the promise that she should come on the morrow, and insisted on Jacynth’s going to bed properly, and trying to get to sleep.

When she had given her patient her supper, and put her right for the night, she tucked her in, and then gave her a hearty kiss.

‘Sleep well,’ she said in the crisp tones that yet held so much kindness. ‘Be brave, little girl. You’ve a good deal left still.’

Jacynth’s lips quivered. ‘I know that. But—but—it’s a bit lonely.’

‘Yes; I know. But it might be worse. You have Gay, and though she is one of the biggest imps that ever helped to turn my hair grey, she’s a good child in some ways. Now go to sleep; and if you want me, call me.’

Jacynth was so tired that she fell asleep again, and slept all night. Miss Wilson came to her next morning, and sat beside her, talking gently to her, and assuring her that the school would look after her.

‘Don’t be afraid, Jacynth. Lady Russell has read your aunt’s letter, now that she is stronger again, and she says that you are our special charge now. Even if you don’t win the Thérèse Lepattre, there are other scholarships, so you need not fear that you must go without your

training. You won't be the first girl the school has seen to in that way; and you certainly won't be the last. Now I am sending Daisy Venables to you. She has no exam this morning, and wants to talk to you.'

'No exam!' Jacynth sat up in bed at this, and Miss Wilson hailed the sign of interest with delight. 'Why—you don't mean that School Cert. has started *already*? How long have I been ill, then?'

'A little more than three weeks. Schools began yesterday. And we are having school exams too. You'll miss those, Jacynth, but it won't hurt you. Gay tells me you are going with them to Barnard Castle for a good long holiday on the moors, and that means you will come back to school quite fit, and ready for work. Now I must go, and Daisy will come along presently.' She said goodbye, and went; and Daisy appeared half an hour later.

Gay came again after tea, and Gillian was with her this time. They sat talking quietly. Then Gillian got up to go. 'I've got piles to do for tomorrow's history. Gay is out of exams, lucky beggar! She can stay. Goodbye, Jacynth. See you tomorrow.'

When she had gone, Gay sat down again, and produced a letter which she put into Jacynth's hand. 'This came for you from Ruth in my letter this morning. She says there's something in it you'll like, Jacynth. I know what it is, and I hope you'll let me see it later. But now I'm going to leave you to look at it by yourself, and see what Ruthans says. Goodbye, old thing! If Matey will let me, I'll pop in again before bed-time.'

When she had gone, Jacynth opened the letter curiously. A snap dropped out of the folds, and she picked it up, and then uttered a cry. It was Auntie—Auntie sitting up in bed against her pillows, smiling her own dear smile, and looking just like herself, though thinner than Jacynth had remembered her! Jacynth burst into tears, in which joy was mingled with grief. One big part of her sorrow had been that she had no good photo of her. They had never been able to afford one. But this was just Auntie herself! It was some time before she could control herself sufficiently to read Ruth Lambert's letter. But at length she managed to check her sobs, and then she read the short note that had come with the snap.

'DEAR JACYNTH,—I went to see your auntie three times while she was in hospital, and the second time, I took some snaps of her, as I happened to have an unused reel of films. This is the best of the bunch, so I am sending it to you. An enlargement is being made, and you shall have it as soon as it comes from the photographers.

'During those three visits, I grew very friendly with Miss Leonard, and I should like you to know how much I appreciated her. For you to have been in the charge of anyone who was so sweet and so really good is a great privilege, dear. I know how sad you are feeling now; but presently the worst of that will go, and then you may be glad to know that a total stranger felt what a wonderful character she was. I also want to tell you that we are all looking forward to having you with us for the summer holidays. Gay says it will be twice as much fun for her with a girl of her own age to go about with, and I agree. If there's anything I can do, do write and let me know, won't you? With love and sympathy,—RUTH LAMBERT.'

