

SCHOOL  
GIRLS AND  
SCOUTS

ELSIE OXENHAM



COLLINS

SCHOOL GIRLS  
AND SCOUTS



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# SCHOOLGIRLS AND SCOUTS

BY  
ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM

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TO  
MILDRED ELIZABETH HILLS  
AND  
GLADYS MARY HILLS  
MY FRIENDS FROM SAMOA

---

*'MA LE ALOFA'*

## CHAPTER I TO MEET THE BOYS

‘You need not change your dress, I think, Elspeth,’ said the head-mistress, as Elspeth, released from French translation, rushed eagerly, but silently, across the hall to the staircase.

‘Oh, Miss Johnson!’ There was a world of tragedy in Elspeth’s voice.

‘It really isn’t necessary, dear.’

‘But—must I wear my school hat, too? I would like to look *nice*——’

Miss Johnson smiled. ‘Who says you don’t look nice as you are?’

‘In my old things? Oh, *please!*’

‘I think not, dear.’

‘Well!’ said Elspeth indignantly, as she ran upstairs. ‘I think it’s *mean*, that’s all!’

To her, there had never been any doubt that the expedition called for Sunday clothes. She was going to London with Miss Johnson! She was going to meet the boys! How could any one think ordinary school dress possible?

She felt decidedly injured as she fetched her sailor hat, and paused to pull a face at herself in the glass.

‘It’s *mean!*’ she said again.

Her school dress was very neat, of serviceable brown alpaca, with broad turned-back collar and cuffs of soft white linen, and a loose white strap belt. She looked very demure and almost Quaker-like, and the school plaits increased the look which her dancing eyes belied. Like the rest of the lower school, she wore her hair, light brown and thick and soft, in two smooth braids on her shoulders, tied with little brown bows at the ends and more little brown bows close to her head behind her ears.

With another grimace, she pulled off the brown ribbons and replaced them with white ones, and hastily changed her collar and cuffs for others spotlessly fresh. Her hat with its band of the school colours, and the loose brown coat she wore for walks every day, put the finishing touch to her vexation. She frowned at the glass again as she turned to go downstairs.

‘It is too bad!’ she murmured. ‘I was going to wear my blue dress, and my white hat, and my new silk gloves, and—and when I’m going to see the boys for the first time for two years, I do think I might have made myself decent, anyway! I’d undo my hair, but I’m afraid—I’m very much afraid she’d only send me up again! She doesn’t understand a scrap.’

Miss Johnson did understand, however. She smiled at sight of the white ribbons, and the flushed cheeks and indignant eyes which greeted her in the hall. Then she sighed, but only for a moment.

‘Come along! We have a beautiful day for our trip. We really should be going into the country on such a perfect summer morning, instead of into town,’ she said brightly.

‘Oh, but London’s so much more exciting!’ and Elspeth’s disappointment vanished in eager anticipation. ‘Will we go in a motor-bus, do you think? Isn’t it ripping—I mean jolly’—as she caught Miss Johnson’s eye—‘well, *nice*, then!—to feel it going off underneath you, like an engine just going to burst? I love it!’

Her face was alight with eagerness as they travelled towards the city, and Miss Johnson glanced at her more than once, and smiled. Then she sighed again, but there was no hint of shadow in Elspeth’s joyous face.

A day in town, while the other girls groaned over French and algebra, was surely sufficient cause for rejoicing. A day in town, not even complicated by a music exam. or a visit to the dentist! A day in town including lunch at a tea-shop, and ending with high tea at home, while the other girls watched enviously—this had always been the height of her ambition and the greatest of all possible delights.

But to-day, beyond all this, she was going to meet the boys! She was a trifle shy at the prospect, for it was nearly two years since she had seen them, but the shyness would soon wear off, she knew. It never lasted beyond the first few minutes.

They had been unlucky in their plans for meeting of late. Miss Johnson's thoughtfulness had striven to supply what had never seemed necessary to their guardian, and during the four years Elspeth had been in her care, she had tried to arrange for her to meet her brothers occasionally. But their school was out in the country, and for them to come to see Elspeth meant a long and awkward journey.

Moreover, various happenings had made any meeting impossible during the last two years. It was only in the holidays that such meetings were practicable. Having neither father nor mother, the children spent their holidays at school, and would have been delighted to visit one another at these times. But the boys' school had been suffering from a time of bad luck and epidemics. Whenever the holidays drew near, some inconsiderate youth developed measles or scarlet fever, and the merest whisper of infection, however remote, was enough to make Miss Johnson take alarm and say regretfully that the invitation to Rob and Jock must be withheld for the present.

Elspeth wrote to her brothers occasionally, but it was difficult to write to people one never saw, and her interests and theirs were very different. Rob's letters were always full of inquiries as to her welfare and progress at school, with references to his own work or his next exam. But then Rob was nearly grown-up, and Elspeth was secretly a little afraid of him. He had been just fourteen two years ago, and she a small girl of nine. He had seemed very big then, and she feared that now he would be so old that she would not know what to say to him, forgetting that she also had grown, and that eleven was a schoolgirl, while nine was only a child.

She thought with more relief of Jock. He was thirteen now, and his letters were always full of his latest match, and the doings of his team. He was, as even Rob admitted, 'a hot man at football, and as good an inside left as you'd find anywhere for his size.' Elspeth did not know what an inside left was, but it sounded very fine, and her opinion of Rob himself rose considerably also, when Jock's letters informed her that old Rob was the best centre-half in the senior team, and she teased her schoolmates till those who had brothers explained the puzzling terms. When she understood that centre-half was a position of importance and trust, she felt convinced that Rob was not a person to be despised, after all.

But she felt much more eager to meet Jock. To judge from his letters, he was just a careless schoolboy, and Elspeth felt that he and she might have much in common.

'We'd have some good times, if we could only live together for a while,' had been her thought of him for some time.

Now the opportunity had come. This most unusual meeting in the middle of the term was the result of family troubles, concerning which many letters had passed between the authorities of both schools and the uncle who was guardian of the children. Their parents had left them to the care of their mother's brother, a wealthy stockbroker. Failure in business had recently brought him into difficulties, so that the support of his own wife and child became a

serious matter, and the education of three children at expensive boarding-schools a considerable burden.

He had written to their father's only relative, a sister living in Scotland, explaining that he could no longer support his sister's children, and when the holidays came they were all to go to Aunt Jean's farm near Glasgow. Hence Miss Johnson's wistful sigh as she looked at Elspeth in the train, for she had hoped to keep her for many years, and had tried to lessen her want of a mother's care so far as she could. And hence Elspeth's eager face and joyful anticipation of the meeting with the boys, for now at last she was to live with them, and she and Jock would have those good times they had longed for.

Rob was sitting for matric., and the fact had made possible the meeting for which Elspeth had pleaded ever since the new arrangements were explained to her. He was to bring his brother with him, and Jock was to spend the morning in the museums near the Imperial Institute. Elspeth and Miss Johnson were going shopping, and at lunch time were to meet the boys at a restaurant.

The programme was almost perfect in Elspeth's eyes, but was marred just a trifle by Miss Johnson's presence. Before her, Rob would be shy and Jock would be proper, and she herself would not know what to say. The natural shyness between them wore off quickly enough when they were left alone together, but the presence of a fourth person, and that Miss Johnson herself, would be quite enough to freeze them all into reserve, and half the pleasure of the meeting would be lost.

But Miss Johnson proved herself an understanding person after all. For when they reached the restaurant agreed upon, she led Elspeth to a table near the window, and after sitting there for a moment rose, glancing at her watch.

'Your brothers should be here immediately, so I am going to leave you, Elspeth. I think you will get on better with them if I am not here.'

'Oh——!' Elspeth's blazing eyes were sufficient thanks. 'Oh, Miss Johnson! Thank you so much!'

Miss Johnson laughed, and with another word of caution left her. Elspeth drew a long breath of delight.

'She is a darling!' she murmured. 'How simply sweet of her! I never thought she'd understand!'

Her position was now wholly delightful, and she felt intensely important as she sat studying the menu card.

'And she never even said what I was to have! She's a dear!—Not at present, thank you! I'm waiting for some gentlemen,' she said, with much dignity, as a waitress approached to take her order.

'I'd like lemonade,' she mused, 'but those little tea trays are awfully sweet, and I'd love to have a blue teapot all to myself. This table is engaged!' and she looked up severely at some students, who had offered to take the seats opposite.

They bowed with extreme politeness and apologised. Elspeth's cheeks burned, and she turned her attention to the card again.

'Perhaps they've been in for the exam. too. Horrid things, I hope they've failed! Great men like that, taking the same exam. as Rob, and he was sixteen last month! I don't expect they'll get through, anyway. But he will, he always does. What a lot of men! Why, some of them are quite old!'



She watched with interest as the room filled with students, all talking and laughing, discussing the morning's paper or joking over their dread of the afternoon. The boys were very late, she thought. No doubt it was Jock's fault. He had probably failed to turn up at the appointed place.

She was so intent on the merry chatter of a party of girl students that she forgot to keep a watch on the door. So her brothers saw her before she was aware of their presence.

Their first quick look round the room discovered her. She was the only small person in all the crowd, and she was resolutely keeping a whole table to herself, though the shop was filling fast.

'Is that the kid? She's getting big,' said Jock.

Rob's eyes had found his sister too. He smiled at sight of her.

'Rum little object!' was his verdict. 'Glad she's managed to keep a table. Thought we shouldn't all get together, thanks to you.'

'Well, if you'd seen——' began Jock, but Rob's eyes were on Elspeth, and he was not listening.

She sat in her corner, her eyes on the party at the next table, her face full of interest. In her neat little brown frock, with its severely-plain white collar and cuffs, her hat pushed back, and her little brown plaits with their white ribbons lying on her shoulders, she looked very small among all the earnest or excited elders. But she was sufficiently changed from the Elspeth of two years ago to warrant Jock's remark, and was now undoubtedly a schoolgirl, though a small one.

'Hallo, kiddie, so you've turned up again?'

Rob's greeting made her jump, and she turned with a start to find them beside her.

'Oh!' she said, 'Oh! Aren't you getting big!'

'Think so?' laughed Rob. 'And what about Buchanan minor? What's the verdict on him?'

Elspeth regarded Jock gravely. He was just what she had expected, just a schoolboy who had not yet discovered that life had to be taken seriously, with merry brown eyes which had not yet learned to be thoughtful, tumbled fair hair which could not be induced to part neatly, and a Norfolk suit which persisted in looking untidy, no matter what efforts he made to improve his appearance. Elspeth looked him over critically, and Jock reddened and looked uncomfortable.

'Jock?' she said at last. 'Oh!—he's just Jock! That's all!'

Rob chuckled, and Jock was beginning indignantly, 'Oh, I say——!' when Elspeth went on hurriedly,—

'But that's just what I like about him! I'd have been dreadfully disappointed if he'd been any different. I'm glad he's just Jock. I like him best that way, and I do hope we're going to have some good times in Scotland together. I know I mean to.'

'Right! We'll see to it, kiddie!' and Jock dropped into a chair, looking much relieved. 'Now let's have some lunch!'

## CHAPTER II CONCERNING RELATIONS

Rob sat watching his sister with amused eyes. His choice had fallen on coffee, as being a good thing to take before an afternoon exam., and Elspeth was pouring out with much enjoyment. It was something new to have a girl to wait on one, and he fully appreciated it, and watched her deft handling of the cups with enjoyment equal to hers. She had asked if he took sugar, and how much milk he preferred, with an assumption of matronliness which had come to her with the coffee-pot, and now, as she handed him his cup, inquired seriously how he had liked his papers that morning, and if he felt prepared for the afternoon?

Jock looked up to answer for his brother.

‘Oh, he’ll scrape through! He always does. It’s all luck. Now I——’

‘Oh, I’m getting on all right, kiddie,’ laughed Rob. ‘Where’s the old lady?’

‘Miss J.? She’s gone, so that we could talk. Isn’t she a darling?’

‘What do you call her? Is that the latest affectionate abbreviation?’

‘Miss J.? Oh, we all call her that! Don’t use long words, please! It muddles me.’

‘I’ll remember. Well, I must say it was very thoughtful of her——’

‘I say, kiddie, what have you done with your hair?’ demanded Jock, after a prolonged stare at his sister.

Elspeth turned on him sharply. ‘Look here! You’re not to call me kid. Rob may, if he wants to, but if you do, I shall call you baby, see? You’re not so very big, and besides, there’s baby. You can call her kiddie, if you like. I am longing to see her, aren’t you?’ and her eyes grew wistful. ‘A baby sister is a lovely thing to have, but fancy having one you’ve never seen! —at least, as good as never! She wasn’t a year old when they sent us to school. She must be nearly five now, and we don’t even know what she’s like! Don’t you feel wild to see her?’

But the boys had not much interest in the unknown baby sister. She was part of the past, and they only remembered her at a stage which had not interested them greatly, though it had been fascinating to Elspeth. She had often thought with longing of Sybil, left in their aunt’s care, and had even written her letters, printed in big capitals, which Sybil could not read and certainly could not answer. But the boys were more interested in the present, and Jock repeated his question insistently. Elspeth looked bewildered.

‘My hair? Why, nothing! What do you mean?’

‘Used to have corkscrews. I used to pull ’em.’

‘We all have plaits. It’s so much neater,’ Elspeth explained. ‘Only the babies are allowed to wear it loose. It *is* hideous, isn’t it? I begged Miss J. to let me wear my Sunday things and make myself decent, but she wouldn’t hear of it.’

Rob smiled at the indignant little face. ‘I like it. It’s so neat and comfortable and ready for anything.’

‘Oh, it’s that, of course! I don’t mind what I do in these old things.’

‘Climb trees and walls?’ queried Jock.

Elspeth nodded, her eyes widening, the colour deepening in her cheeks.

‘Wade through ponds and ford streams?’

She nodded again, the excitement growing in her face.

‘Creep through hedges and under barbed wire fences?’

A third emphatic nod, and eager dancing eyes to confirm it.

‘All right, kiddie. You’ll do. We’ll have some hot times.’

Elsbeth drew a long breath. ‘To make up for all this time we’ve hardly known one another! I’m longing for it so I can hardly wait till term’s over.’

‘I’m sorry for Aunt Jean,’ laughed Rob. ‘You kids must remember she’s being awfully good to us. Don’t be too hard on her all at once. It’s rather rough on her to get so many of us, and when one is Jock——’

‘And I’m another,’ Elsbeth told him frankly. ‘But she’ll want us to have a good time, Rob! Besides, it’s *Cousin Janie!* She’s not an aunt, after all.’

‘How do you make that out?’ demanded Jock, and Rob looked puzzled.

‘It *is* aunt, you know, kiddie!’

‘No, it’s not—not since this morning’s letter, you know.’

‘We had no letter. I thought she was still an aunt?’

‘What’s happened to change her?’ queried Jock. ‘Doesn’t she know which she is? Has she changed her mind about it?’

‘Then she meant me to tell you. I had a letter this morning, with Janie Buchanan at the end, not Jean, and she says she’s a cousin, not an aunt, as I seem to think. You see, I wrote to her, saying how awfully jolly it would be to live with her, and how much I was looking forward to it, and what good times we’d have——’

‘You wrote to her? And who put you up to that?’ asked Rob curiously.

‘No one. I just thought it would be nice, since we’re going to live with her. It seemed friendly.’

‘It was a hot idea,’ said Rob warmly. ‘I wish I’d done it myself! But fancy you thinking of it! Sure your old lady didn’t put you up to it?’ and he gazed at his small sister with more respect.

‘No, but she knew and said I might. Well, Aunt Jean wrote back and said she was pleased we were coming, too, but she thought I didn’t quite understand, as she wasn’t “Aunt Jean” at all, but “Cousin Janie.” Odd, isn’t it?’

‘But how does she make that out? She’s father’s sister?’

‘She says she isn’t. I wish I’d brought the letter, but I thought you’d know all about it. Her mother died two years ago, and she thought we knew. But she’s living in a house near the farm, and somebody’s looking after the business for her, and she’ll be awfully pleased to have us live with her. She says her mother always wanted to have us, for father’s sake, so she’s glad we should come now, even though her mother’s dead. She knows it would have pleased her.’

‘Sounds all right,’ Rob said reflectively, ‘but it’s queer. Queer that we didn’t know, I mean. I suppose Uncle Whitaker knew, but didn’t think it worth while mentioning it. I wonder what she’s like?’ and he sat looking thoughtful.

‘Her letter sounds very nice. I’ll send it on to you.’

‘Yes, you’d better. And look here! You kids mustn’t worry her. It isn’t fair. I know Jock, you see——’

Jock had been absorbing the conversation while not neglecting his lunch. He looked up quickly.

‘Because she’s a cousin? I don’t see that. If she’s an aunt, we may do as we like, but if she’s a cousin we’re not to worry her! What *have* you got hold of now, old chap? What does the cousinness matter? What difference does it make?’

Rob laughed. 'I'll tell you when we get there and I've seen her, if you don't see through it for yourself. Well, if she's pleased to have us, I'm glad we're going. It's awfully decent of her. I want to have no more to do with these Whitakers.'

Elspeth's brown eyes grew round.

'Why?'

'I'm sick of them,' said Rob briefly.

'It's one of Rob's hobbies,' Jock informed her. 'He can talk by the hour about the Whitakers.'

'But—Rob! They've been decent to us too! What's the matter with them?'

'I don't think they have,' he said with emphasis. 'While they had heaps of money, they didn't mind spending some on us. They had so much they never felt it. But it was only because mother took us there and asked them to. They couldn't help themselves. They didn't care about us. They wouldn't have us in their house. They never had us home for the holidays in all those four years. They just signed cheques and cared no more about us. Now, the minute it's difficult to sign cheques, they're done with us, and we must go to Scotland, whether it's easy for Aunt Jean or not. Perhaps she's poor—she's written that she can't afford to keep us at school, but that she'll do her best for us, so she evidently isn't well off. But that doesn't matter. The Whitakers don't want us any longer, so we must go to her, and she must manage as best she can. They've only kept us this long because they felt they had to. They never liked father, you know. They despised him because he was just a missionary. If he'd been rich they'd have thought a lot of him. They never liked mother marrying him, and they don't care an atom for us, or for father's people, or anything. If I can, I'll pay them back all the money they've spent on us some day. I'd feel better. I hate to feel we owe them anything.'

'But they've kept Sybil, and been good to her!' Elspeth urged, with startled eyes, for his way of looking at the matter was new to her.

'They couldn't do anything else. You can't send babies in arms to school. But they're quite ready to get rid of her at the first opportunity. They're sending her north at once, you know, as they happened to have some friends going that way—instead of waiting till she could go with us. I was older than you two when we stopped there before they sent us to school, and I remember the way they used to talk of father, and pity mother because she hadn't married some one with more "go" in him. A mere missionary, content to live all his life on one little island, ninety miles from the nearest white man, and do all the good he could! Content to spend all his time among the natives, teaching and civilising them, and giving up everything for their sake! Such a miserable existence! "No money in it!" That's how they used to talk. Fact! I heard uncle say it. I've never been able to forget it.'

'But—how horrible!' gasped Elspeth, staring round-eyed. 'Why, father was the finest man that ever lived, and he'd have changed that whole island if he'd lived long enough! And mother too! She was *glad* to live among the savages, and was never afraid! *She* thought he was doing the most splendid work in the world——'

'She was proud of him, and so are we. They don't understand. That's why I'm glad we won't be taking their money any longer. Aunt—or Cousin, or whatever she is, will feel as we do, because father was her brother, and I'd heaps rather live with her, even if she's really poor, and we have only porridge for dinner.'

'I don't think I'd like that,' Elspeth said candidly. 'But if she is really poor, and lives in a cottage, it will be rather fun, you know. You'll have to chop wood for the kitchen fire, Rob, and carry water from the well—cottages always have wells, don't they? Jock, you'll have to

run errands and clean the boots and knives. You're just the size of our boot-boy at school \_\_\_\_\_,

Rob laughed, and Jock grunted indignantly,—

'Boot-boy yourself! Catch me! And what are you going to do, miss? Sit in the drawing-room and do needlework?'

'Needlework!' jeered Elspeth. 'A lot of needlework I'll have time for, unless you and Rob go barefoot! It will take Cousin Janie and me all our time to darn your stockings, I guess. And I shall help in the kitchen, and make the beds, and dust, and feed the chickens, and perhaps she'll teach me to milk the cows and make cheese and butter! Wouldn't that be jolly? I shan't have much time for needlework! And, anyway, cottages don't have drawing-rooms, they have parlours. But I shan't ever go in there. I shall stop in the kitchen. That's always cosy—the nicest room in the house, I always think. But we never get a chance at school. I say, *won't* it be a change?'

'We may find it too much of a change before we've been there very long.'

But Elspeth would admit no such possibility.

'It will be ripping, I think! But it will be awfully funny to have you and Jock there all the time! I suppose I'll get used to you, though. Don't you wish we were going to-morrow?'

'Crikey! Don't I just? We'd get out of all the exams!'

Jock had finished his lunch at last, and was ready to take his share in the conversation. Elspeth had forgotten her cake, and sat with her elbows among the plates and her chin on her hands, staring through the window at the traffic with eyes which saw an imaginary farm on the Scottish hills.

'Of course, school's jolly, and Miss J. and the girls are awfully decent, especially now they know I'm leaving, but all the same I'm looking forward to the farm! There'll be you two all the time, and I *think* I'll like that, and there'll be Cousin Janie, and I'm sure to like her, and then there's Sybil, and I'm just longing for her!'

'Well, my time's up,' and Rob rose. 'I shall have to run. Jock, you stay and talk to her till the old lady turns up. Meet me at the station in good time, now! Don't lose the train, or we shan't get home till late, and I've some prep. to do for to-morrow. So have you, for that matter!'

'You should never look up during an exam.,' Elspeth said seriously. 'That should all be done beforehand. What you cram at the last minute is never any good. Once the exam.'s begun, you should take a holiday in the evenings and rest thoroughly.'

Rob laughed out. 'Is that your experience? Not bad for your size! Well, good-bye! We'll meet again in the Scotch express!'

### CHAPTER III

#### THE LOWER SCHOOL CHAMPION

‘I wonder if we couldn’t meet again *before* the Scotch express!’ Elspeth mused, her chin dropping on her hands again.

Jock lounged back in his chair in an easy attitude.

‘Afraid not. But it’s only for a month. Unless your old lady would bring you over to a match one day? Ladies always welcomed and provided with tea and chairs in the shade.’

‘I wish she would! I’d love to see the school and the boys! But she wouldn’t. I wish you could come——’

Then her eyes danced. ‘Sports’ Day! Oh, if she’d only ask you! You know, you were to come last year, and that horrid scarlet fever began the very day before! Do you think you could get off? Then you’d see the school, and the girls, and all the fun!’

‘What’s “all the fun”?’ asked Jock cautiously. ‘We’d be sure to have a match on, and they’d miss me.’

‘Oh, but surely they could do without you for once! It’s the best day of the whole summer! In the morning there’s the swimming. I’m afraid you couldn’t come to *that*. Boys aren’t invited, as a rule. In the afternoon there are the sports, and a grand march-past of the whole school, and a drill display on the lawn, and tea and prizes and fire-drill. Then after tea there’s music by the orchestra and a French play. They’re making their dresses already, and they’re going to look splendid. But of course we’ll miss Melany Merrill in that. She was half foreign, you know, and talked French beautifully, but she left last year——’

‘Are you in for the sports?’ demanded Jock, caring nothing for French plays and half foreign girls.

‘Oh, I’m in for two or three races, but I don’t expect to do much. Still, you never know. But I have my turn in the swimming, you know. Perhaps I’ll be too tired to run, for I’ll have to do my very best, and they’re all counting on me.’

Her eyes sparkled, and she leaned forward eagerly.

‘Such fun, Jock! Oh, I wish you could come! It’s a great honour, really, and I’m awfully proud. You know, last year I couldn’t enter for the tournament, for I’d had bronchitis. But I’ve been practising hard this year, and I’m Lower School Champion, and when Jill Colquhoun and I—she’s Upper School Champion—had a private race a fortnight ago, I beat her by a whole half minute on the three lengths! Wasn’t that jolly?’

‘Well, so you ought!’ Jock made light of this achievement, but his eyes betrayed him. ‘If a South Sea Islander can’t beat any mere English girl at swimming, it’s funny. You could swim before you could walk, almost. There’s not a chap can touch Rob and me in the water.’

‘But Jill’s two years older than I am, and she’s a Highlander, and can do everything of that sort better than any one else! You should see her run! It’s like lightning!’

‘All the same, she wasn’t born on a coral island, and brought up on the beach and in the water. D’you remember the surf-swimming?’

‘I don’t remember any of it,’ Elspeth said regretfully. ‘I only wish I did! But *I can* swim! Well, but this is what I want to tell you, Jock! There’s a Cup held by the school, but it has to be won in open competition every year. We have to defend it, and any one may enter and try to get it away from us. It’s never been lost to the school yet. Until last year, Melany Merrill,

the half-foreign girl, used to win it back for us every time. She was the finest swimmer we had, and best in the gym. too. But last year she had to go abroad, and we were afraid we'd lose the Cup. Jill Colquhoun and one or two others swam for the school, and Jill saved it. But she sprained her ankle at cricket the other day, so she's out of everything, and so this year *I'm* to swim, and *I* mean to save it, see? Because—this is the important thing!—Melany is in England now, with her father and her pretty funny Italian sister, and she's coming back on Sports' Day to try and win the Cup away from us! So, you see——!

'But, I say, she shouldn't do that! Shouldn't try against her own school, even if she has left! That's caddish!' Jock began indignantly.

'Oh, no, it's not! You don't understand! Jill and the rest of her old form begged her to enter, and said they were sure she couldn't win the Cup, especially since she's been abroad for over a year, and must be out of practice. But they begged her to try, just for fun. At first she wouldn't, for the reason you said, although she said she wasn't out of practice a bit. But they begged and teased, and said they'd *like* her to try, and they were sure we'd beat her, and she'd see the school hasn't gone down since she left. So at last she put down her name, and said that if she won, of course she'd give back the Cup to the school again. So they said, all right, she could do that, *if* she won, but she wouldn't, for they meant to beat her. They were trusting to Jill, you see. Now she's sprained her ankle, and can't enter for anything, and I'm the only one left to beat Melany! I mean to do it too!'

'But you're only a kid! Isn't there any one else?'

'Oh, plenty! But I can beat them all, so what's the use?'

'Well,' Jock said reflectively, 'if you can do it, it will be jolly decent. But don't go and kill yourself for the sake of the Cup.'

'I'm not the least likely to. But Melany's big, you know. She's fifteen. I was quite one of the juniors when she was at school, so she'll be rather surprised to find she has to swim with me.'

'She'll back out when she sees what a scrap you are.'

'They won't let her. There's less of me to go through the water. She's tall.'

'She won't like racing a junior.'

'Oh, but I'm not a junior now—not since last Christmas.'

'Oh!' Jock eyed her quizzically. 'Senior, eh?'

'No, I'm a middle. The juniors are quite small, some of them just babies. Here comes Miss J.! Then I'll ask her at once!'

'Have I left you too long, Elspeth? I met some friends, and stayed longer than I intended. But Jock has been taking care of you, I see. Has Rob had to go?'

'Yes, he couldn't wait. Oh, Miss Johnson, there's something I want to ask you! Do say you will, please! As it's for the last time! Because I'm leaving, and there'll never be another chance! Won't you invite the boys over for Sports' Day, *please*? They've never seen the school, and it would be ripping for me to have somebody belonging to me, like all the others.'

Perhaps this argument won the day. Miss Johnson said quietly,—

'I'll be very pleased to see you both, Jock, if you can manage it. Try to arrange to come. I know it would be a pleasure to Elspeth to have you there.'

'And if there's a match that day, they must just do without you for once, that's all! If you play cricket instead of coming to see me, I won't speak to you all the way going to Scotland, Jock. I'll be fearfully offended. I suppose—you couldn't ask them to come early and be there for the swimming?' and she eyed Miss Johnson wistfully.

‘I think that would hardly do, dear. And, Elspeth!’ as Elspeth sighed regretfully. ‘Don’t build too much on the Cup race, dear. Melany is a fine swimmer, and——’

‘I can swim too!’

‘You certainly can!’ laughed Miss Johnson. ‘But Melany is so much bigger and stronger than you. I’m not sure that I ought to let her compete with you. Jill’s accident is most unfortunate——’

‘Oh, but I’m strong too!’ Elspeth assured her eagerly. ‘And I’m not half as heavy as she is! You know I beat Jill the other day, and I’m going to begin training at once, and not eat any sweets till after the race.’

‘I don’t want you to overdo it, dear, and I don’t want you to be too much disappointed if Melany wins. After all, she won’t take the Cup away from us, so it doesn’t really matter, you know.’

‘Oh, it does! It matters all the more! It’s not the same thing at all! It’s never been won yet, and if she gets it, it will never seem really ours again! We’d all be miserable for ever if we lost it, Miss Johnson.’

Miss Johnson laughed. ‘If you all take it so seriously, I shall write to Melany, telling her of Jill’s accident and asking her to withdraw her challenge.’

‘Oh! But why?’

‘Because Jill is the Upper School Champion, and will be unable to defend the Cup.’

‘But—there’s *me!*’

‘We can’t be expected to produce a defender from the Lower School, Elspeth.’

‘But I can beat Jill! I’ve done it! Oh, Miss Johnson, you wouldn’t be so cruel to us all!’

Miss Johnson laughed. ‘Well, don’t build too much on it, and don’t overdo the practising, or I will. Your last argument is certainly a good one. You *have* beaten Jill, and you have just a chance of giving Melany hard work to win the Cup. But don’t be too heart-broken if she succeeds, dear, that’s all.’

Elspeth pouted. ‘I’ll be *quite* heart-broken!’ she declared. ‘And so will all the others.’

‘What do you think, Jock? Ought we to let her try?’

‘It would be ripping if she could do it, but she’s such a kid,’ Jock said doubtfully.

‘I’m not! Jock, you’re a mean thing! You’re only thirteen yourself. You needn’t pretend you’re a hundred!’

Miss Johnson laughed and rose. ‘You and Rob must come over for the Sports, Jock. You’ll hear all about it then. If you could come by the train which arrives just before one, you would have a good while with Elspeth, and she could show you all over the school and gardens before the afternoon’s events begin. We always provide luncheon for our visitors from a distance. Now, Elspeth, we must hurry away. I have some shopping to do before we go to the train. Do you feel competent to help me choose a wedding present?’

Elspeth’s eyes danced. ‘Rather!’ she said. ‘Is it to be silver?’



## CHAPTER IV CONCERNING THE CUP RACE

'Melany! Melany!' shouted the Upper School, at sight of their former champion unable to gain upon her small competitor.

'Elspeth! Go it, Elspeth! Well done, Elspeth Buchanan!' screamed the Lower School, and nearly overbalanced and fell into the big swimming-bath in the excitement of the moment.

Then a groan, almost of disappointment, for the little hand and the bigger one had touched the bar at the same moment.

'A tie! Oh, what a shame! That's silly! What's the good of that? But isn't Elspeth ripping?'

An excited buzz of talk swept round the bath, while the heroines of the moment rested on the steps and laughed ruefully over the result.

'You can swim, kiddie! But what a pity you didn't put on a scrap more spurt at the end! A tie's so silly. I wish one of us had won, even by half a second.'

Melany, a tall girl in pale pink swimming costume, pulled off her cap and let two long braids of black hair fall on her wet shoulders.

'The thing's too tight. Crumbs! It's giving me quite a headache!' she said indignantly. 'You aren't done up, are you?' and she eyed the small defender of the Cup anxiously.

Elspeth, a shiny dark-blue shrimp, squeezed the water out of her plaits and shook her head vigorously.

'Not a scrap. I love being in the water. D'you think they'd let us try again?'

'They might, if you're quite fit. I hadn't thought of it. Zanne! Zanne!'

Her twin sister, a tall fair girl in white muslin, with yellow hair hanging in two thick plaits below her waist, leaned forward from her seat beside the wall.

'Yes? So you could not leave the little girl behind after all, Melany?'

Her foreign accent and pretty manners had charmed all the girls. She was very shy, however, and kept close to her father and sister, but watched Melany's former schoolmates with keen interest.

'She's a fish, not a girl. You might ask Miss J. if we may have another try? The kiddie wants to. She suggested it.'

But to approach Miss Johnson would have been too great an ordeal. Zanne laughed and shook her head, and Melany climbed the steps, coiling her long hair neatly round her head as she went.

'You goose! Then I'll have to go myself.'

She made her way carefully along the slippery side, doing her best not to wet her friends on the one hand nor to fall into the water on the other. She was very graceful and well developed, looking quite her fifteen years, and the elders among the audience watched her with appreciation as she went along, quite unconscious of their gaze, to Miss Johnson's seat.

Some persuasion was needed to win the desired permission. But both the girls seemed quite able for another race, and the rest of the school, having heard from Elspeth what was afoot, cheered till the roof threatened to fall in, and would not be satisfied without a second trial. Miss Johnson hesitated, however, and sent for Elspeth and questioned her doubtfully, while the girls waited in suspense.

At last Melany turned and waved her hand joyfully, and the cheering broke out afresh. But there was still some time to wait, for Miss Johnson insisted on an interval for rest, and Melany and Elspeth were sent to rub down quickly and slip into borrowed costumes, and be fed upon hot milk and biscuits.

Elspeth was the centre of an excited crowd at once, all urging her to make one greater effort next time. She sat on a bench and told her feelings during the few seconds of the race, and received congratulations calmly and exhortations with some warmth.

‘I did my best!’ she said indignantly. ‘I don’t believe I can do any better. I’ll try, of course, but I did the best I could. She’s ripping, you know. I believe she wanted me to win. She didn’t like it when she saw how small I was, but I made her promise faithfully she’d play fair and do her best. I didn’t want her to let me win, or any of that nonsense. And, do you know, I believe she’d meant to, by the way she laughed when I said it! But I made her promise solemnly. She swims far better than any of you. Will some one be a darling and fetch me another handkerchief? I dropped mine, and it’s sopping.’

‘I’ll go. I’d like to,’ and Jill Colquhoun limped away.

Melany, in a blue suit borrowed from Monica Howard, one of the big girls of her old form, and wearing a loose light dust cloak thrown over her shoulders, sat sipping her milk and discussing the race with her father and sister in eager animated French. She looked very grown-up with her long dark plaits coiled round her head, but Zanne laughed at her scanty costume.

‘I cannot understand how you like to run about with long bare legs and arms! I should be ashamed,’ said she.

‘Oh, I don’t mind. Nobody’s going to look at me, except when I’m in the water,’ Melany said lightly, nibbling a biscuit, but she drew her feet under her cloak as she spoke. ‘Well, don’t you think English schools are splendid?’

‘Jolly—ripping—first-class!’ laughed Zanne, lapsing into the English slang she had learned from her sister.

‘How is it the little girl can swim so fast?’ she said.

‘She comes from an island in the South Seas, where they’re swimming all day long. She says she grew up in the water. Her father was a missionary person, and she’s awfully proud of him—thinks there never was any one like him in the world. He’s dead now. So’s her mother.’

‘Poor little girl! Melany, it would be very nice if she could win the race! They would all be so pleased with her!’ murmured Zanne persuasively. ‘Don’t you think it would be kind——?’

But Melany laughed out. ‘Zanne, my dear, I daren’t! She’d know, and so would they, and they’d all be frightfully angry. She made me promise to do my very best, and they’d all be down on me like anything if I slacked off. Jill would see through it, if the rest didn’t. Have you spoken to her yet? She used to sleep with me, you know. Where’s she gone, I wonder?’

Jill was hobbling back from the schoolhouse on her errand for Elspeth, as fast as her weak ankle would allow, when near the big front gates she met two boys, one rather older than herself, one younger. They looked doubtful of their surroundings and of their right to be there, and were evidently hesitating as to how to proceed. They gazed at Jill, leaning on her stick, dressed in white with long fair hair, and she looked back at them, puzzled that strangers should look so oddly familiar. What was it about them that she seemed to know? Who could they be? They must belong to somebody, of course. Of whom did they remind her?

Then as she looked at the younger boy’s round face and fair hair, she saw before her eyes Elspeth sitting on the side of the swimming-bath, and she no longer questioned who they

were. By nature she was shy, but she was far less shy now than before she came to school, and she was far less shy than they, which fact put her at her ease at once.

You must be Elspeth's brothers!' and she limped up to them triumphantly. 'We've all heard about you. She's awfully excited about you coming to-day. It's the first time she's had anybody belonging to her to show round, so it *is* very jolly for her.'

Her Highland speech showed in moments of excitement, and the soft roll of the r's, and the accent on the words—'It *iss* ferry jolly for her'—made Jock stare for a moment.

Rob laughed.

'Are you the defender of the Cup who crocked up and couldn't defend it after all?'

'Yes, that's me!' Jill nodded. 'I knew you must be Elspeth's brothers. You are so ferry like her.'

'Who's won the Cup race?' demanded Jock, and Jill's eyes danced.

'How silly of me not to tell you the first minute! Of course you must be dying to hear! It isn't finished yet. It was a dead heat, so they're going to swim it over again. They're just having a wee rest. You come and wait near the door, and I'll slip out and tell you as soon as I know who's won.'

'Couldn't we get inside somehow? It would be ripping to see the kiddie swim,' said Jock longingly. 'Don't you think you could manage to squeeze us into some corner?'

Jill looked doubtful. 'Boys aren't invited, as a rule. Some of the girls wouldn't like it. But Elspeth would be awfully pleased, I'm sure.'

'Couldn't you ask the old lady?' asked Jock eagerly.

Rob said only—'It would be jolly ripping to see the kiddie win the race!' but he too looked so eager that Jill said quickly,—

'I could ask her, of course. You never know. You wait at the door till I bring you word.'

'Hot stuff!' Jock cried joyously. 'You're a brick, you know!'

Jill laughed. But Rob's face had lit up, too, so she said quickly,—

'I am very much afraid Miss J. will say no, you know, but I will do what I can. If Elspeth could win, and you could be there to see, how fine that would be!'

Rob nodded, and Jock cried excitedly, 'Cut along and ask the old lady quick, won't you?'

'I can't go very quick, I'm afraid,' Jill said ruefully, 'but I'll go as quick as I can. But I don't believe she'll say yes, you know,—unless, of course, Melany was quite willing.'

'Is she a good sort?' Jock asked anxiously.

'Oh, awfully! But she might not like it. You never can tell. But I'll go and find out,' and Jill limped away to find Miss Johnson.

'To please Elspeth! Because she's leaving! And it might help her to win!' pleaded Jill. 'She's never had any one belonging to her here before, and I know she would very much like to have her brothers see her win the race!'

Miss Johnson laughed and shook her head doubtfully.

'Of course, if Melany didn't mind!' she said at last.

'I'll ask her!' and Jill sent a small girl flying to fetch Melany.

Melany laughed when she understood.

'Oh, I don't mind—to please the kiddie!' she said, and Jill gave a whoop of delight. 'Only let me get into the water first. It doesn't matter being looked at when you're in the water. Anybody looks funny then. No, I'm not going to wear the thing, thanks,' as Jill offered her her indiarubber cap. 'It isn't comfortable, and I'm not going under again. I shan't get wet.'

Her long plaits were wound closely round her head to be well out of the way. She ran down the steps and waded across to Elspeth, perched on the side.

‘Come along! Let’s see whether Italy or the South Seas comes in first this time! You ought to win, you know, with two brothers watching and cheering you on!’

‘Brothers?’ gasped Elspeth, looking wildly round.

‘Rather! There they are beside Miss J. Now mind you don’t disappoint them! They’ve come on purpose to see you win, you know.’

‘When did they come? Who brought them in? How did they get leave? Shan’t I go and speak to them?’ and Elspeth nearly tumbled in in her excitement.

‘No, certainly not. Not till the race is over. Come on do! It’s not good form to keep the challenger waiting shivering, while you hop about up there. It’s all very well for you, you’re dry. I’m going to start without you in a moment.’

Elspeth, hesitating between the water and the visitors’ platform, decided that the boys must wait till afterwards. She tucked her hair hastily into a gray rubber cap, flung up one pink arm in greeting to Jock, ran up the steps of the diving-board like a little blue monkey up a cocoanut palm, and took a header into the water, sending a shower of drops over the indignant Melany.

The girls were all dressed now, and thronged the doors of their dressing-rooms with towels thrown over their shoulders and flowing damp hair. And now there was excitement indeed, as Elspeth and Melany took their places. A second dead heat would be too dreadful!

Elspeth looked very tiny beside her big antagonist, and Melany laughed ruefully as she glanced at her.

‘It isn’t half silly that I can’t beat a scrap like you! How you get along so quick with those skinny little arms I can’t imagine!’

‘The boys say I used to be swimming all the time, when we lived on the island. Except, of course, in the middle of the day, when it was too hot,’ Elspeth explained, as they waited for the signal.

‘Too hot! I should have thought it would be ripping then.’

‘No, you’d get sunstroke. Jock once saw a native woman swimming with an umbrella up to keep off the sun.’

‘I say! Swimming under an umbrella?’

Elspeth nodded, her eyes on Miss Johnson.

‘Miss J.’s just going to—there!’

‘I say! The kiddie goes through the water, doesn’t she?’ murmured Jock.

‘Something like! She’s a credit to the island. She’s looking at us. That’s a mistake. She’ll lose her lead.’

‘She winked at me,’ chuckled Jock. ‘But, I say, that big girl swims well too! Isn’t she strong? They’re well matched, if she is three times the kiddie’s size! Now she’s ahead——’

‘Yes, but Elspeth’s pulling up. She’s not overdoing it. She has heaps of reserve yet,’ Rob said approvingly. ‘Good style too. It’s so easy. They’re both graceful swimmers,’ and then they lapsed into tense silence as the last length began.

The cheering from the girls swelled into a roar, as the big and the small blue bodies crept along with strong graceful strokes. Both had been keeping something in reserve, and they were well together almost to the end.

But just at the last, Elspeth caught Jock’s anxious eye. She had thought she was doing her very best, but she could not disappoint him. Suddenly she shot forward, and the little hand

grasped the bar a fraction of a second before the bigger one.

She hung there panting, while the storm of applause swept round the visitors, and the girls shouted themselves hoarse and nearly went frantic with excitement. Jock sprang to his feet to give delighted cheers for ‘the kiddie,’ and Rob laughed out in relief as he cried ‘Well done!’ Pretty Zanne laughed up at her father in some disappointment.

‘The little fish has come in first, after all! But I do not think Melany will be greatly disappointed. I do not think she wished to win.’

Melany looked ruefully at the small defender of the Cup.

‘You did put on a spurt that time, kiddie! Sure you haven’t hurt yourself?’

Elsbeth shook her head breathlessly. ‘You’re sure—you did your best? It was—quite fair?’

‘Oh, quite! Crumbs, yes! I don’t know when I’ve worked so hard. There’s Miss J. calling you. Let’s get out and get dressed.’

‘I’m tired. I’ll come in a minute,’ and Elspeth hung on to the bar, gasping still.

Melany was wading towards the steps. She turned back with a laugh, realising suddenly that Elspeth could not stand in the deep water and was too much exhausted to swim again at present.

‘What a scrap you are, if you *are* a fish! Come on!’ and she held out her arms.

Elsbeth let herself drop into them, and Melany carried her to the side.

‘There! And to think that *you* beat *me*! I do feel small!’

Elsbeth clambered shakily up the steps.

‘Thanks awfully! It comes over my head at this end. Oh, yes! I’m all right, thank you, quite!’ to Miss Johnson, who looked a trifle anxious. ‘I couldn’t get my breath again, that was all. I never swam so hard in all my life!’ she laughed at Melany. ‘But I saw Jock look at me, you know, and I really couldn’t disappoint him. I’ll get dressed as quick as I can, and then I’ll come and speak to them.’

Jill Colquhoun and Monica Howard hurried her away, and Zanne came forward with the long cloak to throw about her sister.

‘So this time the little fish left you behind, Melany!’ she said reproachfully.

Melany laughed. ‘Don’t tell them, but I’m glad! No, I didn’t do it on purpose, but I didn’t want to win. But don’t whisper it to a soul. I’ll pretend I’m awfully cut up, of course. Go and talk to her big brothers while I’m dressing,’ and she laughed at Zanne’s look of horror and the dismay with which she fled back to her father.

## CHAPTER V

### A CREDIT TO THE ISLAND

Rob and Jock stood waiting for Elspeth to appear, and feeling rather shy. She came at last, in a white garden-party frock, her hair released from its plaits and hanging in a soft light brown mane about her face and shoulders, a trifle thicker and wilder than usual from its recent wetting and the vigorous brushing to which Jill had subjected it.

'You can't go and talk to your brothers looking like a drowned cat just come out of a loch!' she had insisted. 'So just stand still while I brush it and make you fit to be seen, Elspeth Buchanan!'

'Every one will be looking at the child, because she saved the Cup,' she said to Monica, as Elspeth, released at last, ran off gladly with barely a word of thanks. 'She must be decent, whether she likes it or not. And it is pretty hair, though I wouldn't tell her so.'

It was pretty hair, very light brown, thick with yellow threads which did not show to advantage in plaits, but caught the sunlight when they fell loose and lit up all the curly waves with gold. She went bareheaded, that the afternoon sun might complete the drying process, and if to-day she was indifferent to her appearance, it was only owing to excitement and her eagerness to reach the boys.

She went flying across the lawn to Rob.

'Rob! Rob! What about your exam.? Have you passed? Have you heard yet?'

Rob nodded, smiling.

'He always does, you know. His luck hasn't deserted him yet. It's awfully jolly to be born lucky. I wasn't!' said Jock mournfully. 'He's got Honours, of course. Everybody knew he would.'

'I *am* glad! That's just splendid!' Elspeth said fervently.

They disappeared together to inspect her garden, and found her in a state of wildest delight that at last she had some one really belonging to herself to be conducted over the grounds.

'It's perfectly ripping to have some one of my own, like all the others!' she confided to Rob, as they admired her tiny garden patch. 'I've often shown strangers round, but it's not the same. Don't you admire my sweet peas? And aren't those lovely pansies? Will you have a button-hole? I'll arrange it for you! It is jolly to have some one of my own to give my flowers to! Do you know, Rob, I'm looking forward to Scotland more every day, because we're all going to be together! I had another letter from Cousin Janie this morning, just to say she's looking forward to Friday too, and she'll meet us at the station. I know she's jolly, from her letters. I'll fetch it for you to read.'

During the afternoon, Melany sought out Elspeth and drew her off down a garden path for a chat. The sports were over, and it was the interval for tea. The school orchestra was entertaining the guests on the lawn, and the girls had been dismissed to change to gymnasium costume for the march-past and fire-drill.

Elspeth had failed to do more than come in third in any race. Perhaps in spite of her statements to the contrary, she was a little tired by the morning's exertions. But, having been racing, she was already dressed in her dark blue tunic and white blouse and girdle, and so had time for a chat.