'Oh, how kind!' sobbed Jacynth as she folded it up. 'How kind everyone is! I oughtn't to cry so, for I know it's better for Auntie, and everyone is so good to me. But oh, Auntie—Auntie—'

Miss Wilson's hand was on her shoulder, and Miss Wilson's voice was speaking to her. 'Jacynth! My child, don't grieve like this! You will make yourself ill again, dear. Is that what would have pleased your aunt?'

'No-o,' sobbed Jacynth, sitting up, and showing her poor little face all swollen and disfigured with tears. 'And I *will* try, Miss Wilson. But oh, it's so hard to remember!'

'I know it is, dear. I went through it myself when I was only twenty-two. My sister died first; then mother followed, and my father went six months later. I lost all three in one year. So, you see, I can understand.'

'Oh, you can!' Jacynth choked and swallowed, and then scrubbed her eyes with the sheet as her handkerchief seemed to be missing. 'Bill' put her own fresh one into the hot hand, and then went over to the washstand and came back with a nicely-soaked sponge. 'Let me sponge your face, child. There, that's better. Now, Jacynth, Gay wants to see you again for a few minutes after supper. If you will lie down now and rest for an hour, and then eat your supper, she shall come to you. Is it a bargain?'

Still catching her breath, Jacynth nodded, and lay down, and 'Bill' drew up the sheet. 'That will be enough. It's a warm evening. I've got a little frame which that snap will just fit. I'll bring it to you at bed-time, and then you can keep it on the table beside you. Now I'm going.'

And, as usual, she went on the word.

Later on, at eight o'clock, Gay appeared. She said little, but she kissed her friend warmly, and then said, 'Tomorrow, I'm bringing your 'cello along, and you can have an odd five minutes now and then at it. Now I must go. Oh, before I forget, Meg sent you this!' And she put into Jacynth's hand a tiny statuette of Ste Thérèse of Lisieux. 'She's carrying roses, you see. I forget why—Meg did tell me. But if Matey lets her come tomorrow, she'll tell you herself. Oh, and I saw Grandma when I was out with Matey this afternoon, and she's *wild* because she's had a baby thing like German measles. She sent you her love or something, and this packet of peppermints which will do you good. So you'd better have one now. I must fly! Matey gave me three minutes, and I'm not awfully popular with her at the moment because she caught me sliding down the banisters of the great staircase. Night-night!' And she flung her arms round Jacynth, gave her a warm if hurried kiss somewhere in the region of her nose, and fled.

Somehow that very offhand speech helped Jacynth to settle down more easily for the night. Gay was good for her, for she helped to distract her thoughts a little, and yet real and deep sympathy was apparent beneath all her nonsense. As Matron said, there was very good stuff in Gay from China.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MARGOT VENABLES PRIZE

‘Gay, have you seen to your pegs? Are they properly chalked?’

‘Yes, Miss Cochrane. I did them last night.’

‘Good! Do you know where Daisy Venables is? I want to make sure that their trio is with the rest of the music.’

‘Daisy was ironing her own and Primula’s white frocks in the laundry, Miss Cochrane; but I saw Gwensi Howell with the music a few minutes ago.’

‘Oh, then I expect she’s put it on the stand. All right; that’s all I want, now.’ And Grizel Cochrane turned away with a nod.

It was the last Saturday of term, and, therefore, Parents’ Day. The school was giving a concert in the garden in the afternoon, and Miss Cochrane, as head of the music staff, was full of business, since this was the first Parents’ Day for which she had been directly responsible. She went off to the tall stand on which the music lay heaped, and Gay shot off in the opposite direction to seek Jacynth. She found her in the music-room, having a little ’cello practice by herself. She had no part in the concert, for she had missed so much, thanks to her illness, that it had been thought better to leave her out. However, she had the important post of head programme-distributor, so she would have plenty to do. Gay grinned happily at her as she shut the door and came forward.

‘You’re making headway, old thing. In another term Mr Manders will be bagging you. He really seemed awfully thrilled with you on Thursday. And he says teaching you has done me a lot of good. So that’s all square!’

Jacynth smiled. There was a gravity about her that was too great for her years. Auntie’s death had taken a good deal of the fun out of her for the time being. But she was improving, and those who watched her carefully hoped that by next term she would be almost her old self.

‘She’ll never be quite as carefree as Gay and some of the others,’ ‘Bill’ had said to the rest of the Staff when they were sitting about the Staff garden the previous evening. ‘She has come up against life too hard for that. But she’s coming round better than I had feared at first. I am sure that is what Miss Leonard would have wanted. From all I can gather, she was one of the most unselfish people who ever lived, and it would have grieved her to know that Jacynth was fretting badly. Gay has never had a really great sorrow. And then, she is a different person altogether. Since she had that bunch of letters from China she has been almost wild.’

‘I’m glad they’ve got news at last,’ said Jo Maynard, who was up for the occasion. ‘I don’t know that you’re quite right, Bill. Gay has very deep feelings; but she can’t express them in quite the way that most folk do. But, of course, I see what you mean. She has never felt so completely alone as Jacynth has; and she’s always had a home.’

‘They are both fine girls,’ said Matron abruptly. ‘Gay is a wonder on that ’cello of hers; and I shouldn’t be surprised if Jacynth doesn’t outdo her. I heard Mr Manders raving about it on Thursday. He seems quite impressed with her. And Gillian Culver, the third member of their chummery, is another, though she’s much quieter. I fancy she helps to keep the others’ feet more firmly to earth. Gay’s high spirits would get her into all sorts of trouble, if it weren’t for Gillian’s sense. And if Jacynth is a genius—or near-genius—as Mr Manders implies, she’ll need someone to hold her down.’

Then the talk had gone on to something else.

Now Gay plumped herself down on a stool, and watched her friend as she practised drawing the bow across the open strings in long, steady notes.

‘You’ve got the wrist-movement perfectly. When I remember the time I had with Mr Manders over it! I thought one day he was going to *eat* me!’

‘Perhaps he didn’t show you as plainly as you’ve shown me?’ suggested Jacynth. ‘That makes a lot of difference.’

‘Perhaps I didn’t pay as much attention to what he said as you do,’ retorted Gay with a grin. ‘That’s more like it!’

‘Well, anyhow, you play toppingly now. I only hope I can do as well when I’ve learnt as long!’

‘You’ll be tons better. Oh, yes; you will. I’ve always loved Cerita, of course; but you are quite loopy about—what d’you call the thing? I don’t believe you ever told me.’

Jacynth went pink. ‘Well, it may be cheek, though I don’t mean it to be; but she’s “Cherry” after Bill’s sister that died. Bill told me she was going to give her to me in memory of her. She was awfully musical, and everyone said she would have a great career; but she died when she was only sixteen, and then Mr and Mrs Wilson went too, a few months after, and so, you see, that’s why I call her “Cherry.”’

Gay whistled. ‘I say! Poor Bill! I’d no idea she’d had such a ghastly time! It was awfully decent of her to give you Cherry. Why doesn’t she play herself, though?’

‘I don’t suppose she’s ever had the time. She’s an M.Sc., you know. That would mean working like mad, wouldn’t it? There wouldn’t be much time for her to do music as well.’

‘No; I suppose not. Look here, Jacynth, how long have you been here? You look tired, and you can’t go round looking like the skeleton at the feast this afternoon. Let’s go and see what Gill’s doing. Slacken your bow, and put Cherry away, and come on!’

Thus adjured, Jacynth did as she was told, and presently they were both racing round the garden, calling for Gillian Culver at the tops of their voices. She turned up in a few minutes, demanding why they were yelling for her like that.

‘I was only giving my sandals an extra brush-up,’ she said. ‘What do you want?’