‘What’s the prize for the Cup race this time?’ asked Melany, when they had talked of the race and the afternoon’s sports. ‘A tennis racquet?—it often is. Or a camera? Or something to wear? Not books, I suppose?’

Elsbeth’s eyes shone. ‘It’s to be a picnic basket! It was my idea. Of course, I might not have won, but we guessed any one would like a tea basket, and I wanted it dreadfully, in case I got it. It’s to be fitted with everything you need for a picnic for two people, and it will come in awfully handy in Scotland. We’ll have picnics every day. The boys will have to carry the basket, and I’ll pour out the tea!’

Melany laughed. ‘Jill told me you were leaving. Don’t you feel bad about it? I felt awful.’

Elsbeth considered the matter thoughtfully. ‘No, I don’t think I do. I’m sorry, and if I could go for the holidays and come back here again in term, I’d like that best of all. But I’m looking forward to it just awfully, you know.’

‘Do you think you’ll have such a good time?’

‘Yes! I do, but it’s not only that. You see, I’ve always lived at school since I was seven, holidays and all. I’ve never had a home, like other girls. And however nice school is—and it is jolly, isn’t it?—it’s not quite the same. I want to have a home. Think how ripping it must be to live in a house without any rules!—where you can go anywhere you like, just whenever you like, and talk in your bedroom as much as you like, and play games in the corridor and on the stairs, without Mademoiselle coming along to give you some French spelling! Think of going into the kitchen!’—in a tone which implied that this was the height of all possible bliss.

Melany laughed. ‘Well, there’s something in that, of course. If your aunt is nice, no doubt you will have a good time.’

‘She’s a cousin, and she must be nice, for she writes such jolly letters. And then the boys will be there all the time. It will seem awfully odd to have them always about, but I guess they’ll be useful in a good many ways,’ and she sat on the fence, swinging her legs thoughtfully. ‘Maybe we’ll quarrel now and then, but that will just keep things from getting slack. And then there’s Sybil—our little sister, you know. She’s only five, and we haven’t seen her since she was a year old. I’m longing to have her to cuddle. It must be fine to have a baby sister. I wonder what she’s like?’

‘It’s been awfully hard lines on you all being separated for so long.’

‘It’s going to be awfully jolly being together again! I guess it will about make up for it. It’s what we have to pay for having such a splendid father and mother.’

‘Because they were missionaries, do you mean?’ asked Melany, puzzled.

‘Of course. Missionaries always have to leave their children behind. I think it’s awfully brave of them. Wouldn’t you be proud if your father and mother had gone and lived for years on a coral island, not the least afraid of the savages, but teaching them and persuading them to leave off fighting and killing and eating one another?’ Her eyes were round and dark with eagerness. ‘The whole island was changed in the twelve years they lived on it. The people were peaceful, and were learning to be clean and sober. Father had made them stop drinking things that drove them crazy and did heaps of harm. They had given up their horrible feasts and stopped murdering their babies. They always used to kill the first two or three babies, you know, before they allowed any to live to grow up. The men were learning how to build more comfortable houses and how to plant new trees and fruits they had never heard of, so that they didn’t have to live on fish and cocoa-nuts all the year round. The women were learning how to look after the babies, and the children were coming to school and had begun to learn to read.’

Father had translated the New Testament into their language, and quite a crowd used to come to hear him read the stories. Wouldn't you be proud if your father had done all that?'

'I am proud of my father,' Melany said stoutly. 'He's awfully clever, and he's written a famous book, and it had splendid reviews. Zanne and I made a scrapbook of them. But you're quite right to be proud too. It's splendid to know your folks did so much good.'

'Father worked too hard, while mother wasn't there to look after him,' Elspeth said thoughtfully. 'She was afraid he would, but she had to bring us home to school. The boys had been at school in Sydney for two years, but the hot climate was making me ill, and Sybil was just born, and couldn't stand the heat. It was right on the Equator, you know. So mother brought us home to her people in London. She wanted father to take a holiday, and come too, but he wouldn't, though he hadn't had a holiday for twelve years. But he felt he simply couldn't come away while there was so much to do, and no one to take his place. So she hurried back to him as quick as she could, for she was sure he would overwork and not take enough care of himself. It was awful saying good-bye to her, and I know it was worse for her. But father needed her, so she had to go. Well, shall I tell you the rest?' and she broke off suddenly, looking up at the big girl with bright tragic eyes.

Melany nodded, and she hurried on.

'When mother got to the island she found he had died a week before. It was just as she had thought, and when he had gone down with fever he was so tired out with hard work that he couldn't fight against it. It just killed her. She felt so much alone, on that tiny island in the middle of the ocean. We were still at Uncle Whitaker's when the news came. The captain of the ship that took her out cabled to us from Samoa. I'll tell you about a plan we made, just before we were sent to school!' she said, turning abruptly from the thought of that terrible time when the news came. 'The last night we were all together, when baby—she's Sybil now, of course—was asleep in her cot, Rob made Jock and me come and sit on the rug by the fire and talk. He was twelve and Jock was ten. I was only seven, and Rob seemed very big to me. He'd made a plan, and he wanted us all to know it, for fear we wouldn't be together again for some time. We didn't know then we weren't to go back there for the holidays. It was mean of them to make us stop at school always, when they had a big house and heaps of room. It just shows they didn't want us or care about us really.'

'And what was your brother's plan?' Melany asked, anxious to turn her thoughts to another subject.

'He told us always to remember the island, and how much father and mother had cared for the people and all they had done for them. I don't mean remember what it was like, for I can't do that, I was too small. But I mean keep thinking about it, and not forget all about father's work there, and that there's nobody to carry it on now. No one was sent to take his place, so it's all stopped and the people will have forgotten everything and gone back to their dreadful ways again. Rob wanted us to remember and work hard at school, and some day, he said, we'd all go back to father's island and begin again, like he and mother did. Rob's going to be a doctor, if he can win scholarships and get to college. Jock doesn't want to study, more than he can help, you know, but he's awfully clever with his hands, so he's going to learn science and carpentry, and all those useful kinds of things. And I'm to be a teacher for the girls and children, and to learn something about nursing, to be able to help Rob. He says I could dispense his medicines and do heaps of things. Sybil will have to learn something too—I think she'd better be the teacher, and I'll be Rob's assistant! Well, that was his plan. I don't know how much of it we'll be able to carry out, but it would be ripping if we could do it, wouldn't



it? Think of the four of us on the island, all working together and carrying out all father's plans!

Melany looked down at her flushed eager face.

'It's a splendid plan! I hope you'll be able to carry it out, if you still want to when you are grown up. But you'll have to see if you still feel like it. You may all change your minds, and not want to leave England. Perhaps you'll get married and have to stay at home.'

'Perhaps I'll get married to some one who would like to go too! I say, wouldn't that be ripping?' and Elspeth laughed gleefully. 'That would be best of all! I'll look out for some one who looks as if he'd like to live on a coral island! I'll remember when I begin to think about getting married!'

Melany laughed. 'In the meantime, there goes the bell for fire-drill. You'd better run.'

'Goodness, yes! I'm on duty in the top corridor, and I have to shut all the windows on this side and tear along shouting "Fire!" I'll have to fly!' and Elspeth sped away.

Melany laughed again, and went more slowly to join her father and sister on the lawn. She repeated the conversation to them as they waited for the fire-escapes to appear. Then Zanne's wide-eyed amazement put an end to her story, and Melany had to explain the proceedings through her laughter at her sister's astonishment.

'But I never saw this before!' gasped Zanne, as big girls and little girls alike came flying down the canvas slides and rolled out on the grass. 'But I should not like to do that! I should be afraid! Is it safe? And even the big girls are willing to be thrown down in the long bag. It is not only the children!' as tall Monica Howard came suddenly over the window-sill, disappeared, and appeared again on the grass below, laughing and dishevelled.

Zanne's blue eyes were at their widest, and Melany could only laugh helplessly at her amazement.

'But what does it feel like inside the long bag?' Zanne asked doubtfully.

'Oh, a bit stuffy, but you've hardly time to think. It's better than being burnt in your bedroom away up there at the top, anyway.'

'But there is no fire to-day?'

'Oh, this is only practice. You have to practise anything before you can do it properly.'

'Here comes your little friend—the little fish.'

'She enjoys it, I guess. I say, Zanne, we wanted one of those escapes at Castle Charming! There would have been no difficulty in running away if we'd had one of those. You wouldn't have tumbled on the rocks if you'd been in a long bag with me holding the end, would you?'

Zanne laughed at this reminiscence of a year ago.

'I tumbled on you, not on the rocks,' she said.

'Yes, and you were jolly heavy. It's no wonder you knocked me silly. Father! You're to fix fire-escapes to the windows of Castle Charming, so that the next time Zanne and I want to run away we won't fall and break ourselves! See?'

'I think we have finished with running away. We have no need to run away now,' and Zanne's hand crept through her father's arm for a moment.

When the march-past was over, and the complicated evolutions and the maze had been gone through without a hitch, the girls gathered on the lawn for the prize distribution, still in their gym. tunics and girdles, and many curious glances were cast at Melany's pretty foreign sister. The girls had been looking at her all day, and had longed to speak to her, to hear her talk Italian, to watch her and Melany chattering in French. But Zanne was too shy for many introductions, and only one or two privileged friends had been allowed to approach. She knew

them all by name, from Melany's stories of her school life, and they knew all about her, and would dearly have liked to make much of her and question her on her adventures at Castle Charming, her home in Switzerland. But Zanne's shy eyes and timid looks kept them at bay, and they had to be content to gaze at her from a distance.

While the prizes were being given out, the silver Cup, saved by Elspeth for the school, stood on a small table beside the prizes, and near it the picnic basket, the special reward for the winner of the Cup race. While the victors in the lesser events were going up to receive their prizes, Elspeth crept round among the visitors and stood behind Melany's chair.

'You really did try your best, didn't you?' she whispered.

'But—it is the little fish! How she startled me!' cried Zanne.

Melany laughed. 'Of course I did, Elspeth. I did my level best, on my honour. You won quite fairly.'

'And are you feeling very bad? Did you want to win very much?'

'Just frightfully! I was awfully keen on it. I'll cry my eyes out when I get home! I'm doing my best to keep cheerful but it's very difficult—especially when I see that lovely picnic basket sitting there in front of me!'

Elspeth looked at her doubtfully, and Melany laughed.

'What does it matter to you how I feel about it, you shrimp?'

'I'd be sorry if you really felt very bad.'

'Well, then, you needn't be sorry! I'm glad you won. I would have felt really bad if I'd won the Cup away from the school, for even if I had given it back I know none of you would ever have felt the same about it again. What a ripping little camera! Was that for diving? And is that the Lower School Championship medal?—look, Zanne!'

'Yes, isn't it a beauty?' and Elspeth displayed medal and camera with keen delight. 'Jock's awfully pleased with it. He's going to help me take a photo of Sybil as soon as we get to Scotland. I'll send you one, if you like.'

'You've had more than your share of prizes to-day,' laughed Melany. 'But as it's your last chance, it's all right. Run along and fetch your picnic basket. Miss J.'s just going to call out your name. Zanne and I are going to cheer like anything. Doesn't she look a scrap?' she laughed, as Elspeth went forward, a trifle shyly, and the applause broke out again. 'To think that a mite like that saved the Cup for the school! To think that *I* couldn't beat *that*!'

'Oh, but she is a fish and you are not,' Zanne reminded her consolingly.

'She's a credit to the island!' cried Jock enthusiastically, as Elspeth received her prize. The idea of the picnic basket had appealed strongly to him.

'Bravo, kiddie! Well done!' and Rob clapped her heartily on the shoulder as she came hurrying back to them, her cheeks hot from some words of praise.

She sat down between them on the grass, and opened the hamper proudly to display its fittings.

'Won't it be jolly for picnics in Scotland? Do you think we could use it for tea in the train?' she said.

## CHAPTER VI CONCERNING THE SHILFIE

Elspeth sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes, for the sunshine was pouring in, and to-day she was to go to Scotland. To-day she and the boys were really to belong to one another at last. To-day she was to see Sybil.

On the chair by her bed lay an envelope, and she snatched it up joyously.

‘A letter for me! It’s from Cousin Janie—I say! Suppose it says we’re not to go?’ and she tore it open anxiously.

‘Why, there’s no letter—only a sheet of paper, and—*oh!* Oh, how—simply—ripping! What a darling!’

She caught up a photograph, and eyed it hungrily. A round baby face, wide serious eyes, dainty little mouth, soft locks waving on the forehead and long close ringlets of sunny hair on the shoulders, a big sunbonnet on the back of the little head, and underneath, in Janie Buchanan’s handwriting, ‘For Sister Elspeth, with love from The Shilfie.’

‘How simply sweet of her! Oh, you darling! I could eat you, I think, I love you so much already!’ and she gazed hungrily, then kissed the sweet solemn little face. ‘I’ve said all along that Cousin Janie was splendid! What a lovely thing to think of! It’s what I wanted more than anything else in the world!’

She set the photo up beside the looking-glass, and gazed at it while she did her hair, with the result that her plaits came crooked and had to be braided over again.

‘The Shilfie!’ she mused. ‘How funny! I suppose it’s a nickname. I wonder what it means? What is a shilfie, anyway? Sybil the Shilfie! Well, I hope a shilfie’s something nice, for she’s just sweet.’

Breakfast was an early and extremely lively meal, that morning. Every one was in the highest spirits, and as rules were relaxed already there was no check on the excitement. Moreover, Miss Johnson had privately suggested that the girls should do their best to keep Elspeth cheerful, fearing lest the prospect of so many farewells should make her unhappy. The precaution was unnecessary, but the girls obeyed and were determined to give her no time to think of the coming separation. So they all talked at once, and the noise in the big dining-hall was worth hearing.

‘Late, Elspeth?’ said Miss Johnson, as Elspeth slipped into her place. ‘You’ll have to be quick. You start early, you know.’

‘Yes, Miss Johnson. I’m sorry. I’ve been talking to my little sister, you see. Please, do you know what a shilfie is?’ asked Elspeth demurely.

‘A shilfie?’ asked Miss Johnson.

‘Her little sister?’ puzzled the girls.

‘Tuts, yes! Don’t you know what a shilfie is?’ cried Jill from her table. ‘A shilfie is a bird, a wee brown and blue and white thing, not a bit shy, but very friendly and tame. The woods at home are full of them. I’ve seen shilfies here too, when we’ve been out in the country for botany walks, but they’re something else in English. What is it now? Chaff something. They are always shilfies to me, so I don’t remember.’

‘She means chaffinches,’ said Monica. ‘I remember, my little cousin in Scotland used to call them shilfies.’

‘It is a ferry much prettier name than chaffinch,’ said Jill. ‘Let me see your sister, Elspeth. Oh, what a dear wee lassie! My wee sister Sheila was like that once, but she is quite big now. She’s coming back with me next term, I think, so you’ll all see her, but she’ll be dreatfully shy just at first. There are so ferry many of you, you see.’

‘Jill! Jill, my dear girl! You are quite forgetting yourself this morning!’ remonstrated Miss Johnson.

‘Was I talking Highland?’ sighed Jill, her blue eyes opening wide. ‘Neffar mind, Miss Johnson, dear! You won’t be bothered with me much longer. I’m going home to-day, so how can I help it, you know?’

‘She always gets Scotchy the last morning,’ laughed the girls.

‘It iss ferry much prettier than the way you speak. You always all gabble so, in such a dreatful hurry. Now ton’t you think so really, Miss Johnson, dear?’

Miss Johnson laughed and refused to commit herself on the point. She turned her attention to Elspeth, but Elspeth was munching away, her eyes feasting on the picture of Sybil, propped against the milk-jug, and did not seem likely to go hungry.

They were all very attentive to her this morning, and Jill pretended to be jealous.

‘You keep fussing over Elspeth, all of you, and asking her to have some more jam, and putting sugar in her tea, and saying she must eat a lot because she is going such a long journey, but I’m going just as far, and you aren’t making any fuss about *me*.’

‘But you’re coming back,’ Margery pointed out. ‘It makes all the difference.’

‘They don’t care about you and me, Monica, because we’re coming back. We can go off hungry, if we like,’ mourned Jill, and the girls hastily offered her more bread and butter.

‘Monica?’ asked Elspeth, waking from her dream of Sybil and the future. ‘Why Monica? Where’s she going?’

Monica laughed. ‘I’m going north with you, Elspeth. Didn’t you know? It was only decided yesterday. Mother and the children are going to Scotland for the holidays, and she says I had better go straight from school, so you and I and Jill can all travel together.’

‘How jolly! That will be a joke! Are you going to Glasgow?’ Elspeth asked eagerly.

‘Yes, and past it. I’ll take care of her, Miss Johnson. She’s going to Glenleny, isn’t she? I’ll see her safely to the pier, and some one is sure to meet her and take her on the boat.’

‘Pier? Boat?’ Elspeth’s eyes grew startled. ‘I didn’t know we went in a boat,’ she said, in growing excitement. ‘Are you sure, Monica? It sounds awfully jolly, but——’

‘There’s no other way to get to Glenleny,’ laughed Monica—‘unless your friends have an aeroplane, of course!’

‘They aren’t likely to, when they live in a cottage,’ Elspeth said frankly. ‘But how simply splendid! I didn’t know it was that kind of place. Cousin Janie said it was in the country and rather quiet, but she didn’t tell us any more about it. Do tell me, Monica! I’m longing to know what it’s like.’

‘Oh, no, I won’t do that,’ Monica laughed. ‘I mustn’t spoil it for you, you know.’

Elspeth drew a long breath of anticipation and delight.

‘I *am* glad we go in a boat! It sounds just lovely!’

‘I hope you’ll get there safely,’ laughed Monica. ‘I was shipwrecked when I went last year.’

Not only Elspeth clamoured for the story.

‘And you’ve never told us, Monny! Well, I do call that mean! Tell us now!’

‘Oh, we ran on a sandbank at the head of the loch and stuck, that was all! I had to go home with a girl I’d never seen before, and stop the night with her. We had an awfully jolly time. I found that she knew my cousins quite well. She was a Queen,’ laughed Monica, ‘and my cousin was the Prime Minister. Elspeth, I shouldn’t wonder if we met, sooner or later. It’s not very far to Glenleny, and we used to go all over the place together. If we do, I’ll introduce you to the Queen.’

‘Do! What’s she like? I’ll keep looking out for you,’ Elspeth cried. ‘But how can she be a Queen? What do you mean?’

‘It was partly her fault that my steamer was wrecked,’ and Monica laughed reminiscently. ‘I’ll tell you all about it in the train.’

The other girls protested, but Monica only laughed.

‘You can wait till next term. It’s too big a subject for just now,’ she said.

Elspeth turned eagerly to the head-mistress, with an idea which had slipped her memory.

‘Oh, Miss Johnson, haven’t you changed your mind? Do be good to us, and say yes! If Monica’s there to look after us! Jill might not be careful, but with Monica anything would be safe. She’s so steady and sensible——’

‘Dear me! Compliments are flying this morning. Don’t you feel indignant, Jill?’ laughed Monica.

‘Ferry!’ said Jill. ‘What iss it the child wants to do?’

‘To make tea in my basket, and they won’t give me spirit for the kettle! I’d set my heart on making tea in the railway carriage, and the boys were looking forward to it, too, but they won’t give me any of the things I need, for fear I’d tip it over and set the train on fire,’ Elspeth explained mournfully, as Miss Johnson shook her head decidedly. ‘With two big boys and two big girls to watch it, surely it would be safe!’ she urged.

‘And one of the big girls Jill Colquhoun, and one of the big boys your brother Jock,’ laughed Miss Johnson. ‘No, Elspeth, dear! I think you must wait till you are safe in Scotland before you make your first cup of tea in your basket,’ and Elspeth sighed resignedly.

When the moment of farewell came, she found it hard, after all. Even the thought of Sybil, and the farm which had to be reached by going in a boat, could not quite reconcile her to saying good-bye to all the friends her life had held. School had been her home, the girls and mistresses her world. A moment of blank despair came when she realised suddenly that she was leaving them all for ever, and she was very silent as the cab drove to the station, Miss Johnson by her side, Jill and Monica opposite. The precious photograph of ‘The Shilfie,’ had been laid in the picnic basket, with a book and a packet of sandwiches, and she gripped the handle as if it had been Sybil herself, and the only thing in the world she had to cling to. The elder girls tried to draw her into their merry chat, but she remained very quiet as the train carried them into town.

‘It’s such a long way to go to people you don’t know,’ she whispered to Miss Johnson at last. ‘I *think* Cousin Janie’s nice, but just suppose she isn’t! Oh, Miss Johnson, I didn’t know I’d feel so lonely!’

## CHAPTER VII RELATED TO A SCOUT

Elsbeth, clutching the picnic basket, stood beside Monica, rather bewildered by the bustle of the big station. Miss Johnson and Jill were seeing to luggage and tickets, and she and Monica were waiting for them and keeping watch for the boys. She felt very small and helpless, and quite forgot, in her puzzled loneliness, that she had travelled thousands of miles while most of these hurrying crowds had only seen hundreds, and that she had touched the fringe at least of three continents and countless seas and islands. Not even the presence of a big girl like Monica, so tall that she was nearly grown up, could cure the desolation which had come upon her so suddenly when she paid her last visit to her cubicle, and remembered that to-night she would sleep in Scotland.

She tried to say something of this to Monica, and the big girl said gently,—

‘But you’ll have your brothers, Elspeth, and that dear little sister, and your cousin! Last night you were longing to see them all.’

‘Yes, I know. It’s different this morning, somehow. I didn’t know it would all change like this at the last minute. I don’t know Cousin Janie at all, except from her letters, you know. They’re nice, but she may not be nice always. And Sybil looks sweet, but she’s only a baby. I know I’ll miss all of you dreadfully.’

‘But you’ll have your brothers,’ Monica said again.

‘Yes, but I don’t really know them either,’ said poor Elspeth. ‘Think! I’ve only seen them twice lately, and before that not for two years. You can’t know much about people when you’ve only seen them twice. They’ve been all right each time I’ve seen them, but it isn’t as if I’d lived with them, you know. People are different when you live with them.’

Monica admitted this gravely. ‘But perhaps they’ll be ever so much nicer than you’ve any idea of. Think how well you’ll know them by to-night! After a whole day in one railway carriage you’ll surely know them pretty well!’

Elsbeth laughed ruefully. ‘Suppose I don’t like them? Perhaps I’ll have too much of them!’

‘Oh no, you won’t. Don’t be afraid! You’re not shy of your own brothers, surely?’

‘I almost think I am,’ Elspeth admitted doubtfully. ‘I’m awfully glad you and Jill are going with us, you know.’

Then her eyes brightened. ‘Oh, there’s Jock! There, in the crowd! He’ll be looking for me. I must tell him where we are!’ and she flew across the platform to meet him.

Monica laughed. ‘She’ll be all right,’ she said to Miss Johnson, as she came up. ‘She was getting very funky, but it was only with thinking about it. She’ll be all right once we’ve started.’

Elsbeth had wriggled her way through the crowd, and was clinging to Rob’s hand while she poured out all her latest news—that Jill and Monica were to travel with them—that Monica said they would have to go in a boat to reach Glenleny—that tea out of the picnic basket would not be possible, after all.

‘And I’ve something to show you as soon as we’ve started! It’s just ripping, and awfully sweet! This is Monica! You know Jill, don’t you? Her foot’s almost all right again. She doesn’t really need the stick now, but she says she doesn’t like to give it up, because it feels so distinguished.’

Jill laughed. 'Let's go and get into the train, and keep people out of the carriage, if we can.'

Miss Johnson shook her head, but nothing could control Jill's spirits. She kept jumping in and out of the train, in spite of her doubtful ankle, prodding Elspeth with her stick, and making pretence of hiding the picnic basket, teasing Monica, and sending Jock on errands to the refreshment stall. The carriage seemed so full of schoolgirls and boys that though many people were travelling, they all passed on hastily to find more peaceful quarters elsewhere. Jock's face had lengthened when the first party approached, but it grew more and more relieved as they were left to themselves. Jill chuckled.

'I'm not as bad as this all the way, you know,' she explained. 'But I do want to have it to ourselves. It is so very much more comfortable.'

At the last minute, however, the guard came hurrying along with an elderly lady, and, seeing only five in the carriage, promptly bundled her in. Elspeth smothered a groan, Rob and Monica laughed and sat down demurely in their corners, Jill stood gazing in blank dismay, and Jock collapsed on the seat and buried himself in *The Scout*. Miss Johnson waved her hand.

'Good-bye! I hope you have a pleasant journey!' and she hurried away, exceedingly sorry for that sixth passenger.

Rob and Monica looked at one another with dancing eyes. The elderly lady glanced at them all severely, and took up *The Christian World*, and began to read the advertisements with a frigid air. Elspeth, seeing the journey suddenly shorn of its excitement, began in a hesitating voice,—

'I want to show you——'

But Jill was not to be beaten so easily.

'Well, what shall we have first?' she demanded briskly, and produced a pack of cards from her bag. 'Shall it be Little Donkey or Beggar-my-Neighbour? Newmarket is good fun, too. I like it because it's so like gambling. But for a real good time there's nothing to beat Snap or Cheating. Come on, you must all play for awhile, and then Monny shall tell us about the girl who shipwrecks people.'

A meaning look passed between her and Jock, and he seconded her efforts nobly. The unfortunate lady looked helplessly at the merry party, and Jill turned to her politely.

'Wouldn't you like to join in our game? It makes the time pass much more quickly than reading. Do have some cards, and we'll start again. I expect we'll play all the way to Scotland. Is there any game you would like better than Snap? We'll play Old Maid, if you like, or do you care for Muggins?'

Then the train drew up at Willesden, and the lady leaned out and called to the guard.

'Can you find me a seat in a carriage reserved for ladies? I can change at Glasgow, if necessary. Is there no one in charge of these children? The noise is quite ridiculous.'

Elspeth looked anxious. Surely such an imposing official would have power to remonstrate! Suppose he confiscated the cards! Suppose he filled up the carriage with passengers!

Jock looked a trifle anxious also, but Jill smiled serenely.

'So ferry sorry our game disturbs you!' she murmured.

The guard took in the situation at a glance. His kindly eyes twinkled.

'Plenty of room forward, madam! Afraid we can't stop them having a wee game. Mind you don't interfere with the comfort of other passengers, missy!'

Jill winked deliberately. ‘Oh, no, guard! We would neffer think of doing that,’ she said seriously.

‘Find you another seat in a moment, madam,’ and he waved his flag and the train moved off.

‘Now we are really and truly off! That is the last of London, thank goodness!’ sighed Jill. ‘It’s your turn, Monica!’

Presently the guard appeared in the corridor with news of a seat in a ladies’ compartment, and the unwelcome sixth left them, with a sour look at the children, whose laughing eyes belied their demurely-grave faces.

‘What a dear man!’ said Jill promptly, before his back was turned. ‘I knew he’d take our part. The guards on these trains are always dears. You can trust them effery time. I believe they choose them for their good manners and nice faces. He knew we were going home for the holidays, and it wasn’t the slightest use asking us to be quiet and proper. I saw him look at each one of us, and say to himself that Monica and Rob could be trusted, but he wasn’t sure about Elspeth, or what she’d got in that basket she’s holding so tight, and he was quite sure Jock and I couldn’t behave for five minutes at a time. Now, Monny, tell us about the Queen-girl who shipwrecks her friends.’

‘She was a lonely girl with no brothers or sisters, living in a big house with only a governess,’ Monica explained. ‘So she made a lot of friends, and they formed a band. She is the Queen, and my cousin is the Prime Minister. I’m a duchess! Of course I don’t brag about it at school, but I really am a duchess in disguise. You didn’t know, did you?’

‘No, Your Grace, we didn’t! But I’ll see that the girls do know next term, and we’ll treat you with proper respect after this.’

‘We have meetings, and excursions, and picnics, and sports, and cricket matches——’

‘And shipwrecks?’

‘Oh, that was an accident! She was playing with the ferry-boat in the dark, one night, and the steamer people thought it had come out to meet them, and ran aground on the sands. Elspeth, Glenleny isn’t far from Morven, where she lives, so it’s more than likely I’ll see you in the holidays.’

‘That would be awfully jolly,’ Elspeth said, a trifle wistfully. ‘Do we go with you on the boat to-night?’

‘No, it’s a different boat. You live up another loch, you see.’

‘I don’t see. I don’t understand. I thought a loch was a lake?’

‘My Loch Avie iss a lake,’ said Jill.

‘Yes, but these others aren’t. They’re bits of the sea running up among the hills.’

‘Hills!’ said Elspeth eagerly. ‘It’s getting to sound jollier and prettier all the time.’

Monica laughed. ‘I didn’t mean to tell you any more about it. Jill, I’m going to beg the Queen to go over to Loch Avie one day. Shall we call on you?’

‘Do! Oh, do! And Jack and I will row you over to Goblin Island, where we used to play, and to Innis Beg, where we once lived! Oh, Monny, you must come! I’d like to see your Queen-girl, but bring the Prime Minister too, won’t you? He’d be company for Jack—my brother, you know.’

‘You’d expect a Jill to have a Jack attached, of course,’ laughed Rob.

He and Jock had hardly shared Elspeth’s delight in the company of her friends. Rob was distinctly shy, and Jock felt Monica’s presence a check upon his high spirits, though Jill did not affect him in the same way. But they both were quieter than if they had been alone with



Elspeth, and though Jock joined in the games with gusto, and was noisier even than Jill, when the girls fell to chatting he hunched himself up in a corner with *The Scout*, and buried himself in a story.

Elspeth began to struggle with the straps of her basket.

‘I want to show you something that came last night. There,—look!’

‘Jolly little kid,’ and Rob studied the sweet little face thoughtfully. ‘I’d forgotten she’d be so big. I’ve always thought of her as a baby.’

‘What’s a shilfie?’ demanded Jock.

‘Come, Mr Scout! Are you really at fault at last?’ laughed Rob. ‘Do you mean to say there’s something you don’t know? I thought scouts knew everything under the sun. You’d better turn up that little book of yours. Surely it will tell you what a shilfie is!’

‘Oh, are you a scout?’ and Elspeth eyed him eagerly. ‘I’ve seen scouts often, but I didn’t know I was related to one! Have you got a uniform? Do you wear a funny hat? You will wear it sometimes for me to see, won’t you?’

Her evident admiration was soothing to Jock’s feelings, after Rob’s bantering tone.

‘The big fellows think it’s funny to scoff at us,’ he explained loftily,—‘unless they happen to be patrol-leaders, of course.’

‘Oh, aren’t you a patrol-leader?’ and Elspeth turned on Rob disappointedly. ‘Why aren’t you?’

‘No time,’ Rob laughed. ‘I was in for matric., you know, so I couldn’t go racing over fields and ditches with a knapsack on my back. Wait till you see him in all his war-paint! You’ll be proud of him then!’

‘I am proud already. It’s splendid to be related to a scout.’ Elspeth’s admiration was heartfelt and sincere. ‘But aren’t you sorry to give it all up? Won’t you miss the others?’

‘There are scouts in Scotland,’ Jock said sturdily. ‘Perhaps I’ll join another patrol.’

‘Maybe there won’t be any at Glenleny.’

‘There can’t surely be a place to which the scouts haven’t penetrated,’ teased Rob. ‘Why, you see them everywhere!’

‘All the same, I don’t think you’ll find any at Glenleny,’ laughed Monica. ‘I think perhaps it is the one place which still hasn’t any scouts. I’ve only seen it from the water, but it certainly doesn’t look likely to have scouts.’

‘Oh, but you find them everywhere nowadays,’ said the scout loftily.

Monica’s stories of the doings of Queen Lexa and her band, and Jill’s tales of her adventures on Goblin Island, kept Elspeth listening contentedly till the journey was half over and it was time to go to the dining-car for tea. Then they reached Carlisle, and Jill was left reluctantly on the station to wait for the Edinburgh train.

Presently Monica pointed out the fact that they were crossing the Solway Bridge, and so, at the moment, half-way between England and Scotland.

‘Then we’re really nowhere just at this minute,’ Jock decided. ‘For we aren’t in England and we aren’t in Scotland——’

‘But now we are in Scotland!’ cried Elspeth, and gazed out as if expecting to see a sudden change in the character of the country. ‘Why, it’s no different from the other side!’

Jock jeered. ‘What did you expect? Did you think the people would all wear kilts, or the fields be all heather?’

‘No, but I thought there would be some difference, Elspeth confessed.

‘Not very far to Glasgow now,’ and Monica took up her book again. ‘Oh, dear, I’m getting sleepy, in spite of the tea. Let’s have a nap before we get there.’

## CHAPTER VIII

### GLENLENY AT LAST

Elspeth stared out at the gray streets of Motherwell with puzzled eyes. Monica had spoken of hills and piers and steamers. Where were they? This succession of smoky gray towns must be the beginning of Glasgow. It was all very depressing, and she was very tired and homesick for school and the girls.

‘Here’s the bridge!’ and Monica threw down her book. ‘And here we are at the Central!’

The big clean station was full of hurrying porters and people meeting friends, and strange Scotch talk on every side. Monica opened the door and jumped out.

‘We’ve ten minutes here. Don’t you want to get out and stretch? It smells fresh, doesn’t it? Why,—how ripping!’

Flying down the long platform came a boy and girl, he in cycling suit and white slouch hat, she with curly red hair streaming from under a tam-o’-shanter, and threw themselves on Monica in boisterous welcome.

‘We’ve come all this way to meet you, Duchess! Don’t you feel honoured?’ cried the Queen.

‘To see you arrive safely, with no accidents this time,—no shipwrecks, for instance,’ added the Prime Minister.

‘Well, I do think you’re mean, to remind her of that!’ cried Lexa indignantly.

‘Besides, it was really the Earl and Countess of Balquidder who were to blame, wasn’t it?’ laughed the Duchess. ‘Lexa, this is Elspeth Buchanan, from my school, and her brothers. They’re going to live at Glenleny.’

‘Glenleny? At the Hall?’ and Lexa eyed Elspeth curiously.

‘I don’t think so——’

‘No, in a cottage,’ said Elspeth promptly.

‘I thought you might be going to stay at Leny Hall. We’re planning to have a ramble up Glenleny one day soon, and we would all be delighted to meet any friends of Duchess Monica’s,’ said the Queen graciously.

Then she broke into eager chatter on private matters, with references to ‘Ruth’ and ‘Rob,’ ‘Roy,’ ‘Tibbie,’ and ‘Nigel,’ which were unintelligible to any but her subjects.

‘I’ve heaps to tell you. I really think we’d better have a carriage to ourselves, for I know I’ll have to talk all the way down to the boat.’

Monica laughed. ‘I’ll move my things into the next carriage. Elspeth won’t mind, I know. It would be rather slack for her, when she doesn’t know what we’re talking about.’

The Prime Minister came to help her, and Rob lent a helping hand also. Jock and Elspeth stood together, feeling a trifle lonely, till the guard bade them take their seats and they were off again.

‘What millions of gray houses! And what crowds of poor people!’ sighed Elspeth. ‘Look, Rob, they haven’t even hats, or shoes and stockings!’ and she gazed at the shawled and barefoot women with startled, pitiful eyes.

From the next carriage came sounds of merriment, Monica’s laugh at some story of the Queen’s, and a shout from the Prime Minister at her comments. Elspeth listened wistfully, and found herself growing sleepy again.

Then they were standing in another big clean station, with porters shouting ‘All change here!’ and crowds hurrying past, all in one direction.

‘Guess we’d better get out,’ and Rob began hastily putting their things together.

‘Cousin Janie said she’d meet us here. Oh, what do you suppose she’s like? Do you think she’ll have brought Sybil?’ cried Elspeth, jumping out eagerly and beginning to grow excited at last.

From somewhere close at hand came the hoarse bellow of a steamer, and through a big doorway could be seen a glimpse of a yellow funnel. The air was fresh and sharp, and the smell of salt and seaweed was very refreshing after the heat of the journey.

Monica and her friends hurried past.

‘Good-bye, Elspeth! I hope I’ll see you some day. We have to run for our boat,’ and they were swept along by the crowd.

Rob was off to look for the boxes. Jock and Elspeth stood together, bewildered by the hurry and bustle.

‘Where *is* Cousin Janie, I wonder? We don’t even know what she’s like. It’s very difficult,’ Elspeth pondered. ‘Everybody seems in a frantic hurry. Suppose we lose the boat?’

The steamer bells rang impatiently, and Rob came hurrying up with a porter.

‘We want the boat for Glenleny——’

‘Glenleny? Oh, aye! This’ll be the Glenleny boat,’ and they followed him anxiously.

‘But what can have happened to Cousin Janie? Don’t you think we ought to wait for her, Rob?’

‘We can’t. He says there’s no other boat to-night.’ Rob looked worried, but confident that there was nothing else to do.

‘Will ye be John Buchanan’s weans for Glenleny?’ A tall, thin man had come slowly along the train, scanning the passengers anxiously. His eyes had brightened at sight of them, and he accosted Rob with evident relief.

They turned to him eagerly. ‘Yes, isn’t Miss Buchanan here to meet us?’

‘Hoots! Is it Miss Janie ye’re wantin’? She couldna come hersel’, ye ken, so she askit me to bring ye hame.’

Jock winked at Elspeth behind their guide’s back, as they followed him out on to the pier. She laughed, then paused with a cry of delight.

Three great steamers lay alongside the pier, pouring out black smoke and clanging their bells impatiently. People were streaming across the gangways, and luggage was being hurriedly carried on board. Beyond was a great quiet sea, enclosed by green hills, and a rich golden sunset hanging low above them and dyeing the wavelets with glowing colour.

Elspeth stared, and walked as if in a dream. There was so much to see, and it was all so new. She scarcely remembered crossing the gangway, but presently found herself sitting beside Jock on her trunk, still gazing round-eyed at the busy scene.

The sudden throb of the screw told that they were off. So were the two other steamers, and from one Monica leaned, waving her handkerchief. The pier fell behind, and the three boats drew apart, all making for different points on the ring of hills. Monica’s boat went straight into the sunset glow. The Glenleny steamer went due north, and the third made off down the firth towards the south.

‘What a lot of water!’ murmured Elspeth. ‘I never thought it would be like this. It’s like the sea, with hills in the distance. Is there any opening anywhere?’

‘Now you smell the salt! I say, this isn’t half ripping, you know!’ and Jock stamped the deck in delight.

‘It isn’t half cold!—but I like it awfully.’

She shivered, however, and Rob said peremptorily, ‘Haven’t you anything you can put on? Then walk about and keep warm, both of you!’

He stood questioning their guide, and Jock and Elspeth paused in their promenade to listen.

‘That’s Glasgow, right up there. Down that way is the sea. Those are the Arran mountains. It will be fine to-morrow, because that dip in the hills is clear. It’s called something——’

‘It’ll be the Farl, ye ken,’ said the old man, putting at least three r’s in place of the necessary one.

‘Oh, well, I can’t say it like that,’ laughed Rob.

‘He looks a jolly old chap,’ commented Jock from a distance, and Elspeth turned to look again at the old man. Till now she had only had eyes for the water and hills.

He was tall and thin, very brown of face, with a short reddish beard and kindly blue eyes. His accent was of the broadest, but his tone was friendly and his eyes had a promising twinkle. He eyed them curiously and with evident interest as he gave his name as Andrew Macwilliam, and explained that Miss Janie had some work which she had not been able to leave.

‘Jist some o’ her sewin’, ye ken,’ he added, and Jock, leaning on the side, commented on this severely.

‘He seems to think we’ll “ken” everything. *I* think if it’s only sewing she might have let it wait and come herself, ye ken.’

Elspeth had the same feeling, but she said only,—

‘Perhaps it was something very important. Perhaps Sybil has only one pinafore and has torn it, or something like that. Here we are at another pier. I wonder how soon we get off the boat?’

‘Hope it’s not for some time. It isn’t half jolly, ye ken.’

Elspeth laughed. ‘Don’t! He’ll think you’re laughing at him.’

‘So I am, ye ken! Let’s go down and see the engines.’

‘If we’ve time. We’ll ask how much longer we stay on the boat.’

‘It’ll no’ be mair nor twanty meenits, ye ken,’ was old Andrew’s verdict. So they fled, Elspeth giggling, Jock crimson with suppressed mirth.

‘I say! Isn’t he a rum old chap? D’you notice he never says “It is,” but always “It’ll be”?’ It’s a bad habit he’s got, ye ken,’ chuckled Jock, as they collapsed on the cushions of the cabin.

The luxurious cabins charmed Elspeth, and the noise of the engine-room delighted Jock. They hung over the rail together, watching the regular rise and fall of the mighty shining rods. Then a bell rang sharply and the movement changed, and they ran on deck to find themselves drawing in to another pier.

‘That’ll be Glenleny up yonder, ye ken,’ said Mr Macwilliam pleasantly.

As Monica had promised, the sea thrust up a long shining finger into the midst of the hills. The water was sparkling in the sunset, every dancing wave touched with golden light. The hills and fields on one side lay in bright sunshine, the other shore was in deep shadow. Away to the north, where the hills seemed to close in, were great mountains, pale blue against the bright sky, every peak clear and sharp.

‘It’s beautiful!’ murmured Elspeth, leaning against the funnel and gazing with rapt eyes. ‘I didn’t know it would be like this. It’s wonderful! But I don’t see which is Glenleny yet.’

‘Ye’ll be seein’ it a’ richt when we get a bittie closer, ye ken,’ explained the old man.

She nodded, not daring to look at Jock, who was hanging over the side, apparently musing on the green foam escaping from the churning paddles. He came up to her presently.

‘I’m not half hungry, ye ken. Aren’t you?’

‘I’m starving,’ Elspeth confessed. ‘I suppose it’s the wind.’

The villages at which the steamer called were pretty rows of gray stone villas, buried in trees and with gardens full of flowers, set along the road which ran by the side of the loch. Above were cornfields and masses of dark trees, and above these the open green hill, with an occasional shoulder of gray rock or great purple patch of heather.

As the steamer ploughed her way northward and the air began to grow chilly and the glowing light to fade, there were no more houses along the road, and the woods crept down to the water’s edge, great dark stretches of magnificent trees, their undergrowth one wide sea of yellow bracken. The rocks were purple and gray, and below the tide-line were hung with brown and yellow seaweed. The hills had grown wilder and steeper and very lonely. There were no other steamers about, and no piers to be seen.

‘This’ll be No Man’s Land, ye ken,’ said Jock. ‘I say! It isn’t half deserted, is it?’

‘Yonder’ll be Glenleny,’ said Mr Macwilliam unexpectedly. ‘We’ll gang doon to meet the ferry, ye ken,’ and led the way below.

‘I say! It’s a bit quiet, isn’t it?’ commented Jock.

‘But which is Glenleny? I don’t see——’ began Elspeth.

Rob pointed to the shore. They were standing on the lower deck near the paddle-box, and the steamer was slackening speed, though there was no pier to be seen. Elspeth looked where he pointed.

The hills fell apart slightly, and suggested the possibility that a road might find its way through. Here, at the mouth of the glen, the slopes were covered with splendid trees, but those beyond looked bare and gray. On the shore were a few whitewashed cottages and two or three houses, and some rich brown fishing nets hung on an erection of poles. Beyond, among the woods, stood a great gray house, its lawns reaching down to the water, a motor launch lying in the sheltered bay, a flag flying from one of the towers.

‘What a ripping place! What is it called, please?’

‘Hoots! That’ll be Leny Hall, ye ken,’ he said, as if surprised that any one should ask such a question.

‘Who lives there? And where do we live? And how do we get there? There’s no pier, is there? Oh,—oh, I see! But are we to go in *that*?’

A big broad boat had suddenly appeared alongside, guided by a tall, ruddy-faced fisherman in blue jersey and cap. Standing in the rocking boat, he made fast a rope, and called a greeting to the purser as he steadied the boat against the steamer’s side. A little flight of steps was let down, but was not required, for before Elspeth had time to hesitate she found herself picked up by old Andrew and dropped into the ferryman’s arms.

He set her down in the stern, with a hearty ‘Gled to see ye, missy! I mind yer fayther fine. A richt good man was he,’ and turned to help with the luggage.

Elspeth sat watching, a sudden glow at her heart. This was welcome indeed! She could not have wished for better.

But where was Cousin Janie? Had she not cared even to come down to the shore to meet them? It seemed rather strange.

With a rush of yellow foam, gushing out from the paddles and dancing all about the ferry, the steamer went on her way up the loch and left them rocking in the waves of her creamy track. Elspeth grasped the side and Rob's arm, and the ferryman laughed.

'I'll no' spill ye in the loch, Miss Elspeth. A cold welcome that would be, would it no'? An' how do ye like Scotland?'

'Oh!' gasped Elspeth. 'Do you know our names? Do you know all about us? How nice of you! Oh, I like it *very* much indeed!'

'Do ye say that? Weel, it's gled I am to hear it. I was thinkin' mebbe ye'd prefer London, ye ken.'

'Oh, London isn't a quarter as nice as this!'

He laughed in delight at her fervent tone.

'Do ye say that?' he said again, 'Weel, Miss Elspeth, ye'll come doon some day for a chat wi' John Shaw at the ferry, will ye?'

'Oh, I'd like to awfully!'

'That's guid! I'll be lookin' for ye. Come you, too, Master Rob an' Master Jock, if ye've a mind to. It's a braw big laddie ye'll be, Master Rob, an' as like yer fayther as can be! Now carefu', missy—jist a meenit,' and he steadied the boat against a long stone slip. 'Oot wi' ye, Master Jock, an' gie the lassie yer han'.'

'Oh, I wis forgettin' Miss Janie's word for ye,' he called after them, as they went up the slip. 'She said ye'd jist excuse her no' comin' doon to the shore. She's gey busy at her sewin', an' couldna spare the time.'

'Cousin Janie and her sewing seem to me very funny,' murmured Elspeth to Rob, as they followed Andrew Macwilliam to a wagonette into which he was lifting the luggage. 'Don't you think she might have come this far to meet us, at least?'

'I guess it was something that had to be done to-night,' he replied, but looked puzzled also.

'I say! This isn't half a hard place to get to, ye ken,' remarked Jock, as Rob helped old Andrew to lift in the trunks. 'First the train, then the steamer, then the ferry-boat, and now a carriage! Four different kinds of travelling since the morning! Wonder if we'll have to go up in a lift when we get to the house?'

'Not if it's a cottage,' Elspeth reminded him.

'Well, I wouldn't be a bit surprised. It would be the right end to all this, ye ken.'

'It'll no' be far the noo,' said Mr Macwilliam, as they took their places. 'Jist twa-three meenits up the road, ye ken.'

'Then I do think Cousin Janie might have left her sewing long enough to come to meet us,' murmured Elspeth. 'I thought perhaps it was too far. Or, at least, she might have sent the Shilfie.'

## CHAPTER IX

### COUSIN JANIE'S KITCHEN

The road, winding among trees, turned away from the loch and ran beside the park surrounding Leny Hall.