‘You! Jacynth’s overdoing the ’cello, so we came out to find you. She’s got to look less like an uncooked muffin before this afternoon, so I vote we go and scorch somewhere, and you can tell her that yarn about the German spy who pretended to be your cousin, and was really a spy. It’s a thriller, Jacynth! Gill nearly got done in, going after her. Only her brother and her old great-aunt were with her, so they all got away—and you said Hawk yanked your great-aunt all along the ground, till her clothes got torn off her, Gill; and then you climbed into a picture frame over the mantelpiece in your entrance-hall, and nearly scared the rest of the family out of their seven senses! I only wish I’d seen you!’

Gillian doubled up in wild laughter at the memory Gay had called up of that very hair-raising adventure. ‘I wish you had! Hawk and I were bad enough, filthy, and messy as you like! But Auntie M. was the limit! And then she rounded on Hawk for dragging her along the ground like a sack of potatoes! You two are coming to Culver’s Hold for part of the Christmas hols, Jacynth, and then you’ll meet her. She has all one wing of the house and we go to tea with her by invitation, and she does ditto with us. She’s a priceless old dear, and the older she gets, the madder things she thinks of doing. But she’s all there, you know. All right; I’ll tell you about the spy. As Gay says, it’s a thriller. Mrs Maynard’s going to make it into a book some time, only changing the names, of course.’

They found their sunny spot, and while they lay on their backs, burning their faces, Gillian told the story so well that Jacynth felt her spine creep, as she said, and at one exciting point actually grabbed the story-teller and squawked loudly.

Gillian was fated not to finish it, for just as she reached the point where she had hidden in a hollow tree to overhear the talk between the German girl and a fellow-spy who lived a few miles away, the bell rang, calling them to early lunch, and they had to run.

‘Finish it tomorrow in the afternoon, Gill,’ implored Jacynth as they hurried to the house. ‘I’m dying to know what came next! It’s as good as Gay’s story of how her cousin was carried off by bandits, and rescued by one of their uncle’s servants.’

‘After she’d made poor old Miss Pritchard, who was a prisoner too, drunk by accident,’ added Gay. ‘It really only wanted the Scallywag to complete the picture! Dear little Scallywag! She sent me her love and many tailwags in those last letters. She’s not really old, though she must be—let’s see; she was a puppy when we went to China, and Mike and I were five. She’s getting on for eleven. But Paul says she’s as jolly as ever, and flies about all over the place, just as she used to do.’

Then they had reached the house, and were hurled into chatter about the coming concert, so out-of-school adventures were forgotten for the time being. And once the meal was ended, and they had helped to clear it away, no one, as Beth Chester said later, had even time to breathe!

The concert was to begin at three o’clock, but parents would begin to come at half-past two, if not earlier, so everyone must help to lay the tables for tea in the rose-garden before rushing upstairs to change into white frocks.

‘Mercifully,’ said ‘Bill’ as she surveyed the tables later, ‘we have a positive glut of raspberries, for the cakes are more conspicuous by their absence than their presence. Well, I suppose the girls have all changed by now, so will one of you people ring the bell and get them into Hall? We shall have plenty of time to get this business over before two—it’s only twenty-to now. But how like Jo to spring this on us at the last moment!’

‘It is!’ agreed Hilary Burn as she went to ring the bell. ‘But rather a great idea, all the same. And it will please Daisy no end!’

‘What’s that for?’ demanded Gwensi Howell as the school-bell suddenly pealed loudly while they were giving finishing touches to their plain white frocks, worn with the school tie, which was their gala uniform.

‘If we go down, we’ll find out, I suppose,’ returned Daisy Venables, hurriedly giving the big, flame-coloured bows on her pigtails a final twitch.

‘Parade, you folk, and let me see if you’re decent!’ commanded Beth, who was responsible, as dormitory prefect, for seeing that they were all as trig and smart as they could be.