'Who lives here?' demanded Jock of Mr Macwilliam.

'Campbell o' Glenleny, ye ken.'

'I wouldn't half like to be Campbell of Glenleny! What a ripping place!'

'And what a pretty entrance!' added Elspeth. 'Is that the front gate? Isn't it just sweet!'

The great double gates were of carved black oak, massive and very heavy. There was no trim little lodge, as she had seen often in England, but on each side of the gate rose a square tower, built of stone and covered with ivy. A gallery connected them, high above the gate, and in this and both the towers were little diamond-paned windows, standing open and showing white dimity curtains. The whole was finished at the top with ivy-clad battlements, and the door of each tower stood open to the road. On one white door-step a thin cat with tiger-like stripes sat primly upright, with half-closed eyes. On the other lay a fat white dog, nose on paws, black ears cocked watchfully.

'Does the gate-keeper live in one of the towers?' asked Elspeth curiously. 'What a jolly idea! How *awfully* pretty it all is! Is the house as nice as the gate, I wonder?'

'Awfully decent,' commented Jock. 'Why—I say! We aren't going in, are we?'

Mr Macwilliam was driving towards the gates. He smiled grimly and gave a shrill whistle. The old white dog sprang up, and the gate-keeper came running out.

She was dressed in white linen, very simple and neat. She was tall, with shining hair of the same rich colour as Queen Lexa's at the station—gold, but brightly touched with red. She was not more than twenty-two.

She came running up to the wagonette.

'You poor things! How very tired you must all be! Elspeth, you aren't shy, are you? May I have a kiss?'

'I'm only surprised!' gasped Elspeth. 'I didn't know—I thought—we were looking for a cottage! We didn't understand——'

Janie Buchanan lifted her down from her seat.

'I hope you aren't disappointed,' she laughed. 'I hope you'll like my house. I rather think you'll like it very much indeed. Rob, what a big boy you are—almost a man! It will be something new for the Shilfie and me to have a man to look after us. Well, Jock, have you had enough of trains for a while? I'm afraid you'll all find Glenleny very quiet, unless you like living in the country. Which of these boxes is yours, Elspeth? This one? And all the other things belong to the boys? That bag is yours, too? And the basket? I see. These into my room, then, Andrew, and the boys' things into the kitchen. We'll arrange them presently.'

'Then do you live in both houses?' asked Elspeth, as the boys helped Mr Macwilliam to carry her things into the room from which Janie had come, and then took their own in at the door of the other tower.

The striped cat watched their movements carefully until they began to approach his step. Then he vanished like a flash of lightning and disappeared inside. The dog, realising that they had come to stay, was capering clumsily about them, overjoyed at sight of a new face.



Janie laughed.

‘Cleopatra’s pleased to see you. She’ll be expecting you to give her some walks. I’ve been too busy to take her out much lately. My poor old Antony will be lying flat under a chair or behind a door. He’s terrified of men, so I’m afraid he won’t take to you and Rob just at once, Jock. But as soon as he knows you are part of the house he’ll be all right. Thanks very much, Andrew. Good-night! Now I’m sure you must all be starving for some tea, aren’t you? It’s all ready for you.’

She led them into the Boys’ Tower, as Elspeth felt she must call it, and they found themselves in a big airy kitchen, very clean and neat, with just enough fire to keep the kettle boiling, and the big table spread for supper. The walls were whitewashed, the floor was of dull red tiles. On the big dresser were rows of plates and cups, all of dark blue china, and a smaller table under the window had a blue cloth and held a vase of delicate blue harebells. In one corner a flight of narrow wooden steps led up to the second story, and the wall opposite the dresser was given up to a big set-in bed, the first of its kind Elspeth had ever seen—a bed in the wall. Its blue coverlet matched the china, and the effect of the whole was exceedingly dainty and fresh.

‘What a ripping kitchen!’ and she looked round in delight. ‘Do you know, Cousin Janie, I’ve been longing for a kitchen! There’s something so homey about it. You’re not supposed to go into the kitchen at school, you know. Perhaps that’s why I’ve always wanted to. Anyway, I’ve felt all along that if you would only let me go into your kitchen I’d love it more than anything.’

Janie laughed and looked relieved. ‘I thought you might not like it. But it was so much easier to have supper in here that I hoped you wouldn’t mind.’

‘It’s just ripping!’ Elspeth said again. ‘But what a funny bed! I never saw one like it before.’

Jock was hovering hungrily round the table, which held plates of tempting scones and country bread and butter, home-made jam and jelly. Janie, bending over the fire, teapot in hand, said briskly,—

‘Leave your hats and coats down here, and run upstairs for a wash. Take this jug of hot water with you. This is the way up.’

They climbed noisily up the narrow winding staircase, and found themselves in a big bedroom over the kitchen, with another built-in bed, and a big table before the open windows. Here again a flight of steps led up in the corner to the flat roof of the tower and the connecting gallery, as they afterwards found.

‘Isn’t it funny?’ whispered Elspeth, as she enjoyed a much-needed wash. ‘I never imagined it would be like this, did you?’

‘It’s like an old castle,’ said Jock. ‘Wouldn’t it make a ripping fort?’

‘Like living in a lighthouse,’ was Rob’s verdict, and was instantly acclaimed by the other two as just what they had been feeling, but had not put into words.

‘It’s a rummy business altogether,’ he added, ‘but we haven’t seen very much of it yet.’

‘I want to see the Shilfie. Cousin Janie evidently calls her that. I wonder why? I suppose she’s in bed.’

Elspeth was wandering round, eyeing the strange bed curiously and peeping into the cupboards.

‘I wonder which of us is to sleep here? And if somebody sleeps in the kitchen? I’d love to! But she sent my box into the other tower, didn’t she? I wonder what it’s like over there? *Isn’t it*

queer? Oh, here's the cat—just as she said! What did she call him? You poor dear ducky, you needn't be so frightened! I wouldn't hurt the tip of your tail for a thousand pounds. Puss, puss! What's your name, silly?'

'Antony. The dog's Cleopatra,' chuckled Rob.

'What weird names! He won't let me get near him. Silly thing, I only want to love you!'

But Antony did not want to be loved, especially by strangers. He was crouching on his stomach in the darkest corner of a cupboard which had been standing open, pressed close to the wall, his ears flat against his head, his eyes wild with terror. Elspeth, talking reassuringly, bent to stroke him, and was welcomed with such a ferocious hiss that she drew back hastily.

'Oh, all right! Stop there then, you cross old thing! I wasn't going to hurt you, stupid!'

'I'll teach him to spit at you like that!' cried Jock, and bent to seize the terrified beast.

With another fierce hiss and a swift snake-like movement, Antony slipped out between his legs and flew like a flash across the room and downstairs.

'She'll think we were teasing him. I'll go and explain,' Elspeth said hastily.

But Janie knew her old friend's ways.

'Were you trying to make friends with Tony? I'm afraid it's no use. The only way is to leave him to himself. He'll soon come round. I wouldn't be surprised if he came in presently to help you with your supper. He's old and nervous, you see, so you must excuse him if he's a little peculiar at times. And how do you like my house?'

'Oh, we *like* it just awfully,' Elspeth assured her eagerly, 'but we don't *understand* it a bit! I never saw any place like it before. It's awfully jolly, but I think it needs some explaining, don't you?'

'Well, perhaps it does. I'm used to it, you see. Now here's your supper all ready. I'll explain what I can once you're fairly started.'

She set a dish of fresh fish on the table.

'I had to send for Johnny Macwilliam from the farm to catch these for you this afternoon, as I hadn't time to go out for them myself. But I'm hoping Rob or Jock will take that piece of work off my hands. It's not a job I'm fond of.'

'Rather! I've never had a chance to fish, but I guess it's easy enough,' Jock said confidently.

'Can you catch fish? And have you got a boat?' and Elspeth eyed Janie with new respect. 'I say, this place is just ripping, you know!'

Janie laughed. The schoolgirl slang was a surprise to her, and not a very pleasant one. She promised herself that she would correct it in time, but at present it must be allowed to pass.

'Please, where is Sybil?' begged Elspeth. 'I'm longing to see her.'

'Sybil is asleep,' smiled Janie. 'She is only five, and it's nine o'clock.'

'Is it really? Why, how long it keeps light here!—much longer than at home. Can't I see her to-night, please?' and Janie smiling, said,—

'If you'll promise not to wake her you shall see her when you're going to bed.'

'Oh, thank you. No, of course I won't. And please, why do you call her the Shilfie?'

'I really hardly know, Elspeth. Nicknames aren't always easy to account for, are they? Perhaps because she's such a wee bit of a thing, and yet so friendly with everybody and everything. That must have been it, I think. The shilfies are so friendly and tame, and she seems like one of them somehow.'

'I want to thank you, just awfully, for that photo. It was the very jolliest thing you could have sent me, and I thought it was just sweet of you to think of it. The girls were awfully

pleased to see it too. Oh, I say! Doesn't it seem a long time since this morning?'

'Bout a week,' Jock agreed, but was too busy satisfying the cravings of his inner nature to have much time for conversation.

'Yes, it's a long journey. Didn't you get very tired of it?'

'Not very. You see, we had friends to talk to. Two of the girls were coming to Scotland for the holidays.'

'A noisy one and a quiet one,' laughed Rob. 'The noisy one was company for those two. The quiet one talked to me.'

Janie glanced at him thoughtfully. She had known his age, but he was older than she had expected in manner. She liked his thoughtful face and earnest eyes, and found in them confirmation of her idea of what his father must have been like. She had not seen her uncle since she was a child, and could not remember him at all, but she thought he must have looked like Rob.

From him she glanced at round-faced Jock, busy with his tea and with no other thought at the moment, and then at Elspeth, a demure little figure in her neat brown tunic with its broad Quaker collar and cuffs, and her hair tightly braided in its two little pigtails with their little brown bows. It was a mode of hairdressing very suitable for travel or play, but not particularly pretty, Janie thought.

'Ripping fish!' ejaculated Jock. 'I wasn't half hungry!'

'Here's somebody else who's hungry, too, but she isn't allowed to have fish. Her doctor says it doesn't agree with her.'

Janie clapped old Cleopatra's fat sides affectionately, but Cleo was begging pathetically, with hungry eyes on Jock, and only responded by a quick indignant glance out of the corner of her eye at that last sentence.

'And here comes another dear one, very much hoping there will be some scraps for him. *His* doctor says he's to eat as much as he can, because he's so dreadfully thin, so we'll give him a feast presently,' and Antony, creeping stealthily in, perched on the extreme corner of the front table, and sat up stiff and straight, watching every mouthful as it disappeared.

Suddenly Janie sprang up with a cry of dismay.

'Excuse me one minute. Oh, dear! I quite forgot!' and she ran out of the open door and into the other tower.

'Here, old chap!' and Jock dropped a morsel of fish on Cleopatra's twitching nose.

'She said he wasn't to have it,' remonstrated Elspeth. 'She said it wasn't good for him.'

'Rot! He wants it badly enough, anyway. I'd rather give it to him than to that cross old cat, ye ken.'

'His name's Cleopatra. Surely you ought to call him she?' Rob suggested.

'I'm going to give some to Antony. I think he's very patient,' and Elspeth held a scrap above Antony's eager face.

The long thin creature promptly reached up to grab it, and stretched up, standing on his hind legs, till he was longer and thinner than any cat she had ever seen before. She held it tantalisingly just beyond his reach, then dropped it hastily as he stretched out a hungry paw to catch it. Antony caught it deftly, and growled his satisfaction as he worried it on the table.

'He takes it like one of the sea-lions at the Zoo,' laughed Rob.

'Hear him swearing over it! Or is it just because he's so pleased?' asked Elspeth.

Janie returned presently, looking much relieved.

'I left my work all lying about when I heard Andrew's whistle and ran out to meet you,' she explained, 'and Tony has a trick of sitting on it whenever he gets the chance. He just loves to sit on the thing you happen to be using. I don't know whether it's affection or just his way of being sociable, but if you put down your work he's sure to come and sit on it. I happen to be working at something rather important, and it would have been a catastrophe if he had been in the middle of it. So I stayed to put my things away safely.'

'And had he been on it? It was your sewing, I suppose?' Elspeth asked, remembering Mr Macwilliam's explanations.

'No, I think he had run out into the garden. By the way, I haven't explained why I didn't meet you, as I promised. But this work has to be finished and sent off to-morrow afternoon, and it will take me all my time to get it ready. I knew I needed every minute of daylight, so I hoped you wouldn't mind if I kept at it as long as ever I could.'

They felt, and looked, puzzled as to the nature of this all-important work, and she laughed.

'I'll show you what I'm doing before I send it off. I think you'll like it——'

'Then you'll be able to get it done?' Elspeth asked anxiously.

'I must get it done, if I have to get up at six to finish it. But I'll manage it all right. I shall have to leave Saturday's housework, though. But Bella Macwilliam will come down from the farm and see to it all. She often does when I'm busy.'

'I'd love to help her,' Elspeth said eagerly.

'Ripping scones!' ejaculated Jock, revelling in his first introduction to them. 'May he have some?' nodding at wistful Cleopatra.

'Just one bite from each of you. Her doctor doesn't like her to have more than one meal a day. He's very strict about it. Cleopatra doesn't care for him at all, but he knows she has a tendency to apoplexy. She's rather stout, you see.'

'Not half! But I say! She doesn't really go to the doctor, does she?'

'Andrew Macwilliam is her doctor. He's very clever with animals. He's had to come to her once or twice, when she has been suddenly taken ill. She's rather greedy, I'm afraid, and whatever I do I can't keep her from eating too much, and then Andrew scolds *me*. While as for Antony, however much I feed him it never seems to make any difference. He keeps as thin as ever. He's rather like a sphinx sitting there, isn't he?'

'Like a stone image,' said Jock, reaching for another scone.

'He's like something,—I don't quite know what,' began Elspeth.

'Like one of the lions in Trafalgar Square,' said Rob promptly, after a glance at Antony's attitude. 'That's just how they sit,' and once more the other two acclaimed his verdict as correct.

'This is apple jelly, Jock. It goes nicely with scones. Now, Elspeth, what can I explain about the house?'

'Please, where do we all sleep? Where do you live? How do we fit in?'

'I sleep in the lower room of the other tower, and that's where I work and keep all my things. Sybil is sleeping with me at present, but if you would like to have her, Elspeth, I'll be quite willing. It would be rather hard on the poor baby to wake to-morrow and find herself sleeping with a strange sister, but later on I expect you'll want her with you.'

'I'd love that!' Elspeth said fervently. 'And where do I sleep?'

'In the room above me. I hope you won't mind our beds. I know you don't have them in England, but they're really very cosy.'

‘They look lovely,’ Elspeth assured her. ‘It will be awfully jolly to sleep in a hole in the wall.’

‘Ripping,’ said Jock. ‘Ripping jelly, too!’

Janie laughed. ‘Then I suggest that Rob takes the bed here, and Jock the one above. But I shall have to ask you to clear out by seven every morning, to let me in to light the fire for breakfast. It would be a good plan, I think, to keep your things in the room upstairs and both use it as a dressing-room. That will keep this room always neat, and you’ll be able to do what you like up there. Then I thought we could use my workroom for meals, but of course that means carrying everything across the drive. Sybil and I have been content to take our meals in here, and if you think you wouldn’t mind——’

‘I think it would be jolly,’ Elspeth said decidedly. ‘Besides, you won’t want your room used that way. You’ll want it all to yourself. Do let us always stay in here, please!’

Janie’s face cleared. ‘Well, if you’re sure you don’t mind!’ she said again. ‘It would certainly be more convenient. Now, Rob, perhaps you would help me to carry the boxes upstairs.’

‘Jock will help. Don’t you come,’ Rob said quickly. ‘Come on, you greedy chump! You’ve had seven scones already.’

‘Ripping scones!’ Jock said contentedly again. ‘All right, I’ll help. Out of the way, old chap!’ to Cleopatra, who was dancing excitedly on her hind legs under the impression that a feast of fish bones lay before her.

Her disappointment turned to frantic distress when the dish was set down before hungry Antony, but though she stood watching his every bite with eager drooping head and twitching jaws, she did not venture within reach. Elspeth laughed, and Janie remarked,—

‘Cleo knows better than to go too near. Tony can take care of himself remarkably well. They have a little difference of opinion now and then, and they’re very evenly matched. As a matter of fact, Cleopatra’s terribly afraid of Tony, though of course she pretends not to be. She thinks I don’t know. She chases him at times, but she’s very careful never to catch him.’

The boys stowed their trunks away upstairs, while Elspeth helped to clear the table. Then they went across to do the same in the other tower, carrying a candle to light them up the crooked stairs, and Janie called after them,—

‘Quietly, boys! Be careful!’

‘May I go?’ Elspeth asked eagerly.

Janie nodded, and they went out on to the broad brown drive.

‘What a beautiful night!’ and Janie paused. ‘Look at the stars! I think you must have brought good weather. We’ve been having a time of rain. We’ll hope for something better now.’

‘Isn’t it still?’ whispered Elspeth, gripping her hand. ‘Isn’t it quiet? Is that little sound the water of the loch? Oh, *isn’t* it nice to go outside to get to your bedroom? This is the loveliest place!’

Janie laughed. ‘I’m glad that’s how you feel about it. Now come and look at the Shilfie.’

Elspeth had no eyes that night for the room she entered, or for anything but the rosy baby face in the middle of the big box bed. Sybil lay with fat little arms thrown above her head, her round chubby face flushed with sleep, her lips slightly parted, her long curls tossed across the pillow, and Elspeth gazed down at her hungrily and found to her dismay that she could not speak for a moment.

‘I’ve wanted her so badly!’ she whispered at last. ‘School was jolly, but it wasn’t home, and the girls were awfully nice, but they didn’t belong to *me*. Oh, it is nice to have her—and you! You don’t know how I’ve been longing to come, Cousin Janie!’

‘I’m glad to have you here at last, Elspeth. Mother always wanted you to come to us, but we knew it was better for you to be in England. Your uncle could give you far more, of education and other things, than we could, so we couldn’t ask you to come to us. But I’ll do the best for you I can, and I’m more than glad to have you here at last. I’ve always been very proud of Uncle John, and I want you to tell me all about him, and your mother, and the island. We’ll have a fine long talk some time soon. Now I think you should go to bed. It’s ten o’clock, and you must be very tired.’

‘I believe I am, but I’d forgotten all about it,’ Elspeth said confidentially. ‘What’s she lying on, Cousin Janie? Oh, is it a Teddy Bear?’

‘Yes, it’s only her Teddy,’ Janie smiled. ‘He is always called “My Teddy.” I should have thought he’d be a hard pillow, wouldn’t you? He always goes to bed with her. I’ll have to move her when I’m ready. She will lie right in the middle.’

‘I do hope she’ll like to sleep with me. It would be ripping!’ sighed Elspeth, and turned to hug Janie before going up to bed.

‘Cousin Janie, I love your house and this whole place, and Antony and Cleopatra too, and I love you and Sybil best of all!’

‘I hope we’ll all deserve it,’ smiled Janie. ‘I’ll do my best, and I know Cleopatra will, too. I’m not so sure of Tony. Now, mind you sleep well, and to-morrow you shall be introduced to the Shilfie.’

## CHAPTER X THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

Elsbeth sat up suddenly in her box bed and stared about her. Something unusual had wakened her. What could it have been?

She looked curiously at the walls and roof of her bed, but realised that she had found it very comfortable. The room was very daintily furnished, though everything was of the simplest. White matting on the floor, pretty pink-tinted walls, furniture all enamelled in white and looking very fresh, all served to throw up the rich colour of the curtains of bed and window and the hangings of dressing-table and cupboards, which were of deep strawberry-pink.

‘It *is* pretty! And after a cubicle it seems so big. It’s just perfect to live in a proper house, not a school,’ Elspeth decided, and lay back on her pillow wondering what had wakened her.

Then it came again, a sharp shower of pebbles thrown against the window-pane, and she sprang out of bed and pushed the lattice wide open and leaned out.

‘Fancy having windows that open out instead of up,’ she thought, and called down to Jock to know what he wanted.

‘Come for a swim! It’s going to be hot, and the water’s like a pond. There’s heaps of time before breakfast.’

‘I’d love to!’ Elspeth cried joyfully. ‘Does Cousin Janie mind?’

‘She says not if the ferryman’s there to see we don’t get drowned,’ laughed Jock.

‘Drowned! Oh, I don’t think we’re likely to get drowned. All right, I’ll be ready in five minutes. I needn’t do my hair till after.’

In its tight plait it was quite suitable for the water. She flung on her clothes, rummaged in her trunk for swimming garments and cap, snatched up a towel, and ran downstairs.

At the bottom of the winding stair she stopped short, and once more she had no eyes for the room, though it was as white and pretty as her own, with dark green hangings and covers in place of pink.

The morning sunshine was pouring in, the light softened by the trees which shaded the window. Beside the window in a low chair sat Janie, the sun touching her hair to fiery colour. She was bending over an embroidery frame which stood before her holding her needlework, and she was working with long golden threads of silk. On a low table by her side were spread silks of every colour, from delicate tints to deep shades, all piled carelessly together. On a corner of the table, on a sheet of coarse brown paper, sat Antony, noisily purring out his satisfaction that the lonely night was over and the morning come again.

In the middle of the room the Shilfie was struggling with her undergarments. Her brown legs and fat white arms were bare, her long ringlets in disorder. She was bravely trying to button a tiny petticoat, and as Elspeth paused, gazing at her hungrily, Janie said, without raising her eyes from her work,—

‘Come to me if you can’t manage it, Sybil.’

‘Can do it *quite* well, thank you.’ She had a clear high little voice and a very decided way of speaking. Then very deliberately she added, ‘That—is—to—say, *think* I can, if I twy hard.’

‘All right. Twy hard, and when you’re tired of twying come to me.’

‘Oh, mayn’t I help her?’ burst out Elspeth. ‘Sybil, won’t you let me do it for you? I’d love to dress you.’

Janie smiled a morning greeting. ‘I don’t think she’ll let you. She’s very independent.’

‘Won’t you let me, Sybil? Are you glad to see me?’

Sybil had dropped her petticoat and was gazing at her sister with serious eyes, as if forming her opinion of her. Slowly a friendly smile broke over her face.

‘So vewy gwad to see you! Did you have a pweasant jou’ney yes’day? Aren’t you wather ti’ed this mawning?’

Her tongue had not yet learned to frame certain sounds, and she occasionally omitted them altogether, but usually made a brave attempt at them, with disastrous results. As for the first person nominative, she considered it entirely superfluous. Since she was making the statement, she saw no need to say that she was. Her manner and tone had the assurance of twenty-five, rather than five, and so far from showing any trace of shyness, she spoke out with a confidence that rather staggered Elspeth till she grew used to it. But in London the Shilfie had been her aunt’s constant companion, and had been admitted to the drawing-room and trained to help to entertain visitors as soon as she could talk. Her company manners did credit to her upbringing, but the effect of her staid little speeches was rather spoiled by the failures in her pronunciation.

Elspeth, taken by surprise, stared blankly, first at her and then at Janie. Janie smiled comprehendingly but said nothing, and Sybil held up her face for a kiss, and made another effort to say the right thing.

‘Was your twain cwowded? Was ’fwaid it might be. So many people goin’ away jus’ now. Wasn’t it wather hot twavelling?’

Elspeth caught her in her arms. ‘Sybil, I have wanted you so badly! I’m so glad to see you at last! Do you think you’ll like me, dear?’

‘Oh, yes, s’ould think I will,’ the Shilfie responded cheerfully. ‘Why s’ouldn’t I? Aren’t you nice?’

‘The Shilfie likes everybody,’ Janie explained. ‘Are you going to bathe, Elspeth? Jock tells me you can all swim, but you will be very careful, won’t you? Think of my feelings if anything happened to you!’

‘Oh, we’ll be all right,’ Elspeth laughed. ‘I was school champion in swimming, you know. I’ll show you my medal when I get it unpacked. Won’t you come for a bathe too, Sybil?’

‘Mus’ he’p Bella with the bweakfas’. Have to stir the powwidge,’ Sybil explained importantly.

‘Oh! Shall I stay and help too?’

‘No, no! Run along with the boys, and we’ll have breakfast ready when you come back. Don’t stay in too long and catch cold.’

‘But I want to dress Sybil.’

‘Can do it vewy well myse’f, thank you! That—is—to—say, *think* I can,’ the small person explained hastily. ‘Don’t want to be dwessed by anybody, pwease, E’speth. Would vewy much pwefer to do it all myse’f.’

Elspeth smothered a laugh. ‘All right. Mind you dress Teddy when you’re ready yourself.’

‘Goin’ to, but he has to wait till I’m weady. He knows quite well, an’ he’s never im-patient,’ said Sybil, making a word of each syllable.

Elspeth laughed, and hurried out to join Jock. Unlike Teddy, he was distinctly impatient, and indignant that she should have kept him waiting so long.



'Rob's away to find a place for you to change. He'll be in the water by now, I guess. What a time you've been!'

'I've been talking to the Shilfie,' Elspeth explained. 'Come along, Cleopatra. Good-morning, Fatty! Have you seen her yet?'

'Who—Fatty?'

'No, Sybil.'

'Yes,' Jock laughed. 'Janie called me in to speak to her. She says we're just to call her Janie, not "Cousin" all the time. The kiddie was sitting up in bed, so we went in to shake hands. Rob kissed her, but I didn't like, though she seemed to expect it. She said she was *so* glad to see us, and asked if we'd had a pleasant journey and if we felt quite rested this morning. I didn't quite know what to say. She might have been forty.'

'Yes, I was taken aback too. Isn't she funny? She's not a scrap shy, is she?'

'Shy! Rather not! It was me that was shy, ye ken.'

'I always expect tiny wee children to be shy. Hasn't she lovely long curls?'

'Rather!' said Jock, with sincere appreciation. 'Isn't Janie awfully fine too? She's what I call downright pretty.'

After his years at school, it was very strange to feel that these three belonged to him,—Janie, just growing into beautiful womanhood,—Elspeth, at the right age to be a comrade and companion in all his plans,—and Sybil, as dainty a baby sister as he could have wished. It was a new sensation, but a very pleasant one, and he had already formed a high opinion of each one of them, though for very different reasons. The Shilfie was sweet, Elspeth was jolly, and Janie he felt instinctively was beautiful, and he was proud of them all.

Elspeth was feeling the charm of her new surroundings.

'Isn't it pretty? Don't you love this place already? How bright all the colours are! What's the smell in the air?'

Jock sniffed doubtfully. 'It's a mixture of salt, and seaweed, and pine-trees, and heather,' he said at last. 'Isn't it jolly?'

'But how do you know? I can smell the salt, but——'

'Oh, we scouts learn to know all those things,' Jock said loftily.

'Oh, yes, of course! I'd forgotten. It must be awfully useful. I shall ask you whenever I want to know anything,' Elspeth said eagerly.

Jock glanced at her doubtfully, to see if this were sarcasm, but she was transparently in earnest, and he felt a trifle uncomfortable, wondering how soon she would discover the limitations of his knowledge.

'Oh——! Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it wonderful?' cried Elspeth, coming to a sudden halt.

The winding road had been shaded by trees, its high banks hung with long green ferns and cushions of brilliant heather, the park land beyond one great sweep of green, with occasional patches of yellow bracken. Through the trees could be seen glimpses of rich deep blue and gray, where the hills towered close above, or a gleam of white, where the sunlight struck the sparkling water of the loch. But now they had come to the end of the trees, and the loch lay at their feet, dancing in the sunbeams, stretching away to the green and brown and golden hills of the opposite shore, and up to the great blue mountains of the north. Behind, the sun pouring into Glenleny lit up all the hollows and threw deep purple shadows from every rock, and each crag and shoulder of the crowding hills stood out in bold relief. Last night it had looked dark and stern and wild. To-day it was wild still, but beautiful also, as each hill showed its rugged

outline, and the whole formed a ring of bold round heads and bare gray slopes and rocky clefts.

But Jock was not content to stand and gaze. Rob was already in the water, and at sight of them came in to meet them with long steady strokes. They went towards the slip, and John Shaw came out to speak to them.

‘A gran’ day this ye’ve brocht to us, missy! An’ are ye for the watter as weel as the laddies?’

‘Rather! I love it. I’m longing to be in. It looks lovely,’ Elspeth said fervently.

‘Do ye say that? Weel, then! I’ll see ye’re no’ droon’t, Miss Elspeth. Mind ye keep an eye on the lassie, Master Jock.’

‘She’s all right. She can swim like a fish. Where did you change, old man?’

Rob, sitting on the slip, waved an arm to Elspeth and pointed to a cottage a few yards along the shore.

‘Good morning, kiddie! Isn’t this first-class? The water’s perfect. Mr Shaw says we may use that cottage, as it’s standing empty. How soon can you be ready?’

‘Minute and a half,’ and Elspeth and Jock disappeared into the cottage, she into the inner room and he the outer.

Jock was out first, and ran down the beach and into the water. Then, as Mr Shaw laughed at his antics, Elspeth picked her way carefully across the stones to the slip. She ran past him, with a laugh which made him jump, stood for a moment poised above the green water, a slim blue figure, then shot out and down like a seagull, just as Mr Shaw, awakening to her intention, cried anxiously,—

‘Hoots, lassie! Ye’ll no’ be jumpin’ in there! It’s ower deep—— Weel, then, did ye ever see the like o’ that! The wean’ll be droon’t, sure,’ and he began to push down his boat.

Then Elspeth, laughing and shaking the water from her face, went breasting gallantly away to join the boys, with never a thought of how far beyond her depth she was venturing, and Mr Shaw watched them amazedly.

‘It’s no’ a lassie, it’s a fish she is, I’m thinkin’,’ he murmured, and listened to the merry shouts and laughter coming across the quiet bay, and watched their untiring play as they raced and chased, with extreme wonder.

Elspeth, a little tired at last, lay floating with only her face above water, and gazed up into the deep blue of the sky. Then she called a merry challenge to Jock.

‘I’ll race you to the launch, Jock! Give me a little start. Now, go!’

She need not have handicapped him, for her speed was equal to his, and she reached the little yellow launch, lying at anchor in the bay, an easy first, and hanging on its side turned to look back for him.

Suddenly across the water from the shore came a shrill indignant voice.

‘Kindly leave our boat alone! It isn’t put there for you to play with!’

‘Well, I never!’ and she turned with an indignant jerk to see who had called.

‘What a cheek! Who on earth is it?’ and Jock came up beside her.

At the water’s edge, where the gardens of Leny Hall ran down to the loch, stood two girls and a small boy. He, wearing a tiny kilt of the Campbell tartan and a tam-o’-shanter on the back of his dark curly head, was five or six years old. The girls, dressed in frocks of fine holland embroidered in white, and with big white Panamas set well back on their dark hair, were nearly the ages of Jock and Elspeth. They had apparently been watching the three in the water till Elspeth’s hand on the launch roused their indignation. It was the younger girl who

had hailed them, and as Elspeth still hung on to the side, in blank surprise that so harmless an act should arouse such vehement remonstrance, she shrilly repeated her peremptory call.

‘Kindly leave our boat alone *at once!* It isn’t left there for your convenience.’

‘What a horrid temper! I’m not hurting her silly boat, am I?’ and Elspeth loosed her hold hastily, her cheeks blazing with wrath, and began to swim away.

‘What beastly cheek! I’ll get right into their horrid boat! Of all the ridiculous rot!’ and Jock paddled towards the launch. ‘I’ll jump on the velvet cushions and make them sopping wet, that’s what I’ll do!’

‘No, you won’t, you silly chump!’ and Rob headed him off. ‘She’s a little donkey, but if it is their boat we can’t insist on using it. We weren’t doing any harm, but if they choose to be nasty they’ve the right to, of course. Take no notice of them. That will make them madder than anything. Elspeth, come to the slip for a dive.’

Elspeth resolutely kept her back to the angry children on the shore, but found it hard not to give them the satisfaction of an answer which would provoke an argument. They were quite ready for it, but they could not continue to shout remarks at heads which were continually disappearing under water and took no notice of them whatever. They watched the racing, floating, and diving suspiciously, but found no further pretext for interference, and the fact only added to their wrath. That these strangers had not deigned even to answer them was distinctly irritating.

Elspeth ran up the beach to the cottage at last, followed presently by the boys. Cleopatra had watched them anxiously, crying with distress that she could not reach them but not venturing into the water. She greeted them with joyful barking, and Elspeth heard the elder girl, who had wandered along towards the slip, say loudly and very distinctly,—

‘What a disagreeable beast! Such a terrible disturbance! I shall have to speak to Grandmother about it. We really cannot be expected to have a dog like that about!’

‘What horrid, unpleasant creatures!’ she remarked through the wall to the boys. ‘Who do you suppose they are? They’re not half swanky, anyway; think no end of themselves, any one can see. What do you think she meant about Cleopatra? Surely she couldn’t——’

‘They must come from the big house—the Hall. We’ll ask Janie about them,’ said Rob, as he rubbed down vigorously.

‘Campbell was the name. The girls are jolly pretty,’ Elspeth said grudgingly, ‘but shocking bad manners, you know, to speak to strangers like that.’

‘Rather! But what could you expect, living in the wilds like this? I guess they’re only half civilised, anyhow,’ suggested Jock. ‘People who have lived in London, or who’ve travelled, as we have, know a thing or two more than that.’

‘That’s so,’ Elspeth agreed, struggling with her wet mane. ‘We aren’t country kids, anyway. We have been to decent schools. P’r’aps those girls have always lived here, and don’t know any better, poor things.’

There was distinct comfort in this thought. She pondered it as she dressed, and on going out with Rob presently her eyes danced at sight of the three aggressive Campbells still on the beach and well within hearing.

‘Isn’t it odd what bad manners country people have?’ she said carelessly, turning to Jock. ‘It’s so different in London, isn’t it? There, people do know how to behave decently, anyway!’

‘I say, kiddie, that was too bad!’ muttered Rob, checking his desire to laugh. ‘Don’t look round, you ass!’ to Jock. ‘Don’t give yourself away. Pretend you don’t notice their existence.’

Jock chuckled. 'They looked fairly stumped! Good for you, Elspeth. That should do them good.'

'Well, I think they deserved it,' Elspeth urged, and from behind a screen of bushes turned to glance at the objectionable girls, who stood aghast and speechless, too utterly taken by surprise to frame any retort till even the noise of Cleopatra's joyful barking had died away among the trees.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

‘Their names are Mysie, Madge, and Ninian Campbell,’ said Janie soberly, as the morning’s experience was described during breakfast.

‘Ninny what?’ cried Jock.

‘Ninian. He is only six. He has been away in Glasgow staying with an aunt, and only came home yesterday afternoon. They live at the Hall with their grandmother.’

‘Mr Macwilliam said the house belonged to some one called Campbell of Glenleny.’

‘That’s the wee boy, Ninian.’

‘What, that little chap in the kilt? Is *he* “Campbell of Glenleny”?’ cried Jock. ‘My stars!’

‘His father and grandfather are dead, so the estate belongs to Ninian. I’m sorry you had trouble with them. I knew they would probably not be friendly, but I hoped you would get on without actual quarrelling.’

‘They certainly began it,’ Rob remarked. ‘We were doing no harm, and wouldn’t have dreamt of annoying them.’

‘No, it wasn’t your fault. Madge ought to have left you alone.’

‘It was the younger girl shouted at us,’ said Elspeth.

‘Yes, that’s Madge. Mysie is the elder. Madge is always very quick to speak, but I think she is generally prompted to it by Mysie.’

‘I guess they’re not half swanks, aren’t they?’

‘I’m afraid that’s rather beyond me, Jock. What does it mean?’

‘Why, they think no end of themselves and like to show off, don’t they?’

‘They are inclined that way.’

‘I suppose they’ll look down on us, and call us “those children at the Lodge”!’ Elspeth said thoughtfully. ‘Do they go to school, Janie? Or do they always live here?’

‘They have a governess, a very nice girl, but she is away for her holidays just now.’

Elspeth nodded.

‘Then they’re only country girls, however much they swank. They haven’t had our advantages. I don’t think all the looking down need be on their side.’

Janie looked troubled. ‘I hope you won’t keep up the quarrel with them. I know they won’t be friendly, but you needn’t have anything to do with them. Don’t begin wrangling and calling names whenever you meet. They’ve probably been told not to play with you.’

Jock sniffed. ‘They haven’t been asked yet.’

‘You see,’ Janie explained, ‘there was trouble long ago between their people and ours, and it was about your father.’

‘About father?’ and all three turned to her in sudden attention.

‘He was a very clever boy, and determined to study and not just stay on the farm. Old Mr Campbell, grandfather of these three, was interested in him and wanted to help him to get on. His son Ninian, little Ninian’s father, was at college, and was intending to stand for Parliament presently and take up a political life, and they hoped he would make a name for himself. So his father decided to train John Buchanan from the farm to be his secretary, and offered to help with his education, with that end in view. But Uncle John was very independent—something like the Shilfie!—and preferred to try for bursaries and pay his own way—’

‘Is that the same as scholarships in England?’ interrupted Rob. ‘Yes, I see.’

‘They didn’t like it when he refused their help and said he would rather depend on himself, though he tried to do it without hurting their feelings, and thanked them for the offer. But Mr Campbell was still more annoyed when Uncle John told him that he could not be Mr Ninian’s secretary, even if he were qualified for it, as he had always felt that he must go into the ministry. From the time he was a small boy he had been determined to be a missionary and go abroad, and his parents were proud that he should feel called to it, and were willing to let him go. Mr Campbell was very angry, but Uncle John stuck to it and said he could not do anything else. So they had to give up the idea, and of course made no further offer of help. It wasn’t needed, for Uncle John made his way without them, and won bursaries which paid all his college fees. He did brilliantly at Edinburgh, as you probably know, and then he married your mother, who had been staying in Edinburgh when they met, and went out to the South Seas. But the Campbells were offended and disappointed, and have taken no notice of us ever since. We Buchanans have always held this house and the right to be gate-keepers of Leny Hall, as well as owning the small farm up the Glen, which Mr Macwilliam is looking after for us. But the Campbells of the Hall aren’t friendly with us now, as they used to be, and except on business matters they ignore us completely. We open their gates and keep them in good order, but have nothing else to do with them. So now you understand. There must always be some one at hand to open the gates, so when I go out I leave Bella Macwilliam in to keep house. If any of you hear the whistle, you must run as quickly as you can, and hold the gates open for the carriage—but of course you won’t have to do it if I am at home,’ she added quickly, as she saw the look which passed between Elspeth and Jock.

‘I won’t open the gates for those swanky kids,’ Jock said mutinously. ‘Not if I know it! They’ll wait all day, so far as I’m concerned.’

‘Then I shall be turned out of my house, that I’ve lived in all my life, because I have failed in my duty,’ Janie said calmly. ‘I don’t think you’d like to feel you had been to blame for that, Jock.’

‘You silly chump!’ said Rob vigorously. ‘Don’t make an ass of yourself if you can help it. Of course you’ll attend to the gate, if there’s any need, and Elspeth too.’

‘I’m bothered if I will!’ muttered Jock.

‘I’d *rather* not have to, for those rude girls,’ Elspeth admitted. ‘I wouldn’t mind for the old lady. But I know I’d want to make faces at that Madge, and that wouldn’t be good manners, would it? And the older one, too,—what’s her name? Did we tell you what she said about Cleopatra? Janie, surely she couldn’t do anything to her? She was only putting it on, wasn’t she?’

‘Oh, that was ridiculous!’ Janie assured her at once. ‘Cleopatra is almost as old as Mysie herself. Mrs Campbell would never dream of interfering with our dogs. If she was really objectionable—I mean Cleopatra, of course!—we could send her up to the farm. But she isn’t. She’s a very good house dog, and I must have one when I live here alone. Mysie was only trying to annoy you, Elspeth.’

‘I thought it was only a bit of swank,’ Jock said triumphantly.

‘Mysie is just as bad as Madge, and Madge is just as bad as Mysie,’ Elspeth decided. ‘Perhaps the boy’s nicer. But they’re pretty, aren’t they, Janie?’

‘Very pretty,’ Janie assented. ‘Their mother was a beautiful woman.’

Jock sniffed. ‘I don’t call that pretty a scrap,’ he scoffed. ‘I say, where’s the Shilfie? She isn’t half late for breakfast.’

‘She went back to dress her Teddy, after helping me to stir the porridge,’ Janie laughed. ‘I’m afraid she must be in difficulties. Suppose you go across and fetch her, Elspeth. Tell her the porridge is getting cold.’

Elspeth sprang up and ran across the drive.

‘Sybil! Sybil! Don’t you want any breakfast?’

‘Can’t button my Teddy’s fwock,’ the Shilfie explained mournfully. ‘Been twying vewy hard for hours an’ hours. You do it, pwease, E’speth.’

She was sitting in the middle of the floor, dressed in a tiny smocked overall of pink linen and big pink sun-bonnet, and struggling with the fastenings of a little red coat made to fit her Teddy. Elspeth took the matter in hand, and Sybil said, in her friendly little voice,—

‘Have a pweasant bathe? Isn’t it a wovewy mawning? Think it’s going to be hot, don’t you?’

‘Yes, very hot. It was just *wovewy* in the water, Sybil. You should come too. We’ll teach you to swim.’

‘S’ouldn’t care for it, thank you! Don’t think it would ’gwee with me. Think it would be too much twouble to undwess,’—the Shilfie was hastily trying for a sufficient excuse.

‘There! Teddy’s ready now. Shall we take him to have some breakfast?’

‘Yes. Wants his powwidge vewy bad. Oh, there’s the whistle! Come quick!’

A shrill whistle from within the closed gates had startled them both. The Shilfie flew out and began tugging at the handle, and Elspeth instinctively ran to help her. The handle turned easily, for Janie had already unfastened bolts and bars for the day, and as she hurried out in answer to the call the gate swung open, Sybil leaning with all her small strength against the one side, Elspeth holding back the other.

Janie hastened to help Sybil, secretly much amused at sight of Elspeth doing duty so soon after her protest at the breakfast table, and a big carriage, drawn by a pair of unusually fine horses, came slowly out.

On the back seat sat an old lady, dressed in black, with a widow’s cap and veil on her white hair. Beside her was the small boy Ninian, in his little kilt and tammy. The two girls sat together facing them, still in their holland frocks, the shady Panama hats on their dark curls.

A swift look passed between them at sight of Elspeth. The presence of their grandmother prevented any renewal of hostilities, but Mysie’s cold stare needed no words of interpretation, and the disdainful curl of Miss Madge’s lips was easy to read.

Elspeth leaned against the heavy gate and stared back at them coolly. Mrs Campbell was eyeing her critically, and not having heard of the morning’s meeting, put down her steady gaze to impertinence. The child had evidently inherited her father’s independent spirit. Otherwise she was presentable enough. There could be no objection to her presence at the lodge. Her brown school tunic, with its loose belt and broad white collar and cuffs, was very neat, and the hair which Jill had pronounced pretty was all loose and waving on her shoulders, slightly damp still, all its bright threads catching the sunshine, all a-ripple from its plaiting and wetting and the brushing on which Janie had insisted before breakfast. Elspeth had rummaged in her trunk for her swimming medal, and had pinned it on her breast to show to the Shilfie, and Mysie’s eyes fastened on it curiously.

Little Ninian was not looking at Elspeth. He was gazing at the Shilfie, leaning back against the other side of the gate, her Teddy in his red coat clasped to her breast, her long curls under the pink sunbonnet hanging over her shoulders. As the carriage passed he leaned forward suddenly and threw something towards her from a basket in his lap.

Madge began to remonstrate angrily, and her scolding could be heard as the carriage passed out into the road.

‘Ninian, how could you! Don’t you know she’s one of those horrid children?’

‘He hasn’t seen her before, Madge. He doesn’t understand. He won’t do it again,’—apparently Mysie was a trifle less unreasonable than her sister.

‘Will do it again if I like. She’s a nice wee girlye,’ Ninian was insisting, as they passed out of hearing.

A bunch of ripe cherries lay in the roadway, and Sybil grabbed them in delight.

‘Think chewwies are jus’ wovevy things, don’t you, E’speth? Think that was a vevy pweasant boy, don’t you?’

‘Sybil, surely you won’t take them?’ Elspeth cried indignantly.

‘S’ould think I *will*! Why not? They’re good, aren’t they? Can’t I have them, Janie, pwease?’

‘Oh, don’t you understand——?’ began Elspeth, but Janie said quickly,—

‘Of course she doesn’t. Don’t be silly, Elspeth! Let the baby enjoy them. She can’t be expected to feel as you do, and I wouldn’t advise you to try to make her understand. Yes, Sybil, you may have the cherries, of course. It was very nice of Ninian to give them to you. They must be away for a picnic. Now come along to breakfast.’

‘Are weal good,’ Sybil said contentedly. ‘Won’t you have some, E’speth? Are vevy nice! Do! Sure you’d ’joy them, you know! Would be so pweased to give you some!’ she pleaded.

But Elspeth resisted the temptation manfully.

‘I wouldn’t eat one for anything. Oh, dear! She doesn’t understand! She only thinks I’m cracked!’ she sighed, as Sybil regarded her with wide, wondering eyes. ‘No, thank you, dear! I—I don’t eat cherries! Not to-day, anyway!’

‘Wish you’d have some,’ mourned Sybil. ‘Don’t want to be a gweedy, an’ eat them all myse’f. ‘Fwaid they’ll make me bad. Pwaps Jock will have some.’

Elspeth was careful, however, that Jock should understand the history of the cherries. Her chagrin at having been betrayed, by her eagerness to help the Shilfie, into doing so soon the thing she had resolved not to do if it could possibly be avoided, deepened her resentment towards Mysie and Madge and led her quite unreasonably to include Ninian in her dislike.

The Shilfie was much distressed when Jock also declared he did not eat cherries to-day.

‘Nobody won’t he’p me, an’ they’re vevy good chewwies, an’ such big ones too!’ she mourned. ‘Feels dweadful gweedy to eat them all myse’f. Won’t you have some, Wob? Would be *so* pweased to give you some!’

Rob laughed. ‘All right, kiddie, I’ll have two, just to make you feel comfortable,’ and the Shilfie sat contentedly and watched him eat them while she took her porridge with a big horn spoon. She had conceived a fervent admiration for this very big brother, who had not been too shy to kiss her, and much as she would have liked to give her fruit to Elspeth or Jock, she was still more pleased to share it with him.

‘So kind of you! Think you’re vevy nice to take them, Wob. Think you an’ me will get on vevy well together,’ she said confidently.

‘I’m sure I hope we shall,’ Rob said seriously. ‘I’ll do my very best, I assure you. What are you grinning at, you chump?’ to Jock.

Janie rose. ‘Elspeth, come across to my room and see my work. I put in the last stitches just before breakfast.’



‘I never saw anything half so pretty in all my life!’ and Elspeth drew a long breath of admiration and surprise. ‘But however do you do it? It’s beautiful! I never saw anything like it before.’

It was a small tablecloth, embroidered in a wonderful design of green and blue and gold, exquisitely shaded. The delicate colouring and intricate pattern fascinated Elspeth, and the work was of a very high quality in every way.

‘I only have to press it now, and then pack it for the boat. They’ll have it in Edinburgh to-night. I think it’s for a wedding present, and they are in a hurry for it. I didn’t know there was any hurry till yesterday or I’d have had it done before you came, and then I’d have been free to meet you as I’d hoped. But I had a letter yesterday asking for it by to-night, if possible. You see, when I’m working in colours I can only do it by daylight. I couldn’t make out those delicate shades after the lamp is lit. White work is rather different. I have a lovely thing on hand—but you’ll see that later. I find I can get orders for as much as I can do, and it’s delightful work.’

‘Then do you do these things for the shops in Edinburgh?’ Elspeth asked curiously.

‘For one of the very biggest shops. You see, I spent two years in Glasgow, attending classes at the University, and I took lessons in this kind of work at the same time, and made friends who were good enough to like what I could do and to introduce me to the places where I could dispose of it best.’

‘I didn’t know you’d lived in Glasgow. Didn’t you hate it after Glenleny? It’s such a big, noisy town, isn’t it?’

‘It certainly is that. I didn’t like it, but mother thought I ought to go to college. I never did anything very brilliant in the way of study. I wasn’t made for that. But I went through my course and got on well enough.’

‘You know,’ Elspeth said confidentially, ‘I’d been wondering how it was you were so—why you talked so—well, you know what I mean, don’t you?’

Janie laughed. ‘Oh, I’ve had a decent education,’ she assured her. ‘Distinctly more than is needed to help you to open a gate. I believe Mrs Campbell thought it very foolish of mother to send me to Glasgow. Of course, it cost money, for I’m not the kind to win bursaries and pay my own way. I’d have loved to do it, but I could never come out first in anything. But my fees and expenses used up most of what we had saved. The farm is very small, and some years doesn’t do much more than pay for itself. So although we have it and this house we have very little else to fall back on if any sudden call comes, and I am only too glad to make a little by my needlework. I enjoy it, and get very well paid. I love working with these,’ lifting a handful of delicate silks of all shades, ‘and the planning and designing are delightful.’

‘Do you really make up those lovely patterns?’ Elspeth’s voice was awestruck.

‘Oh, I prefer to make my own designs, and generally do, unless some special one is ordered. I love colours and designs, and it is very interesting to work them out. I have two or three other things begun that I’ll show you later on, but now I must get this packed up carefully. What would you like to do this morning? Don’t you want to explore the Glen?’

‘Oh, yes, please! We’re all longing to see more. It’s just beautiful.’

‘On days like this. Wait till you’ve had a week’s rain! Well, run along then! Take the Shilfie with you, and she’ll show you the way to the farm, and Mrs Macwilliam will give you a glass of milk. You might ask her for some fresh eggs for me, and tell her to send Johnny down in the evening to do some digging for us in the garden.’

‘But couldn’t I help Bella tidy up the house before I go out? I’m sure there must be heaps to do on a Saturday morning, and I’m longing to do some real work. It would be such a change from school!’

Janie laughed. ‘When I’m working you shall help me,’ she promised, ‘but Bella can get on all right to-day.’

‘Shan’t I help her make the beds? At least I ought to make my own. Oh, but they’re those funny beds! How do you make them?’

‘I think you had better leave all the beds to Bella. I’d rather you didn’t do anything this morning, Elspeth, really I would,—except, perhaps, unpack your box and put your things away neatly. Then run away out with the boys. If you’ll take Cleopatra, she’ll be grateful, and a walk will do her good.’

‘Of course we will. But where’s Antony? I didn’t see him at breakfast.’

‘He had his before you came in. We scraped out the porridge pot for him, and then gave him another feast of fish, and now he’s sleeping it off,’ and Janie showed the long thin creature curled up in the middle of her bed.

‘I don’t like him lying there, but he will do it, and he’s such a poor thin old dear that I haven’t the heart to disturb him. So he does pretty much what he likes, as you’ll very soon find.’

‘He’s a dear! They’re both dears,’ said Elspeth, and climbed the narrow stairs to her pink bedroom to finish her unpacking.

## CHAPTER XII LED BY THE SCOUT

Elsbeth stood looking round her pink room with satisfied eyes.

'It *is* pretty!' she said. 'It's awfully sweet. It's such a lovely deep shade of pink, not too bright. She does know all about colours right enough. Her room's awfully jolly, too. I like the deep green curtains.—Yes?' and she leaned out of the lattice window in answer to a hail from Jock.

Then—'Oh!' she cried. 'Oh! You do look splendid. It is fine to be related to a scout!'

For he was dressed in all his 'warpaint'—khaki shirt and slouch hat, bright green neckcloth, haversack, shoulder knots, and all, and with sleeves rolled up and stockings turned down and long staff in hand looked decidedly businesslike.

'Come on! Buck up, do! We're all going up the Glen.'

Elsbeth hurried out to join him. 'Where are the others?'

'Gone on without us. I wasn't ready either. The kiddie's talking straight on, and Rob's listening as solemn as a judge,' Jock chuckled. 'She can talk!'

Rob and the Shilfie were strolling up the road, deep in earnest conversation, while Cleopatra trotted beside them, her jaws stretched to their widest over a big stone. She did not look comfortable, but she was extremely happy, for she, like Sybil, had conceived a fervent admiration for Rob, the only man of the household, and Rob had thrown the stone. She had raced after it and brought it back to him, and was now being graciously permitted to carry it, to her great content.

'Oh!' Sybil dropped her Teddy in the road and clasped her hands in delight. 'Oh, Jock, you do look vewy fine! Didn't know you were a sojer! Oh, I'm vewy pwoud of you, Jock! Doesn't he look fine, Wob?'

'Very,' Rob assented gravely. 'And it's so useful to have him with us, you know, for if we meet any enemies or wild beasts up the Glen we'll only have to get behind Jock, won't we?'

'Can he *wreally* fight?' asked Sybil, wide-eyed.

'Oh, of course! Besides, he knows everything when he's dressed up like that. If you want to know anything, ask the scout.'

Jock lunged at him with his long staff.

'Stop that rot! Can't you see she believes every word you say? Let's get on. Where's this farm, I wonder? Janie said you'd show us, Sybil.'

'But surely the scout knows! The scout ought to lead us!' objected Rob. 'What's a scout for, if he doesn't scout?'

'Oh, all right!' and Jock threw his staff over his shoulder and marched on in front.

'Nice to have a sojer march in fwont of us, isn't it? Feels wike a picession. Am vewy pwoud to be in a picession, aren't you, E'speth?' and Sybil tucked her Teddy under her arm, and marched after Jock.

The road was hot and open and sunny, and soon began to grow steep. Leny Hall, with its gardens and home farm, stables and laundry buildings, soon lay behind, with a glimpse of the shining loch and distant hills through the trees. Jock marched steadily on, but presently, meeting an old man trudging down, stopped and questioned him, and then marched on again. The old farmer stood looking after him, in mingled amazement and amusement, as if

wondering what he was and where he had come from, and from his face it seemed probable that Monica had been right and that Glenleny did not yet possess a scout patrol.

As they went slowly up the road, suiting their pace to the heat and the Shilfie's short steps, Elspeth told Rob what she had learned from Janie of her life in Glasgow and her college course, and of the explanation of her mysterious needlework.

'It seems to explain her, doesn't it? I didn't know she'd been to college, and I was wondering how she managed to be so—well——'

Rob looked worried. 'That sewing for the shops bothers me. She shouldn't have to work like that——'

'But it's only when she wants to! She said it was only when she had some extra expense—that she didn't have to do it all the time.'

'Well, don't you see, we're the extra expense just now.' Rob's clear insight had gone to the root of the matter at once, and had grasped what Janie had hoped they would not understand. 'The farm yields enough for her to live on, but not for three or four more, and there'll be things like clothes and school to think of, and she's trying to provide for them this way. She hasn't said so, but that's evidently it. Seems to me, she's done far more for us already than those Whitakers in London. The minute it was difficult for them they were done with us, without even asking if it would be quite easy for us to come here. They just said they couldn't help us any longer. And Janie never says it won't be easy, or anything, but tells us to come at once and then sets to work to supply the extra, without a word to us or anybody. She's got pluck, that's what I think. But she can't go on working for us like this. I'm going to have it out with her as soon as I get the chance. She'll have to let me help. For you girls it's all right, and we'll have to get Jock to school somehow and make him work in earnest and not fool about any longer. He'll be all right when he understands. But I can't have a girl working for me. I'll have to get something to do pretty quick.'

'But what can you do here?' Elspeth asked, in great dismay over his explanation, which she felt to be right. 'I'm awfully sorry if we're a trouble to her. She's so jolly, and I don't believe she minds a bit, you know, but——'

'I'm not saying she minds. I don't think she does. It was true what she said, that she wanted us to come. But all the same, I can't stay here doing nothing. It isn't reasonable. Of course, I meant to go on studying. I thought perhaps I could work up for my Inter. alone, and go up to Glasgow or Edinburgh for the exam. But that's not enough now, it's too slow. I must get to something useful right away.'

'But you were going to be a doctor, and prepare for going back to the island!' cried Elspeth, in sharp dismay.

Rob's face grew determined. 'I'll do it some day yet, but it will have to wait till you kids are educated and provided for. We can't let her do it all. Perhaps I could get something to do in Glasgow, and come out here for week-ends. She may have friends there who could help me to something.'

'Oh, but, Rob——'

'Hallo! What's the scout up to now? I say, that's doing it in style, isn't it?'

Rob was anxious to change the subject, and found a ready pretext in Jock, several hundred yards in front. He had dropped his staff and cast aside his hat, and was kneeling down to put his ear to the ground, Indian fashion. He sprang up and came marching back to meet them.

'Something coming. You'd best get out of the way,' he said importantly.

‘But what is it? Surely you can tell us that!’ teased Rob. ‘Is it a cart from the farm, or the carriage with the swanky family coming back?’

‘It’s not the carriage. It’s something lighter, like a gig,’ said the scout sharply, nettled by his bantering tone.

They sat waiting among the heather, and his surmise proved correct, for a light farm gig driven by Mr Macwilliam came down the road, and old Andrew nearly drove his horse into the bank as he stared at Jock’s unusual costume. He drew up before them.

‘Guid day to ye! An’ what kin’ o’ hat do ye ca’ that, Maister Jock? Ma horse’ll be gey feart at the sicht o’ ye, ye ken. Playin’ sojers, eh?’

‘Playing—soldiers!’ Jock gave a snort of disgust. ‘D’you mean to say you’ve never seen a scout before?’

‘Scouts, is it? Aweel, see ye dinna frichten the coos in the fields,’ chuckled the old man. ‘They havena bin used wi’ scouts, ye ken. Are ye no’ feart o’ yer brither, Mistress Shilfie?’

‘Am vevy pwoud of him,’ Sybil said loyally. ‘Is vevy powite of him to be a sojer for us, don’t you think so, Andrew?’

‘Polite, ay, that it is! Aweel, ma horse is gettin’ ower his fricht a bittie, so I’ll gang on ma road to meet the boat. He wis gey feart o’ yer hat, ye ken, Maister Jock,’ and Mr Macwilliam chuckled again and drove on.

‘Well, of all the outlandish ignorant places——’ began Jock wrathfully, and springing to his feet marched on in front once more, as if dreading a fresh instalment of ridicule from Rob.

‘Poor chap! He doesn’t get much encouragement, except from you and the Shilfie,’ laughed Rob.

But presently Jock met them once more.

‘The farm is just round the corner, but it’s a quarter of a mile off the road,’ he announced importantly. ‘Shall we go on, and call in on our way back?’

Rob glanced at Sybil, who already showed signs of weariness.

‘No, we won’t go farther just now. We’ll go to the farm and get some milk for the girls, and rest a while.’

‘Well, it isn’t half hot, ye ken! But I want to see what’s at the top of the road.’

‘That may be ever so far,’ said Rob, glancing up the winding road, which rose all the time between bare green hills, growing steeper and more bleak, more covered with heather and bare gray rock. The path went up and up, till the hills seemed to close it in, and there was no visible break through which it could find its way.

‘Don’t believe it leads anywhere,’ Jock decided. ‘It just goes to some other farm, ye ken. Come on and inquire after that milk!’

The farm was a tiny collection of gray buildings with blue slate roofs,—a small house, a long cow-byre, two barns, and some hay-stacks and pigsties. Johnny Macwilliam, a loutish boy of nineteen, was digging potatoes in a field, and stared vacantly at the party, and particularly at the scout, then grinned sheepishly at the Shilfie. Mrs Macwilliam, a bustling busy woman, stared too, but gave them hearty greeting when Sybil’s presence told her who they were. Sybil, conscious of her own previous acquaintance, was quite prepared for the duty it imposed upon her.

‘Vevy pweased to see you this mawning, Mrs Macwilliam,’ she said pleasantly, advancing before the rest of the party. ‘This is my bwother Wob, an’ my sister E’speth, an’ my other bwother Jock. He’s a sojer, as you can see by his dwess, and ’pesh’ly by his hat. He goes in

fwoont to show us the way. Pwease will you give us some mi'k to dwink now, an' some eggs for Janie?'

'I'll gie ye a' I've got, Mistress Shilfie, but it's no' verra mony the day. Sit ye doon an' rest ye, missie. It's gey hot the morn, is it no'?' and she bustled away to bring milk and scones for them all, not forgetting Cleopatra.

They rested for some time in the old-fashioned kitchen, and then went out to survey the farm. Sybil knew her way about, and took them to see the pigs and hens with much enjoyment.

'So vewy pweased to show you wound,' she said again and again. 'Hope you're all 'joying it as much as I am myse'f. It is vewy pweasant to have a farm to visit, isn't it?'

They set out for home at last, much interested in their father's old dwelling, but not sorry that they were to live in the more interesting lodge house. The farm was 'pweasant to visit,' as the Shilfie said, but would have been rather cramped quarters for living in.

As they were walking home Jock stopped suddenly, with a peremptory 'Halt!' and knelt to listen on the ground again.

'Carriage coming,' he said decidedly. 'Let's sit on the wall and make faces. It won't half make them mad, ye ken.'

'*I'm* not going to make faces. They're not worth it. I'm going to stare as if I'd never seen them before. That made them mad this morning,' Elspeth assured him.

They sat on the stone dyke beside the road, and gazed critically down as the carriage from Leny Hall drove home.

'My nice pweasant boy is there,' said the Shilfie suddenly. 'Want to say thank you——'

'Well, you can't then, that's all!' said Elspeth, a trifle sharply. 'I wish you could understand that they aren't nice children, Sybil.'

'Is a vewy pweasant boy, *I* think,' Sybil said sturdily.

Mysie and Madge were ostentatiously looking the other way. Jock's strange attire was a severe temptation, but they would not condescend to show any interest in the 'lodge children.'

But Ninian was staring with all his might.

'Just look at that boy's hat!' they heard his shrill little voice peal out 'It's like a soldier's, or a p'liceman's. If you'd been in Glasgow, Mysie, like *I* have, you'd have seen lots and lots of p'licemen.'

Mysie's shoulder humped indignantly as she turned half round in her seat, sooner than face the children on the wall. In Ninian's speech there was an unconscious reminder of Elspeth's taunt concerning 'country people,' which was very annoying. Madge was administering an indignant rebuke when the small boy deliberately turned in his seat and waved his hand to the Shilfie.

Her face broke into a delighted smile, and she waved back, and flourished her Teddy in the air. Then as the carriage turned the corner, and Mysie and Madge fell on Ninian in a torrent of reproach, Sybil looked up at Elspeth, her face aglow with delight.

'*Isn't* he a vewy pweasant boy! Do wike him vewy much indeed, don't you, E'speth? Think he's so ex-tweme-wy powite, don't you?'

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SHILFIE'S VISITOR

Janie, her work despatched by the steamer, had been helping Bella all morning. But when Bella was sent off home in the afternoon, she sat down to her embroidery frame again, and spread out another big piece of work. The boys were out experimenting with the boat, but had declined to take Elspeth or the Shilfie till they felt more sure of themselves, so the girls, a trifle tired with the morning's uphill tramp, were left at home to rest.

Elspeth stood at the open door watching her cousin at her work.

'You're like a picture, you know,' she burst out suddenly, and Janie looked up in astonishment. 'Yes, you are! In that white dress, with all those lovely colours heaped round you, and the dark green curtains behind, and the sun coming in at the door and shining on your hair, and that gorgeous work in the frame in front of you——'

'Dear, dear!' laughed Janie. 'The white dress is to keep my work clean, and the silks are very untidy, I know, but I like to have them where I can find them in a minute, and I've been told often enough that my hair turns bright red in the sun, and as for——'

'Yes, I know. That's why I like it. It's so awfully pretty,' interjected Elspeth.

'And as for the work,' repeated Janie severely, 'it's only half finished. How do you like it?' and she leaned back in her chair and eyed it critically.

'It's just lovely. Those pink roses might be real. What beautiful shades of silk!'

'It's a bedspread. It ought to be for a bridal chamber, don't you think so? I was wondering if it could be for the same bride as my little table-cloth.'

'I shall call you the Lady of Shalott, when you sit there sewing. I'm sure she looked something like you, and you live in a tower, so it's just right.'

'Did she have an old thin cat, who insisted on sitting beside her while she worked?'

laughed Janie, pausing to stroke Antony's head. He broke into loud contented purring at her caress, and curled himself up on the sheet of paper spread for him to sit on, and Elspeth laughed and went up to her pink bedroom.

She was sitting in the window-seat leaning against the wall, with the book she had been reading in the train, when an unusual sound made her look up. It sounded like something striking on the big closed gate, and she pushed her lattice wider and leaned out to see.

From inside the gate came a shrill imperative voice.

'Open the gate! Please open the gate!'

Sybil appeared at the kitchen door, her Teddy tucked under her arm, and ran to answer the summons. Janie came hurrying out to help, looking rather puzzled, and threw open the gate.

Alone on the brown drive stood Ninian, carrying a little cane with which he had struck the gate to call their attention to his presence. In his other hand he held a bunch of crimson roses. For the first moment he did not see Sybil, who was behind the gate, so he boldly addressed Janie.

'I want to see the nice wee girlie from London, if you please.'

Elspeth gasped and stared down in amazement. Janie laughed.

'Here she is, Ninian,' and the Shilfie, her friendly little face radiant with smiles, came forward holding out her hand.

‘Good afternoon! So vewy pweased to see you! Isn’t it a vewy hot day? Did you have a pweasant dwive this mawning?’

‘Oh yes, nice enough. The girls were a bittie cross,’ Ninian explained, pushing the dark curls back from his brow with an embarrassed gesture. ‘These are for you,’ and he offered the roses. ‘They’re out of my garden. I picked them for you myself.’

Janie’s face was a study. Elspeth watched from above in mingled amazement and dismay. Sybil glowed with delight.

‘How vewy kind of you to think of it! Am so ex-tweme-wy fond of woses! Thank you *so* much!’ and she buried her face in the posy and sniffed luxuriously. ‘Oh, aren’t they sweet? You smell them, Janie! So vewy good of you!’ she said graciously again to the embarrassed small boy.

The offering of his gift had caused a momentary fit of shyness, but her delight restored his equanimity, and he said pleasantly,—

‘Thought I’d like to play with you. The girls are rather old for me, you see! They are getting so grown-up. I’ve got a Teddy, too. He came from Glasgow. Would you like to see him?’

‘Vewy much indeed! Would be vewy pweased to pway with you. What game shall we have first? What pway do you wike best? You choose——’

‘Wait a moment, Sybil,’ Janie felt constrained to interrupt. ‘Does Mrs Campbell know you’re here, Ninian? Won’t she be wondering where you are? What are Madge and Mysie doing?’

‘Reading. They’re always reading,’ Ninian’s voice was full of disgust at such a choice of occupation. ‘They’re s’posed to be minding me on the lawn, but they hadn’t spoken to me for hours an’ hours, ’cept to say, “Go away, an’ don’t bother!” So I came along to see *her*,’ with a nod towards the Shilfie. ‘What’s her name?’

‘Sybie Buchanan, but am gene’wy called the Shilfie. Are you the ninny boy?’

‘I’m Ninian Campbell. Shilfie’s a pretty name,—prettier than Mysie or Madge. They don’t like your sister and the big boys. They say they’re cheeky. What is cheeky, do you know?’

‘Fwaid I don’t, but if it’s something unpweasant, E’speth isn’t it,’ Sybil said loyally. ‘She’s vewy nice, an’ so’re the boys. Like them all vewy much myse’f.’

‘They wouldn’t like it if they knew I was here,’ Ninian said complacently. ‘They said I wasn’t to look at you this morning, and they were quite cross about the cherries.’

‘Chewwies were vewy good,’ sighed Sybil reminiscently. ‘Got any more?’

‘Sybil! Sybil! How can you?’ cried Janie, laughing and dismayed. ‘That isn’t polite, you know.’

‘Didn’t mean not to be powite. Vewwy sowwy, I’m sure,’ and the corners of her mouth drooped penitently. ‘Was I vewy wude? Sure I beg your pardon——’

‘Look here!’ said the small boy, embarrassed again. ‘I’ll bring you some more as soon as ever I can. Very glad you liked them. Now let’s have a game!’

‘I’m afraid you ought to go home, Ninian. We shall have Mysie coming to look for you presently.’

‘Oh no, I don’t think that’s at all likely,’ Ninian said easily, with one of the quaint phrases he had learned from living so much with older people. ‘She won’t miss me till the bell rings for tea.’

‘All the same, I think you must go home. They won’t know where you are, and if they do happen to miss you they’ll be alarmed about you,’ Janie said decidedly. ‘I’ll ask Mrs



Campbell if you may come to play with Sybil as soon as I get the chance, but until she says yes I don't think you ought to stay here, Ninian.'

Ninian sighed. 'I *did* want to play with *her*!'

'Would be vewy pweased,' the Shilfie said wistfully. 'Mustn't we pway a wee while, Janie?'

'Another day, dear. Good-bye, Ninian, and thank you for the roses!'

'Vewy many thanks for the woses! *So* kind of you to think of it! So vewy pweased to have seen you! Come again and see us as soon as you can, won't you? Will be dewighted to pway with you at any time. So gwad we were at home!'

Ninian pushed back his curls again with his characteristic gesture of embarrassment.

'I hope we shall be friends,' he said quaintly. 'I would like to play with you. Good-bye!'

He sauntered off up the drive, swinging his tiny cane, and Janie and the Shilfie closed the gate. Janie looked thoughtful and amused, Sybil radiant.

'*Isn't* he a vewy pweasant boy? Think it is so nice of him to be so fwiendwy! E'speth! See my woses!'

Janie looked up, and laughed.

'Did you ever see anything like that? Weren't they funny? It seems to have been a case of love at first sight on both sides. Ninian knows his own mind, doesn't he?—and generally gets what he wants, I expect.'

'Don't you think they're rather young?' Elspeth asked solemnly, and then, with intense annoyance in her tone,—'But what are we to do, Janie? We can't let those two babies be chummy when his sisters call us cheeky and we're sure they're swanks! It'll have to be stopped. We can't let it go on like this, you know. Sybil, come up here and talk to me!'

Sybil came obediently and Elspeth talked. But her lecture did not seem likely to have much effect. The Shilfie was delighted with her new friend, and could not be brought to see any reason against the acquaintance. The Ninny boy had been very kind, she insisted, and she liked him very much. She hoped he would soon come back to play with her, and all Elspeth's remonstrances were quite unintelligible to her.

'Don't see why not!' she insisted again and again. 'He's a vewy pweasant boy, *I* think.'

Elspeth sighed. 'Well, we simply can't allow you to be friends with him, that's all, and the sooner you make up your mind to it the better. I expect the old lady won't allow it, anyway.'

The story was told to the boys over tea, while the crimson roses stood in a big green bowl in the middle of the table. Rob laughed, but Jock looked glum.

'I say, kiddie, you must play the game! We can't have a traitor in the camp. They began it, remember. They were horrid to us this morning. You mustn't go running after them, it's not decent!'

'In justice to Sybil, I must point out that Ninian has done most of the running after so far, Jock,' said Janie. 'The Shilfie has only been graciously pleased to accept his advances, that's all.'

'Well, she shouldn't, then. It's rotten of her.'

'Is a vewy pweasant boy, *I* think. Hope he'll come back soon,' said Sybil complacently, and Jock and Elspeth exchanged despairing glances.

When Sybil had been put to bed—in Elspeth's room this time, and a merry business it was, before she was finally induced to settle with her Teddy in the big box bed—Johnny Macwilliam was left to dig in the garden and attend to the gate, and Janie took the boys for a

lesson in fishing, while Elspeth and Cleopatra wandered on the shore, and the sun set behind the hills of Glenleny, and the golden glow dyed the waters of the loch.

She sat on the slip and watched the fishing, and presently saw two small figures, familiar enough already, come running through the gardens from Leny Hall. Behind them more sedately came a man-servant, and Mysie and Madge waited for him impatiently on the beach. He launched a tiny boat and took them aboard, and rowed out to the launch. Elspeth watched enviously as they all climbed on board and presently went chuff-chuffing away up the loch towards the lonely silent stretches in the north.

‘How simply ripping!’ she sighed. ‘No wonder they’re swanky. But it was hateful of them all the same. They needn’t be horrid, if they have everything in the world they want. Everything but manners! I do think they were rude this morning. We can’t possibly let Sybil play with the boy. It’s quite out of the question. But how we’re going to make her see it *I* don’t know!’

## CHAPTER XIV SYBIL THE TRAITOR

To Elspeth's surprise, the Sunday evening service at Glenleny Church was held at half-past two in the afternoon. Janie laughed at her astonishment, and explained that it was more convenient for farmers who came for many miles, and could not drive so far twice in one day. So they brought their dinner with them, or visited friends, and drove home to tea.

Bella Macwilliam came down to keep house during the morning, and Janie and her family walked along the shore road to the little church.

The Shilfie's affairs were prospering, for Mrs Campbell came to church with the three children, and eyed Sybil in a way which showed that Ninian had made his request already. Meaning looks, smiles, and nods passed between the two children during the service, to the chagrin of their elders. Elspeth pulled Sybil sharply by the arm whenever her eyes wandered towards Ninian, and Mysie and Madge kept a strict watch upon the small boy and seemed equally anxious to check the acquaintance. But when Janie paused to speak to Mrs Campbell afterwards, the old lady, instead of the prompt refusal which the elder children expected and hoped for, said only,—

'What kind of child is she? The boy has no companions but his sisters, and is too young for their amusements. If the child knows how to behave, it might do him good.'

Elspeth would have resented the tone and words, but Janie knew the old lady's manner of old. She was mistress of a big establishment, and held undisputed sway over the whole neighbourhood, and a certain condescension in her attitude was hardly to be wondered at. If she allowed little 'Campbell of Glenleny' to play with the lodge-keeper's cousin, she was undoubtedly making an effort to put his feelings before her own. But as Janie had guessed, Master Ninian did not often fail to get anything he had set his heart upon.

She smiled and turned to look for the Shilfie.

'Sybil, come and say good-morning to Mrs Campbell.'

Sybil had been edging towards Ninian, in spite of Elspeth's detaining hand and Mysie's indignant face. She came forward readily, her face breaking into its eager, friendly smile.

'So vewy pweased to meet you, Mrs Campbell! *So gwad* to make your ac-quaint-ance! Hope you are vewy well this mawning?'

The old lady's face broke into a grim smile, and she gravely took the little hand held out so fearlessly.

'I am fairly well, I thank you! So you are pleased to make my acquaintance, are you?'

'Vewy pweased! Am *de-wight*-ed to meet you. Isn't it a pweasant mawning? Or do you find it wather hot?'—the Shilfie was doing her best to keep the conversation going, since Janie did not offer to help.

'So you want to play with Ninian, do you, Miss Shilfie?'

The small face broke into another friendly smile of delight at sound of the nickname.

'Would be vewy pweased to pway with him. Is *such* a pweasant boy, I think.'

'Hmph! Well, I hope so. I don't mind him playing with you, Miss Shilfie. I don't think he'll learn much harm from you.'

'Hope not, I'm sure. Don't see why he s'ould,' said Sybil cheerfully.

Mrs Campbell laughed. 'Would you care to drive home with us in the carriage?—since you find it "wather hot" to-day? We'll drop you at the lodge.'

'Oh, Granny!' burst from Madge, and Mysie looked unutterable things, while Elspeth hoped against hope that Sybil would refuse.

But Sybil's face glowed with transparent delight.

'Would be vewy pweased!' she said breathlessly. 'Would be just wovewy to dwive home! May I, *pwease*?'

'Granny, *please*!' implored Mysie.

'Mysie, don't be ridiculous! Come along then, Miss Shilfie. We'll leave her at the lodge, Miss Buchanan,' and they passed on, carrying Sybil with them, she and Ninian radiant, Mysie and Madge looking very glum.

Janie laughed. 'I'm sorry for you, Elspeth, but it seems to me you'll have to make up your mind to it. Both Ninian and Sybil have wills of their own, and if they are determined to be friends, I really don't see how you are going to stop them, nor what right you have to try.'

'She's a traitor to the rest of us,' Jock said darkly. 'We shall jolly well have to teach her that it won't do.'

It was a very radiant little traitor who awaited them outside the lodge.

'Had *such* a pweasant dwive,' she informed them, 'and Ant'ny was *so* pweased to see me! Came out singing wike anything. Never heard him purr so much before. Think he'd been wondering where we'd all gone.'

'Yes,' Janie smiled. 'He always greets us, doesn't he? He's so sociable, you see. He likes company,' and Antony came purring up to prove her words. 'I think he's lonely when we're all away,' and she cuddled her old favourite and set him down on the bench, where his contented and long-continued purring made a chorus to the children's questions.

'How could you go, Sybil? You knew we wouldn't like it——'

'Don't see why not——!'

'What did you talk about?' demanded Elspeth anxiously.

'How did you get on, Shilfie?' asked Rob.

'Oh, vewy well indeed, thank you! Had such a pweasant time! Mrs Campbell was vewy nice, an' Ninian an' me talked all the way home——'

'You bet you did,' said Jock disgustedly. 'If there was any talking to be done I guess you'd get your share of it.'

'They were vewy intewested,' protested the Shilfie. 'Told them ewything I could think of. Told them all 'bout your school, E'speth, an' the medal for swimming, an' the pwizes you had, an' the picnic basket, an' evvything you'd told me. They did 'joy it, too.'

Jock and Elspeth looked at one another in despair. Then she asked sharply,—

'What do you mean? Did they ask questions about us?'

'Madgie did. Mysie jus' stared an' stared, an' wistened an' wistened, an' sometimes she said, "Go on!" Madgie asked all kinds of things 'bout school. Of co'se, I couldn't tell her evvything, so I said she mus' come an' ask you herse'f.'

Elspeth laughed. 'And when do you think she's likely to turn up? For I'd better wait in to receive her.'

'You'll wait a long time,' scoffed Jock. 'What did she say to that, Sybil?'

'Said she'd see you in the water 'fore she'd come an' ask you anything,' said Sybil glibly. 'An' Mrs Campbell she said, "Madgie! Madgie!" an' I said you were vewy fond of swimming an' I thought you'd be in the water to-morrow mawning if she wanted to see you there.'

‘Shilfie! You didn’t?’ cried Jock.

‘Did you say that, Sybil?’ cried Elspeth. ‘You’re smarter than I thought.’

‘Don’t know what you mean,’ and the Shilfie sounded decidedly ruffled. ‘‘Tisn’t funny. ‘Tisn’t meant to be, anyway. Vevy pweased to have amused you, I’m sure, but I mus’ say I don’t see the joke myse’f.’

‘Never mind them, Shilfie. Come and talk to me,’ and Rob lifted her on to the bench beside him. ‘What did you think of the sermon this morning?’

He delighted in asking her opinion on some subject, and listened gravely as she answered to the best of her ability, her face very serious over the problem. She was intensely pleased to be talked to in grown-up fashion, and was ready at any moment to forsake Jock and Elspeth for the sake of a chat with Rob.

‘Fwaid I didn’t hear vevy much of it,’ she confessed, as they sat on the bench under the kitchen windows where old Antony was still drowsily purring in the sun. ‘Was vevy hot, you see, an’ I was wather ti’ed, an’ I could see Ninian, an’ he gwinned at me an’ I gwinned back, so I’m fwaid I didn’t wisten vevy well. Thought the wee sermon was vevy good,’ and they discussed the children’s address till Janie called them in to dinner.

Rob had not yet found his opportunity to discuss matters with Janie. But it came in the evening, for she left Bella in charge of the house again and proposed a walk, while the Shilfie was sent to bed.

‘Would be vevy pweased to go with you, Janie,’ the small person said wistfully, when the plan was propounded at tea, but Janie was very strict on this point, and Sybil accepted half-past six as her fate, and submitted to being kissed and left behind with Bella without further protest. She stood hugging her Teddy and waving good-bye as they set out.

‘Hope you have a vevy pweasant walk! So vevy sowwy I can’t go with you!’

Janie led them down to the shore and along the road, till an open glade among the trees invited them to rest. They sat on the heather, the forest of pines behind and around, the shore with its rocks and seaweed at their feet. The evening was very still, the loch like a sheet of silver, the tide creeping up among the boulders with scarcely a ripple. There was no boating to disturb the Sunday quiet, and no steamers had passed all day. The mountains at the head of the loch stood bold and clear, like giants of the north brooding over the lesser hills. Janie told the name of each in turn, and explained how the loch thrust its way up among them, far beyond the point to which they could see, like a long twisting finger.

‘We must go some day. I’d like you to see the head of the loch. There’s a dear wee white village, and several deep gloomy glens, and a sunny green valley. Isn’t it still to-night?’

When they listened intently, however, the silence resolved itself into several continuous sounds,—the splash of a stream falling over the rocks, the murmur and rustle of the pines, and the singing and calling of birds. Elspeth exclaimed in delight, and Janie smiled.

‘Those are the shilfies. The woods are full of them. Didn’t you see them as we came along?—wee brown things, with a flash of white and blue as they fly? They are very tame and friendly.’

‘It’s all very beautiful,’ and Elspeth lay back on the pine needles and gazed at the mountains.

Then Rob, sitting up suddenly, claimed Janie’s attention for the matter which was troubling him. She listened gravely, studying some sprays of pink heather as if weaving them into a design, till he had finished. Then she said quietly,—

'You're quite right in everything, Rob, except in your objection to my work. It *is* necessary, at present, if I am to give you all I wish. We had a bad harvest last year, and the sheep did not do well, either. We lost several, which was very serious, and the farm did not bring in much. This year I hope we shall do better. Mr Macwilliam is satisfied so far, I think, though he won't say very much. When I ask him he just says, "It'll no' be so bad, ye ken!"—but that means a good deal from him.'—Elspeth and Jock grinned at one another, but did not interrupt.—'So anything I can make by my work is very useful. But you have no need to object to it, nor to feel I'm working too hard. I enjoy it thoroughly. I'm never happier than when I'm working. If you ever find me grumbling you can object then. I enjoy the work, and I'm thankful it can be turned to some practical use. It's a very great pleasure to me to have you all here. Since my mother's death last year I have been very lonely. I have no friends but the farmers and their families, and although they are all very old friends, they are not quite like my own people. Even Sybil was company. I felt different when she had been here a single night. She's very companionable, and we got on very well together. Just for my own sake, I'm more than glad to have you here, and that's saying nothing about its being my mother's wish that you should come, or about my being pleased and proud to have you for your father's sake. Besides those two great reasons, I'm glad to have you here because it's so much pleasanter for me. Only—don't go quarrelling with Mysie and Madge Campbell and give me constant trouble.'

'We won't!' said Rob emphatically, while a look passed between Elspeth and Jock. 'But I want to help. What can I do?'

'What do you want to be? I expect you have some plans?'

'A doctor—some day. I've passed matric., and that's the first step. But just now I want to help. If there's need for you to work, there's still more need for me. I must do my share.'

'In one of Elspeth's letters she said you wanted to be a doctor,' Janie said quietly, 'and I was glad to hear it. I hoped you would think of some profession, either that or the ministry or teaching. I felt sure you couldn't be satisfied with less, if you were at all like your father. So I've been making inquiries to see how you could manage it. Your Inter. B.Sc. is the next step, isn't it? Now there are bursaries offered in science which you should try for, Rob. I thought perhaps you could work up for them at home here, if you set to it in earnest. It would mean very hard work, but I believe you could do it. I know you'll stick at it, and do it if it's possible. I think it must be done that way, if you are to get to college at all, for we must think of Jock, who hasn't had as long at school as you. I'm going to try to teach Elspeth myself for a while. I don't think she'll be very troublesome,'—and Elspeth nodded reassuringly. 'But it is time for you, Rob, to try to do as your father did and win your own way. Our old doctor here knows all about you and is interested in us all. He has been here for thirty years, and knew your father and mine. He will do what he can to help you and to coach you for the exam. if he has time. He offers to lend you books, if you'll go and have a chat with him. I think with his help you can manage it. What do you say?'

Rob's eyes were glowing, but his face was very serious.

'It sounds awfully tempting, and I'd like to have a shot at it above anything, but I don't think I ought to. Look here, Janie! At that rate I can't earn anything for years. I ought to do something more useful. I can't settle down to study and enjoy myself, and let you slave for these other kids. I ought to help. Can't I get some kind of paying job at once, and let the degrees wait? I'll get them later on. Just now I want to help.'

Janie leaned forward and laid her hand on his knee.

‘Do you hope some day to take up your father’s work? Elspeth hinted at it,——’

‘Yes,’ he said quickly, facing her with eager eyes. ‘I want to go back to the island. I’ve always hoped to some day. But not till I’ve done all that’s right for these other three.’

‘Yes,’ she said quietly. ‘That’s right, too, but it isn’t necessary, Rob. I can do what’s needed for them. If I need your help I’ll tell you, honestly I will. But if I could see you ready and qualified to take up your father’s work, it would be the proudest day of my life. If I could feel that I had helped you towards it, even a wee bit, I’d be prouder than I can say. I’d feel that I had done something worth doing, after all,—just I, Janie Buchanan, living here in this bit of a place, in this corner of Glenleny, just opening the gates of the Hall and sewing away at my embroidery, I would have done something for the far-away parts of the world. That’s how I feel, Rob, and I ask you not to let your pride come in the way and disappoint me. There’s no need for you to give up your career. When there is need, I’ll tell you. Till then, please, Rob, to please me, go on with your studies and do the best you can. I want it more than I can say. I believe you’ll do well, as your father did, and I want to feel that I have helped you a wee bit.’

Rob’s face, as he sat gazing out across the quiet loch, was a study, new hope struggling with doubt for the mastery. It had cost him much to give up his cherished ambitions, even for a time, and it was difficult to believe at first that they might be realised after all. He had been very silent since his discovery of the facts of the case, and only the Shilfie had been able to rouse him out of his thoughtful mood. That the sacrifice might not be necessary seemed too good to be true. Janie’s words chimed so exactly with his own wishes that it hardly seemed right to accept her view of the matter.

She watched him anxiously. ‘I’m in earnest, Rob.’

‘Sure?’ he asked at last, turning to her, a great light in his face. ‘Are you sure it’s right? Ought I to do it? It seems mean, somehow.’

‘That’s only because you had made up your mind to look at it so. I’m quite sure it’s right. There’s no need for you to hesitate.’

‘Certain? Honestly, now?’

‘Absolutely certain, and absolutely honestly, Rob. Only do your best at your work. That’s all I hope for.’

‘I’ll do that. I’ll work my head off,’ he said fervently.

‘Oh no, you won’t!’ she laughed, in great relief. ‘Now I can be happy again. It would have broken my heart to see you wasting your time. I want you to go right ahead.’

‘I say, you are ripping, you know!’ Rob said, half under his breath.

‘I’m sure it must be easier to go right to college without wasting any years in business, as some men do. You shall use Jock’s bedroom as a study. There’s a big table there, and it will be much quieter than a downstairs room. Change beds with him, if you like——’

‘Ay, ay, ma’am! I’ll sleep in the kitchen. That will do me fine, ye ken,’ cried Jock, who had sat looking very sober during the conversation. ‘It’s always nice and warm, and it’s very close to the larder, ye ken.’

‘I shall take the keys of the larder and cupboards to bed with me, Master Jock. I have a message for you from the minister. He offers to give you lessons for a time, till we make up our minds about another school. He was your father’s minister, and he says he would like to have the teaching of one of his laddies for a while. So mind you behave and do your best, and don’t disgrace him.’

‘He seemed a jolly old chap,’ Jock said meditatively.

‘I say! How decent everybody is!’ cried Elspeth, that warm glow at her heart again. ‘I felt we were coming home from the minute Mr Shaw at the ferry began to talk to us. It’s awfully jolly!’

‘Well,’ laughed Janie, ‘as all our affairs are settled now, and this “awfully jolly” evening is getting a wee bit chilly, suppose we go home to supper. Antony will be as glad to see us as he was in the morning.’

‘There’s one thing I don’t understand,’ Rob said thoughtfully, as they called Cleopatra from her search for rabbits and turned homewards through the darkening woods. ‘Your mother was our father’s sister, and yet you’re Buchanan too. Was your father her cousin?’

‘Yes. He lived at the lodge, you see, and she came from the farm. You are Buchanans of the farm, I am a Buchanan of Leny Lodge, and the gatekeeper by right of being my father’s daughter. The farm legally ought to belong to you, through your father, but in fact it was left in my mother’s hands when he went abroad, and she managed it through Andrew Macwilliam. I don’t think we’ll quarrel over the legal rights of it, but it certainly ought to support you four if it can, so you need not hesitate to live on anything it can produce, Rob. Now don’t you think we have been serious long enough? It had to be talked out, I suppose, but I don’t like business, especially on Sunday evenings——’

‘I’m sorry!’ Rob laughed.

‘And I’m tired of it. What are you going to do to-morrow? I suggest an afternoon picnic up near the farm. Mrs Macwilliam will give us milk, and there’s a dear wee burn where we’ll get water, and Elspeth shall make tea for us in the picnic basket.’

‘*Isn’t she ripping?*’ murmured Elspeth ecstatically. ‘Janie, you’re just splendid! I love you more every day.’



## CHAPTER XV MYSIE MAKES A MOVE

Mysie and Madge watched the merry bathing-party from their bedroom window next morning. After the Shilfie's unconscious retort they were not likely to be seen on the beach, but they were deeply interested in what went on in the water, and could not refrain from watching at a distance. Sybil's stories of Elspeth's feats at school had explained her unusual skill as a swimmer, and the two girls watched her diving from the slip, like a thin blue needle, and breasting out to join the boys, like the little fish she had been called by Melany Merrill, with eyes full of envy and surprise.

The Shilfie stood on the slip, her Teddy tucked under her arm, and conversed with Mr Shaw, to his infinite amusement. He laughed out at her grave remarks, and drew her on to further conversation.

'*Hope* you are having a pweasant time,' she remarked, backing hurriedly as Elspeth, wet and shiny, laughing and rosy, climbed on to the slip for a final dive. 'Pwease don't come too cwose to me. You are so vewy wet.'

'I'm going to kiss you, Sybil,' and Elspeth pretended to approach.

Sybil fled, and Elspeth laughed and waded to the side, bent, and shot down into the dark green water, where ten feet below the pebbles shone like jewels.

'Seems to 'joy it vewy much, doesn't she? Think it mus' be wather pweasant, don't you, Mr Shaw?'

'She's no' a lassie, she's jist a wee fish,' Mr Shaw remarked again. 'Did ye ever see the like o' that now, Mistress Shilfie?'

Elspeth, floating on her back, thrashed the water into a shower of spray, just as Rob came creeping up with long silent strokes. The water flew up in his face, drenching out of him the intention she had read in his eyes of catching her by the feet and dragging her under, and while he shook off the spray with an indignant outcry, she slipped away and made for the shore, throwing a triumphant laugh back at him over her shoulder.

'Rob tickles so frightfully, if he gets hold of you,' she explained to the staring Shilfie. 'I had to get away somehow.'

'Mus' be vewy unpweasant to be tickled in the water,' Sybil agreed. 'S'ouldn't care for that a bit. Aren't you vewy cold, E'speth?'

'Not a bit. I'll be dressed in five minutes,' and before very long she was out, with streaming damp hair, to demand Sybil's help in wringing out her costume.

Rob was in the highest spirits, now that his affairs were settled. But he had been thinking of the matter, and as they went merrily home to breakfast he interrupted Elspeth and Jock with a sudden,—

'Do you kids understand now what I said in London about not worrying Janie?'

'Because she's a cousin? We won't worry her because she *is* Janie, I guess,' said Jock sturdily. 'She's ripping. I wouldn't do anything to upset her for nuts.'

'I understand,' Elspeth said abruptly. 'It's awfully good of her, Rob, and we won't forget. I think she's just splendid. I'll even open the gate for that horrid Mysie, if she wants me to.'

Shortly after breakfast, the shrill imperative whistle sent her flying to do so—for the carriage, as she thought. The duty was distasteful, but loyalty to Janie constrained her to fall in

with the custom of the house and to run out at the first call. Janie was making beds upstairs, and called her thanks through the lattice window at sight of the flying figure.

But it was not the carriage this time. Down the drive came Mysie and Madge, alone, and mounted on brown ponies. They wore white knitted caps almost hidden by their flying dark hair, and dark green riding suits, very neat and useful, with short skirts and knickerbockers, and Elspeth stared wide-eyed, and quite forgot to look haughty, for they were riding astride like boys. They carried little riding whips, and round Mysie's neck hung a whistle with which she called up a big greyhound, who came leaping after them down the drive.

She saw Elspeth's look of amazement, and read it aright and coloured slightly. Madge saw it too, but she only laughed, and threw a curt 'Thanks!' to the little brown-clad gatekeeper, with the bright rippling hair and wondering eyes. They rode away up the Glen, Madge laughing still, Mysie's head very high, and Elspeth went in to vent her astonishment on Janie.

'I never saw that done before! They do look queer,—big girls like that! Don't you think they look awfully odd, Janie?'

'No, I think they look rather nice. They always ride like that. It's very sensible. It's much the safest way to ride. Oh, I believe lots of girls do it nowadays.'

'But it *looks* so horrid! A girl looks awfully nice on horseback, but only when she sits properly.'

'I think Mysie and Madge look very well, and they ride beautifully. Wasn't Ninian with them? They have to take a groom if he's there, for fear he should get into any difficulty. He's so wee, you see. But the girls are allowed to ride alone now.'

'No, he wasn't there. He'll be coming to play with Sybil, I guess,' Elspeth said, in a tone of concentrated disgust.

Both she and Jock had talked to Sybil, but without result. They had tried to explain their objection to the acquaintance, and had begged her not to persist in her friendship with Ninian. More they could not do, since the authorities on both sides had permitted it. But Sybil seemed quite unable to understand, and could not be brought to see any objection to her new friend.