Daisy led the way, and they meekly paraded before her critical eyes. ‘Gay, your hair’s a bit wild still. Give it a brush,’ she ordered. ‘Daisy, your trefoil isn’t in the middle.’ Welsh Gwensi of the clever fingers was passed, and so was Jacynth; but Mollie Avery was requested to part her hair again; and Frances Coleman had to be taken in hand by Beth, Gwensi, and Daisy, and generally set to rights. At length they were ready, and the bell was pealing again, so they went down the stairs very circumspectly, and joined the rest of the school, most of which was congregated in Hall. As they went in, they were given slips of paper and pencils by one of the mistresses stationed at the three doors which led in from the corridor.

‘What’s all this in aid of?’ asked Gay in an undertone of Mollie, who was next her.

‘Ask me another! I haven’t the foggiest notion!’ replied Mollie.

They found their seats and sat down, all agog with curiosity. What *was* coming next? They had to wait for a few minutes while stragglers came hurrying in; but as the last girl scrambled hurriedly and with red cheeks into her place, Miss Wilson appeared from the door at the top of the room, and mounted the dais. She had no need to ask for silence—she had it already. The girls were wild to know what was going to happen, and they almost held their breath as she began to speak.

‘Girls,’ she said, ‘this morning, Mrs Maynard—Joey—rang me up to say that there was one prize she thought the school ought to give but had never given, so she was going to make the omission good. Some of you will remember Mrs Venables, mother of Daisy and Primula, who came to us as Matron of St Clare’s House in Tirol, and remained as Matron until we were forced to leave the Tiernsee. Jo is giving this prize in her memory, and it will be called the Margot Venables Prize. It is to go to the girl who, in the estimation of the school, has done most to help other people. It will be given for the first time this year; but Jo has made arrangements for it to be an annual award. You may like to know that she is providing it from the proceeds of one of her books, which is also dedicated to Mrs Venables. It is to consist of fifty shillings to be spent on books by the winner. You are here now to make that first award. You all have paper and pencil: will you please write down the name of the girl who, to your mind, has done the most to help other girls at school? Don’t discuss it with anyone else. We don’t want that. We want your own, unbiassed opinion. Now, will you write the name of the girl you consider has been most helpful to others?’

There was an immediate rustle as the girls turned to the task. Daisy Venables had flushed at mention of her mother’s name, and tears came to her eyes. It was five years since she and little Primula had been left motherless, but Daisy’s sense of loss still overwhelmed her at times. However, nothing would induce her to cry in public, so she drove the tears away resolutely, and quickly scribbled a name on her slip.

‘Now,’ said ‘Bill’ when she judged they had had enough time, ‘please fold your slips over, and pass them to the right. The end girl of each line will bring them up to the dais and put them in this bowl. Then you may march out and wait in the garden to welcome our friends.’

‘But—please, Miss Wilson, when shall we know the results of the voting?’ asked Elizabeth Arnett, the head-girl—and thereby earned deep gratitude from the rest, who were dying to know who had won.

‘I shall make it known during the course of the afternoon. You must give us time to go through the slips,’ returned ‘Bill’ with a smile.

‘Thank you very much—thank you, Miss Wilson!’ rose from various parts of Hall. Then Miss Cochrane slipped into her place at the piano and struck up a rollicking march, and the girls marched smartly out to the garden, where, by special permission, they posted themselves on the front steps and along the front terrace, ready to greet friends and relations when they came.

The first to arrive was—naturally!—Joey herself, accompanied by her entire family. She got a tumultuous greeting, and many were the questions showered on her as to why she had suddenly thought of her prize.

‘No idea! It just came into my head,’ said Jo calmly. ‘Don’t you like it? Perhaps most of you haven’t been bothering to help other people?’

‘Josephine—Mary—Bettany—Maynard! There are times when I could shake you!’ proclaimed Robin Humphries. ‘You wait till I get you home again!’