'Is a vevy pweasant boy, *I* think,' she said again and again. 'Am vevy fond of him, I'm sure. Hope he'll come often to pway with me. I 'joy his visits vevy much, E'speth. Am so gwad to have made his ac-quaint-ance. Wouldn't you care to come an' pway with him, too, don't you think? Would be vevy pweased to have you, I'm sure.'

'No, thank you, Sybil! I don't want anything to do with Ninian Campbell, and if you must have his company you can't have mine, that's all. I *thought*,' said Elspeth, in rising indignation, 'that when I came home from school I was going to have a little sister to play with, but you seem to like Ninian better than me or Jock. I don't think it's at all nice of you, Sybil.'

'Would be vevy pweased to have you pway with us, I'm sure,' and poor Sybil repeated her friendly little invitation valiantly. 'Would be so vevy gwad if you would come too, E'speth.'

'I can't go with you if the Ninny's there. I've told you so already.'

'Have pwomised to pway with him, an' I'm goin' to. Don't think it's nice of you to call my fwiend names, E'speth,' protested Sybil with spirit.

'Hear, hear! I agree with the Shilfie,' said Janie, looking down from a lattice window. 'Calling names isn't good form, Elspeth. Leave the poor baby alone. If you won't play with her and Ninian, at least let them enjoy themselves together.'

'Hope to 'joy ourselves vewy much. So sowwy you won't come too, E'speth. Sure you won't change your mind? Think you'd weally have a vewy good time, you know,' Sybil said wistfully.

But Elspeth would not, so when Ninian appeared presently the two went off hand in hand through the big gates, and disappeared into the gardens of the Hall.

Those gardens, and the big house among the trees, were an enchanted land to Elspeth, and she would dearly have liked to explore them, and to visit the aviary, and the pigeon-house, and the pond of gold-fish, of which the Shilfie told on her return. But she would not accept Ninian's friendship as the price of entrance. The thought of striking up an acquaintance with him, and so annoying his sisters by visiting their haunts in their absence, did not appeal to her as 'good form.' If she could not be friends with all the Campbells, she would not have anything to do with any of them, and least of all with the baby of the family.

Unconsciously she won a measure of respect from Mysie Campbell by adopting this attitude. For Mysie, with no very high opinion of 'the lodge girl,' had said to Madge, when they discovered that the friendship of the babies was to be permitted,—

'Then that girl's sure to make up to Ninian and get him to bring her in here, and we'll see her all over the place. Ninian, if you bring that big Buchanan girl into the garden I won't speak to you for a week.'

'Shall bring her in if I like,' Ninian said defiantly. 'An' I'll bring the wee girlie in, for sure an' certain. She's nice, an' I like her, an' she wants to see the birds.'

'Then the other girl's sure to come too, and we'll never know when she isn't somewhere round!'

'Of course she will. She'll be only too delighted to get the chance,' Madge agreed confidently. 'Never mind, Mysie. We'll ask her what she's doing in our garden. She slid off the launch quick enough when I shouted at her.'

'I do wish they hadn't come,' sighed Mysie. 'I much preferred having the place all to ourselves.'

So when Elspeth refused Ninian's repeated invitations, and steadily declined to set foot inside the gates, Mysie and Madge were first surprised and relieved, and then indignant.

'It looks as if she thought our garden wasn't worth seeing!' Madge said wrathfully. 'I'm sure it's prettier than any she's ever seen in her life!'

'You can't be sure of that,' Mysie reminded her. 'She may have seen just as good in England. Perhaps she doesn't think it's worth coming to see. I do wish she hadn't been to that big school the wee girl talks about! It makes me feel somehow as if she knew more about things than we do. She must have been in London and seen all kinds of things, you know. Perhaps she looks down on us because we've always lived in the country.'

'She couldn't! She'd never dare!' asserted Madge, but Mysie remembered Elspeth's remark about 'country people,' and felt a growing suspicion that she had rightly guessed her opinion of themselves. It was a horrible thought, and caused her growing uneasiness, and at the same time accounted for the proud tilt of Mysie's chin as she rode past Elspeth in the morning.

There were factors at work in Mysie just then of which Elspeth had not the faintest idea. Had she understood, she might have made more allowances. As it was, she only saw the results and resented them.

But for years Mysie's greatest ambition had been to be allowed to go to boarding-school—a big boarding-school—and meet other girls. She had read every school story she could lay

her hands on, and had formed a doubtless very exaggerated idea of the delights of school. She had never had any companions but her sister, and had longed intensely for the comradeship which school would mean. To have to live in lonely Glenlenny and study under a governess was a bitter disappointment, and she craved continually for school, with its excitements and rivalries, and all the varied interests of a large number of girls living together.

And here to her very door had come a girl, two years younger than herself, who had enjoyed all these privileges for years. She had not understood till the Shilfie's conversation on the way home from church enlightened her, and then, as Sybil had said, she had listened breathlessly, saying only, 'Go on! Go on!' She had realised then that Elspeth, whom she had scorned, had possessed all that she most longed for,—had been one of the throng of girls she so desired to join,—had competed with others and won, as she herself would above all things have liked to do. Certainly, Elspeth was not a girl to be despised! It might not be desirable to be actually friendly with her, but surely she could be induced to tell something of this wonderful school life to one who so hungered for it! Mysie did not put her thoughts into these words, but that was the result to which she came at last. She would make Elspeth tell her about school. It would be better than any book. One could not ask questions of a book.

She did not come to her decision without a struggle. She could not forget that the first move in their unfortunate acquaintance had come from Madge and herself, and she felt uncomfortably that they had been in the wrong. However, she would forget that and overlook the independent attitude on Elspeth's part which had helped to foster the feud, and now she would show herself friendly. They would start afresh.

She had it all decided to her satisfaction as they turned homewards from their morning ride a few days later. Madge, when appealed to, only laughed.

'Speak to her if you like. I don't believe she'll be nice. If you ask me, I think she's a bit stuck-up—I'm sure I don't know what about. But she thinks a good deal of herself, any one can see. And you know Ninian can't get her to come and see the garden or the birds. She's too proud. We aren't good enough for her. I don't believe she'll be friends.'

Unfortunately for Mysie, Elspeth was feeling very sore that day over the Shilfie's desertion. Sybil slipped away to play with Ninian whenever she could, and Elspeth, refusing to accept the inevitable and play with them both, was left lonely. She had been out in the woods with Jock and Cleopatra, but she wanted Sybil too, and Sybil would not be parted from her friend. So as Elspeth and Jock persisted in ignoring Ninian, they had to do without the Shilfie.

So it was a rather morose-looking Elspeth who opened the gate in response to Mysie's whistle, and stood leaning sulkily against it while they rode in.

Madge laughed and rode on, calling to the greyhound. Mysie reined in her pony abruptly.

'I want you to tell me about your school,' she began. 'Will you let me see your medal?'

Now was Elspeth's chance to be generous and forgive the unfortunate remark which had caused all the trouble. But Elspeth could not rise to the occasion. If Mysie had said a word of apology—if she had said, 'I'm sorry we were so nasty about the launch. I know now it was silly,'—Elspeth would have responded readily enough. But Mysie's tone, meant to be friendly, sounded only condescending, to her at least. It was rather too much to expect her to be patronised by a girl who had been rude and had never said she was sorry for it. Her swift and not unnatural thought, in the midst of her surprise, was, 'She wants something, so she's trying to be friends. It's only for what she can get,' and her answer was curt and forbidding.

‘I haven’t got it downstairs. I don’t wear it every day, it’s far too valuable. And I haven’t time to stay and talk. Besides, you wouldn’t understand. You’ve never been to school. Are you going in? For I want to shut the gate.’

Mysie, astounded beyond words, stared down at her blankly. Then she jerked her pony forward just in time to escape the heavy gate as it swung to. She was half-way up the drive before her whirling thoughts settled down.

‘I’ll never speak to that horrid girl again! I tried to be friends, and she wouldn’t. She is stuck up, as Madgie said! We aren’t good enough for her, because we haven’t been to school!’

‘You’ve never been to school!’ How those words stung her! If Elspeth had searched the dictionary for a week, she could not have found any which would wound more deeply. It was the great regret of Mysie’s life, but she had never been taunted with it before.

‘I told you so!’ Madge said cheerfully, as a glance at her sister’s face told her what had happened. ‘I knew she was hateful. She doesn’t know any better, that’s all.’

Mysie slid from her saddle and collapsed on the grass under a big tree, in a torrent of tears, more of anger than disappointment.

‘She won’t speak to us. We aren’t good enough for her. We’ve only lived in the country and never been to school. She *said* it, Madgie!’

Madge’s arms were round her. ‘Mysie! Mysie, dear! Surely you don’t care. We can get along all right without her. We did before she came. She’s a horrid stuck-up thing, and we’ll never even look at her again. Don’t care about her, Mysie. She isn’t worth it.’

But Mysie did care. She had been sorely disappointed and her pride severely hurt. That any one could reject an overture from her had never seemed possible. That Elspeth could resent her former attitude had not occurred to her. She had never dreamt of saying she was sorry.

She held her head a little higher when next she rode past Elspeth, and did not look in her direction. And Elspeth, with an uncomfortable feeling that she had been as wanting in good behaviour as Mysie herself, felt uneasy whenever they met, and more and more convinced of the undesirable nature of the Shilfie’s new friend.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SCOUT NUMBER TWO

Elspeth sat stroking old Antony and watching the Lady of Shalott as she bent over her embroidery frame. The first picnic had been followed by several others, and the picnic basket had seen much service, but it was only in the afternoon that Janie would leave her work. Every morning and evening she sat over it, either by the window or just inside the door, ready to run to the gate at any moment, and the pink roses were growing under her skilful fingers, and had nearly covered the big quilt. Elspeth had realised that she had spoken the truth in saying she enjoyed her work, for she seemed perfectly happy when busy at it, and was always eager to get back to it.

Janie glanced down at her sober little face. She knew that Jock was out fishing and Sybil playing with Ninian, and guessed that Elspeth was lonely. Rob had settled down to work under the old doctor's guidance, but the younger two had urged that they had only just finished a long hard term and had begged for their fair share of holidays. So until the hot weather was past no more was to be said about lessons.

Janie glanced once or twice at Elspeth, stroking old Antony till he purred in noisy content. At last she said quietly, as she sat back in her chair to look at the effect of her work,—

'I wonder if you would be interested if I told you something about this work of mine, Elspeth,—an extra reason why I like it?'

Elspeth's face lit up.

'Oh, do tell me! It sounds interesting!'

'To me,' said Janie seriously, 'every finished piece of work I send away is a kind of message to somebody.'

Elspeth looked up at her quickly, but found her half laughing, half in earnest.

'Whatever do you mean? Do you mean it? I don't know whether to believe you or not, Janie.'

'I don't know myself,' Janie explained. 'Sometimes I think I'm foolish, but sometimes it seems as if something might come of it, after all. I'll tell you, and you can judge for yourself, and let me know what you think.'

'Go on!' urged Elspeth eagerly. 'It sounds very interesting. Tell me, please.'

'When I lived in Glasgow, I had a friend,——'

'Lady or gentleman?' interjected Elspeth eagerly.

Janie coloured suddenly. 'Elspeth! Elspeth! What does that matter? I mean a girl friend.'

'Oh!' Elspeth drew a quick breath of disappointment. 'Oh, I'm sorry! You ought to have a sweetheart. I was hoping there was one we hadn't heard about. You're so—so—I don't know what, but you *ought* to have one, you know, and there's nobody here good enough. The doctor's old, and the minister's old, and they're both married, anyway, and there's nobody else. I thought perhaps you'd met some one in Glasgow. You ought to get engaged, Janie. You're the right kind. Haven't you ever seen any one you liked? Of course, he'd have to be very nice, and I dare say even then he wouldn't be half nice enough, but still I suppose there must be nice people somewhere. I did hope you were going to tell me about him.'

Janie was rosier than her roses, and she looked a confusion which her quick denial hardly warranted. Elspeth eyed her keenly, wondering if perhaps there had been something which she

did not care to tell. Perhaps she had met ‘somebody’ and quarrelled with him. Perhaps there had been some misunderstanding or mistake. Certainly if there had never been anything, there was no need for Janie to look so upset and hurry into her story with that wave of rich colour still in her face, making her prettier than ever. Elspeth was deeply puzzled, but felt that she could ask no more. She knew, too, that it was a matter she must keep to herself. It would not do to discuss it with Jock. That would not be fair to Janie.

‘She was a girl who studied with me at the art school,’ Janie was saying hurriedly. ‘She had wealthy parents, and was only studying for pleasure. We often sat together, and grew very friendly, and I visited her home in Edinburgh, and met the rest of her family.’

Elspeth gave her another quick look, seeing a possible hope here. Janie, colouring swiftly again, realised that the child was older than she had thought, and that if she had wished to keep her secret she should not have touched on the subject. She had not dreamed that Elspeth was old enough to understand. Evidently she had not made sufficient allowance for the results of a boarding-school education, with its opportunities for mixing with older girls and its well-filled library of romance. She went on quickly, and Elspeth asked no more questions.

‘Just at the end of my last term, they—her family—had great trouble. It was concerned with money matters. Her father died, and soon afterwards people began to hear rumours that his affairs were not straight. They said that some funds which he had held in trust could not be accounted for. His friends knew that anything of the kind was utterly impossible. He had always been perfectly honourable, and when everything was straightened out it would be proved to be all right. I am sure myself that it would be so. I knew him, and had always found him delightful in every way. But they said it would be months before matters could be settled and everything known, and it might be longer, for he had business connections with Australia, and people there might have to be consulted. Some one might even have to go there to inquire into matters thoroughly. His family felt it very keenly, that any one should distrust him. My friend, Margaret, left the school of art, and I left myself shortly after. I wrote to her, but she didn’t answer. I don’t think they even wanted sympathy from their friends just at first. I know they kept away from everybody, and Margaret went off to their country house, while her brother tackled the business matters; and went nowhere and saw no one. Well, you see, I came home and lost sight of them. Margaret had my Glasgow address, but she knew nothing of Glenleny. I may have mentioned the name, but she may very well have forgotten it, or she may never have heard it. She came from Edinburgh, and did not know this part well. A Glasgow girl would know Glenleny by name, but Edinburgh people might never have heard of it. So she couldn’t write to me, even if she felt like it later on, and we have never heard anything of one another since that time. It’s a year now since I came home from Glasgow, and I wonder very much how they have settled their affairs. Now, Margaret always used to say she would know my designs anywhere. She said there was something original about them, and that she would be sure to recognise my work. She may be living in Edinburgh now, and if she hasn’t forgotten me she may wonder sometimes how she could find me again. And whenever I send away a piece of work, it is with the feeling that perhaps when she is walking down Princes Street, she will stop suddenly in front of a big shop window and say, “That is one of Janie Buchanan’s designs!” and then go in and ask, and they will say the work was done by a Miss Buchanan, of Glenleny, on the Clyde! Or that at some big wedding, when she is admiring the presents, she will say, “I know that was worked by Janie!” and will be able to trace me that way. That’s my idea, Elspeth. I dare say it’s a very silly one, but I can’t help

thinking something might come of it some day. I would very much like to hear from her again. What do you think?’

‘I think it’s quite likely! I do hope you will, Janie.’

Elspeth sat looking very thoughtful, and Janie glanced at her anxiously again, wondering if she was reading more into the story than had been told. There was more lying behind, which she had not meant to hint at, but Elspeth had been more quick to guess it than she had imagined.

‘That’s the story, Elspeth. Now don’t think any more about it. What are you going to do this afternoon?’

‘We’re going scouting up the Glen,’ Elspeth said eagerly, putting aside the story for the moment, but not by any means forgetting it. ‘I’m going to scout too. Jock’s going to teach me. Oh, Janie, I wanted to ask you! Haven’t you some kind of slouch hat you could lend me? I could sew a strap on, and it would feel so much more real than a sailor.’

Janie laughed. ‘If you rummage in that cupboard perhaps you’ll find a big linen thing I once wore in the garden. Maybe that would do.’

‘It’s just ripping!’ and Elspeth posed before the glass to try the effect. ‘Now how can I manage the chin-strap, I wonder?’

When Jock came up from the shore, carrying his string of fish and the oars, he was met by a very fair specimen of Girl Scout. Elspeth had never heard of Girl Guides, and had no ambition to be one, but she did desire very strongly to be a feminine edition of Jock, and had done her best to look like one. Her brown tunic was an eminently suitable costume; she wore the white hat with a band beneath her chin, a green tie under her broad white collar, and a flask and wallet slung one at each side by straps which crossed on her breast. With her loose white belt, her hair plaited in its two pigtails again, and a long pole in her hand, she looked thoroughly ready for scouting or anything.

‘I say! That’s jolly ripping,’ cried Jock, in hearty approval, and she beamed in delight.

‘Thought you’d like it. We’ll have a fine time this afternoon. Jock, have we any films left? Couldn’t you take me like this? I’d love to send one to the girls next term.’

‘A hot idea! Half a minute, and I’ll see,’ and he dropped the fish and ran upstairs.

Elspeth rescued the catch from Antony, who came slinking up to sample them, and tried to pose him on the bench beside her. But at sight of the camera he fled, evidently considering it some kind of instrument of torture, and Elspeth had to be content with Cleopatra sitting at her feet.

She was posing against the wall, rigidly erect and very still, a broad smile on her face in spite of all her efforts, and Jock, across the drive, was steadying the camera on his knee, when the sound of the whistle startled them both, and Mysie and Madge turned in from the road on their brown ponies. A glance showed them the whole situation,—Elspeth, in her strange costume, posed against the wall, Jock just about to touch the button. Then they rode on up the drive without deigning another look, and the Girl Scout sulkily came forward to open the gate.

‘Happily I wasn’t ready,’ Jock said philosophically. ‘The swanks would have spoiled the picture without thinking twice. Any decent person would have waited.’

‘They’d have been rather pleased than otherwise, I expect,’ Elspeth said gloomily. Then her face blazed with sudden laughter. ‘We’ll lie in wait with the camera to-morrow morning, and take *them!* The girls will love it—riding like boys, you know. They go out nearly every morning. I’ll open the gate, and you’ll stand there at the corner and snap them beautifully. Mind you aren’t nervous. It’ll make that Mysie madder than anything.’



‘All right. I’m on—but we’re running out of films, mind, and they’re expensive.’

‘I think it’s worth wasting one on them,’ Elspeth said gleefully. ‘Now let’s go in to dinner. Don’t say anything about it to Janie. I believe she’d stop us, you know.’

Their afternoon’s enjoyment was marred by one unfortunate incident. Jock, leaning on his staff, was directing Elspeth, who knelt in the road, her head almost in the dust, listening intently. She refused to put her ear right down on the ground, insisting that she could hear well enough and there were too many ants about. Jock was expostulating indignantly and so not listening himself, when the carriage from Leny Hall came round the corner.

Elspeth sprang up, looking foolish. At sight of Sybil tucked in between Mrs Campbell and Ninian her face clouded over, and she turned her back on the party. She could hear the Shilfie’s clear little voice explaining that Jock was a scout and E’speth was pwaying she was one too, an’ Jock said it was vewy pweasant to be one, but she didn’t think she would care for it herse’f.

‘I do *not* like those girls,’ she said emphatically, as she and Jock lay in the heather and watched the carriage toiling up the Glen, ‘and I do wish the Shilfie wasn’t so taken up with the Ninny. But it isn’t any use speaking to her. She’s with him morning, noon, and night.’

‘He’s *such* a pweasant boy, ye ken,’ mocked Jock. ‘It’s vewy hard on the Shilfie to have such a pweasant fwiend, and not be ’lowed to ’joy his comp’ny in peace an’ quiet. That’s what she said to me last time I went for her, and it just shut me up. We’ll have to leave her alone.’

‘I’m going to try something else,’ Elspeth said darkly. ‘Talking’s no use. I’m going to try something more. I’m going to see what bribery will do.’

‘Sybil,’ she said that night, ‘Jock and I are going scouting to-morrow, and we’re going to take my picnic basket and stay out all day. You may come too, if you like, and if you do I’ll let you pour out. There! You’ve been asking to ever since you saw my little teapot.’

Sybil looked up hopefully. ‘Can my fwiend Ninian come too? Have pwomised to spend the mawning with him to-morrow, but he’d like to go a picnic with you vewy much, I’m sure.’

‘That Ninny boy! It’s not likely. No, Sybil, we only want you. You can play with the Ninny another day.’

‘But have pwomised! Can’t bweak my pwomise, E’speth. An’ ’tisin’t pwoper to call names, Janie said so. Vewy wude, I call it.’

‘You can send him a message saying you have another engagement. We’re going to pick blackberries and make a pudding of berries and biscuits and sugar and milk, and eat it up on the hill. You’ll be sorry if you miss it.’

But not even for the blackberry pudding would the Shilfie forsake her friend.

‘Would be *wowewy* if we could go both of us, E’speth. Sure you would like Ninian, you know. He’s vewy pweasant comp’ny, an’ never cwoss. Won’t you let him come?’

But Elspeth would not, and Sybil went to bed looking very sober.

‘Would be vewy pweased to go with you an’ be a scout, E’speth,’ she said wistfully, when Elspeth went upstairs for a good-night kiss. ‘But I pwomised Ninian, you know, an’ I do ’joy his comp’ny a’ways.’

‘You can’t have both him and us, Sybil. We’d be awfully pleased to have you, but we want you alone.’

‘Fwaid I can’t go with you, then. Hope you’ll have a pweasant time, an’ find heaps of bwackbewwies! Bwing some pudding home to me, E’speth. Would be vewy pweased to have some, if it’s good.’

Elspeth kissed her hastily, and ran downstairs.

‘I do feel mean,’ she confessed to Jock. ‘But I *don’t* want that boy. I won’t give in. I said I wouldn’t have anything to do with him, and I’ll stick to it, but she nearly got round me to-night.’

## CHAPTER XVII

### BLACKBERRY PUDDING

Elspeth's amiable intentions with regard to the photo were frustrated next morning, for though she and Jock waited at the gate with the camera, the girls did not go for their usual ride. Instead, the footman appeared with a message for the Shilfie. They called her out to receive it, and she stood looking very small, and gazing up at him as he touched his hat. Master Ninian was going driving with his grandmother and sisters, so would not be able to meet her as arranged.

'Thank you *vevy* much! *So* good of you to come an' tell me! *Vewy* kind of you, I'm sure!' Sybil said gratefully. Then, as he turned hastily away, she ran to Elspeth joyfully.

'Isn't that *vevy* pweasant! Can go with you an get bwackbewwies after all!'

Mysie and Madge Campbell had a strange experience that day. A shower made Mrs Campbell give up her drive, so the girls dressed for riding, and went off up the Glen. Ninian went in search of his comrade, but found her out for the day, so had to amuse himself alone. From the garden he watched the arrival of the morning steamer, and noticed, small boy as he was, the unusual number of passengers that came ashore. A few strangers always came off in Mr Shaw's ferry, attracted by the lonely look of Glenleny, and picnicked on the shore or entrance to the Glen till the steamer called to take them home again. But to-day Mr Shaw's big boat was so full that the gunwale was only just above water, and the second boat, which usually carried stores or luggage, was full also. They were all boys and girls, very merry and noisy. Ninian could hear them laughing and calling to one another from his place in the garden. They set off up the Glen for a picnic, and Ninian watched the steamer go on its way up the loch, then went to play with a family of puppies.

Mysie and Madge rode past the scouting-party before they had gone far up the Glen. Neither deigned to give the others a glance, and as the camera was left at home, Elspeth's hope remained unfulfilled. But Mysie sighed as they cantered on.

'Of course, I wouldn't play with *them* for anything! But it would be nice if we had some one besides just ourselves. We could be scouts, too, if we knew how, but we don't.'

'Oh, you only need a floppy hat and a walking-stick! Then you strut about, and kneel down and pretend you can hear something, and slink behind bushes, and think you're being a Red Indian! I think I'd make quite a good scout,' Madge said lightly. 'Let's try, shall we?—just to show them we can do it too. Granny would get us hats and things.'

'No, they'd only laugh at us. I'd want to do it properly if I did it at all, and we don't know how,' Mysie said heavily.

They were coming home again about midday, cantering smartly down the steep road, their ponies' feet sending the loose stones flying as they came round the sharp corners at a higher speed than Mrs Campbell would have approved of, when at one sudden bend in the road Mysie reined in so abruptly that Madge was almost on top of her before she could stop herself.

'Whatever did you do that for?' she cried indignantly. 'You nearly had me down.'

'Whisht! Come and look!'

She dismounted, and scrambling up the rocks at the side of the road, gazed down into the meadows below.

All Glenleny lay spread before them, a long green strip between bare hills, with a blue stretch of loch in the distance beyond the trees and lawns of Leny Hall. The merry picnic party from the steamer had established themselves in the rocky hollow into which Madge found herself gazing. There were about thirty of them, all boys and girls, engaged in some lively game, and led by an imperious red-haired girl and a merry boy in a white slouch hat. They were of all ages, from fifteen downwards, and all were playing except one boy, who sat watching from a little mail-cart, with crutches by his side. He had been dragged up the Glen by relays of willing hands, for it was the party's creed that he must never be left out of anything, except perhaps climbing hills.

The masterful girl with the curly red hair stopped to speak to him as she passed, and they saw that he had a whistle with which he evidently regulated the game, so that he was able to take part even in this. Mysie and Madge watched the proceedings with keen interest.

'It's that girl from Morven, who pretends to be a Queen,' Mysie observed. 'You know—we heard about her from a girl at that party last winter. She's never asked *us* to join her band. She could have got to know us if she'd wanted to.'

'Granny said she wouldn't have let us, anyway,—because it's such a long way to Morven, and besides, you could never tell who you'd meet there. She may have all kinds of people belonging to it.'

'I wish granny would let us get to know all kinds of people!' sighed Mysie. 'I don't believe it would matter, and we're dreadfully lonely.'

'I say! What are they up to now?' cried Madge softly.

The game had ceased, and the players, panting and tired, had seated themselves on the rocks sprinkled over the field. The Queen, mounting on a flat stone, proceeded to make a speech, and every word rose on the still air to the two watching and listening above. She had tossed aside her tam-o'-shanter and assumed a crown of gilt cardboard, and two of the boys brought up a big flag which had been lying in the heather and held the pole erect. It was a yellow Scotch banner, and fluttered over the Queen and the lame boy while she spoke.

'Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to distribute the souvenirs of this year's meetings of our band! You can wear them beside your badges, if you like.'—She was interrupted by loud cheers from the band, led by the Prime Minister, and Mysie and Madge, looking at them critically, saw that each wore a round gilt medal on brooch or watch-chain or hung pendant-wise on their breasts. 'I think you'll like them. They only came from town last night. But first I want to remind you that next Friday is to be our treat to the school-children, if it's fine. The steamer will leave Dunoon at ten o'clock, and those of you who are not on board already can join us then. I hope we'll have a good day, and we'll all do our best to give the weans a fine time on the Kyles. Some of them can hardly sleep for thinking about it already, and they're talking of last time's picnic still. Then I want you to remember that every Saturday afternoon we have a party of the very poorest children in Glasgow come down to Morven for the day, and any of you who can come and help me to play games with them will be gladly welcomed. Some of you haven't been turning up. Of course, as the Prime Minister reminds me, the boys want to play cricket on Saturdays, but still I think you might come sometimes. The Duchess of Ealing and Miss Nanny and I have had to do it all lately, and it's rather hard work. Now as we go home we'll make inquiries about that cottage where Duchess Monica's friends are staying. It would be nice to meet them. I know some of you are grumbling because we are not going round the hill and home to Morven that way, but it's too far for Lady Isobel and the other little ones, and we must think of them. So we're going home by steamer, and we mustn't stay here

too long or we'll lose it, in which case the boys will have to carry the little ones home by the shore road. Sir Jim! Here is your souvenir.'

The Prime Minister went forward, with a low bow and flourish of his white hat, to receive a bronze charm, a tiny copy of the rampant lion on the banner.

'I say, Your Majesty, that's awfully neat.'

'I'm glad you like it. Countess Ruth, this is yours,' and a tall dark-haired girl in a red tammy sprang up, and received hers with a graceful curtsy.

Name after name was called, and Mysie and Madge listened in envious surprise. They would dearly have liked to belong to this lively band, and be created Countesses or Duchesses of Glenleny. Some of the members had only courtesy titles, however, and were addressed as 'Lady Isobel,' 'Lady Effie,' and 'Sir Rob,' while one small girl was for some unexplained reason merely 'Miss Nanny.' But there was plenty of high society in the band, which boasted two Marchionesses of Monzie and an Earl and Countess of Balquhiddier—a laughing, mischievous pair of twins—while the lame boy was addressed as the Marquis of Cove.

'Monica, Duchess of Ealing,' was the last to receive her gift, and one of the eldest girls of the party, a golden-haired damsel of nearly sixteen, made her way out from among the rocks and curtsied daintily as she received her charm.

Then came the great surprise of the day to Mysie and Madge Campbell.

On the opposite side of the rocky hollow in which the band were gathered there appeared suddenly two scouts and a small girl in a pink sun-bonnet. They had been picnicking in the heather, intent on the boiling of the kettle and the mixing of the blackberry pudding, when the invasion below attracted their attention. Lying hidden in the heather, they had watched the games and distribution of gifts till the appearance of Monica was too much for Elspeth's patience. She had felt shy at thought of facing so many strangers, but when Monica came forward this was forgotten, and she sprang to her feet with an eager cry.

'Monica! Monica! I'm so glad to see you again!'

She came flying down the hill-side, her strange costume forgotten. Sybil, quite bewildered, stood staring, her Teddy clasped to her breast, her sun-bonnet pushed back, her pinafore stained with blackberry juice. Jock, the scout, mounted guard over her and his camp, and stood leaning on his staff and watching the proceedings.

'Scouts! Enemies! *English* enemies!' cried the Prime Minister. 'Defend the Queen, boys! Guard the banner with your life, Cameron! Where is my revolver? Keep an eye on the tuck-baskets, Sir Roy! Tib—I mean Countess—look after the Marquis! Girls, form up to receive the enemy!'

'I'm afraid they're friends this time, Jim,' laughed the Queen, while Elspeth and Monica bombarded each other with questions and never waited for the answers. 'Don't you remember meeting them at Glasgow?'

'Believe I do,' Jim said regretfully. 'I didn't know her under that hat. It's an awfully decent rig-out. I say, couldn't our girls adopt it? It would be a great attraction. All Glasgow would want to join. Think how imposing we'd look, marching out from Morven. I *say*! Wouldn't Janet Mactaggart stare! *Do* consider the idea of adopting a uniform, Your Majesty.'

He was nearly as old as Rob, and Elspeth did not mind his teasing. The words tumbled over one another in her haste as she talked to Monica, while the band stared and laughed and commented. The Prime Minister waved a peremptory signal to the watchful scout on the hill-side.

‘Come hither and own the supremacy of Queen Lexa of Morven, young man! Bring with you also the youthful member of your patrol!’

‘I’m afraid we can’t claim authority over Glenleny,’ Lexa laughed. ‘Is that your wee sister, Elspeth? I’d like to speak to her.’

Mysie looked at Madge, and Madge looked at Mysie.

‘That girl knows them, and they know her! *How* do they know her?’ demanded Madge.

‘And she can go and join in their fun, and we—we—can only watch from a distance! *We* were never asked to join their band, but they’ll have these lodge children,’ groaned Mysie.

It hurt her keenly that she, Mysie Campbell, must sit there among the rocks and look on, while the despised Elspeth was received into the charmed circle of the Queen’s acquaintance without question. Why it should be so a chance word of Monica’s told her.

‘Have you heard from any of the girls since you left school? Have you seen Melany?’

‘School! School again! It’s because she has been to school that she knows all these girls!’ and Mysie’s unhappiness increased.

‘Melany! No, how could I?’ cried Elspeth.

‘We met her the other day. She’s yachting up here with some friends they met in Switzerland—a pretty Highland girl, who talks just like Jill Colquhoun, only worse. She said she’d look out for you.’

‘I’d love to see her. It would be a joke!’

‘I want to speak to your wee sister, Elspeth,’ said the Queen, and Elspeth turned and called up the hill.

‘Sybil, come and be introduced to the Queen!’

‘She’ll be shy,’ laughed Lexa. ‘It’s rather hard on the poor baby, when there are so many of us.’

‘I don’t think she’ll be shy,’ Elspeth smiled. ‘I’ve never seen her shy yet.’

The Shilfie did not know what shyness meant. She came carefully down the hill, picking her way deliberately among the boulders, and advanced to meet Lexa with outstretched hand and friendly smile, her Teddy tucked under her arm, her eyes admiringly on the gilt crown.

‘So vevy pweased to meet you, ma’am! So gwad to make your ac-quaint-ance! *De-wight-*ed to meet any friends of E’speth’s. Isn’t it a vevy pweasant mawning? Hope you are ’joying your picnic vevy much,’ she said rather breathlessly, in haste lest she should be interrupted before she had completed her greeting.

Lexa shook hands gravely, finding difficulty in her surprise in keeping sufficiently serious.

‘We’re enjoying it extremely, thank you. It is a *very* pleasant morning, is it not?’ she agreed. ‘I’m very pleased to meet you. May I ask your name?’

‘Jus’ the Shilfie, or Sybie Buchanan. Do you care for bwackbewwy pudding? We’ve jus’ made such a big one up in our camp.’

‘We were just going to have our lunch, and then I thought we’d pick blackberries for dessert,’ said the Queen.

‘Oh, then, perhaps you’d like to taste our pudding,’ Elspeth said quickly. ‘We spent all morning picking, and we’ve heaps. If you have any biscuits and milk we could make some more pudding, if you’d care to use our berries. We can easily get more this evening.’

‘That is very good of you,’ Lexa said graciously. ‘Won’t you bring your camp down nearer us? Then you can talk to the Duchess while we all have lunch together.’

Mysie and Madge watched with envious indignant eyes while the picnic basket, pudding, and various utensils were transferred to the hollow, amid the admiration of the band. This

meeting with the scouts was an unusual excitement in their meeting, and they were all very friendly, and grateful to Monica for the introduction.

‘I think, since you are friends of the Duchess of Ealing, we ought to adopt you into the band, you know,’ the Queen said, when the pudding had been sampled and the big basket of berries offered and accepted with many thanks. ‘Do you think you could come to meetings at Morven? Do you cycle?’

‘No, we don’t. I’m very much afraid we couldn’t,’ Elspeth said mournfully, remembering that steamer fares cost money and there was none to spare. ‘I’d love to join, but I’m afraid we couldn’t possibly come.’

Lexa tactfully asked no questions, but only said,—

‘Well, you shall be Lady Elspeth of Glenleny, and Sir Jock and Lady Shilfie. We’ll put your names down, and if ever you think you can come to meetings you must write and let me know. How will that do? Perhaps you don’t understand, Lady Shilfie?’

‘It’s just ripping!’ Elspeth cried in delight, and Jock nodded approval.

‘Think it’s vewy pweasant to bewong to the band. Would be vewy gwad to go to meetin’s,’ said Lady Shilfie, apparently understanding well enough. ‘Think it’s vewy kind of you, ma’am. Hope we’ll meet you again some day vewy soon.’

She was munching a slice of cake, which ‘Lady Isobel,’ a shy timid child with lint-white curls, had thrust into her hand without a word. ‘Miss Nanny’ had begged to be allowed to nurse Teddy, and ‘Lady Effie’ had shared a box of chocolates with her, so Lady Shilfie had some reason for thinking the band a pleasant thing to belong to.

‘Very well. Then you’re adopted. Make a note of it, please, Prime Minister, and put down their ages and birthdays. I’ll send your badges in a few days, Lady Elspeth.’

‘How perfectly ripping!’ said Elspeth again.

‘I’m going home!’ and Mysie sprang up and called to her pony. ‘I can’t stand it any longer. That girl has everything we’ve been wanting for ages, and I don’t think it’s fair at all.’

They clattered round the corner and down the stony road, and cantered smartly home. The members of the band looked up from their blackberries and luncheon baskets, and exclaimed in admiration of the ponies and their riders in a way which might have soothed Mysie’s feelings if she had heard them.

‘That’s the way to ride! What a fine seat that first girl has, and doesn’t she hold herself well! Now that’s something like riding!’ cried the Prime Minister. ‘It’s heaps more sensible than the way most girls sit.’

‘Thanks!’ said the Queen. ‘Lady Elspeth, I’ve been learning to ride this year, and I’ve been teaching Monica too. We prefer side-saddle, but Jim is always teasing us to try that way. Which do you think best?’

‘I quite agree with Jim that for little girls that way is best,’ said Monica, ‘but I think Lexa and I are too big for it, especially to begin now. If we had been in the habit of it, it would be rather different. But it’s very sensible, and those girls looked very nice. They ride beautifully,’—and Elspeth hastily dismissed all thoughts of the photo she had planned to send to school. She had not meant to send it with the idea of winning admiration for Mysie and Madge.

‘Who are they? Do you know them, Elspeth?’ Monica asked.

‘Not to speak to,’ Elspeth said, colouring. ‘They live close to us, but they don’t like us and we don’t like them.’

‘In fact, we’re deadly enemies,’ added Jock.

'I've heard of them,' said the Queen. 'They're the Campbell girls from Leny Hall. But I don't know them.'

'They have a launch, and go scooting up and down the loch in it,' said the Earl of Balquhiddy, looking up from the pudding he was mixing with the help of his sister Tibbie. 'We met them once as we were rowing the Marquis home, and they nearly swamped us. I believe they did it on purpose. They swirled round just beside us and made a circle right round, and I really thought we'd go down. Nigel was scared to death, and so was Tib.'

'Oh, Roy Macgregor! What a big one!'

'Here, you two, have some more sugar in that pudding, and shut up. It's too hot for one of your warm discussions,' and the Prime Minister diplomatically turned the twins' thoughts into other channels.

'Why is that girl only called *Miss Nanny*, when all the rest are knights and ladies?' asked Elspeth curiously, nodding towards the Prime Minister's little sister, who was nursing Teddy affectionately.

There was an awkward pause. The Prime Minister glanced at the Queen from under the brim of his hat, and began to whistle softly. Lexa stared down the Glen at the distant waters of the loch. After a moment's hesitation she said gravely,—

'That is a subject we do not discuss, Lady Elspeth. It concerns matters which are all done with and forgotten. Now we must help you to fill your basket again!' and she changed the subject abruptly. 'Oh yes, we must! That's only fair. Then we'll have another game, and then go back to the boat.'

'And the scouts shall march in front and be our escort,' added the Prime Minister, recovering his spirits. 'All but the very young member of the patrol, who is going to walk with me and entertain me nicely all the way.'

'Vewy pweased, I'm sure,' Sybil responded amiably. 'Do my vewy best to 'muse you nicely.'

'You won't have to twy vewy hard,' he assured her cheerfully.

From their garden Mysie and Madge watched the departure of the Queen and her band. On the slip, as Mr Shaw rowed the party out to meet the steamer, stood the scouts, waving their hats, and the Shilfie, flourishing her Teddy.

'That girl gets everything she wants,' groaned Mysie, and did not dream that Elspeth had long ago made the same accusation concerning herself. 'And she's as horrid and stuck-up as she can be. I did try to be friends, and she wouldn't.'

'Don't look at her then,' advised Madge. 'Don't think about her. She'll be worse than ever after this.'

'I don't want to think about her, but I can't help it. We're meeting her all the time, and I can't go about with my eyes shut. She's everywhere.'



## CHAPTER XVIII THE WHITE SHIP

On the day after Queen Lexa's picnic in Glenlenny, Mysie and Madge had yet another curious experience.

The afternoon was hot, so they carried story-books to the shore and sat reading in the small boat, which lay moored to the rocks and swayed gently in the rising tide. On the beach near the slip Ninian and the Shilfie were playing with their Teddies, and presently Elspeth came down for a bathe, towel and blue costume over her arm.

A slight mist had been falling before breakfast, and Janie had advised her not to bathe, though raising no objection to the boys doing so if they wished. So Rob and Jock had had their swim, and were now hard at work, Rob at his books, Jock helping Mr Macwilliam to get in the corn up at the farm. But the weather had improved so greatly that Elspeth had begged permission to bathe in the afternoon, thinking it better to go alone than not at all.

She paused as she reached the beach, and stood gazing admiringly, for a white steam yacht was creeping up the loch. Both steam and sailing yachts passed occasionally, on pleasure cruises among the mountains, but this was an unusually big one. Mysie and Madge had seen her too, and watched her gliding gracefully towards them with eager appreciative eyes.

Elspeth disappeared into the cottage, and came out five minutes later ready for the water. She looked at once for the yacht, and gave a cry of surprise, for it was lying off Glenlenny and had lowered a boat, which was speeding towards the shore. Mysie and Madge, sitting up suddenly in their little boat, were watching eagerly.

'Suppose it's some one who knows granny! They might take us out to the yacht. Wouldn't that be fine?' cried Madge eagerly.

'Splendid! I've always longed to see over one, and this is such a beauty! What nice cabins she must have! I wonder who they are,' said Mysie.

'How funny! What can they want here? Perhaps they're going to have a picnic,' Elspeth mused. 'I suppose they'll land at the slip,' and she crossed the stones and stood on it, watching the white boat, and quite forgetful of her unconventional costume—her neat blue swimming suit and little fair plaits on her shoulders, her blue rubber cap swinging in her hand.

'Do look at that girl!' breathed Mysie. 'Fancy standing there like that!' but Elspeth was without a trace of self-consciousness.

Suddenly, to the amazement of her critical foes, she began to wave her arms in wild excitement and to shout a greeting to the approaching boat.

'Melany! Melany Merrill! I *am* so glad to see you! How good of you to come! Monica told me——'

In the boat were three girls. They had declined the services of the sailors of the yacht, and one had taken the pair of light oars and was handling them deftly and with much enjoyment.

The other two sat together in the stern. One had waving black hair in a loose mane on her shoulders, and wore a navy blue skirt, white blouse, light green knitted coat, and little green cap to match. The other, as fair as her sister was dark, with long light yellow hair in two thick plaits, wore a white skirt, and knitted coat and cap of white also. The girl at the oars, a year younger than the others, wore a neat blue yachting costume and a blue tammy on her

streaming hair, which was of the same rich colour as Janie's and Queen Lexa's—fiery golden red.

Melany waved her hand, and Elspeth responded with another frantic greeting. Mysie and Madge looked at one another.

'She knows them! That girl! She knows everybody!' said Madge indignantly.

'You'll see, it's school again,' groaned Mysie. 'She'll go out to the yacht! She'll see everything! They'll ask her out there to tea! That girl gets everything!'

'It's awfully jolly to see you here,' Elspeth called eagerly, as the boat drew in to the slip. 'I say, Melany, don't you want a swim? The water's ripping, and it's so awfully hot.'

'That's what I've come for,' and Melany waved a pink bundle in one hand and towels in the other. 'We saw you go to undress, and I couldn't resist it. I have to go swimming alone, and it's so slack. I've been trying to tempt Zanne to try, but she thinks I'd let her drown, and Eilidh doesn't care for it either. So I've brought my things and I'm going to join you. They can watch.'

'How ripping! That will be fun! The boys aren't here to-day, and I was all alone. I'll wait for you.'

'Put on my coat, then, or you'll catch cold,' and Melany tossed her the green jersey.

'Oh, I'm all right! I'm not wet yet, you see.'

Zanne and the bright-haired Highland girl—'Eily,' as Melany called her—were eyeing Elspeth with laughing eyes. Zanne said shyly,—

'I am glad to see you again, little fish.'

'I'm awfully glad to see *you*,' Elspeth said heartily. 'Monica was here yesterday. Melany, this is my little sister. I told you about her at school,'—as the Shilfie came up, round-eyed and interested.

Poor Mysie groaned again.

'School! I knew it! I *must* make granny let us go to school.'

Sybil came down the slip to greet Melany, who was standing just above the water-line.

'Vewy pweased to meet you, I'm sure! Am a'ways de-wight-ed to meet any fwiends of E'speth's. Isn't it a pweasant day? What a vewy fine boat you have! Won't you take me for a sail?' she asked breathlessly, holding out her hand, her Teddy tucked under her arm.

Melany laughed and shook the small hand impressively.

'I think we could manage it. I'm sure Eilidh and Zanne will be delighted. Elspeth, won't you and this baby get in while I'm undressing? The Princess will row you up and down. You're perfectly safe with her. She knows all about boats. Oh, I haven't introduced you, have I? Miss Elspeth Buchanan—Miss Eilidh Munro. We met in Switzerland last year, and she was awfully good to me when Zanne was very ill and I thought she was going to die. We met again in London, and Eilidh asked us to come to Scotland and see the place where she used to live—Loch Ruel, a lovely loch not far from here. We wanted Zanne to see Edinburgh and the Trossachs and some other places, so we came. We're having a kind of tour, you know, before we go back to Switzerland. She hasn't been in England before. So just now we're sailing about with Eilidh's friends, who have that lovely yacht, the *White Ship*, and to-day we came to look for you. Now, Princess, you paddle them up and down till I'm ready.'

She made for the cottage, and Elspeth, slipping on the green jersey, sat down beside Zanne and drew the Shilfie on her knee. Ninian had retreated shyly to his sisters, and stood beside their boat, watching the adventures of his comrade with wide eyes. Mysie and Madge were

apparently buried in their books again, and would not deign to show any further interest in the yacht.

Zanne's stock of conversation was limited, and she was very shy and quiet. But Eilidh, plying her oars skilfully, turned to Elspeth with a friendly smile.

'I think bathing must be ferry pleasant when you can swim like Melany does, you know. But I haf neffer tried, an' I really ton't think it can be as easy as it looks. She says you can swim like a fish too, whateffer. Did you find it ferry hard to learn?'

She had a soft low voice, with a Highland accent, which neither an English education nor months of travel on the Continent could altogether destroy. She was very pretty, Elspeth thought, with clear fair skin and big gray eyes, and all that bright hair waving about her face. She spoke perfect English, save for her accent, but it was as evidently foreign to her as Zanne's, and sometimes she hesitated for a word.

'I don't remember ever learning to swim. The boys say I could swim as soon as I could walk,' Elspeth explained.

'Oh! But how ferry funny!' The gray eyes opened wider than ever. 'But how could that be? Babies ton't generally learn to swim, you know. I haf brought up six, so I know a wee bit about weans—children! And there is Miss Mollie's sister's wee boy, too. He iss two years old now and can run about ferry well, but he can't swim. Dear me, no, intee!'

Elspeth laughed. 'No, but I was born on a coral island, you know,' and she explained, while Eilidh listened, intensely interested.

'How ferry nice! An' ton't you remember it at all? Oh, but what a pity!'

'Melany is ready. You had better jump into the water, little fish,' said Zanne.

Elspeth slipped off the green jersey, put her foot on the gunwale while she poised for a moment, then shot down into the cool green water with scarcely a splash. The boat rocked as she dived, but so neatly did she cleave the water that not a drop was thrown on board. She went breasting away to join Melany, and Eilidh and Zanne laughed and watched them curiously.