‘You just try it on and see what happens to you!’ retorted Jo. ‘And don’t set my family a bad example, you dreadful girl! Heaven knows they don’t need it! As a matter of fact, if you really must know, I was glancing through one of Madge’s old story-books the other day—a priceless thing! You must read it, some of you!—and this prize was described. Of course, in the book it was a magnificent affair of fifty pounds. I couldn’t rise to that; but I thought two-pounds-ten-worth of books wouldn’t be too dusty. So there we are! *Now* are you satisfied?’

‘So that’s how it was! It’s like you, Jo!’ Then Robin turned to greet the little girls, and led them to seats on the lawn in readiness for the concert. ‘Sit here, pets, in these little chairs. They were put for tiny folk like you.’

The trio sat down, and looked gravely round them. They all were in little white muslin frocks with embroideries of buttercup yellow, and they wore big shady hats to shield their eyes from the bright sun. Jo was very particular about this, explaining that she did not approve of little people going about in the hot sun without hats.

‘I don’t want my daughters to be wrinkled before their time,’ she said. ‘Neither do I wish to have to provide glasses for them. Oh, I know it’s the fashion to let tinies go hatless; but not for mine in sunshine!’

Others began to arrive, and Robin, as one of the Seniors, had to help to seat them and make sure that the programme-sellers had attended to their needs. The programme money was to go to the Sanatorium, and the girls were anxious to sell as many as possible. They were very artistic things, with hand-painted sprays of wild-flowers on one side, and the items in Old English lettering on the other. They cost sixpence each, and the girls had hopefully prepared two hundred of them. They were also selling knots of flowers from their own flower-beds for the same fund; and as these would cost a shilling, they expected to have between nine and ten pounds to hand over to the Treasurer. There was a big free ward for children at the Sanatorium, and the Chalet School took a deep interest in it.

By ten to three all the chairs set out were filled; every programme had been sold; a dozen people were frenziedly making up more flower-knots, and still the people kept on coming.

‘It’s not an audience—it’s a *horde!*’ said Primrose Day, who had met the word in a history lesson a week or two before, and now used it in season and out of season, and not always accurately.

‘Madame’s not here; and Sybil says she isn’t coming,’ said Lavender Leigh regretfully. ‘But Josette is here, so she must be all right again. She doesn’t look too bad, does she?’

‘She’s pract’ly well,’ agreed Bride Bettany, one of Josette’s many cousins. ‘Oh, I wish Mummy and Daddy could have come! We never have them for anything like all you others. India’s such a long way away!’

‘They’ll be coming back some day,’ comforted Elfie Woodward. ‘P’r’aps it won’t be long now. And you’ll have your other twin brother and sister to see. It must be funny to have a brother and sister and never have— Oh, there’s Mother and Joan!’ And she went flying over the grass to greet her mother and elder sister with: ‘You *are* late? I thought you’d forgotten!’

By three o’clock every seat the Chalet School could provide had been filled. Cushions and rugs had been laid on the grass for the small folk, and grown-ups occupied the Kindergarten chairs instead. Even the stools from the gymnasium had been brought out. As for the school, it sat in a solid phalanx at the far side of the lawn, on groundsheets and strips of carpet. One of the pianos had been brought out, and Miss Cochrane took her place at it as the church clock struck three. Everyone rose, and the strains of the National Anthem swelled out. After that, the Choir marched out to sing very delightfully, and with full attention to words and phrasing,

Parry's 'England,' and a favourite setting of Noyes' 'May Queen.' It was followed by a violin solo from Lorenz Maico. Lorenz played two of Brahms' 'Hungarian Dances' with a vim and force to be expected from a Hungarian girl, and fully deserved the storm of applause she got. The trio sung by Daisy, Gwensi, and Beth nearly came to grief, for Daisy was seized with a giggling fit just before they began. But the other two reduced her to gravity with violent pinches, and Mendelssohn's setting of 'Titania's Lullaby' sounded very sweetly in the three girlish voices. The next item was a song by Joanna Linders, accompanied by Meg Farrant, whose gift had been leapt on by Grizel Cochrane with cries of joy. Meg stayed at the piano to accompany Gay's 'cello solo, and then gave place to Miss Cochrane again for the group of country dances which came next. The girls danced 'Broom, the Bonny, Bonny Broom,' and followed it up with 'Picking Up Sticks,' which was most appreciated with its 'sheepskin' hey, and 'Oranges and Lemons' with its quieter, more courtly movements. Then the Choir sang again; and there were one or two piano solos. Monica Marilliar and Jocelyn Redford danced a morris jig, 'Jockey to the Fair'; and four teams gave 'Trunkles' and 'Laudnum Bunches.' Jesanne Gellibrand's 'cello solo was very much appreciated, and if encores had been permitted, she would certainly have got one. But there was a long programme, so there was no time for encores. The Choir sang once more; there were two quartettes for voices; a string trio came from Amy Stevens, Myfanwy Tudor, and Ernestine Benedict; and then every girl who played any sort of instrument but piano was called on, and they played, quite delightfully for a school orchestra, Balfour Gardiner's 'Shepherd Fennell's Dance,' and two dances from the ballet music 'La Boutique Fantasque.' At the end of that, and just as the applause was dying away, Miss Wilson came slowly forward, walking for the first time without her stick. There was dead silence almost at once. The girls guessed what was coming, and their attention infected the visitors.

Miss Wilson spoke briefly, in mercy, to the excited girls around her. She explained the prize, and then paused.

'I nearly burst with trying to hold my breath!' said Gwensi later.

'This is the first time the prize has been awarded,' she said. 'The school voted for it just before our concert began, and three of the mistresses have been occupied in counting the votes. Naturally, the voting was not unanimous. I am very pleased to know what a great number of kind and helpful people the school contains. But one girl definitely gains far more than any other. And I am pleased to be able to add that the whole Staff have informed me that if they had been voting, they would have voted for her too. The first award of the Margot Venables Prize goes to Gay Lambert!'

Such a noise of cheering was seldom heard at the Chalet School. There were shouts of: 'Gay! Gay! Gay Lambert!' And someone took Cerita from Gay; someone else snatched the bow away. Half a dozen hands pushed her forward; and Gay, very shy for once, and blushing furiously, made her way to where 'Bill' stood awaiting her, her kindest smile on her lips and in her eyes.

'Well done, Gay!' she said, when at length Gay had reached her. 'You deserve it! I am so glad, dear!'

'But—but, Miss Wilson!' gasped Gay. 'I don't—*honestly!* Why, I brought German measles into the school!'

'We could certainly have done without that,' agreed Miss Wilson, beckoning Jo from her seat on the grass among the Babies to join them. 'But you have helped more than one person

this term. And the very great help and friendliness you have shown to Jacynth Hardy has brought her through a bitterly hard time. Here is Jo, to give you your prize.'

Jo held out an envelope. 'Well done, Gay from China!' she said loudly, so that everyone else could hear. 'I'm glad the prize is yours. You deserve it! The only thing I ask is that if you feel moved to be really generous another year, you'll choose something a little less trying than German measles!'

As Mary Burnett said later on feelingly, 'Trust Jo to do the trick!'

The audience broke into renewed cheering, mingled with laughter. And from a shady corner where she sat enthroned, surrounded by her family, Grandma remarked, 'Well, I always liked that young girl! A real little lady she is, and no mistake! Ethel, give me that bag.'

Then she rose, as Gay came near, on her way to Ruth, who had managed to come—Jo had asked her and the babies for the week—and came forward. 'I'm glad you've got it; and here's a few peppermints to settle your stomach. Likely it'll be uneasy with all this excitement.'

Gay managed to stammer out some sort of thanks, and then fled to take refuge with her sister.

It was left to Jacynth to sum up the situation. 'Gay deserves every good and decent thing she can get!' she cried, as she stood with the rest of her form. 'I can't tell you how much I owe her; and I'm glad and thankful that she left China and came to the Chalet School!'

[The end of *Gay From China at the Chalet School* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]