'She's awfully nice, your Scotch friend, and isn't she pretty?' Elspeth said, as they floated together, gazing up into the deep blue sky.

'She's awfully interesting. There's a story about her, but I haven't heard the whole of it, and I don't like to ask too many questions. Her governess—Miss Mollie, she calls her—won't talk about it, but Eilidh is evidently as rich as rich now, and she told me herself that she used to be very poor. I've seen the farm where she lived till she was eleven, and it's a tiny bit of a place, and full of babies.'

'Yes, she said she'd brought up six. I wondered what she meant.'

'She used to look after them, and run about barefoot. She talked Gaelic and hardly knew any English. I don't know how it happened. She says her father died and left a lot of money, but it sounds queer.'

'Why did you call her Princess?'

'Oh, that's just a nickname. She's so like Cinderella, turned suddenly into a princess, after going about in rags and tatters, you know. That's what she says herself. But she's very jolly. Only there's one thing—you mustn't talk slang before her. She doesn't know any, and she's not allowed to learn it. I have an awful time trying to keep it in. Zanne winks at me every time I say "awfully" or "ripping." It's a frightful weight on my mind all the time. Let's race to the launch. What a ripping little boat!'

‘All right, but whatever you do, don’t put a finger on it. It belongs to two swanky girls, who get in an awful temper if you look at anything of theirs. Oh, I say! They’re in the wee boat over there! I clean forgot! I wonder if they heard?’ and Elspeth disappeared under water in her dismay.

Mysie and Madge looked at one another over their books, and turned their backs still more resolutely to the merry bathers. ‘Swanky’ was not included in their vocabulary, but the other words were intelligible enough, and Mysie murmured gloomily,—

‘That girl’s hateful! She has no right to speak of us like that.’

‘I’m sure we had a right to be angry when she grabbed our boat with her horrid wet hands. It’s a wonder the cushions weren’t all spotted,’ said Madge indignantly, with an effort at self-justification.

Their feelings may be imagined when, after Melany and Elspeth had dressed again, the white boat, under Eilidh’s skilful hands, carried them out to the yacht, and Elspeth and the Shilfie were helped up the ladder to the deck.

‘A cup of tea is never so nice as after a bathe, and it’s four o’clock, so it will just be ready,’ Melany said, as they stood on the slip together.

‘We will be ferry pleased to show you the yacht, if you can spare the time to come,’ Eilidh said hospitably. ‘Oh yess! You must come, intee! There iss nobody there but only Miss Mollie, an’ her sister Mrs Grant, and the wee boy. Captain Grant iss left at home for the shooting, you see, so there iss nobody at all to be afraid of. *Do* come an’ have a cup of tea with us!’

‘Would be vewy pweased to go. Think it would be vewy pweasant to see your ship. Sure she must be *such* a fine boat,’ the Shilfie said, breathless with eagerness, and eyed Elspeth anxiously.

But Elspeth was delighted to accept the invitation. Her only regret was that Jock was so far away. As they stood on the white deck, looking round with wondering eyes at its spotless order and shining brass fittings and trim sailor boys, she wished again that he could have been there, and looked enviously at bright-haired ‘Princess’ Eilidh, to whom such an interesting story was attached. Eilidh was quite at home on the yacht, and did the honours with much enjoyment, conducting them down to the cabins and showing them every corner.

‘We ferry often go sailing while Miss Mollie and I are in Scotland. We live in London now, you know, and go abroad for a good long while each year. Last year we met Melany in Switzerland, and this spring we were in Italy. Rome was splendid, but I liked Venice shust as much, I think. But effery year we come home to Scotland in the autumn, when the heather iss at its best, an’ I go to see all my friends on Loch Ruel, an’ see how my babies are getting on. They are quite big weans—children!—now, and they are so ferry pleased to see me always. Now haf I shown you efferything, I wonder? Well I mind—I mean remember—the first time I came on this boat,’ and she looked sober for a moment. ‘It was Larry showed me the cabins and engines and all.’

‘Larry?’ questioned Elspeth.

‘A friend of mine—a rather bad laddie sometimes. Melany knows him too,’ and the gray eyes danced mischievously.

‘Who’s that? Larry? Crumbs, yes, I know Master Larry,’ said Melany, a rising note of indignation in her voice. ‘He played me a low trick in Switzerland, Elspeth, and I’ve never seen him since to tell him what I think of him. It’s a very sore point with me. I only want ten minutes’ quiet conversation with him, but I want it very badly.’

Eilidh laughed. ‘I am ferry much afraid you won’t get it just yet, since he iss only coming here the day after you go away next week.’

‘He’s funky, that’s what it is. He knows he daren’t face me.’

‘Oh well, neffer mind him. He iss always a bad boy, and not worth caring about, whateffer. Now come an’ have some tea.’

‘Where did you meet Monica?’ Elspeth asked, as they sat comfortably in deck chairs, and Eilidh and Melany waited on them.

‘We were having a picnic in Arran one day,’ Melany laughed, ‘when the whole band came off the steamer and encamped close to us.’

‘Oh, did you see the band? They adopted us yesterday,’ Elspeth said eagerly. ‘Our badges are to come in a day or two.’

‘Aren’t they funny, with their earls and duchesses, and lords and ladies? And doesn’t the Queen boss them all?’

‘Rather! She called me Lady Elspeth of Glenleny.’

‘An’ I am Lady Shilfie!’ Sybil put in eagerly.

‘Did you happen to hear why that one wee girl was only called *Miss* Nanny, when all the others had titles? I asked them, out they all looked the other way and wouldn’t tell. It seemed so queer.’

‘I asked Monica. She said there was some trouble last year, and the kiddie was at the bottom of it, so they decided she didn’t deserve to have a title. But she wouldn’t tell me what it was all about.’

‘I do wonder! I would like to know,’ Elspeth said thoughtfully.

‘I really think we ought to go home,’ she said regretfully at last, when five o’clock had struck. ‘It’s been awfully jolly,’—Eilidh laughed, and she reddened in dismay and hurried on.—‘And I only wish Jock had been here too. He’ll be simply wild when he hears about it. I’m awfully obliged to you for coming.’

‘Mebbe I will come again some day,’ said Eilidh, as they took their places in the boat. ‘I would ferry much like to, an’ it issn’t so ferry far from my Loch Ruel.’

‘I do wish you would. I’d be so pleased to see you again.’

‘Vewy pweased to have met you! Dewighted to have made your ac-quaint-ance! Would be so gwad to see you again some day,’ said the Shilfie, as they landed on the slip.

‘Horrid stuck-up things they are!’ murmured Mysie, as Elspeth and the Shilfie stood waving, quite unconscious of her gaze.

‘But she does know heaps of people, that girl. Isn’t it queer?’

‘No, it isn’t queer at all. It’s school,’ said Mysie heavily.

## CHAPTER XIX

### WHAT ELSPETH LOST

‘We must all wear our medals to-day,’ said Elspeth jubilantly.

The post had brought a little cardboard box, containing three bronze medals as bright as new pennies, marked with the word MORVEN, and the motto, ‘Friends for aye.’ Queen Lexa had not forgotten her newly-adopted members, it seemed.

‘Very decent,’ was Jock’s verdict, as Elspeth pinned one on the breast of his khaki shirt.

‘Feel vewy pwoud to have a medal like you, E’speth. But my Teddy would be vewy pweased to have one too,’ said the Shilfie, as she hung hers round her neck.

So Elspeth begged from Janie some circles of gilt cardboard which had ornamented her reels of coloured silks, and hung one round ‘my Teddy’s’ neck. Then, admiring the effect and Sybil’s delight, she fastened one to Cleopatra’s collar, telling her it was a good-conduct badge, because she hadn’t got any fatter lately, and urged on by Jock’s applause, succeeded in catching old Antony and hanging one round his neck by a yellow ribbon.

On ‘my Teddy’ the decoration looked out of place, on clumsy Cleopatra still more so, but on gaunt, dignified Antony it looked ridiculous. The scouting party shouted with delight, but he sat up, severe and serious, on the bench, his eyes half closed in the sunshine, and did not resent his ornament, nor, more wonderful still, their laughter. He was very sensitive to ridicule, when he realised that he was its object, and would stalk away at once if he were laughed at, but to-day he apparently thought they were laughing at Cleopatra or Teddy, and sat complacently watching them, his medal hung gracefully under his chin, a bow of ribbon standing rakishly up behind one ear.

Elspeth brought her swimming medal and pinned it beside her badge on the breast of her brown tunic. Then they donned their scouting hats and took up their staves, and with a final laugh at dignified Antony went off for a morning’s scouting up the Glen, leaving the Shilfie to go and show her badge to Ninian.

Jock was explaining to Elspeth the mysteries of ‘tracking.’ Every footstep in the dusty white road had to be examined, identified, or traced home. When any one came along they made for cover and lay in hiding in the heather or among the rocks, to the great disturbance of the sheep, who had considered the lonely moors of the Glen their territory, but found them so no longer. When Mr Macwilliam came driving down towards the ferry, they lay in ambush till he was close upon them, then sprang out, waving their hats, and nearly frightening his horse into a fit. They would dearly have liked to do the same when Mysie and Madge rode past, but thought better of it and lay in the heather, only the tops of their hats showing. The girls saw them, however, and Madge said scathingly,—

‘Playing that silly game again! I wonder they don’t get tired of it.’

‘All the same, you’d like fine to join in if you had the chance. It’s just the kind of thing you’d love, Madge, so you needn’t pretend you wouldn’t,’ Mysie said heavily. ‘You know, it’s a great pity we began so badly. We could all have played together, as Ninian and Sybil do. But the girl wouldn’t speak to me when I did try to be friendly.’

‘Oh well, I wouldn’t have done it myself, considering how we began it, you know!’ Madge was in a candid mood to-day. ‘We *were* nasty about the launch, but how were we to

know she'd be so easily offended? I don't see she had any right to be. She was *dreadfully* rude, too, both then and to you later on.'

Mysie said nothing. She was seriously distressed by the situation she had created, but saw no way to better it. She had conceived a respect for Elspeth which had been completely lacking in the first days of their acquaintance. Elspeth the public-school girl, Elspeth the Londoner and traveller, Elspeth the friend of Queen Lexa and her band, was not to be despised. And the fact that Elspeth and Jock seemed quite content with their own company, and showed no consciousness of the many advantages she had imagined she possessed, only increased her respect for them and tended to lessen her idea of her own importance.

It was scarcely her fault if she had learned to feel herself a person of consequence from the first. The position of her home, the only big house in the neighbourhood, her father's standing as owner of most of the farms, and her own importance as eldest daughter of the house, had all fostered the pride which she had inherited. The absent governess had done her best to counteract all these influences, but had found it a hard task, and had often thought it would be well for the girls to go to school, that they might find their proper place among others of their own age, and learn to respect some who had none of the things which meant so much to them. It seemed as if Elspeth's coming might be the lesson Mysie had needed, but she did not find the learning of it pleasant.

Elspeth showed no interest, however much she might feel, in Mysie's beautiful home. She was apparently indifferent to the delights of the launch, the horses, the carriage, and she would not come inside the gates. To Mysie, who had thought to dazzle her with these splendours, her indifference was surprising and very disappointing, while the haunting fear that this little schoolgirl might possibly venture to scorn her because she had never been to school, was galling in the extreme.

Mysie Campbell was what her ancestry and surroundings had made her, and at the moment she was profoundly uncomfortable. All her inherited ideas had received a severe shock in Elspeth's indifferent attitude to herself. Mysie's first wish to make use of the stranger in learning the many things she wished to know, was quickly merging in a fierce desire to force this girl to be friendly, and to acknowledge her at least worthy to be a comrade. But how to set about it she did not know.

Madge was altogether lighter of character. She had the same feelings as Mysie, but they were not so fully developed, and she was two years younger. She was very quick to speak and act, but just as ready to follow Mysie's lead in anything. The burden of the situation was thrown entirely on Mysie, and she knew she must solve it alone, for Elspeth apparently cared nothing about her, and Madge would fall in with her wishes, not without protest, perhaps, but still she would agree.

She was not by any means right in her estimate of Elspeth's feeling, but she could not know that. As she and Madge cantered up the road, their dark hair flying, Elspeth murmured from her place in the heather,—

'They don't half look swanky, do they? I wonder if they know what lucky girls they are? Those ripping ponies all their own, and we saw them cycling the other day, too, to say nothing of the launch and the wee boat. They've got everything.'

'Yes, I wouldn't half like a sail in the launch,' Jock agreed. 'They were away out all day yesterday, and the Ninny says they went right to the head of the loch, to the wee place among the mountains Janie talks about. It must be just ripping, ye ken.'

‘Well, we can’t have it, so we’ll make the best of the things we have,’ Elspeth said philosophically. ‘Whatever you do, mind you never let them guess we envy them! But if they weren’t such mean stuck-up things we might have made friends with them, and then they’d have invited us as they do the Shilfie. As it is, of course, we can’t have anything to do with them. Now, sir, what do we do next?’

They scouted valiantly all morning, disdaining a glance at the clouds gathering up the Glen. By this time they had lived long enough in Glenlenny to be indifferent to a shower, and cared no more for mist than did Mysie and Madge, who rode out in all weathers except an actual downpour.

They only reached home when dinner was on the table, both thoroughly tired out. Cleopatra welcomed them joyously, having been left behind because she did not know when to be quiet. But for this fault she would have been allowed to join the patrol. As it was, she barked altogether too much, and scouts have to learn the value of silence. She had been burying bones in the garden during the morning, and her good-conduct badge was sorely battered and dragged in consequence, but Antony’s was still in place under his furry chin, and he seemed almost proud of it as he posed on the front table, watching the disappearance of the dinner with anxious eyes.

‘I’m going to rest all afternoon and read,’ Elspeth announced. ‘I’m too tired to walk another step. We’ve been about fifty miles this morning.’

‘More like five,’ grinned Jock. ‘But I’m a bit fagged, too.’

‘It was hot, and damp, and muggy. I guess that’s why we’re tired. It’s going to rain like anything presently. I wonder if those girls are home yet. They’ll get soaked.’

‘No, they haven’t come back yet,’ Janie said, dealing out the broth. ‘Did they go up the Glen?’

‘Yes, with their noses in the air, as usual. They will get wet. Antony’s washing behind his ears.’

‘He seems to find his medal in the way,’ Jock laughed. ‘I say, doesn’t he look rum? I think he rather likes it.’

‘I must put my championship medal away safe,’ and Elspeth’s hand went to her breast.

Then she sprang up, with a little scream of dismay.

‘It’s gone! I must have dropped it in the Glen! Oh, Jock, you’ll come and help me find it, won’t you? I’ll get my hat. Come on!’ and she flew to the door, her face white, her lips trembling.

‘But, Elspeth, your dinner! Take your dinner first and then go,’ pleaded Janie. ‘And look at the rain!’ as the first drops of the storm came lashing on the window. ‘And you said you were so tired!’

Elspeth was lacing her boots in feverish haste.

‘If it’s lying in the road in all this rain, it will be spoiled for ever,’ she half sobbed. ‘Oh, why did I put it on? It’s the most precious thing I’ve got! Jock, it must have dropped when I fell into the ditch that time. You pushed me and I slipped. Why did you push me? If you hadn’t it might not have fallen off.’

Jock whistled. ‘That’s away up ever so far beyond the farm! It’s a good three miles. I say, Elspeth——!’ and he looked at the rain beating on the window.

‘I don’t care. I must go. Never mind if we get wet. I’ll go alone, if you like. I know it’s my own fault.’



Jock was tired and footsore, and it was not his medal. He was hungry, too, and the few mouthfuls he had taken had only served to whet his appetite. He had no great liking for a six-mile tramp in such a storm, with only the barest chance of finding the treasure. But he could not let Elspeth go alone, and it was plain she would not be kept back. Janie pleaded, but in vain. The medal was Elspeth's dearest possession, and the thought of it lying in the road, in such a storm, drove her nearly crazy. She dared not face the possibility that she might never find it again, and they dared not suggest it to her.

At Janie's urgent request, she caught up a slice of bread in her hand as she made for the door. Jock stuffed some into his pocket and followed. Rob took up his hat.

'I'm coming too. Three heads are better than one. Perhaps I'll be some help. Don't cry, kiddie. We'll find it all right. But put on your mackintosh, or you shan't go at all. You'll get soaked as it is. I say! Isn't it coming down! It's not just what one would choose for a stroll up the Glen, but it can't be helped. Ready?'

'It's awfully decent of you, Rob,' sobbed Elspeth, buttoning her waterproof with trembling fingers, while Sybil, fully understanding the extent of the calamity, said piteously,—

'Would be vewy pweased to go too, E'speth! Would be so gwad to he'p you find it. Would do my vewy best, I'm sure you. Pwease, may I go, Janie?'

'No, Sybil, dear, you must stay with me.'

'Thank you, dear, all the same,' and Elspeth brushed away her tears bravely and kissed her. 'Come on, boys! It's awfully good of you both!'

## CHAPTER XX

### A GREAT SURPRISE

Mysie and Madge saw the storm gathering among the mountains from the head of Glenleny. From that high point they looked down on hidden beauties as yet unknown to Elspeth and Jock, who had never been able to walk so far. They watched the clouds gather and the sky darken and the hills grow misty, and then they turned and made for home.

The road wound down the Glen in great loops, with sharp turns and sudden corners. The greyhound went ahead with long silent leaps, but the ponies clattered noisily over the stones, and sent the pebbles flying. Mysie and Madge always took the steep road at a canter, in spite of their grandmother's repeated injunctions to be careful. When Mrs Campbell drove that way, she always made the horses take this bit of road at a walk, so that going down was almost as slow as going up, but the girls were very reckless, and rode down at a pace which would have seriously alarmed the old lady had she been aware of it. The ponies were very surefooted, however, and they rode well and never came to harm.

To-day they had reason for haste, for they had stayed too long. The storm was close behind them, the rain threatening to come at any moment. A gale swept down the Glen from the mountains, making their progress easier, and in the distance the loch showed dark and stormy, covered with white caps.

Suddenly Mysie drew rein and slid to the ground.

'What's that?' she cried.

'What's the matter? We ought to be home,' urged Madge, turning in her saddle. 'We'll get soaked presently, and it's lunch-time, anyway.'

'Look here, Madge! See what I've found. What is it doing here? Somebody must have dropped it, but no one comes up the Glen but us.'

She held up a round gold medal and examined it curiously. Madge slipped from her saddle and came to look.

'"Lower School Champion, July, 1910,"' read Mysie. 'On the other side there's a crest and motto. I think it's Latin. Who do you suppose——?'

Their eyes met. 'Elspeth!' said Madge decisively. 'I say! What a joke!'

'It's that girl's swimming medal that the baby talks about. She must have dropped it this morning.'

Mysie stood staring down at the medal and pondering.

'She'll be in a dreadful state when she finds it's gone. She thinks such a lot of it. "Vewy pwecious," the baby calls it. She wouldn't show it to me. It's funny that I should have found it. Isn't it pretty? Fancy giving real gold medals just for swimming! It must have been a very big important school. And fancy that girl being the best swimmer! She's not very big. It's queer she swims so well. You know, she could go just as fast as that big girl from the yacht the other day. She will be upset about losing it. It would soon have been spoilt or trodden on if I hadn't happened to see it. What shall I do with it, Madgie?'

'Leave it there,' Madge suggested cheerfully. 'It isn't any business of yours. You can't very well keep it, since you know it's hers. I should leave it there and let her find it if she can.'

'How can I? Some cart will go over it, or the cows will step on it.'

'That's her look-out. She shouldn't have lost it. It was very silly to wear it up here.'

‘Yes, it was silly, but since I’ve found it I can’t leave it here,’ Mysie said thoughtfully. ‘That would be too mean altogether.’

‘Well, take it home, then, and give her a good fright before you let her have it back. It will serve her right, and perhaps she’ll learn to be more careful. Send it back by the baby in a week or two, and say you found it and thought it might be hers. It will teach her a lesson, and she ought to be very grateful. I don’t see what else you can do. But you must do something quick, Mysie. The rain’s beginning. If you stand there much longer I shall go home without you.’

Mysie pinned the precious medal on her dress, and felt a sense of satisfaction in seeing it on her own breast. But if it had really been hers! If she had raced and won it honourably! How absolutely delightful school life must be!

She had nothing to say as they cantered home, the wind howling fiercely between the narrow walls of hills, the rain beating on their backs in a drenching shower.

‘We’ll be scolded and put through the mangle when we get home,’ laughed Madge. ‘I must say we’ll need hanging up to dry. It’s fine, isn’t it? I like it. I like the Glen best in a storm.’

Mysie said nothing. She was facing a problem, and had not yet solved it to her satisfaction.

Elsbeth would be miserable over the loss of her medal. She would remain miserable until it was recovered. And Mysie held the medal and could end her distress in a moment. What should she do?

‘I say!’ Madge chattered on. ‘If that girl finds she’s lost it, perhaps she’ll come back to look for it. Won’t she get wet! Mysie, you’d better take it off. If we met them and she saw it, it would be awkward. Put it in your pocket. She’s such a horrid thing that she’d think you meant to keep it. Of course, you can’t absolutely *know* it’s hers. You could always say you weren’t sure. But you know it can’t be anybody else’s, and we’ve heard enough about it from the baby and Ninian.’

Mysie did not answer. She almost wished she had not found the medal. Then she would not have had to decide.

It was only when they were close to the lodge that she realised that her mind had been made up from the first. She had been unwilling to confess to herself or Madge what she intended to do. But she knew now that she had never hesitated. Of course there was only one thing to be done. She had been playing with facts, but when the point was reached she really had no choice.

‘I’m going to give it back to her,’ she announced abruptly. ‘You can go on, if you like. You’re wet enough.’

‘You’re going to give it back?’ echoed Madge in amazement. ‘At once? But I thought you’d be glad to pay her out! She’s been horrid, Mysie. What are you going to do it for?’

‘Because I can’t help it,’ Mysie retorted tartly. ‘I don’t know why myself. I only know I’ve got to. You go on home.’

She blew her whistle shrilly as they reached the lodge. Madge promptly pulled up and sat watching.

‘You *are* funny!’ she said frankly. ‘You’ll be asking her again to be friends next, or saying you’re sorry about the launch that morning.’

‘I won’t, then. This is quite different, and you’d understand if you were old enough.’

Madge whistled expressively. Mysie was not often in this mood. But Mysie did not like to be criticised when she knew she was in the right, and she strongly resented her sister’s

suggestions, perhaps because she knew they were both things she ought to do.

‘I wish they wouldn’t keep us waiting in the rain,’ she said impatiently.

The moment’s delay had been caused by Elspeth’s refusal to answer the call, in spite of her equipment of mackintosh and boots. She knew who had whistled, and could not face Mysie and Madge with tear-stained cheeks. Janie sprang up at sight of her hesitation, but Rob stopped her hastily.

‘I’ll go. Don’t you get wet.’

Mysie saw him appear with some relief. She had no particular objection to him. It was easier to speak to him than to Elspeth herself. To his surprise she addressed him, speaking hurriedly and nervously, and he paused on his way to the gate.

‘I think this belongs to your sister. I found it lying in the road, away up the Glen.’

Rob’s face lit up with relief. ‘I say, thanks awfully!’ he said frankly. ‘She’s in an awful stew, and we were just going out to look for it, but we weren’t looking forward to the job. I didn’t really think she’d ever find it, but I didn’t dare to say so. I was afraid she might have dropped it in the heather. I’m awfully obliged to you. But, I say, you’re soaked! Won’t you come in and get dry? It’s a long way up to the house, isn’t it?’

‘No, thank you. We must get home at once.’

Mysie’s tone was decisive, so he opened the gate, and raised his cap again as he repeated his thanks.

‘He’s polite enough, anyway,’ Madge commented, as they cantered up the drive. ‘I saw her through the door, didn’t you? She’d been crying like anything, and she was all ready to go and look for it, with her mack. on. She ought to be *very* much obliged! I suppose it *was* better to do it at once, though I didn’t think you would, Mysie. I say! Aren’t you wet? I can feel it coming through,’ and she wriggled in discomfort.

‘What were you talking to the swanky girls about, Rob?’ demanded Jock curiously.

‘Come on, let’s go!’ Elspeth said breathlessly. ‘We’re only wasting time. *Oh, Rob——!*’

Rob dangled the medal triumphantly before her.

‘She found it—the big one. Be more careful next time, kiddie. It’s better luck than you deserve. Thank goodness, we’re saved that tramp! It’s blowing great guns down the Glen. It would have been just hideous. We’re better off at home this afternoon,’ and he sat down thankfully to take his boots off.

‘How awfully decent of her!’ Elspeth was half laughing and half crying in her relief. ‘Mysie, did you say? I’d never have thought she would.’

‘It’s a wonder she didn’t leave it there or keep it,’ Jock agreed. ‘She can’t be such a bad sort, after all. Well, I’m jolly glad you’ve got it again, and I’m more than jolly glad we haven’t got to go away up the Glen in this storm without any dinner. I’m sure of one thing, too, and that is that you won’t wear that medal again when you’re out with me. Now let’s have something to eat!’

‘So vewy gwad you’ve found it, E’speth! Think it was vewy pweasant of Mysie to bwing it back, don’t you?’

‘And I wouldn’t show it to her when she asked me,’ Elspeth mused. ‘She might quite well have kept it, to pay me out, when she had such a splendid chance. She can’t be so bad as I thought. It was really awfully decent of her, you know,’ and she was very thoughtful as she returned to her meal, her eyes scarcely straying from the medal lying beside her plate.

‘She’s decenter than I thought,’ she said again, after a long period of musing, and once more, as she carried her treasure away to a place of safety, ‘Yes, it was really *awfully* decent of

Mysie! I can't have been quite fair in the way I've been thinking of her. I never would have believed she'd do it.'

'I never would have believed she'd do anything else,' Janie retorted quickly. 'Perhaps you haven't been quite fair to them, Elspeth. You don't know them very well yet, remember.'

'But think of the things we do know, Janie!'

'I know. But it's not very much, after all. Perhaps you made up your minds rather too quickly.'

Elspeth said nothing, but went off with her medal, looking extremely thoughtful.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A DREADFUL PROPOSITION

‘What do you do here when it doesn’t stop raining?’ Elspeth inquired that evening. ‘I’ve been reading all afternoon, and I want a change. It’s all very well if you happen to be Rob, or the Lady of Shalott, for then you’re glad to get on with your work. But what about the rest of us?’

Jock yawned. ‘Let’s have a game. What shall we do?’

‘So vewy gwad you’re goin’ to pway someth’n’, and Sybil came out of the corner where she and her Teddy and Cleopatra had built themselves a house of upturned chairs. ‘Ti’ed of games all by myse’f. Didn’t want to ’sturb you, E’speth, but if you’re sure you’ve finished weading——’

‘You poor baby! Why didn’t you say so before? I thought you and your Teddy were quite happy in that corner.’

‘Didn’t want to bother you,’ Sybil said cheerfully. ‘Thought you might be busy. But would be vewy gwad to have a game.’

Janie cried out in mock remonstrance presently, for Jock, in full scouting array, was hunting the girls all over the house. They hid in cupboards and cellars, then when he was on the point of finding them, fled, shrieking with delight, up the winding stairs and across the gallery and into the other tower, or raced across the drive through the rain to fling themselves down in sanctuary by Janie’s side. That was ‘home,’ and the baffled scout had to be content to wait till they ventured out, when another wild chase and scuffle ensued.

Rob, working in his bedroom, with books spread all over the big front table, looked up with raised eyebrows when first Elspeth and the Shilfie came tumbling down the corner staircase and dashed out at the door.

‘Sorry!’ gasped Elspeth. ‘Couldn’t help it! No other way!’ and was gone.

‘Jock’s comin’. Know he’s goin’ to catch us!’ cried Sybil, with an excited chuckle of delight, and clung to Elspeth’s hand.

Then Jock, in khaki and slouch hat and staff, came tumbling down the stairs in pursuit.

‘Sorry, old chap! Don’t let us interrupt you! Just grind away and take no notice. Must do something in weather like this, you know!’ and he was gone, but only to find his quarry prone on the floor by Janie’s chair, and Antony sitting up suddenly among her silks, looking very much astonished.

Rob shrugged his shoulders and kept bravely to his work for a time, ignoring the continual interruptions as best he could. But at last he tossed aside his book and lay in wait behind the door for the next invader. It was the Shilfie, who came stumping hurriedly up the stairs, two feet on every step, Elspeth urging her on impatiently from behind.

Sybil, arriving breathless at the top, found herself caught up in a pair of strong arms and tossed deftly into the big box bed. Her little scream was cut short by Elspeth landing on top of her, and as Jock came prancing up the stairs Rob stood guard over them, brandishing a cricket bat.

‘Now we’re ready for a siege! Come on, Mr Scout!’

Jock gave a whoop of delight and hurled himself upon him with a fine disregard for consequences. He knew himself no match for Rob, but what of that? Cleopatra had been

revelling in the fun, dancing wildly about and galloping clumsily after the girls, her good-conduct medal swung round under one ear. She capered about the boys as they closed and rolled on the floor, and her frantic barking, added to Elspeth's cheers and the Shilfie's excited giggling, gave the finishing touch to the hilarity of the proceedings.

'That wasn't half bad!' Jock declared at last, when the conflict was over and he had been utterly routed.

'That was something like!' Elspeth agreed, as Rob gallantly handed the rescued ladies over to Janie.

'Someth'n wike! Not half bad!' echoed Sybil. 'Had a vewy pweasant evening, thank you, Jock. So gwad to pway with you!'

The next morning was showery, so Jock went off fishing, and the Shilfie and Ninian disappeared to play in the nursery at Leny Hall. Mysie and Madge did not appear, though Elspeth kept a sharp look-out for them, and was on the watch for their peremptory whistle all morning.

'They always go out. Surely they won't stop in for a wee drizzle like this?' she said to herself. 'But perhaps they got wet enough yesterday to satisfy them for a while.'

She did odd jobs about the house, tidied her bedroom, teased Antony, and gave Cleopatra a bath. Then she sat down beside Janie with a book.

'How pretty that is!' she said admiringly, and the Lady of Shalott sat back in her chair and looked critically at her work.

The pink rose bedspread had gone off to Edinburgh the day before, carrying with it an unspoken hope from Janie, which Elspeth echoed with understanding, though neither had referred to that matter again. Janie was working now on a piece of delicate white embroidery for a child's frock, with a dainty little design in silver thread.

'It's almost finished, you see. It isn't an order, but this kind of thing will always sell. So I just take it up when my other work is done. I've something else on hand that you might like to see. I'll give it a turn now, I think. I sat at this all day yesterday.'

She took the work out of the frame and wrapped it in its white cloth. Then as she laid it on the table, gaunt old Antony came leaping silently up, picked his way carefully among the silvery silks, and sat down on the parcel and began to purr noisily. Janie laughed.

'No, no, Tony, my dear! That's too much of a good thing. Sit on this, darling. I know you want to be beside me. It's your kind heart, isn't it? Very affectionate he is, the dear, and loves his mistress very much, doesn't he?' and she spread a sheet of rustling brown paper and pushed away the silks and reels. 'He likes that because it crackles when he moves,' she explained, and Tony's contented purring grew louder than ever.

From a big press in the corner Janie brought a bundle wrapped in white coverings. She laid it on the table, and opened it for Elspeth to see.

'I just do this when I really have nothing else. I keep it for a treat when I have finished other things,' she explained. 'Isn't it lovely? I don't mind saying it, for I know it is. I'm so fond of it, you see. I don't think I'll ever be able to bring myself to part with it, unless I'm *very* hard up. But we'll see when it's done.'

It was yards and yards of shimmering white silk net, covered with intricate designs all in white, flowers and leaves and berries interlaced in a bewildering fascinating whole.

'It would make a pretty evening dress, I think,' and Janie spread a sheet on the floor and laid the soft fairy-like material upon it. She fixed a breadth in her frame and let the rest fall all

round like a filmy misty cloud, then spread white silks in skeins and reels over the table and sat down amongst them.

‘Pretty! It’s beautiful! It’s fit for a princess! I think it’s too good even for that. It ought to be a—a bridal robe, you know! Think how lovely it would look over some soft rich colour.’

‘No, something pure white. White satin, perhaps,’ Janie laughed. ‘Yes, I might let it go for a bride. I like working at it. It’s so dainty.’

Elspeth sat watching her as she bent over the frame, a watery sunbeam touching her hair to flaming colour, the delicate white web heaped about her. A question was on her lips, which had been there more than once since their conversation together, but it had never been uttered, and she kept it back still, feeling instinctively that Janie did not want to discuss that matter.

‘If only you were engaged, you could finish it for a wedding-dress for yourself,’ she sighed. ‘You’d look lovely in it, you know.’

Janie laughed, and a wave of soft colour filled her face again.

‘You’re very anxious to get rid of me, Elspeth! What is to happen to you all if I get married, I’d like to know?’

‘Oh, you’ll marry a millionaire, of course, and send us back to school, and we’ll all come here for holidays. I’m not sure that I’d like to go back, though. It’s so awfully jolly here, Janie!’

‘Yes? You seem to have thought of that very suddenly.—What’s the matter?’

‘It’s been worrying me ever since yesterday. I’ve been putting it off.’

Janie nodded, as though she had been waiting for this.

‘I haven’t thanked that girl for bringing back my medal. It was awfully decent of her. Don’t you think I ought to?’

‘Certainly. I don’t see how you can help it. Don’t you want to? Is it so very difficult? You’re sure to see her some time to-day.’

‘Yes, but it *is* difficult.’ Elspeth knit her brows and gazed up at her in distress. ‘I don’t know what to say, and I don’t want to say it, anyway. You see, I never told you—I never told anybody but Jock—but I was awfully horrid to her one morning when I opened the gate for them. She spoke to me, and I think she wanted to be friends, but I wouldn’t. *I* was rude, Janie.’

Janie nodded, ‘Yes, you were. I was sure you’d think better of it afterwards.’

‘Why, how do you know?’ Elspeth cried in surprise and dismay. ‘Jock wouldn’t—’

‘My dear Elspeth, all our doors and windows are always open, and neither you nor Mysie spoke in a whisper.’

‘Oh—! Did you hear? You heard what I said?’

‘I didn’t say anything about it, for I thought surely I could leave it to yourself. I was sure in time you would feel you had been wrong.’

‘All the same, it was decent of you not to scold,’ Elspeth decided. ‘Some grown-ups I know wouldn’t have missed the chance for anything. They couldn’t have resisted it. Of course I’ve been feeling bad, but I didn’t know what to do. You see, we didn’t want to be friendly with them. They were horrid to us to begin with.’

‘All the same, that was hardly a good reason for being just as bad, was it? I remember you were very indignant with them for their “bad manners”!’

‘And mine were just as bad, you mean, and they had just as much right to be mad with me? Well, but they did begin it, Janie!’

‘Yes, and you said you supposed they knew no better, as they were only country girls.’



‘And you mean I—— Oh, well, you needn’t remind me! I suppose I ought to have known better, but it’s horrid to be told so,’ Elspeth said indignantly.

‘I didn’t refer to the matter till you began it yourself,’ Janie reminded her. ‘Well, I suppose you mean to thank Mysie, although you were so unkind?’

‘Unkind!’ said Elspeth, and sat pondering it.

She was still sitting thinking when the Shilfie appeared in the doorway.

‘Am vewy hungwy,’ she said plaintively. ‘Think surety it mus’ be time for dinner. Vewy pweased to he’p you get it weady, Janie.’

But Janie laughed and declined her help.

‘Only keep Antony off my work,’ she implored. ‘I think perhaps I’d better take him with me,’ and she tucked him under her arm and went across to the kitchen.

The Shilfie’s chatter during meals usually concerned Ninian, and to-day she had much to tell of her visit to his nursery. She mentioned casually that ‘Madgie was there, but didn’t speak to her,’ and Elspeth said sharply, ‘Wasn’t Mysie there too? Do you know why they didn’t go riding to-day?’

‘Madgie said she couldn’t be bothered widing alone, and Mysie’s in bed with a wee cold,’ said Sybil, glibly. ‘Ninian says it’s because she got so vewy wet yesterday, an’ Madgie says it’s ’cause Mysie would talk to Wob ’bout your medal, ’stead of going home quick to be hung up to dwy. Asked her if her gwanny hung her up to the woof in the kitchen, wike Janie does the wet cwothes, an’ she said, not to be silly. Didn’t know it was silly. Never would have dwreamt of being silly if I’d known.’

Elspeth looked troubled. ‘I’m sorry if she really caught cold yesterday.’

‘P’waps she didn’t. P’waps that Madgie told a story,’ Sybil said cheerfully.

‘Sybil, that isn’t a nice thing to say,’ Janie said severely, and the corners of Sybil’s mouth drooped penitently.

‘Vewy sowwy,’ she murmured. ‘Didn’t mean not to be nice.’

‘Elspeth,’ said Janie abruptly, ‘don’t you think you should go up to the Hall, and ask for Mysie? You could send in your message of thanks, or perhaps you could see her and thank her properly.’

Elspeth dropped her pudding-spoon and gazed at her in dismay.

‘Oh, Janie, I couldn’t! I’d be frightened! Janie, you don’t think I ought to, surely? Just think how awful it would be!’

‘I don’t see that it would be awful at all. It might be a wee bit of an ordeal, but I think you owe it to Mysie, after the way you repulsed her before. She probably didn’t find it very easy to offer to make friends. You refused, and were distinctly rude. Don’t you think the next advance should come from you?’

‘Hallo! I hadn’t heard about that,’ Rob said, looking up quickly.

‘And there’s no need for you to, either,’ Elspeth retorted sharply.

‘You were jolly lucky to get your medal back, that’s all,’ Rob said coolly. ‘It was a sight more than you deserved, if you’d been nasty to her. She must have something in her, that eldest Campbell girl, or she’d have left it lying in the road for you to find if you could.’

Elspeth looked imploringly at Janie.

‘Janie, you don’t really think I ought to go?’

‘Think it over,’ Janie advised. ‘If Mysie is really in bed, she’ll be getting tired of it by this time, and would probably be delighted to have a visitor.’

‘I really don’t think I could,’ Elspeth mused. ‘It would be awful! I’d be scared to death. If I did anything so dreadfully difficult as *that*, it would surely make up for any amount of nastiness. I’d feel a perfect heroine. But they’re such swanks, they’d probably say—“Elspeth from the lodge? Oh, dear me, no! We couldn’t think of admitting her to *our* house, not for a moment”—and then think how I’d feel!’

‘Elspeth, don’t be ridiculous. If you go and ask for Mysie, saying you’re sorry to hear she’s poorly, and that you would like to thank her for finding your medal yesterday, that’s all you need to do. You’ll have done your share. If she wants to be friendly, she’ll say she’d like to see you, or send Madge with a message.’

‘Don’t know that I want Madge and a message. *She* didn’t try to be friends. I feel as if I could quarrel with Madge without trying very hard.’

‘If you make friends with Mysie, you’ll have no difficulty with Madge,’ Janie said confidently. ‘Think it over, Elspeth. You needn’t go this very minute.’

Elspeth sighed. ‘It’s an awful thought! I wish you hadn’t suggested it, Janie. I don’t think I could do it, really. I guess I’ll wait till she’s better, and thank her the first time I see her.’

Janie shook her head. ‘That wouldn’t be half as good,’ she said decidedly, and Elspeth sighed again.

After dinner she disappeared to her bedroom, and sat in the window-seat, gazing out at the rain. Jock clamoured for her company in vain, so had to be content with the Shilfie, and after some instruction she succeeded in playing her part very well. She and her Teddy, leaning out of Rob’s window, were prisoners in the Tower, and Jock was at first a scout belonging to the rescue party, trying to spy out their whereabouts without attracting the attention of Cleopatra, the jailer, who lay, very clean and unusually white, on the doorstep. Presently he became the rescuer, making his way stealthily in spite of Antony, sitting on the stairs, and quite ready to do his part and fly at the scout’s bare knees if so much as a hair of his whiskers were disturbed. Then Jock changed his mind and became one of the murderers of the little Prince, creeping noiselessly up the stairs to smother the Shilfie in Rob’s box bed. Unfortunately, he forgot to warn the imprisoned little Prince, and she was unaware of the change in the game and quite unprepared for her sad fate, so she dissolved in tears under Jock’s too realistic smothering and had to be rescued in earnest by Rob, who sprang to her help at her first sob.

About four o’clock Elspeth crept down to Janie’s room.

‘The rain’s off, and I’m going,’ she announced. ‘But—oh, Janie!—I do feel scared. I’m quite sure they won’t be nice.’

## CHAPTER XXII

### A PERFECT HEROINE

‘I feel a perfect heroine,’ Elspeth repeated, in a vain attempt to keep up her courage, as she trudged along the wet drive to Leny Hall.

Certainly if heroism be measured by the amount of courage needed for the deed, she had some claim to the title. Neither Janie nor Rob, who urged her to go, quite appreciated the effort it cost her. Her nervousness was unnecessary, no doubt, but it was very real, and when Jock heard she had gone, and all alone, he instantly pronounced it ‘downright plucky, a real sporting thing to do.’ If Mysie’s deed had made a great call on her generosity, Elspeth’s made just as much on her courage. But she was spurred on by gratitude, and by shame at her former unfriendliness, and she had been unable to dismiss the thought once Janie had suggested it. It had faced her as a necessary duty, and she felt that it must be done before she could feel comfortable again. She would do her share towards making up the unfortunate feud. She would even do it handsomely, and say she was sorry for all that had passed. The rest must be left to Mysie and Madge.

The drive seemed very long in her anxiety to get the ordeal over. At another time she would have been interested in everything—the magnificent chestnut-trees which lined the broad brown road, the great sweep of green park beyond, fresh and sweet after the rain, the splendid copper beeches set here and there on the lawn, their rich colour a fine contrast to the vivid greens and yellows of the first autumn tints, the rabbits who scurried away at her approach, and the blue vistas of the loch through arching trees, or glimpses of mighty purple mountains, so near in the rain-washed air that they seemed to hang almost overhead. Elspeth had eyes only for the gray peep of the Hall at the far end of the drive.

The trees came to a sudden end at last, and the roadway parted in two, sweeping round a big circle of flower-beds, one blaze of colour. The fountain of which Sybil talked was in the middle, with a broad stone basin where the goldfish lived. In the beds grouped around were sunflowers, dahlias, asters, late roses, and anemones. The house stood on a broad terrace, and this south front was hung with purple clematis and reddening creepers.

Elspeth, feeling very small and frightened, but making a valiant effort not to show it, walked sturdily round to the big steps leading up to the terrace. If the house had not been so very big and important it would have been very much easier to approach it. All the windows seemed like staring curious eyes. She wondered if Madge were hiding behind the curtains and reporting to Mysie,—

‘Here comes that Elspeth from the lodge! What cheek! What do you suppose she wants?’

She rang the bell bravely, and felt her heart sink into her boots as it clanged through the house. The door was opened in a moment and before she had time to recover her ebbing courage, by the man who had brought the message to Sybil. But though Elspeth felt desperately frightened, as she said to herself, there was no sign of it in her face as she looked up at him gravely.

‘I came to ask how Miss Mysie is this afternoon. I’m awfully sorry if she’s really ill. Will you please tell her that I wish to thank her very much indeed for finding my medal, and—and that I’m sorry I haven’t been more friendly to her, please?’

She flushed scarlet in embarrassment, but did not hesitate.

'I may as well do it thoroughly, since I've come this far,' she said to herself.—'No, thank you, I think I'd better not come in—unless she would like to see me, of course. I'll wait here, if I may. I'm Elspeth Buchanan, from the lodge.'

The man went off with the message, and Elspeth waited, much relieved that all had gone well so far, and a trifle awed by the splendour into which she gazed. It was all so *big*, was her first thought—so massive and imposing. She felt very small and cheeky, and was inclined to hope that the girls would not wish to see her, after all.

The greyhound stalked out of a room close to the door and came forward with dignity to sniff at the intruder. Elspeth welcomed him as a friend and patted his long head and looked into his deep eyes, while he sniffed at her dress and recognised her as a friend of Cleopatra's. She talked to him in a low tone, finding anything better than the solemn silence.

'You knew she was a doggy friend at once, didn't you? That's Cleopatra, dear, you know her, don't you? She's white, you know, and rather stout, and you're gray and rather thin, aren't you, you beauty? Didn't you get dreadfully wet up the Glen yesterday, with such a bare thin coat? I'm sure it can't be much good as a mackintosh, you know. Isn't it a wee bit cold in winter, dear? Do you wear a wee red coat, like Sybil's Teddy? I think you should have furs and a muff, too, you know, to make up for your poor skin. Cleopatra is *much* better off than you, but she isn't nearly so—so aristocratic-looking as you are, of course. She's a very ordinary dog, isn't she?—but very friendly and good-tempered and all that, you know. But you are the kind of gentleman who runs beside his mistress's carriage in the Park, or goes out with his master when he's riding in the Row. Cleopatra would look rather out of place there, I'm afraid, don't you think so?'

Old Mrs Campbell was sitting in the front room with the open door. She had heard Elspeth's conversation with the man, and the clear well-trained little voice and well-chosen words won her instant approval, just as the Shilfie's friendly greeting had done. The child had evidently been well educated, and the baby's stories of the big boarding-school had apparently not been exaggerated. She knew how to speak and to behave, and Mrs Campbell had heard enough from Mysie and Madge to enable her to appreciate Elspeth's apology at its true value. She raised her eyebrows as she listened, then wondered much what response Mysie would send. The low-spoken nonsense-talk with the dog brought a grim smile to her lips, but she listened critically and heard nothing to offend her. Fortunately Elspeth's school slang was in abeyance at the moment, subdued in part, no doubt, by the strangeness of her surroundings, but partly also by the influence of Janie's constant conversation.

Elspeth had to wait a considerable time for her answer, and her acquaintance with the greyhound progressed so rapidly that he was standing on his hind legs and reaching out a long red tongue to kiss her cheek before the man returned. She had no idea of the consternation her arrival had caused in Mysie's bedroom, where Madge was sitting with her sister.

'That girl? Here? Whatever does she mean?' cried Madge. 'So she has come in at last, has she?'

'She's willing to be friends, if we are, but she's going to leave it to us. She won't push. That's how she's been all along. Give me my brush, Madge, quick, and my ribbon—wait a minute, Thomas, please!—I'm a perfect sight! Tidy things up a wee bit, Madgie. We can't have her see the room in this mess.'

'You aren't going to *see* her, surely?' cried Madge, astounded. 'Up here?'

'Of course I am. If she's come so far, it would be mean not to——'

'Tisn't so far from the lodge!'

‘Oh, I don’t mean *that!* You don’t understand. Put the bed tidy—pull it neat in that corner—that’s right. Now put these books together. Am I fit to be seen?’

‘I guess so;’ Madge gave a quick glance at her sister, who, with flushed cheeks and very bright eyes, was vigorously brushing out her curls. ‘Quite good enough for *her*, anyway.’

‘Shut up!’ Mysie said sharply, but not politely. ‘You’re to stop talking like that. Give me my comb, and put this brush away. Pull that wee table more into the window, and put these roses in the middle. Now, is there anything else we can do to make it look nice?’

She slipped on a round comb with pink ribbon bows to keep her curls back from her face, and looked anxiously round the room.

‘Perhaps granny won’t want her to come up,’ Madge suggested.

Mysie’s face clouded over. ‘Thomas! Tell him, Madge. Tell him to beg granny to let her come. Say I am most anxious to have a chat with her, and I’m simply dying for somebody new to speak to, and as I’ve been good enough to wait in bed all day, just to please her, when there’s nothing whatever the matter with me, and in holidays too. I hope she’ll let me have the pleasure of a visitor to tea in the afternoon. Mind he tells her all that, every word. Then when he’s shown Elspeth up he can bring another cup and some more bread and butter.’

Either Thomas delivered the lengthy message with parrot-like exactness, or Mrs Campbell thought it would be well to end the constant bickering between the children, which had certainly not improved Mysie’s temper at home during the past few weeks, or Elspeth’s talk with the dog had taken her fancy. She gave the required permission, and Thomas went back to Elspeth, who, understanding very well why he had gone into that room on coming downstairs, instead of coming straight to her, was struck dumb in sudden dismay.

‘She’s in there—the old lady—and the door’s been open all this time! I wonder if she heard me talking to the dog? She’ll think me quite cracked,’ she thought gloomily.

Then Thomas announced solemnly that Miss Mysie would be pleased to see Miss Elspeth, and Elspeth followed him up the wide staircase in a sudden, silent agony of nervousness again.

Thomas, opening the door of a big bedroom, announced ‘Miss Elspeth Buchanan,’ and withdrew.

Elspeth had seen nothing as she came up the stairs, though her eyes had wandered up and down the wide corridor, and she remembered details of pictures and ornaments later. She saw nothing now but Mysie, sitting up in bed in a pink dressing-gown, and she went straight to her, only vaguely aware of Madge’s presence and critical gaze.

‘I am so awfully sorry I was rude to you that day,’ she said frankly. ‘I’m glad to have a chance to tell you so. I knew it was mean, but I was feeling bad just then because Sybil would play with your wee brother instead of with me, and Jock had gone out fishing, and I was left all alone. But that wasn’t any real reason for speaking to you as I did, and I’m sorry. I’ve been sorry ever since, but one doesn’t like to say so sometimes.’

‘Oh!’ said Mysie, with a little gasp of relief. ‘That’s just it exactly! That’s what has been the matter with us too. We were horrid to you that first morning, but we didn’t like to say so. We had made up our minds not to like you ever since we heard you were coming. But we were sorry, you know, only we couldn’t quite make up our minds to tell you so. But we’ve been sorry all along. Couldn’t we forget all about it?’

‘I’ll be awfully glad to, if you will,’ Elspeth said earnestly. ‘I haven’t been feeling a bit good lately, and when you brought back my medal yesterday, and I remembered how I wouldn’t show it to you, I felt just too mean for anything. I knew something would have to

happen after that. Thank you awfully for finding it for me. I'm more obliged than I can say. It's the most precious thing I've got. It was really awfully decent of you to bring it back to me, when I'd been so horrid to you. The boys think so too.'

'Oh, but I couldn't do anything else, could I? I knew it was yours.'

'You might have given it back in a nasty way, but you didn't. I was really awfully obliged to you.'

Mysie laughed. 'Won't you sit down?' she said, as Thomas entered, bringing more bread and butter. 'We were just having tea. Oh, Madgie, you never put the cosy on. You are a mean thing. It will be quite cold, and I hate cold tea. You'll have to boil the kettle again.'

'I was so—so agitated, when I heard you two being so polite, you know. It gave me such a shock that I forgot the cosy,' Madge explained, bending to light the spirit lamp again.

Elspeth sat down in a cushioned basket chair and took a long look round the room, and Mysie watched her with eager eyes. She was proud of her room, and loved every picture on the walls, and she longed to hear Elspeth express her admiration. Even if she did not say it aloud, Mysie meant to read it in her eyes. But Elspeth had no need to pretend indifference now.

'What a lovely room!' she said, in frank delight. 'How awfully pretty!' and Mysie was satisfied.

It was a very light room, and very dainty. Walls and paint were spotless white, while carpet and curtains were of a soft shade of rose pink, to which Mysie's gown and the draperies of the bed were matched. The pictures and photographs in dark frames looked well on the white walls, and were all of the best. An open door showed another room exactly the same, so Madge's domain was not far away.

On the table by the window stood a big bowl of late crimson roses. Another table was drawn out into the middle of the floor and spread for tea, and Madge, in her everyday holland frock, sat down to preside. Mysie, in her pink dressing-gown, with excited crimson cheeks and starry eyes, and dark curls caught back by pink ribbons, lay on her pillows, looking rather too lively and merry for an interesting invalid.

Elspeth looked round with appreciative eyes.

'You have everything to match. How simply ripping! Everything is pink or white—even the cups and saucers! Are they really to match the room?' and she looked admiringly at the dainty wild-rose pattern on the china as Madge passed her cup.

Mysie laughed, well pleased. 'Granny gave us our own tea-service last Christmas. It's nice to have them. They're rather pretty, I think. I do like having things to match, don't you?'

'Even the tea-cosy,' Elspeth mused. 'It's awfully pretty.'

'It's an old one——'

'I don't mean the cosy, I mean everything, the whole room. It suits you so well, too.'

'Oh, Mysie would have pink. She thinks it suits her,' Madge said lightly. 'I wanted blue, but she wouldn't hear of it. I don't care about complexions and things, so long as it's a nice colour, and I'm very fond of blue. But Mysie said it must be pink, so of course it had to be.'

'Well, she was quite right, you know. You sometimes have to have the doctor in bedrooms, and you may as well be prepared for him,' Elspeth argued. 'But I'm awfully sorry to see you in bed,' and she turned to Mysie again. 'Is it much, do you think? And was it yesterday's wetting gave you cold?'

Mysie laughed. 'There's nothing whatever the matter with me. Do I look ill? Do I sound ill?'

‘No, you don’t do either! But why——’

‘Granny thought I was beginning a cold last night. I was a wee tiny bit feverish—one point or so over ninety-nine—and kind of shivery and aching with the damp, and she made sure I was in for influenza or rheumatic fever or pneumonia or something. She’s frightfully nervous if she thinks we’ve caught cold, and Ninian had bronchitis last winter, and that made her more afraid about *us*. I don’t see why it should. Ninian always has been delicate, but we’ve never had anything wrong with us. But she’s fussy, you see, and she told me to stay in bed to-day. I’d have begged and prayed to get up if it had been fit to go out, but when I saw it was wet I thought I might as well be lazy. The new books came in from the library yesterday—granny gets a box from town, you know, and she lets us choose one each—so I thought a day in bed wouldn’t be so bad. But I’m perfectly all right, and I was just getting tired of reading and Madge when you came. So you see——’

‘If you’re rude, you shan’t have any cake, for I won’t pass it to you. So be careful!’ Madge warned her. ‘I’ve been devoting myself to you all day, like the good kind sister I am, and that’s all the thanks I get. “Tired of reading and Madge!” All right, my dear! Next time you choose to be lazy I’ll go out without you, instead of staying in to cheer you up. And you shan’t have any cake, either.’

‘Then I’ll get out and fetch it for myself,’ Mysie retorted. ‘I’m glad you like my room, Elspeth!’

Elspeth’s eyes had been wandering round again.

‘It’s awfully pretty. I do love pretty rooms. All our rooms at the lodge are pretty, and they’re such a change from school.’

‘Don’t you have pretty rooms at school?’ queried Madge.

‘School! Do you know, I want to go to school more than anything else in the world?’ Mysie said earnestly. ‘Granny says she won’t let us go as long as she’s here to look after us, but I keep hoping she’ll change her mind. The doctor said Ninian would have been better in a warmer place than this last winter, and if granny decided to take him away she might let us go to school. I keep hoping, anyway. I’ve read all I can about school, and I’d just love to go. Look at my books!’ waving her hand towards a bookcase. ‘They’re nearly all school stories. I always choose school stories from the library. I’ve read every one I can get hold of. And yet I have to stay here and do lessons with a governess! I’ve nobody at all to be friends with. There’s only Madge, and——’

‘Only Madge! Poor dear, it is hard lines. Only Madge! What a dreadful fate!’ mocked the despised Madge. ‘I am sorry for you! You are ill-used, aren’t you?’

‘I want to know all the things you did at school, and about the girls, and everything that happened. I want to hear about your friends—the big girls who came here in the yacht the other day, and the one who’s a Duchess, and all the rest. We’ve never had any friends, and we hardly know any girls. We’ve always lived in Glenleny, and never even been to Glasgow. And you’ve been at school for years, and I suppose you’ve often been in London, haven’t you?’

‘Oh yes, often!’ Elspeth said lightly. ‘For exams., you know, and sometimes for concerts or museums or picture galleries. Miss J. was awfully decent about taking me round, especially in the holidays.’

‘No, I don’t know! Who is Miss J.? What were you doing at school in the holidays? And why couldn’t you have your exams. in your own school?’

Elspeth explained elaborately the unreasonable regulations which required candidates to attend at given centres for examination, and Mysie listened wistfully, and punctuated her story

with questions.

‘And then you go home and wait for the results to come. How excited you must all feel! What fun it must be!’ she sighed. ‘Go on! Tell me some more. Tell me how you won the swimming race and saved the Cup for the school!’



## CHAPTER XXIII AN ARRIVAL

Elspeth soon began to reap the fruits of her effort at friendship.

The day after her visit to the Hall was Sunday, and it came bright and clear and calm, a great relief after the showery weather of the week, and a proper kind of day for Sunday.

‘It’s more Sunday-like here than anything I ever saw before,’ Elspeth declared, gazing out over the placid loch and dreamy hills. ‘Everything seems to go to sleep once a week. To-day there isn’t a breath of wind,’ and they listened to the church bells from the village across the loch, some miles away. ‘It never seemed quite like this at school. There were so many of us. We couldn’t be very quiet. But I like this. I like the country on Sundays.’

They were taking an evening walk once more. Mysie and Madge had been in church, and a conscious and somewhat shamefaced look had passed between them and Elspeth, as each remembered the first Sunday, when, as Mysie put it when they met in the porch afterwards. ‘We glared at one another all through the service.’

‘Yes, and tried to squash the babies afterwards,’ Elspeth agreed. ‘You were mad because the Shilfie was asked to go home with you, but you couldn’t be madder than I was when she said she’d go.’

‘Oh, we lectured Ninian frightfully, but it did no good. He always gets his own way.’

‘So does she, somehow. Jock and I did our best to keep her away from him, but we had to give in and leave her alone at last. She says he’s *such* a pweasant boy.’

To atone for her past discouragement of the Shilfie, Elspeth suggested that Ninian should be asked to tea, and the small comrades were left completely happy together, when Janie, Elspeth, and the boys set out with Cleopatra for a walk up the Glen.

Cleopatra, mouthing a big stone, trotted contentedly behind Rob. Elspeth repeated her account of her visit to the Hall, which had already been told several times. Then Janie said, as they sat in the heather looking down on the gardens of the Hall and the loch and hills beyond, ‘Tell me what you can remember of your father and mother and the island,’ and Elspeth sighed.

‘The boys will have to do that. I only wish I could remember more about it. I’ll listen to what they tell you and think I’m remembering it, anyway. But we’re going back some day, you know.’

While the boys told what they could, she lay on the heather and gazed at Janie. She had heard it all many times before, till she was almost coming to believe she did remember it, and her thoughts soon wandered from South Sea Islands to matters nearer home.

For an evening stroll up the Glen, hats were quite unnecessary, and if one meant to lie in the heather were distinctly out of place. Janie was bareheaded, and the evening sun, dropping behind the hills far up the Glen, caught her hair and brought out its brightest colour. Elspeth had conceived an intense admiration for her cousin, and lay and gazed at her in rapt delight, while a thought which had often possessed her returned and drove away all interest in South Sea Islands.

There must have been ‘somebody’ in Glasgow! Janie’s conscious face had betrayed her. The matter had never been referred to again, but Elspeth had not forgotten. Margaret, the friend, had had a family, and Janie had visited them. There had been a brother. Was he

‘somebody’? Had there been ‘anything,’ and had they quarrelled? Or had he been hindered from saying ‘anything’ by his father’s death and the troubles which had followed? Were he and Margaret wondering where they could find their friend?

Elspeth would dearly have liked to discuss the subject with some one. Mysie would be intensely interested. Jock would probably not care very much about it. He would say it was not in his line. But Elspeth recognised the impossibility of talking it over with any one. It would not be fair to Janie. She sighed, as she realised there was nothing to be done. She could only wait—and hope, as Janie did, that some of the unconscious messages might do their work.

‘Dear, dear! What’s that deep sigh for, Elspeth? Was it for the island, dear?’ and Janie turned to her quickly.

Elspeth sat up hastily. ‘Oh no! I wasn’t thinking of that at all. It was something quite different,’ she assured her, but Janie was not satisfied, and began to wonder if there was anything else she could do for them.

‘I don’t believe you and Jock have ever been up to the head of the Glen yet, have you, Elspeth?’

‘No. You see the Shilfie can’t walk so far, and when she isn’t with us we’re usually scouting, so we haven’t had time yet. Is there anything to see when you get to the top? Doesn’t the road just end in another farm? And isn’t it a very long climb?’

‘Very,’ Janie assented. ‘But I think it’s worth it. No, I won’t tell you what there is to see, but one day this week we’ll have a picnic and borrow Andrew Macwilliam’s wagonette, and you shall see for yourselves.’

‘That will be ripping!’ Elspeth said enthusiastically. ‘Couldn’t we take Ninian, and ask Mysie and Madge to come too?’

‘I don’t think there would be room——’

‘Oh, but they could ride. Of course, they must have been heaps of times already, but still perhaps they’d like it. I’d love to give them tea out of my picnic basket, but we’ll have to take plenty of cups.’

‘Very well. I think we can manage the cups. I’ll take a whole holiday, and we’ll make Rob take one too, and all have a jolly time together.’

‘You *are* decent!’ Jock, said appreciatively.

‘And after that it will be time to think about lessons,’ Janie warned him. ‘It’s the middle of September, you know. We can’t be lazy for ever.’

Jock made a grimace, then laughed. ‘Oh, all right! I’ll play the game. It’s a bit of a fag, but I guess there’s no help for it.’

A note for Elspeth awaited them when they reached home, and a very wide-awake Shilfie informed them that the big footman had brought it and had said he thought to-morrow would be a vewy pweasant day, an’ he hoped they’d have a vewy ’joyable twip. Elspeth read the note hastily, and handed it to Jock with sparkling eyes.

‘It’s from Mysie. She wants us to go in the launch with them to-morrow, up to the head of the loch for a picnic at the wee village you told us about, Janie. Won’t it be ripping?’

Jock gave a whoop, for however he might have pretended to ignore the delights of the launch, he was not by any means indifferent in reality, and they went off to bed so excited over the excursion that Elspeth and Sybil and Teddy talked till Janie had to go up and remonstrate. Elspeth explained that it was Teddy who would talk, as he was so ’cited over his twip, and Sybil giggled, but changed her laughter to a sob when Janie threatened to take

Teddy away, if that were the case. She tucked him under her and lay upon him defiantly, and Elspeth promised not to say another word till the morning.

She flew to the window as soon as she woke, but Thomas had been right and it was a very pleasant day, so her mind was at rest. The launch, the cause of all the strife, looked very inviting as they swam about it during the morning bathe, and they would have liked to start immediately after breakfast. But various duties had been assigned them, and these had to be done first. The milk had to be fetched down from the farm, and Jock had to pump water for Janie, and see to her supply of firewood, while Elspeth washed up the dishes and dusted her bedroom. Mysie had suggested ten o'clock for the start, but Elspeth had asked that it might be eleven—'as we have work to do for Janie.' Janie herself would have allowed them to go, and would have done the work for once, but Rob would not hear of it, so the expedition had to be delayed slightly, and Mysie and Madge went for a canter away along the road by the shore.

At eleven o'clock the two scouts and the Shilfie were waiting on the slip by Mr Shaw's ferry-boat. The loch was a long sheet of placid water, the bay before Leny Hall a calm clear mirror for the dark woods on the hill-side. There was not breeze enough for sailing, but for the launch the day was perfect. They were all eager to be off, and waited impatiently for Mysie and Madge, who had gone too far, and had come flying home at full speed to take their ponies up to the stables.

'Sorry! Won't keep you long—if you'll have us in these things! They're nice for the boat,' Mysie cried, as they passed.

So the scouting party discussed the weather with John Shaw, and watched him push off in his big boat as the morning steamer came creeping up the loch.

All the calm and quiet were gone as she came panting into the bay, churning the glassy water into foam, drowning the hills in smoke, and deafening the seagulls with her hoarse roar. The throbbing of her engines had been sounding from far down and across the loch for nearly an hour, in the still air. The paddles ceased for a minute, as she lay beside the ferry-boat, and the creamy foam gushed out and sent ripples washing along the shore and running up the slip to the Shilfie's feet.

'I wish she didn't have to come every day. It's so very quiet till she comes disturbing it all,' Elspeth remarked.

'All the same, she's the only way we can get away when we want to. We can't stay here always. And she brings the letters, to say nothing of newspapers and visitors,' Jock retorted. 'We must know what's going on in the rest of the world.'

'She never brings us letters—or visitors. There! Only one man coming ashore to-day! All that fuss and noise, and all that dirty smoke, for one man!' Elspeth said severely. 'I hope Mysie and Madge won't be ready for quite a while, so that she'll be out of sight before we start. There'll be no peace or quiet till she's round the point, and then as soon as it's all clean and nice again, and the smoke cleared away, she'll begin coming back.'

'Here they come!' Jock laughed. 'Come along the beach to the boat.'

Elspeth lingered on the slip, in no haste to start till the steamer had gone. She liked the loneliness of the loch, and revelled in the thought of penetrating in the launch into the quiet upper reaches where there would be no one but themselves. The presence of the steamer quite destroyed that feeling, and she was anxious to see her go.

Mr Shaw was talking cheerfully to the single passenger, and Elspeth eyed him curiously, wondering if he had come for a picnic all by himself, or if he were on a walking tour through the Highlands. He looked rather like it, for he was young and looked very strong, she thought.

Certainly he was very brown, as if he had travelled or spent much of his time in the open air. Perhaps he had been abroad——

A startling idea had just occurred to her when the passenger sprang out on to the slip, and turning to Mr Shaw asked,—

‘Which is the way to the village? Do you know a Miss Buchanan?’ and Elspeth gasped and stared, wide-eyed.

‘Village, is it?’ chuckled Mr Shaw. ‘Is it the village ye’re wantin’? Weel, the kirk’s doon yonder, an’ the schule’s up beyant, an’ this yin’ll be ma hoose, ye ken, an’ there’ll be twa-three fairms up the Glen, an’ yon’s the Hall. But the village—yon’s a’ the village there’ll be, ye ken.’

The traveller was looking puzzled, when Mr Shaw added,—

‘But if it’s Miss Janie ye’re after, ye’ll fin’ her at the lodge, a bittie up the road, ye ken.’

The stranger turned and strode away, and Elspeth, awakening from a dream, hurried down to the beach in response to an indignant hail from Jock.

‘You are a rotter, keeping us all waiting like that!’ he grumbled.

Mysie eyed her curiously. ‘What is it, Elspeth? What’s the matter? You look as if something nice had happened. Is it a secret?’—disappointedly, as Elspeth, bright-eyed and with flushed excited cheeks, shook her head and scrambled into the boat.

‘I don’t know. It may not be anything. If it is something, it is a secret,’ she said incoherently, and would say no more in spite of all their puzzled teasing.

But she was very thoughtful and unusually quiet as the launch puffed away up the loch. Beyond one man in charge of the engine, the little boat needed no crew, and the children had her all to themselves. Ninian, the Shilfie, and Teddy sat together and were content with their own company, as usual. Jock’s acquaintance with Mysie was making rapid strides, while he had recognised Madge as a kindred spirit at once.

‘Look here!’ he said, as they started. ‘I’ve been thinking we might form a regular patrol, if you’re willing to join. If we let the babies in there will be six of us, and that’s enough.’

‘To be scouts, do you mean?’ asked Madge, with eager eyes. ‘We’ll ask granny to get us floppy hats and things——’

‘We’ll drill in style,’ Jock said with gusto, seeing himself as patrol leader already. ‘We might rig up a stretcher, and practise first aid. You girls ought to know something about ambulance work——’

‘Miss Cameron, our governess, will teach us when she comes back next week. She gave us bandaging lessons last winter,’ Madge said eagerly. ‘I know how to tie a knot and put your leg in splints, and Mysie bandages heads beautifully. We used to practise on Ninian.’

‘That will be first-class! We can practise on Antony and Cleopatra too,’ laughed Jock.

Elspeth, very full of her own thoughts, nodded her agreement, but had not much to say. She was apparently absorbed in the opening way before them, as the hills fell apart and undreamt-of long stretches of shining water appeared, but a picture would come before her dreamy eyes of Janie as she nodded her farewell, sitting by the doorway where she could hear any call to the gate, bending over her embroidery frame, the delicate white web heaped on the floor beside her, and gaunt old Antony sitting upright among the silvery silks on the sheet of rustling paper.

Would she still be sitting there when the brown-faced stranger arrived? Was he ‘somebody’? Was he Margaret’s brother? Had he just returned from Australia? Was he merely a friend, or something more? What news would be awaiting them when they reached home?

She was intensely sorry to be away to-day. She wanted to know what was happening at home. But ever since her arrival at Glenleny she had longed to wander up among the mountains, and keenly interested as she was in Janie's affairs, she was yet able to enjoy the fulfilment of her desire.

The upper loch was very beautiful, very lonely, very wild, and she sat drinking in its wonders as point after point seemed to be the end, but fell back at their approach to show yet another lonely stretch beyond, always narrowing, the mountains always growing closer and steeper, their slopes more desolate and deserted. They rose right from the water's edge at last, bare and rocky, given up to sheep and lined with silver threads of falling water, with wild gray heads and heather-clad shoulders, a fringe of trees and seaweed round their feet. The silence was broken only by the defiant 'chuff-chuff,' of the launch, which echoed among the rocks, and the wash of the ripples on the beach or the splash of falling streams and calling of seagulls. A startled bleat from a straying lamb seemed so loud that Sybil cried out in alarm, and Elspeth spoke barely above a whisper as she said,—

'Isn't it quiet? It almost frightens me, it's so lonely.'

'That s'leep *quite* fwightened my Teddy an' me. Don't think it was at *all* nice of him,' the Shilfie said severely. 'Couldn't think what the funny noise was. Gave me a dweadful fwight, it did.'

'It's like a horrid, sneering laugh, I always think. I want to throw something at them when they do that,' Mysie observed. 'Now this is the last point, Elspeth. Round the hill—in one minute more—now, you see!'

The head of the loch was a quiet pool among the mountains, scarcely a ripple breaking the dark surface, where shadowy pictures of the sombre heights shivered in the depths, and then vanished as a breeze ruffled the mirror for a moment. It was very still to-day, and every crag and shoulder, every tree and patch of heather, was repeated in the sleeping lake, and the great bold heads seemed to nod as they sat in a drowsy circle cooling themselves in the salt tide which had crept so far from its ocean home to meet them.

'And is it really the sea?' Elspeth's voice was awestruck. 'It seems such a long way off. Is it really salt water? Do they have tides up here? It's more like a river or lake.'

'Taste it!' laughed Madge, dipping her finger in and offering it.

'If one of those streams, tumbling down the mountain, thinks it has found the sea when it runs into this quiet loch, and then goes on and on down to the big loch by Glenleny, and still farther on till it comes out in the river, and on again till it comes to the real ocean at last, and there's a big storm going on, with the wind blowing, and the waves all dashing about, won't it be *surprised*?' Elspeth said meditatively.

Mysie laughed. 'Where shall we have our picnic?' she asked practically, and Elspeth came down suddenly from the realm of fancy to discover that she was hungry and that the mountain air smelt very sweet.

They chose a sandy cove beside a stream, opposite the little white village at the foot of the hills, with a sharp blue peak thrusting up behind, and spread their lunch on the rocks. Elspeth opened the picnic basket and explained its history as she waited for the kettle to boil, while Jock and Madge and the babies disappeared in search of blackberries.

'That sharp blue mountain over there is Ben Aan, one of the highest in Scotland. Loch Avie is between us and it,' said Mysie.

'Loch Avie! That's where Jill Colquhoun lives. How funny! I didn't know we were so near.'

‘She’s one of the girls at school, isn’t she? Tell me more school stories!’ begged Mysie. ‘Do you know, I’ve thought of a splendid plan! Granny says she wouldn’t mind. Do you think your cousin would let you come and do lessons with us this winter? It would be nice for all of us. I’m sure I’d work harder if I had some one to try against. You’re younger than I am, but very likely you’re nearly as far on. It would be heaps more fun than working with only Madge.’

‘Only Madge!’ The berrying party returned at that moment, and Madge cried out in pretended wrath. ‘What’s she grumbling about now? I do think it’s hard lines! It’s always “only Madge” nowadays. I’m going to begin it too. I say, Jock, couldn’t you borrow a bike and come riding with us? I’m tired of going with only Mysie! And do come out fishing with me one day! I like fishing, but it’s slow with only Mysie! Will you come and play cricket in the garden to-morrow? I can’t have a really good game with only Mysie!’

But Mysie only laughed, and Elspeth said eagerly,

‘It would be ripping! I’d like it awfully. I wonder if we could?’

‘We could pretend it was school, and have marks and prizes, and the babies could have lessons together too, and be a junior class!’ Mysie said wistfully.

‘Or kindergarten! It would be awfully jolly. But we’ll have to ask Janie,’ and Elspeth’s thoughts wandered back to Glenlenny and what might be happening there, till recalled by Mysie’s peremptory demands for school stories, and the boiling over of the kettle.

## CHAPTER XXIV GREAT NEWS

One matter was finally settled as they sat by the quiet loch with the mountains towering opposite.

'You know,' said Elspeth suddenly, 'the reason you weren't nice to us at first was that you'd been told about our father not wanting to do what your father wanted. Janie told us too.'

'Well, I don't think it was nice of him,' began Madge.

'But we *do!*'

'I suppose it was all right for him to choose,' Mysie said grudgingly. 'But——'

'Well, I just want you to understand from the very first that there never was anybody like him in the world, and that we're more proud of him than if he'd been a millionaire or done most wonderful things or been very famous. See?'

'Oh, but——' began Madge in remonstrance.

Mysie cut her short. 'Tell us about him, then!' she said peremptorily. 'If you think so much of him, tell us the reason. Perhaps there's something we don't know.'

Elspeth, launched on a subject very dear to her heart, spoke out as vehemently as she had done to Melany, and the girls listened, Madge surprised and puzzled, Mysie very thoughtful.

'It does sound rather fine, when you put it like that,' she confessed, as Elspeth paused at last, breathless, with glowing eyes. 'I hadn't thought of it that way before. And you really think you'd like to go back? You wouldn't be afraid?'

'I'd love to go back. We've talked lots about it since we came here. Rob's awfully keen on it, and he's made Jock and me keen too.'

'Didn't need any making,' Jock said sturdily. 'I always was keen.'

'Well,' said Mysie thoughtfully, 'we won't say anything about your father you wouldn't like. Perhaps it was better for him to do it, if he felt he had to, as you say. Go on being proud of him!'

'I'm going to! And even if we can't go back to school, I'm going to work hard here, so that I'll be ready when Rob wants me to go back with him. I'm going to get my B.A. and be trained as a teacher, and Sybil is to go into a hospital and learn nursing thoroughly'—Elspeth's ideas had crystallised since her talk with Melany, and she had no doubts now as to her own future.

In spite of her enjoyment of the picnic, in spite of the beauty of that quiet mountain haven, Elspeth was early ready to go home. Mysie and Madge would willingly have spent the afternoon cruising about, but she insisted that they ought to go home to tea, as the Shilfie went to bed so soon after.

'Well, we'll get you home by six, if you really think you ought to,' Mysie said unwillingly. 'But why you're in such a hurry I don't know.'

Elspeth had no explanation to give, so fell back on the excuse of Sybil's bedtime, and Mysie had to yield.

Jock and Madge were full of plans for the future of the patrol, and discussed them all the way home, while Mysie listened and criticised, and Elspeth sat dreaming in the stern. The crest of the patrol was to be a shilfie, out of compliment to its youngest member, and Janie was to be asked to embroider a patrol flag. It was to meet for drill on the lawn of Leny Hall,

and when something like perfection was reached Jock intended to hold a review, to which Mysie suggested that Queen Lexa from Morven should be invited. At her suggestion, also, it was agreed that members should so far as possible have all things in common, and, in particular, that she and Madge should teach Jock and Elspeth to ride, and should themselves be initiated into the mysteries of scout lore and taught to swim. Colours and passwords were discussed, but there was still much to be settled when the launch puffed noisily into the bay.

‘Aren’t you goin’ to pway too, E’speth?’ asked the Shilfie anxiously, glancing at her sister’s dreamy face. ‘Hope you’ve ’joyed your twip? You’re vewy quiet. Sure you feel quite well?’

‘She’s seasick,’ suggested Jock.

‘She’s sleepy. Sailing always makes granny sleepy,’ jeered Madge.

‘I’m not! I’m wide awake—but I *was* dreaming, I think. But I’m very wide awake now,’ and Elspeth sat up suddenly, her eyes ablaze, for she had seen something.

The whistle of their siren had given notice of their coming long before they reached the bay, and Rob had come down to the beach to meet them. That was unusual, and her hopes leapt up with a bound. Did it mean news?

‘Why, there’s old Rob! It takes something to drag him from his work nowadays. What’s he after, I wonder?’ cried Jock.

‘Come to see if we’ve brought you safely home,’ laughed Madge.

‘Come to say it’s vewy nea’ my bedtime, an’ to be as quick as I can,’ piped the Shilfie.

‘Elspeth looks as if she thought she knew,’ and Mysie eyed her curiously.

‘I don’t know, but I want to get out and ask him,’ Elspeth confessed impatiently.

‘What’s up, Rob?’ cried Jock anxiously. ‘Anything happened?’

Rob seemed in unusually high spirits, but did not gratify their curiosity immediately. He greeted their questions with a laugh, and answered them with another.

‘Had your tea, kiddies? No? Then scorch up to the house and start at once. Bella’s warming the teapot. We thought maybe you’d had it. Janie’s away up the Glen, and we’re all to hurry after her and drive her home. Mr Macwilliam’s waiting, so buck up.’

‘But why? What a funny idea! What’s up?’ cried Jock in frank astonishment.

Elspeth hung on to Rob’s arm. ‘Tell us, Rob! Be a dear, and explain! Who was that nice brown man who came by the morning steamer, and asked where he could find Miss Buchanan?’

‘Hello! I didn’t hear that. You never said a word about it, Elspeth, you rotter! Why did you keep it to yourself all day? Has Janie had a visitor, Rob?’

‘I *knew* she had something on her mind,’ Madge said triumphantly.

Mysie, looking exceedingly curious, asked anxiously,—

‘Is it a secret? Mustn’t you tell while we’re here? Must we go away? Surely Janie—Miss Buchanan—hasn’t gone away up the Glen all alone?’

‘Who’s with her, Rob?’ cried Jock, while Elspeth looked her question imploringly.

‘S’ould think she’d find it vewy dull all by herse’f! Not vewy pweasant ’thout somebody to talk to! Why didn’t she wait for us, Wob?’

Rob laughed. ‘It isn’t a secret, but you all talk at once, you know. She’s with *him*. He’s been here all day, and he had so much to say that he lost the boat. Never thought about it till it was half-way down the loch. Neither did she. So he’s off to walk round the hill. She wanted to show him the Glen, and I suppose they had more to say still. So they went off together, and she said you could come after her and bring her home, if you liked.’



‘Oh! I’m so *glad!*’ breathed Elspeth, while the others stared and gasped, quite breathless with the suddenness of it.

Then Madge broke into a little dance of delight, clapping her hands.

‘Your cousin? Oh, how jolly! She *is* so pretty! That’s awfully nice! Will she have the wedding here? I *say!* Won’t it be splendid!’

‘Oh, I *am* glad!’ said Mysie, flushed and bright-eyed. ‘I’ve often wondered why she didn’t get married. Elspeth, I believe you’ve known all day! That’s why you were in such a hurry to get home.’

‘I didn’t know. I only hoped. I knew something about it,’ Elspeth explained, her eyes shining. ‘I was quite sure there was somebody, but she wouldn’t talk about it. But he came by the steamer, and I did hope he was the right one.’

‘But who is it?’ demanded Jock, grasping the situation less quickly than the girls.

‘She met him in Glasgow, when she was at college, or Edinburgh,’ Elspeth explained. ‘He has a sister Margaret, who was her friend, and he’s been away to Australia all this year on business. Isn’t that right, Rob?’

‘I gathered that much from their conversation at dinner, but I had no idea you knew so much about it, kiddie. You’ve kept it very dark——’

‘Oh, well, it was her secret. She told me not to talk about it. He had business troubles of his father’s to see to. Do you know if it’s all come right?’

‘Apparently it has, but he wouldn’t ask her to marry him till he had settled things up. Then he didn’t know where to find her, and she thought perhaps he hadn’t really cared, so she couldn’t very well write and tell him where she was. His sister—I believe the name was Margaret!—has just been married, and among her presents was something Janie had designed, and she recognised it as her work, and traced her that way.’

‘Oh, I am glad!’ Elspeth sighed fervently again, while Madge cried gleefully,—

‘Some of the lovely needlework you were telling us about? How awfully interesting! But how funny that he should find her that way!’

‘They’re going to get married soon—perhaps at Christmas,’ Rob continued enjoyably. ‘He’s tired of travelling and wants to settle down. So they’ll live in Edinburgh, and send you kids back to school—Janie thinks she will be able to manage it out of the farm now. It’s been a good year, you see, and things will be rather different——’

‘Oh!’ Elspeth’s eyes met Mysie’s, and there was a dismayed silence.

Then Mysie said gloomily, ‘You are a lucky girl! You’ll go back to school, and we’ll have to go on in the same old way.’

‘But I don’t think I want to go back!’ cried Elspeth sharply. ‘It means leaving everything and everybody, and it’s so awfully jolly here.’

‘We’ll make granny let us go too. She must! She shall! We’ll cry our eyes out, and pine away and starve till she says yes,’ cried Madge.

‘And we’ll all come here for the holidays,’ Rob continued. ‘They promise always to live here in holidays. They’re going to make Bella Macwilliam get married and live here the rest of the time.’

‘Oh! And what does Bella say to that?’

‘She says, “Anything to please ye, Miss Janie!” I think she must have somebody up her sleeve too.’

They had reached the lodge by this time, and Rob paused.

‘Now hurry up over tea, kiddies, or it will be too late, and she’ll have to walk all the way home.’

‘Oh, couldn’t we come too?’ cried Mysie wistfully. ‘I would like to congratulate her at once. If we’re very quick over tea? We could ride, you know. It would be nice all to go together.’

‘You’d better come in and have tea with us, then. It’s all ready, so that would be quickest,’ Elspeth said eagerly.

‘We’d love to. Then we can go on talking about it over tea.’

‘What’s his name? What is she going to be? Mrs what? Oh, I say, look at the cat!’ cried Madge.

Antony, his legs and tail very neatly arranged in the smallest possible space, was sitting on the tea-table in the midst of the dishes, while Cleopatra pranced wildly round on the floor, convinced that Tony was getting something which she could not reach. Elspeth laughed, and dropped Antony gently on the front table in his usual place.

‘He’s so very neat. He doesn’t take up much room, the darling, and he never touches anything. He only sits there for company. He’s so very sociable, and he arranges himself so neatly that Janie lets him sit there sometimes. She says she thinks he could sit on a sixpence if he wanted to.’

‘His name is Fraser, but she calls him Jack,’ said Rob. ‘I’m not referring to Antony, you understand.’

‘Jack and Janie. John and Jane. H’m!’ murmured Elspeth.

‘Mrs Fraser! Doesn’t it sound rummy?’ cried Jock.

‘And I suppose when he—when *Jack* arrived, she was sitting there like the Lady of Shalott, sewing by the door. That’s just what I always hoped would happen! And that lovely white cloudy thing will do for her own wedding-dress, after all. Isn’t that just ripping?’ sighed Elspeth happily.

Rob laughed. ‘A tragedy was enacted during the afternoon. She forgot all about the “lovely white cloudy thing,” as you call it, and Tony was discovered sitting in the middle of it. He hadn’t done any harm, however,’ as Elspeth cried out in dismay, and shook her fist at dignified Antony.

After a hasty tea, they crowded into the wagonette, while Mysie and Madge raced off to fetch their ponies. Janie had left special permission for Sybil to go too, and the Shilfie was nearly beside herself with delight.

‘It’s a good thing she’s not going to bed at once, for she’d never go to sleep. She’s far too excited,’ Elspeth said severely.

‘Been a vewy ’citin’ day, you know. Think it’s vewy pweasant to go dwiving at night. *So* kind of Janie to let me go. Mean to ’joy myse’f vewy much. Such a pweasant evening, isn’t it?’ said the Shilfie contentedly.

‘Oh, well, it’s an unusual kind of occasion, you know. It’s not likely to happen very often,’ laughed Rob.

‘Wis’ Janie would get ’gaged evvy day,’ murmured Sybil, as they drove up the Glen right into the golden sunset.

Ninian was tucked in between her and Elspeth, wrapped in a big plaid, for there was a touch of autumn chill in the evening air. He loosened the end of it and drew the Shilfie in, and Elspeth with a laugh tucked it close about them, and dropped a kiss on the tip of Sybil’s nose. Then she turned at sound of flying hoofs, and Mysie and Madge came cantering up.

Madge greeted her with a whoop of delight, her face ablaze with excitement. Mysie cried eagerly,—

‘Elspeth! Elspeth! Such news! Granny’s had a letter from our governess, while we were away to-day, saying her mother is ill and needs her at home, so she can’t come back, and granny says if you’re going back to the same school, *perhaps*, just *perhaps*, she’ll let us go too. Wouldn’t it be splendid?’

‘Simply ripping!’ and Elspeth’s eyes blazed responsive to theirs. ‘But I’ll be sorry to leave Glenlenty, you know.’

‘But, I say! What about the scout patrol?’ cried Jock.

‘Oh, that will keep for holidays. We’ll all come here for holidays, you know.’

The sky was all red and gold, with pale greens and blues above, as they drove up the long Glen towards the hills standing out black and bold against the brightness of the west. Very soon they had passed the farthest point which Jock and Elspeth had yet reached, and had begun the long climb. Mr Macwilliam turned all but the babies out of the wagonette and led his horse up the stony winding road. Mysie and Madge dismounted also, and they all toiled up the steep way on foot. Up and up they went, round shoulders of the hill, with always another corner and another white stretch of path in front, while the hills on each side drew so close that only the road and a noisy stream could break through.

Then the cliffs fell back a little and the road was easier, while in the distance blue mountains began to show. On each side of the unfenced road were purple stretches of moor, sweeping away up to the hills, and in front was more moor, and then a great dark range, very steep and bare.

On the edge of the moor among the heather, there suddenly appeared Janie, in her white dress. She waved her hand, and they forsook the road and plunged through the heather to meet her. Elspeth and Jock made straight for the hillock on which she stood, but Mysie and Madge more wisely followed a winding path round the hill. The other two were in difficulties immediately, between treacherous bogland and tangled roots, but striking another path made better progress and raced after the girls.

Elspeth came suddenly to the crest of the moor, and stopped abruptly.

‘Oh!’ she panted. ‘Oh! I didn’t know. Oh, why didn’t we come before?’

A dreamy shadowy loch lay between the moor and the range of dark hills. It was very narrow and very still, fringed with stately firs looking down at their own reflection. Not a ripple broke the surface, and only the cry of the moorland birds disturbed the silence. The loch curved away among the hills, reaching out to blue heights in the north and winding among bold bare hills to the south, all their rugged sides seamed with silver streams and broken by great shoulders of rock. A white road ran like a ribbon along the margin at the foot of the moor. On the other side there was barely room for a footpath, so steep was the slope.

‘And it’s been so near us all this time, and we never knew!’ breathed Elspeth. ‘Oh, why didn’t we find it before? Is it always like this, I wonder?—all asleep and dreaming, and not a sound anywhere? It’s the ghost of a loch, with ghostly hills. I believe I’m only dreaming it.’

‘It’s real enough,’ laughed Janie, coming to her over the heather. ‘I thought you’d like it. Isn’t it very beautiful? So you didn’t know what lay at the head of your own Glen!’

‘Oh!’ Elspeth turned to meet her. ‘Janie, I *am* so glad! It’s just what I hoped for. It’s just perfect. I don’t mean the loch, you know. But where is he? Can’t we see him? Is he nice?’

Janie laughed, and stood looking down the road, shading her eyes with her hand.

‘You can’t see him to-night. He’s turned the corner. So we had better take the Shilfie home to bed,’ she said.

‘But we want to see him, Janie!’

Janie laughed again. ‘Oh, he’s coming back to-morrow.’

‘Then you must go home and finish the wedding-dress,’ Elspeth said contentedly. ‘And please, will you show it to Mysie?’

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE WHITE SHIP COMES AGAIN

Elspeth woke next morning all eagerness for her introduction to the brown-faced stranger she had seen the day before. Mysie and Madge were equally curious concerning 'Janie's young man,' as Jock had irreverently dubbed him, and they were all on the beach long before the steamer could possibly arrive. The Lady of Shalott had declined to be of the party, preferring to await her friend at home, and Elspeth had applauded her resolution heartily. It satisfied her sense of fitness that when *he* arrived,—'Janie's Jack,' as she preferred to call him—Janie should be sitting by the doorway, the snowy net piled about her on the floor, her fingers busy with the shining silver threads, and Antony, a tall thin figure, sitting purring noisily on his sheet of paper, as close to his mistress as he could induce her to allow. So Elspeth and the Shilfie saw Janie settled to their satisfaction and her own amusement, and then raced down to the beach to join the others.

Their household tasks had been hurried through, and it was only ten o'clock. Mysie and Madge had refused to go for their usual ride, for fear *he* should arrive while they were away, but they admitted the uselessness of beginning to expect him so early, when the steamer was not due till eleven o'clock, and would very probably be late.

'A good chance for some drill, then, that's all,' cried Jock, and marshalled them into line, Ninian and the Shilfie at the end, and Elspeth as leader.

He was putting them through their paces, giving his orders with quite extraordinary fierceness, in a peremptory tone which startled Madge and almost frightened Ninian, but which Sybil accepted with her usual easy complacency and a cheerful smile, when Elspeth fell out of her place in the line to stand pointing excitedly down the loch.

'Oh, look! look! It's that yacht come back again. I do believe!—the White Ship, you know, where Melany took us for tea!'

A big white yacht had come round the point while they were all looking the other way, and was creeping swiftly up the loch towards them. They all stood watching admiringly, with wondering comments as to why she had come and where she could be making for.

'She's a ripper,' Jock said enthusiastically. 'You were jolly lucky kids to get the chance of going on board. Is it the same one, do you think? They're all so much alike.'

'Oh, no, they're not. *I* can see differences, if you can't,' Mysie said quickly. 'It is the same yacht. I wonder if your friends have come to see you again, Elspeth?'

'The pretty Scotch girl said perhaps she would. I say, wouldn't that be ripping? But perhaps they're just going for a cruise, like we did yesterday.'

'No, she's slowing down!' Jock cried eagerly. 'I say, d'you think they'd take us on board again? That wouldn't half be ripping——'

'Here comes a boat!' cried Madge excitedly. 'How awfully nice of them! Are your friends in it, Elspeth?'

'It would be jolly to meet some of the girls from your school,' Mysie said wistfully.

Elspeth gazed at the white boat, shading her eyes with her hand.

'Melany isn't there,' she said, 'but the pretty girl with the reddy hair is—and a boy. I wonder who he is? There wasn't any boy before.'

'What's her name?' asked Mysie, eager to be prepared.

‘Eilidh. It means Helen, and it has a dh at the end that you don’t say—just Eily! Melany told me.’

‘I know. It’s Gaelic,’ Madge said importantly.

‘Oh, do you know Gaelic?’

‘N—no,’ confessed Madge reluctantly. ‘But I’ve heard people talking it. Old Peter—the gardener, you know—talks Gaelic, and wanted to teach us, but granny wouldn’t let us learn.’

‘This girl knows it. She talks funny English too. Here they come!’

They all hurried to the slip, the expected arrival of ‘Janie’s Jack,’ quite forgotten in this new excitement.

The white-clad sailors brought the boat up beside the slip, and Jock ran down and caught the bow to hold her steady. The boy in the boat, who was of Jock’s age, but considerably smaller, sat lazily in his seat, while Eilidh sprang out eagerly on to the slip.

‘Rather bad manners, that boy,’ thought Elspeth severely. ‘It’s a good thing Mr Shaw can’t see him; he’d talk to him if he did. He’s always so particular about making Jock help me and Sybil.’

Jock had much the same thought.

‘Lazy bounder!’ he said to himself. ‘*He* thinks a lot of himself, evidently. I’d jolly well like to punch his head.’

There was something in the strange boy’s contemptuous smile as he eyed the scout’s costume, put on to do honour to ‘Janie’s Jack,’ that roused Jock’s instant antagonism. He turned his back on the boat, and looked appreciatively at Eilidh, for, like Prime Minister Jim, he knew a pretty girl when he saw one.

She wore a dress of pale blue muslin, with a loose white strap belt, and over it a big warm coat of navy blue, unbuttoned at the moment, and a blue knitted cap on her loose red-gold hair, which fell to her waist in curly shining waves. She was talking eagerly to Elspeth and the Shilfie, her face aglow with anticipation, her words tumbling over one another in her haste, the soft Highland accent more pronounced than ever in her anxiety to explain her wishes.

‘We haf come to carry you off for the day, all of you, as many as will come! It issn’t so ferry far to my Loch Ruel, an’ I’m ferry lonely there now, with just Miss Mollie. So I want you to come with me on the yacht for the day. We will bring you back whateffer time you like, but ton’t make it any earlier than you really have to, now, will you? Some time in the evening we will bring you home, an’ I do so want to show you my loch, and my seffen babies, an’ my Sandy, an’ everything. Do say you can come!’

The proposal left them breathless for a moment. Sybil was the first to recover, and to gasp excitedly,—

‘Would be vewy pweased to go! Would be mos’ de-wight-ed! Think it would be jus’ wovewy, Pwincess.’

Jock looked at Elspeth, and Elspeth at Jock. Mysie looked wistfully at them both and then at Eilidh, and Madge cried eagerly,—

‘Oh, do you want us too? *Do* say we may come! We’ve never been on a yacht, and we’re just longing for the chance.’

‘Inteet, I will be ferry pleased,’ and Eilidh dimpled mischievously. ‘But I ton’t know who you are, you know.’

Elspeth introduced them hastily, and Eilidh said thoughtfully,—

‘Campbell? I knew some one called Campbell once, but I haven’t seen him for a long time now.’

‘That’s the chap I didn’t like, isn’t it?’ asked the boy in the boat unexpectedly. ‘Thought you’d forgotten all about him long ago.’

‘I neffer forget!’ and Eilidh turned on him sharply.

‘Oh, well, the country’s full of Campbells, anyway——’

‘*We* are Campbells of Glenleny,’ said Mysie, with a slight tilt of her little chin.

‘I am ferry pleased to meet you,’ Eilidh said, as ceremoniously as the Shilfie herself could have done, and then, with her native hospitality, ‘and if you think you can come with Elspeth and her wee sister, I will be ferry pleased. Iss this your brother you told us of, Elspeth?’

‘It’s Jock. He’s a scout,’ Elspeth explained unnecessarily.

‘I can see that. I have seen them in London many a time, but I have never met one before,’ Eilidh said graciously. ‘You’ll like to come on the yacht, won’t you?’

‘Rather! Not half! She’s ripping,’ Jock said enthusiastically.

Elspeth poked him in the ribs. ‘You mustn’t talk slang, or she’ll catch it. I told you before, you know.’

Jock reddened uneasily, and Eilidh laughed.

‘Please don’t make him uncomfortable. Indeed, Jock, I won’t listen if you say bad words. That laddie in the boat is Larry Avery. You can talk to him. His mother’s house is near ours on Loch Ruel, so we’ve been together a good bit. You can tell him all about scouts. Oh, no, he issn’t one! He iss ferry much too lazy.’

Larry laughed, and Jock commented in an undertone,

‘He looks it. A regular slacker, I should say.’

‘Well, now, can you come at once? Or must we go and ask somebody?’

‘Oh, we’ll have to ask. It would be awfully jolly. I wonder if Janie will let us?’

‘I’d love to go,’ said Mysie wistfully. ‘But I’m quite sure granny will say no. You know she will, Madgie. It’s no good asking, I’m afraid. It really isn’t worth while.’

‘Oh, but we’ll ask, anyway. Come on! She might say yes this time. You never know. Besides, see how she’s changing her mind about school,’ cried Madge hopefully.

She and Mysie raced away through the trees to Leny Hall, and Elspeth and Jock turned up the road with Eilidh, leaving Larry still lying lazily in the boat.

‘It’s too beastly hot. I’ll wait for you here,’ he called after them, and Eilidh shrugged her shoulders.

‘That Larry Avery! He iss just laziness all through. But it iss hot, an’ I forgot to take off my coat. I meant to leave it in the boat. How ferry silly! Now I’ll have to carry it. It was a wee bit cold out on the water, you see.’

She slipped off her ulster and threw it over her arm. Jock said quickly,—

‘I’ll run back with it for you, shall I? It’s only a step. I’ll chuck it at that lazy slacker in the boat.’

Eilidh’s eyes danced. ‘No, ton’t do that. But if you would put it in the boat for me I would be ferry much obliged. Thank you so much! It iss good of you!’

Her cool muslin was more suitable for the heat of sheltered Glenleny, and she walked with greater comfort as Jock hurried back with the heavy coat.

‘Isn’t Melany with you?’ Elspeth asked eagerly, as they walked up the road under the trees.

‘No, they have gone away back to Switzerland, and I do miss them so much. I was ferry fond of them both. An’ Mrs Grant an’ her wee boy are away to stay with some friends in Perthshire, so Miss Mollie an’ I are all alone in the big house. I have been so lonely, so I

thought of you, and Miss Mollie said I could come for you and bring you back if I liked. Of course, there iss Larry, but I'd rather have a girl for a friend. I haven't known many girls. And Larry is—well—!' and she shrugged her shoulders again, 'not all I want, sometimes.'

'Is he the boy Melany said she had quarrelled with?'

Eilidh laughed. 'Yes. They had a great quarrel in Switzerland. Larry cheated her, an' she was ferry angry. He really was ferry bad that time, and Melany wanted to tell him what she thought of him. But she has neffer met him since, and he only came to Loch Ruel three days ago, after she had left, so she didn't meet him even then. She was wild when she heard he wasn't to come till after they went away. He always has been good at playing tricks on people, that Larry.—Oh, what a ferry pretty house!'

'Yes, that's where we live,' Elspeth said proudly. 'The boys live in one tower, and Sybil and I in the other. The gates belong to Mysie's house, you know, and our cousin is the gatekeeper. You'll like her. She's pretty too.'

'And do you really live in these old towers? But how ferry nice! Aren't you proud of your house?'

'Rather! I should just think we are.'

'Oh, *what* a fat dog!' as Cleopatra came rolling out from the kitchen to greet them.

'She is rather round, isn't she? She's always stealing scraps, you see, and we can't stop her. Jock will feed her when nobody's looking, too. I'm quite sure he does, though I've never caught him at it. He says he can't resist her pleading eye. She can look very hungry when she tries, even if she's just that minute finished her dinner. Now come and see Janie.'

Eilidh paused at the corner, before Janie had caught sight of them.

'Oh!' she said again. 'How pretty she is!'

Janie sat very intent on her work, her eyes fixed on the silky breadth she was placing in her frame. Antony was purring noisily in the sunshine, which was warming his thin back so pleasantly, and Eilidh's eyes wandered to him after her first long look at Janie.

'Iss that your cat? But issn't he thin? Don't you effer feed him, then?'

'We're always feeding him,' Elspeth said indignantly. 'We do our best, but he won't get fat, however hard we try.'

'My Sandy iss quite big and fat. I'll show him to you. Let's go and ask her. I do hope she'll let you come!'

Janie looked up in surprise as they approached, knowing the steamer could not have arrived yet, and wondering where Elspeth could have found a stranger. But she had heard all about their visit to the yacht and the new friends they had met there, so she soon gathered from the rather incoherent story poured out so eagerly who the girl with the red-gold hair must be and where she had sprung from.

Elspeth and Sybil ran to her, both talking at once, interrupting one another and pleading anxiously to be allowed this great treat. Eilidh stood and listened and laughed, stroking Antony with fond gentle hands, and looking admiringly at the delicate white cloud in whose midst sat Janie.

'I do hope you will be able to let them come,' she said earnestly, when Elspeth paused for breath and gave her a chance to speak. 'I will be so disappointed if you say no, and I have to go home alone. I want them ferry much indeed.'

And Sybil's little voice piped wistfully,—

'Would be vewy pweased to go with her. Think it would be vewy pweasant on the big boat. *So* kind of her to ask us!'



‘And it’s so hot. It’s just a proper day to go on the water. Do let us go, Janie!’

‘Well, I really don’t see why you shouldn’t, you know,’ Janie laughed, with a pardonable thought for the peaceful hours the expedition would allow at home.

Elsbeth cheered, Eilidh’s face lit up, and the Shilfie broke into a delighted smile of anticipation.

‘So good of you, Janie! Think you’re vewy kind. Much obwiged to you, I’m sure.’

‘It iss good of you!’ Eilidh said earnestly. ‘We will be ferry careful of them, an’ bring them back in the evening some time. You don’t want them too early, do you? We’ll have tea at home and then come back here afterwards.’

Some persuasion was needed to win Janie’s consent to this. In consideration of the Shilfie’s late night the day before, she was inclined to stipulate for an earlier return, but Eilidh’s persuasive tongue won the day at last.

‘If she feels sleepy, we will put her to bed in the cabin. The yacht has the cosiest cabin. She would be ferry comfortable there. An’ I would so ferry much like to have her. I just love babies an’ wee children. I have seffen at home I am going to show Elspeth this afternoon.’

‘Hadn’t you better change your dress, Elspeth?’ suggested Janie, with a glance at the much-worn brown tunic and white slouch hat.

‘Well, buck up, do!’ cried Jock, arriving in the doorway. ‘Don’t waste time posing in front of the glass!’

‘Oh, please, I want her to come at once! Elspeth, please don’t trouble to change. Indeed, you will see nobody but Miss Mollie and the babies and me. There is nobody to dress up for, you see. Please, may we go at once? We must get home for lunch.’

Janie laughed. ‘Oh, very well. Run along then. Don’t you want to take my old Tony with you, Eilidh?’

‘I would love to! But you see I have my own Sandy—a big yellow cat, who loves me better than anything or any place in the world. He goes nearly everywhere with me, except travelling, of course. I am afraid he might not like your Tony. Elspeth, you must take your coat, or I shall have to wrap you and your wee sister up in rugs.’

‘Here come the other girls!’ Jock announced, and opened the gate for Mysie and Madge.

Their downcast faces told their news at once, and Elspeth said sympathetically,—

‘Won’t she let you go? Oh, what a shame!’

‘Inteet, I am ferry sorry!’ Eilidh said earnestly. ‘I would have been so pleased if you could all have come together.’

‘It’s no good,’ and Mysie shook her head gloomily. ‘Granny won’t hear of it. We’d have loved to go. Elspeth, you do manage to have a good time!’

‘Well,’ said Eilidh hospitably, ‘at least you can come out to the yacht and see what it iss like. You haven’t effer been on one, have you? We’ll show you efferything, but we must go quickly, for we haven’t very long to spare.’

Madge’s face cleared a little, and Mysie said warmly,—

‘It’s very kind of you. We’d like that awfully.’

They hurried down to the beach, where Larry was still lazing in the boat, idly throwing pebbles at the seagulls.

‘What an age you’ve been! It’s blazing hot sitting here in the sun. I thought you were never coming,’ he grumbled.

‘If you weren’t so ferry lazy, you’d have had a nice walk under the trees to the prettiest house you effer saw,’ Eilidh said vigorously. ‘If you are half roasted out here, it iss your own

fault, that's all. Be careful, Miss Shilfie! This is the best way.'

She dropped Sybil into the arms of one of the sailors, then sprang into the boat herself, and turned to give her hand to Elspeth.

'Lazy bounder!' muttered Jock again, as Larry never stirred. 'He *is* a slacker, and no mistake!'

'I'm too beastly hot for anything,' said Larry uneasily, roused to an effort at apology by Jock's glance as he turned to help Mysie. 'We'll have some lemonade and fruit when we get on board. I've been aching for it for half-an-hour.'

'You are a greedy thing!' Eilidh said frankly. 'You had lemonade and fruit as we came past Dunoon.'

'Oh, that's ages ago. I'm quite ready for another tuck-in,' Larry said easily.

'You always are. Tell me a time when you weren't!' Eilidh said scornfully. 'But we mustn't quarrel before visitors. It isn't polite. We are going to show Mysie and Madge all over the yacht, and then start for home at once.'

The visit to the yacht was some slight compensation to the girls for their disappointment, but they were still very envious of Elspeth as they took their places in the small boat again.

'You are a lucky girl, you know,' Mysie said wistfully. 'Well, good-bye! I hope you'll have a jolly time. I only wish granny was as sensible as your Janie!'

'Well, there's one thing!' cried Madge exultantly. 'We shall see Mr Fraser sooner than you, anyway. There's the steamer coming now. He'll be gone long before you get back.'

'Janie's Jack! I'd clean forgotten all about him. Oh, I say!' Elspeth cried in dismay.

'How rotten! So had I. But he'll keep, you know,' Jock said reassuringly. 'He's sure to be here 'most every day now. I guess we'll see plenty of him yet.'

'All the same, it's a pity we'll all be away again to-day. It looks as if we didn't care,' Elspeth observed. 'We'll have to explain to him to-morrow, that's all.'

'Who iss it you want to see?' Eilidh asked curiously, and Elspeth explained, as they sat in the basket chairs and enjoyed the lemonade and fruit for which Larry had craved.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### BABIES ON THE SHORE

The disappointment of not meeting 'Janie's Jack' was soon forgotten in the delight of the trip down the Firth. The White Ship carried them swiftly and very smoothly out of the loch and down the broad open river towards the sea. Elspeth's only sight of these parts had been on the evening of their arrival, when she had been too tired and excited to take it in very clearly, and she was quite bewildered as to their whereabouts. The round bare hill at the point with its bold white castle, the sunny little loch round the corner filled with white-sailed yachts, and with great mountains round its head, the tree-clad slopes above Dunoon and the woods of Ardgowan and Wemyss Bay, kept her gazing in delight, though Jock and the Shilfie were more interested in the steamers and the yachting, for it was a regatta day, and the white-winged birds were out with their canvas at full stretch. Then, passing Toward, they entered the Kyles, and all were deeply interested in the narrow passage through which they had to thread their way.

One great surprise they had as they crossed Rothesay Bay. For Larry, wishing to point out the Hydropathics for Elspeth's admiration, called a sailor and ordered him peremptorily to fetch his field-glass from the cabin, and the man turned to go with a respectful, 'Yes, my lord.'

Jock stared. Elspeth's eyes sought Eilidh's in questioning surprise. Larry, remembering that the glass was not where he had thought, went off to find it for himself, and Eilidh said,—

'Didn't you know? Somehow I thought you did. Of course, we don't call him that. I used to call him 'Mr Lord Larry,' but that was a long while ago.'

'But—*is* he?'

'Oh, indeed, yes! His father is dead, and he is Lord Avery. His mother is Lady Avery. She is a dear, an' has been ferry good to me, whateffer. One time, two years ago, when Miss Mollie's sister was ill, I stayed with them for more than a month, at their house on the loch, so of course we are ferry friendly.'

'How funny!' Elspeth said frankly.

'Oh, well, I didn't know. I guess that's why he's such a lazy bounder,' Jock said grudgingly. 'I suppose that kind of chap is inclined to turn out that way.'

'He iss lazy,' Eilidh admitted. 'But his mother lets him do ferry much what he likes, you know.'

'But—a chap that size! It does seem rummy. How old is he?' demanded Jock.

Eilidh laughed. 'A year less than me—thirteen. But it makes no difference, you know. You don't have to be twenty-one before you can be a lord. Elspeth, don't you think Loch Striven, up there, is very beautiful? It's all so wild and lonely, and such wonderful colours on the hills. Now this is where we go into the Kyles.'

In one corner a lonely loch left the straits and thrust up among the hills. At first glance it seemed deserted by all but seagulls and a few sheep on an islet at the entrance. But as the White Ship crept up to anchor off a tree-covered point, farms and cottages began to show among the dense covering of woods on each shore, and here and there a big house or mansion.

Eilidh leaned over the side, her gray eyes wide with eagerness as she pointed out each spot she loved so well.

‘That wee white farm is where I lived till I was eleven. This is Darmidale Pier among the trees in the corner. Up yonder is Lady Avery’s house, at the beginning of Glenaroon. Well I mind—I mean remember!—the day I first went there.’

Larry chuckled. ‘Yes, Miss, and so do I. Weren’t you scared I’d give you away, that’s all! She’d played a mean trick on me,’ he said, turning to Jock indignantly, ‘and she was in a dreadful funk lest I’d tell mother——’

‘Well, you’d laughed at me. You had no right to. It was only to pay you out, and you deserved it, whateffer!—And this, over on this side opposite my wee farm, is Mrs Grant’s house, where we are going, Elspeth. Captain Grant’s father built it for them last year, and they come here for their holidays whenever they can. But only Miss Mollie and I are living there just now.’

The boat carried them to the shore and set them down on the beach just below the big house among the trees. Elspeth felt a touch of shyness as they climbed the path through the woods to the road, but at the gate stood Mollie Raby, Eilidh’s dark-haired governess and friend, smiling a welcome to her guests.

‘Come away! I’m so glad to see you. Lunch is waiting. I sent word to cook as soon as I saw the yacht at the point. You’ll be able to have a fine long afternoon on the loch. I know Eilidh wants to introduce you to her babies and all her friends.’

‘Oh, bother those babies! I say, Jock, you and I won’t fag over there to mess about with a crowd of kids. Eilidh’s cracked about babies.’

Mollie laughed at Jock’s look. ‘Is this Jock? I think he rather agrees with you, Larry. Besides, such a warlike visitor might alarm the babies. They aren’t educated up to scouts yet. You and he can amuse yourselves somehow, while the girls go over to the farm, I’m sure.’

As Elspeth sat down to lunch, her eyes fell on a big painting hanging in a place of honour on the wall. It represented a nook on the shore, a wall of rock behind, with ferns and tufts of heather in every cranny, a stony beach and stream in the foreground. On a rock sat a small girl of about her own age, with great wistful gray eyes, and waving red-gold hair hanging loosely on her shoulders and about her cheeks and almost into her eyes. She was dressed in tattered garments—a ragged blue skirt with many patches, and a little green tartan shawl thrown over her shoulders—her arms, legs, and neck bare and tanned with sun and wind. On the shingle at her side sat a great sandy cat, gazing out of the picture with wide yellow eyes.

Elspeth looked long at the picture. Then she turned and looked at Eilidh, who laughed and reddened and nodded.

Mollie Raby had been watching her. She asked quietly,—

‘Do you think it’s a good likeness, Elspeth?’

‘Very good! But it’s a long time ago, isn’t it?’

‘Just three years. My brother is the painter. It was the first picture that really made his name, so he feels very much obliged to Eilidh, of course,’ and Eilidh dimpled, and then laughed out. ‘Oh, I believe, it brought him several orders, and he had a number of offers for it, too, but he wouldn’t sell. He wanted it for himself, but he allows Captain and Mrs Grant to hang it here, as he has so many in his studio, and he said it ought to be up here where it was painted. Our private name for it is “The Princess in Tatters,” because she was such a ragged little Highland lassie at that time, and it was just then that my brother and I took her in hand, and began to teach her to say “very” instead of “ferry.”’

Eilidh laughed consciously. ‘And I ton’t—don’t—always remember now, do I? But I do try, you know, Miss Mollie, and besides, it is holiday time just now.’

‘I think you ought to remember a little better sometimes, Eilidh, and especially in holidays.’

‘Oh, well, I will try harder than effer, Miss Mollie, dear.’

‘What a huge enormous beast!’ cried Jock, as a great yellow cat came stalking into the room and leapt up on to the back of Eilidh’s chair.

‘What a beauty! Why, it’s the cat in the picture!’

‘Yes, it’s my Sandy. Isn’t he a beauty?’ Eilidh said proudly, and Sandy sat throughout the meal gazing over her shoulder like the presiding genius of the feast.

‘Now we’ll go and see the babies. You boys can do whateffer you like, if you don’t want to come. *We* don’t care! Come along, Elspeth and Sybil! It iss on the other side of the loch, you know, so we have a long row before us.’

‘I say! Oughtn’t we to go?’ Jock asked doubtfully. ‘To look after them, I mean? Who’s going to row? Elspeth’s no use, though she might fish the rest out if they got upset——’

‘I’m going to row. Oh, we don’t need your help, thank you. I am ferry well able to manage a boat by this time, I think. But thank you all the same.’

Jock hesitated, and looked at Miss Raby.

‘Will they be all right? It seems slack not to go and help.’

‘I’m going with them,’ Mollie explained. ‘So you can be easy about them, Jock. Eilidh is quite able to row us across the loch. She is always at home in a boat.’

‘Indeed, yes, I just love a boat,’ Eilidh said eagerly, and led the way down to the beach.

She proved herself familiar with the pair of light oars, handling them easily and gracefully as she rowed out into the middle of the loch. Mollie Raby sat in the stern, with Elspeth on one side and Sybil nestled close to her on the other, all enjoying the brilliant sunshine and the cool breeze out on the water.

‘*Isn’t* it vewy pweasant here!’ murmured the Shilfie, drowsy with the heat. ‘Do think it was *vewy* kind of you to ask us, you know, Pwincess.’

Eilidh’s name was too much for her stumbling tongue, and she never attempted it, but had adopted Melany’s nickname instead. There seemed a certain appropriateness in it to Elspeth, as she remembered the ragged little heroine of the big picture and then glanced at Eilidh now, in her dainty muslin frock, so thoroughly at home in her very different surroundings. The fact that the story of how the change had come about was not fully known to her only served to deepen Elspeth’s interest in her mysterious hostess, and to surround her with a halo of Cinderella-like romance which was distinctly fascinating.

Eilidh lay on her oars in the middle of the loch and rested, shaking back her red-gold mane with a laugh.

‘I am glad you like it, Miss Shilfie. I am glad to have you here. But I knew you would like my Loch Ruel Anybody would! Issn’t it ferry beautiful?’

She caught Miss Mollie’s eye and laughed.

‘It iss still holidays, you know, Miss Mollie, dear, an’ I can’t always be thinking of the mistakes I make. I don’t suppose I will effer be quite English now.’

‘I think you could try a little harder sometimes,’ and Mollie shook her head reprovingly.

‘I don’t! Well, Elspeth, don’t you think it’s beautiful?’

‘Just perfect!’ and Elspeth drew a long breath of delight as she gazed round at the placid loch, the banks of dark trees mirrored in the depths, the great blue hills in the north—and away to the south, no visible opening to the straits, but a low purple ridge all ablaze with

heather, closing in the loch till it seemed an inland sea, and above the ridge two mountain peaks, pale shadowy blue.

‘Those are the Arran mountains. It is very clear to-day. I love this place, you know,’ Eilidh said earnestly. ‘I have been in Switzerland and seen the snow mountains, and most wonderful lakes, like the one Melany and Zanne live beside at their Castle Charming, and I have seen the lakes in Italy too, and the sea at Naples and Capri. But I don’t love any of them as I do my own loch. They may be more beautiful—though I don’t say I think so!—but I could never like them as I love Loch Ruel. I was born here, you know, and neffer saw any other place for eleffen years, until things began to happen.’

She caught Mollie’s eye again and paused, then went on eagerly, but with a slight change of subject.

‘Now we’ll go on and see my babies. They are always so pleased to see me. I am like their Princess, you know, always taking them presents and helping Mrs Maclachlan, their mother. That iss the best thing of all—that I can help them a bittie. They used to be so dreadfully poor, and there are so many of them.’

She turned in her seat to look forward, shading her eyes with her hand.

‘Yes, there they are on the shore, just where I used to mind them, all waiting for us. I thought they would be looking for me. I told them I would come this afternoon. Do you see them?—those blue spots on the beach.’

She took up the oars and rowed vigorously on, while Elspeth and Sybil looked eagerly ahead to see the babies of whom they had heard so much.

There were seven of them, in charge of a dark-haired sharp-faced girl from the farm. They were all much alike, with short flaxen hair and chubby brown faces, and all were barefoot and dressed in big blue overall pinafores. The two eldest were boys of seven and eight, who might have been twins, so little difference was there in their size. Then came twin girls of six, startlingly like one another and the boys, and then two more boys of four and five, very little smaller. The youngest was a fat rosy baby girl of three, as fair-haired, as brown-faced, as sturdy and rather stolid as all the rest.

‘What a lot of them there are!’ laughed Elspeth. ‘It’s like an infant school. Do you know them all apart?’

‘*Know* them?’ cried Eilidh, infinite scorn in her tone. ‘Why, I haf nursed each one in my arms as a baby, until the next one came. The wee-est of all is my baby-lassie, Helen, who iss called after me. She was just born when I had to go away. She iss the lucky bairn—the seventh, you know. The seventh wean is always lucky.’

‘And what are the rest called?’

‘The big boys,’ said Eilidh impressively, ‘are Jock and Tam,——’

‘And which are the big boys, please? They are all so much alike.’

‘Oh, no, they’re not! Those are Jock and Tam, playing by the burn, the bad laddies! One of them will be falling in, and Lizzie is reading a book and not minding them nicely at all. I will haf to speak to her.’

Mollie laughed. ‘Eilidh is always scolding Lizzie for not doing her duty. She is sure she would mind the babies much better herself, but I *have* heard my brother tell a story about a baby falling in the burn, while Eilidh sat dreaming in the heather.’

‘The big girls are Aggie and Maggie,’ Eilidh went on. ‘They are quite big lassies now—six years old. And the wee boys are Jimmie and Alexander. It was Jimmie fell in the burn yon

day when Mr Raby came. I brought them that big cart from London, and they will neffer be done playing with it.'

Jimmie and Alexander had been dragging a four-wheeled toy wagon, in which Baby Helen sat enthroned, but had dropped the shafts to gaze at the strangers in the boat, as it crept in to the shore. They began to edge shyly towards Lizzie, and Helen scrambled out of the cart and ran to hide behind her sisters.

'Oh!' cried the Shilfie. 'Oh, what a lot of Teddies! How vevy nice! My poor Teddy is at home without me. Never saw so many Teddies all at once before.'

Aggie and Maggie were conducting a school at the foot of the rocky wall. Not being old enough to go to school yet, they were constrained to play at it on every possible occasion. Six big brown Teddy Bears were propped in a row against a rock, with one small one, the property of Baby Helen, at the end of the line. At sight of the visitors, however, the schoolmistresses basely forsook their flock and ran with Helen to the safety of Lizzie's arms, and Eilidh laughed.

'They are still ferry shy, my babies. They ton't seem to learn any better, somehow. I once was shy myself, but I have learnt not to be silly now. But they will soon be used to you, you know. They ton't mind Miss Mollie, and they will stop greeting—crying!—when they see I am here. There, you see!'

She waved her hand, and shy smiles broke through the tears on the stolid faces.

'Am vevy de-*wight*-ed to see so many Teddies!' said the Shilfie eagerly.

'Those were my presents when we came from London six weeks ago. I brought one each all round, and the babies were so pleased with them. They take them everywhere, even to bed or when they fall into the burn, but the Teddies don't seem to mind. I will go and speak to the babies, and presently you may come too.'

She sprang out on to the shingle and called a Gaelic greeting. The babies, seeing she was alone, came running down the beach, and she held out her arms to gather them all in. Their words and hers were quite unintelligible, for even Jock and Tam had only a few words of English, but the warmth of love on both sides was unmistakable.

'They are very fond of her,' smiled Mollie, 'and Eilidh is very faithful to them. I wondered if she would forget them, but she is very loyal, and though we may be away for six months at a time, she is as eager to come back here as ever. I think, as she says, it will always be home to her.'

Eilidh had driven the boat neatly into the mouth of the burn before leaving it, and Mollie stepped out on to the beach and lifted the Shilfie out too. Sybil went straight to the row of Teddies and sat down before them worshipfully, to gaze in eager longing, but not to touch without express permission. Aggie and Maggie tore themselves away from Eilidh's embrace to watch her apprehensively, and Eilidh laughed and said some words of Gaelic to reassure them.

'Come and be introduced, Elspeth. Then we'll go up to the farm and see their mother.—Why, who iss it? Oh, it's Mr Kerr! Oh, what fun! I am so glad!'

Down the steep bank from the road came a tall young man, his face alight with surprise and eagerness.

'I thought I couldn't be mistaken. I was sure that must be Miss Eilidh's voice. Good-afternoon to you all! is everybody all right? Good-day, Miss Raby.'

Eilidh shot a quick glance at Mollie, and Elspeth, following it, saw in Miss Raby's face something of what Janie's had held when she questioned her about 'somebody' in Glasgow.

She waited, keenly interested, and wondered who the stranger could be. He was evidently well known to Eilidh, and even the shy babies did not run away, but after a moment's doubtful hesitation returned to their games. Aggie and Maggie went back to school, and, picking up their Teddies, presented them one by one to Sybil to be embraced, and the Shilfie delightedly sat down to nurse all seven at once.

'We didn't know you were coming to-day, you know,' Eilidh was explaining to the stranger. 'You said you were coming back in the middle of September, and this is the fifteenth, so you haven't lost much time, have you? Larry won't be very pleased to see you, I'm afraid. He's over there across the loch, with Elspeth's brother. They are spending the day with us.'

'Then I had better row you all home again, and perhaps you'll invite me to tea with the rest of your party, and Larry and I can go home together in the evening,' suggested Mr Kerr, with a hopeful look at Mollie.

'Oh no! We will be very pleased to see you to tea, of course,' Eilidh said hospitably, 'but after that we are all going to sail with Elspeth to her home at Glenlenny, so Larry won't want to go home with you early, you know.'

'Glenlenny! Better still. That will be a delightful evening cruise. You'll let me join you, won't you? I've only just come by the afternoon boat, and I was on my way to report my arrival to Lady Avery. I think I ought to tell her I have come. Miss Raby, won't you walk up the road with me? I suppose you are on your way up to the farm, Miss Eilidh?'

'Yes, to see mother—Mrs Maclachlan. Oh, won't you go, Miss Mollie?'

Mollie hesitated. Then her eyes met his frankly.

'I'd like to!' she said.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE FARM OF THE BABIES

Eilidh led the way to the road, and up the steep brae to the little whitewashed farm where the babies lived and where her first years had been spent. The Shilfie had declined to leave those fascinating Teddies, so was left in Lizzie's charge, carrying on an animated conversation with Aggie and Maggie. She could not understand their shy Gaelic replies, but that did not matter. They were deeply interested in her, and she in them, and actual words were unnecessary to the course of their friendship. Sybil herself had always plenty to say, and it took more than shy silence on the part of her companions to stop her flow of conversation. Mollie and the stranger had disappeared up the road in the direction of the big house which was Larry's home during the summer months.

'Who is he?' asked Elspeth, at the first opportunity.

Eilidh dimpled. 'He iss Larry's tutor, Mr Jack Kerr. And I rather think he iss going to be—"Miss Mollie's Jack"! I have been hoping it would happen. I like him, and I think she does too.'

'How jolly! I *am* glad we came to-day. She's awfully nice,' Elspeth said fervently. 'But have you known him long?'

'They saw one another just once or twice here, two years ago, when we came for the summer. Mr Kerr was here with the Averys, but Miss Mollie had to go away to nurse her sister, so he only saw her for two days, and I think he was disappointed. Oh, and they had met once before in the train, she told me. But last year we met in Switzerland, and they got to know each other better then. He was travelling with Larry, and they came to the same place where we were. It was then we met Melany too. And this year Miss Mollie heard from him that he was to spend his holidays at his own house at Cove, not far from your Glenleny, but that in September he was coming here to go on with Larry's lessons. I think he has written to her once or twice. I know she had a letter two days ago, and she was *effer* so long up in her own room reading it, and when she came down her eyes were full of secrets, though she didn't tell me anything, and I didn't like to tease. But I do hope he iss going to—well, we'll see when they come back! I know she'll tell me if there iss anything to be told.'

'How awfully interesting! But if they get married, what will you do? I suppose you'll have another governess?'

'Oh no, I don't think so! No, I'm sure not!' Eilidh cried, in alarm. 'I neffer thought of that. I think I'd have to live with them. I could neffer bear to have anybody else teach me. You know, Miss Mollie iss more than my governess. I belong to her. She iss my guardian too. I'm sure she would neffer send me away to anybody else. But I shall ask her as soon as I get the chance. What a dreadful idea to put into my head, Elspeth!'

'I'm sorry,' Elspeth said apologetically, 'but I thought——'

'I can't bear to think of it! I do hope they'll settle it soon, for I must ask Miss Mollie if I am to stay with her. Well, come in and see my farm. I lived here, you know, and milked the cows, and fed the hens, and baked the scones, and made the porridge, and minded the babies. I used to wash their clothes and all. Oh, I was ferry busy, but I sometimes think I am just as busy now, only with different things. Lessons, you know, and music, and needlework, and drawing. Miss Mollie makes me do them all. Mother!—I always call Mrs Maclachlan my

mother still, for she was instead of my mother for so many years. My own died when I was born, you know, but first of all I had Mrs Maclachlan and then Miss Mollie, so I have been very well off, I think.'

A stout kindly woman came out of the kitchen to greet them, and her face glowed as Eilidh ran to kiss her. In her adopted daughter's loyalty and constant love, Mrs Maclachlan had found her truest reward for her care of Eilidh in her early years. Other benefits she had received in plenty through her thoughtfulness, and the farm of the babies was no longer oppressed by want and poverty, for Eilidh's gifts had been as lavish as her guardians would allow, but the greatest of all to Mrs Maclachlan was the fact that wherever Eilidh might wander, or however much she might learn, the farm of Loch Ruel was still home to her, and her love for mother and babies there remained unchanged.

They sat for a time in the big kitchen, and received a basket of scones and a pot of honey to carry home for tea. As they ran down the brae again, Eilidh laughingly told of her first visit to Lady Avery with just such a burden, and of Larry's delight in the newly-baked scones, and Elspeth wondered again at the astonishing change in her new friend's circumstances.

They had to wait awhile for Mollie and Mr Kerr, so Eilidh gathered the babies round her, and sitting on a knoll among the heather told them a fairy tale in Gaelic, to which they listened open-mouthed. Elspeth watched the expressions on the round brown faces and laughed in sympathy with them, though she could not understand a word of the story, while Sybil played happily with the seven Teddies.

When Mollie appeared at last, her face was very bright, and she smiled reassuringly at Eilidh. But no explanations were possible just then, as Mr Kerr pushed down the boat and bade them all jump in, utterly refusing to give up the oars to Eilidh in spite of her pleading. They pushed off amid shouts of farewell from the babies gathered in a crowd on the shore, and Sybil waved her hand frantically to her new playmates till she was half-way across the loch.

Lord Larry and Jock had been out fishing all the afternoon, but had caught nothing. So Larry was not in the best of humours, and at sight of his tutor he relapsed into sulky silence, which jarred somewhat on the high spirits of the rest of the party. They ignored him, however, knowing from past experience it was the only way to treat him when he was in this mood.

Tea was awaiting them in the garden, and Jock and Mr Kerr waited on the girls, and allowed Larry to wait on himself. The tutor was the merriest of them all, and Elspeth and Jock found him quite an addition to the party. Eilidh was in the highest spirits, too, though Mollie was quiet, and disappeared to her own room after tea. There Eilidh followed her, leaving her guests in the garden, and only appeared again when it was time to go back to the White Ship and start for home.

'It's been an awfully jolly day,' Elspeth sighed happily, as Mollie tucked her and the Shilfie up in rugs lest they should catch cold.

'I'm glad you have enjoyed it,' and Eilidh slipped on her big blue coat and sat down beside them.

'Oh, I've enjoyed it *very* much, thank you! It was so kind of you to think of it.'

'I'm afraid it wasn't, you know. I wanted you to please myself quite as much as to please you,' Eilidh said candidly.

'Well, but that's the best of all,' Elspeth insisted.

'Vewy much obwiged to you, Pwincess, I'm sure. Been a vewy pweasant day. Hope you have 'joyed it as much as I have,' murmured the Shilfie, from her nest of rugs. 'Am *so*

pweased to have seen those Teddies, an' your wee babies.'

Mollie and Mr Kerr had disappeared behind the funnel. The boys were below watching the engines. Elspeth cast a long look over the wide shining stretch of the Firth, as they left the straits behind, and sighed again for very happiness. Then she turned eagerly to Eilidh.

'Did Miss Mollie tell you? Is it fair to ask questions? You can just tell me if it's all right, can't you?'

Eilidh smiled. 'It is "all right," and she iss ferry happy. They will be married sometime, but not just yet. But she says I'm neffer to leave her unless I want to, whether she iss married or not. She says when they do I shall go and live with them, but it won't be just yet, maybe not till I am grown up. I told her she must not wait because of me, and she said she'd see, but she must think of me, because she has promised to look after me.'

'I suppose your father asked her to before he died?'

'I suppose so. Ferry likely. I don't know ferry much about it. And I think we mustn't talk about my father, please, because she doesn't like me to. I don't know anything about him, you know, except that he was ferry sorry when my mother died, an' went away effer so far, and then, when he got rich, he sent all kinds of things for me, and Miss Mollie came to teach me and take me to live with her. I neffer saw him'—wherein she was wrong, though she did not know it—'and Miss Mollie won't let me talk about him, so we will speak of other things instead. Are you going to sleep, Miss Shilfie? I'll bring some chocolates to keep you awake,' and she went to the cabin and brought a big box of fancy chocolates.

'What beauties!' Elspeth said delightedly, hesitating between cream and walnut.

'They came from London. Mr Raby sent them—the painter, you know. He iss always sending me chocolates, big fine boxes like this. So last Christmas I knitted him a tie—Miss Mollie taught me—and he said he'd always wear it till it was too old, and then I could make him another. But,' she laughed, 'he has neffer asked for the second one yet, so it has lasted pretty well.'

The sunset cruise up the Firth was a fitting close to a very enjoyable day. Mollie and Mr Kerr were invisible in a quiet corner, and Jock and Larry in another, so the girls had the deck almost to themselves.

'An' it iss just as well, too, for if Mr Lord Larry saw those chocolates they'd go pretty quick, I know. I keep them for my ferry particular friends, an' ton't let him see them unless he has been ferry good. Then sometimes he gets one,' Eilidh remarked. 'Choose some for Jock, Elspeth, and we'll put some in a wee box for your other friends, too.'

'Here's Glenleny! I'm quite sorry. It has been so jolly,' Elspeth sighed.

'Mus' be long past my bedtime. Hope Janie won't be cwiss,' said the Shilfie, suddenly conscience-stricken.

'Of course she won't. She said you might stay. Couldn't you make a whistle somehow, so that Mysie and Madge will come to meet us? I want to hear all about Janie's Jack,' Elspeth exclaimed, remembering suddenly that home as well as the White Ship held an interesting couple.

Eilidh laughed and spoke to one of the sailors, and the long-drawn squeal of the syren brought the boys from their corner and Mollie from her hiding-place to see what was the matter. Mysie and Madge came running down to the beach, and farewells were hastily said, promises made of letters and possible future meetings and the white boat carried Elspeth and Jock and a rather sleepy Shilfie to the shore.

‘He’s just awfully nice!’ Mysie reported eagerly. ‘Janie’s a dear, you know. She asked us in to tea, because she saw we were feeling bad, so we were introduced to him properly, and he’s splendid.’

‘And we know him before you, after all, if you *have* been off yachting for the day,’ Madge said exultantly. ‘And I don’t know when you will see him, either, for he’s gone away again.’

‘But he’ll come back to-morrow,’ Elspeth cried quickly.

‘Of course he will. *I* know what engaged couples are like,’—began Jock.

‘Oh no, he won’t——!’

‘Not so soon as you think, anyway,’ Mysie explained, ‘for he came to-day to tell Janie he had to go away again on business. He thought it was all settled, but something has turned up, and he wants it all properly finished before they get married. So he’s off to-morrow, and he left a message that we’re all of us to be as nice to Janie as we know how, for it *is* hard on her.’

‘Oh, I say! That is hard lines!’

‘And we’ve never seen him once! Oh, it is hard luck!’ mourned Elspeth. ‘I call that a mean shame. I don’t think I’d have gone with Eilidh to-day if I’d known.’

‘Oh, rot! We’ll see him all right later on. It’s only postponed,’ Jock said cheerfully. ‘Think how ripping it was on the yacht! Larry and I had a hot time in the engine-room with the men.’

‘Anyway, we’ve seen him, and you haven’t!’ Madge clung to her one comfort exultantly.

Elspeth turned impatiently from her to Mysie.

‘Is Janie feeling bad? It *is* hard on her.’

‘Oh well, I think she’s sorry, you know, but she won’t say so. She says she’s going to finish the wedding-dress and get you ready for school. And granny says she’ll have to get Janie to tell her what things we’ll need, so she’ll be too busy to be miserable, she says.’

‘Then you think you really are coming to school? How ripping!’

Mysie nodded. ‘I really think so. Granny seems to be getting used to the idea, and she’s talking of taking Ninian away for the winter to some warmer place. I’m looking forward to it and counting the minutes already.’

‘Oh well, if we can’t see Janie’s Jack, we’ll just have to look forward to school, and make the most of the rest of the holidays, that’s all. But I do hope he’ll turn up here again before we go back. I say! Won’t the girls be surprised to see me? Shall I write and tell them I’m coming back?’

‘No, don’t! Let it be a surprise,’ said Mysie.

## CHAPTER XXVIII AN EXCITING EVENING

It was the first of October, and school had been in full swing for a fortnight. Monica felt that months had passed since she said good-bye to Queen Lexa and the Prime Minister, and Jill's little sister Sheila, who had returned to school with her, had quite settled down in her new surroundings. The holidays seemed a very long time ago.

Study-hour was over for the evening, and the elder girls were gathered round Monica, discussing arrangements for a concert to be given by the school for a local charity. Miss Johnson had asked for volunteers, and Monica was drawing up a tentative programme.

'We can't do anything very exciting, I'm afraid. There used to be Melany Merrill to play and give French recitations. We'll miss her. Jill, you'll have to give us a Scotch song.'

'But not "When ye gang awa', Jamie." She's sung that three times. We really can't stand it again,' protested Margery.

'I'll sing one in Gaelic, if you like,' Jill said obligingly. 'I know some ferry pretty ones. There's "Mo run geal, dileas," that is ferry nice, or "Ho-ro Mo nighean donn, bhòidheach." I know you'd like that.'

'What dreadful gibberish it sounds!' mocked Margery.

'You don't understand it, that's all. The tunes are splendid. Then there's your fiddle, Monica. People always seem to like that, somehow. Put yourself down twice. You'll have to recite, too, since we haven't Melany. No one else is good enough——'

'That's a compliment worth coming back for! What do you want Melany to do? Anything particularly unpleasant?'

At sound of the full ringing voice from the doorway they turned in bewilderment, and then with one accord fell upon her.

'Melany! Where *have* you come from? Have you come to stop? Oh, do say you've come back! That would be ripping——!'

Melany laughed. She wore a light blouse and dark skirt, but no hat or coat, so the inquiry seemed reasonable. Fair-haired Zanne, similarly dressed, kept shyly behind her and shrank from the merry familiar crowd. Melany slipped her hand through her sister's arm.

'Girls! We've come to stop, but please, you mustn't frighten my little sister. She hasn't been to school before, and she's terribly afraid of you all. You've no idea what hard work I've had to get her to come. I've been cheering her up all the way by telling her how nice you were and how much she'd enjoy school, but she doesn't believe it yet. So you must be as nice to her as you can, and don't all talk at once, or she won't understand you. Just leave her alone and let her stay with me till she begins to feel at home. Then she'll be all right.'

'And have you really come to stop? How simply ripping! But why, Melany? How has it happened?'

'Our father is writing another book,' Melany explained, 'and he has had to go off to South America to make sure of some points he wants. We lived last winter in Italy, with our grannies, and in the spring and again this September, we've been at Castle Charming in Switzerland, so now Daddy said we ought to stay in England for a while. They wanted us to go to Italy again, and that would have been heavenly; and *we* thought we might have kept

house for ourselves at Castle Charming while Daddy is away. But he didn't see it, so we've come here to please him.'

'And are you going to run away this time?' laughed Jill. 'How many times did you run away last summer?'

'Only three. No, we won't run away this time. Now what were you wanting me for? What were you all doing? You were so busy that you didn't hear us come in.'

'It's a concert—on the fifteenth. We're trying to get up a decent programme, but it was rather difficult. You'll play, won't you? Do you still keep up your music?'

'Do we? *Do* we, Zanne? How many hours is it you practise? Do we do anything else?'

'Oh, do you play too?' and Monica turned eagerly to shy quiet Zanne, who had laughed softly at the question. 'That will be splendid. Couldn't you play a duet with Melany?'

'Perhaps if you're very nice to her, she'll sing you something in Italian,' Melany suggested. 'But don't say too much about it or you'll frighten her off. She won't mind if I play her accompaniment. We can manage a duet, if you like, but I'd strongly advise you to have a piano solo from her without me to mess it up. You don't know how she plays. They know a little about music in Italy, you know, and she's always practising. She beats me into fits.'

'I say, you'll be awfully useful, you know!' and Jill turned to Zanne in frank appreciation.

Zanne blushed, and began to smile shyly, and Melany's eyes lit up. Monica, looking thoughtful, turned to the shy stranger.

'Do you sing soprano or contralto?'

'Soprano,' murmured Zanne, the colour rising in her fair face.

'How delightful! Then you'll sing a duet with Melany, won't you? I'm sure you must often sing together, since you take different parts.'

The twins' eyes met and they laughed.

'Oh, I guess we could manage that. Daddy makes us sing for him. He says he can think better if one of us is at the piano, or squalling out in the garden under his window. But we aren't going to give the whole programme, you know. What else are you going to have?'

'Oh, Monica's fiddle, of course—people always seem to like that, somehow——'

Monica laughed, and Melany turned to Zanne.

'You'll like that. She plays beautifully. Well?'

'Jill's going to sing a Gaelic song——'

'Oh, not that thing about Jamie and Jeanie she's so fond of?'

'A *Gaelic* song,' Jill corrected promptly. 'I say! What a noise the weans are making!' at a sudden uproar from the classroom next door. 'What do you suppose they are up to?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, I *know*,' and Melany smiled mysteriously. 'Because we saw her in the train. But I mustn't tell you. You'd better go and see. She's brought two jolly pretty kids back with her.'

'Who? What do you mean? What are you talking about?' and Jill and the others made for the door.

The classroom was in an uproar. Mademoiselle was forgotten in the excitement. Any interruption to needlework class was a relief, but this was a very great surprise.

Elsbeth Buchanan, laughing and excited, was the centre of an excited questioning crowd. By the door, looking on, rather bewildered, stood two dark-haired, dark-eyed girls, the elder eager-faced and interested, the younger merely amused. They wore neat blue skirts and ties, with pink ribbons in their hair, and blouses of their favourite pale pink, as like Elspeth's as they could contrive, save that her blouse and ribbons were blue.

‘Why, it’s Elspeth come back! How weird! Come here and give an account of yourself, child. Did Miss J. know you were coming? She might have told us.’

‘Oh, yes, she knew ever so long ago,’ Elspeth laughed, and perched on a desk to answer questions.

‘She knew we were coming too. She’s been lying low to give you a surprise,’ said Melany. ‘We decided in the train you’d get a bit of a shock. You see, we met Elspeth at Victoria, so we all came out together.’

‘And why didn’t you come at the beginning of the term, Elspeth?’ demanded Monica. ‘What do you mean by lengthening out the holidays like this? You must have had nine or ten weeks.’

‘And why don’t you introduce your friends?’ asked Jill severely, and eyed them critically, then nodded as if she found them up to standard.

Mysie and Madge gazed back at the elder girls, bright-eyed, with deep colour in their cheeks. This entrance into the long-desired school life was very exciting and deeply interesting. Ever since their grandmother’s consent had been won they had been looking forward to this moment and building castles in the air of the wonderful life before them.

‘They’re Mysie and Madge Campbell, and we live close together at home,’ Elspeth explained. ‘We only decided I was to come back about a fortnight ago, and of course we’ve had to get ready. When they heard I was coming they begged to be allowed to come too, and as their grandmother wants to take their wee brother away to some south coast place for the winter she said they might come. My wee sister’s dreadfully upset about losing him, because they’re such chums, but she’s learning to write so that she can send him a letter every week, and he’s learning to read so that he’ll be able to read them. We’re going to have a wedding at Christmas, and we’ve never seen the bridegroom yet. Isn’t it too bad? My cousin’s to be married, and *he’s* had to go away on business, and won’t be back till next week. We begged her to let us wait to see him, but she wouldn’t. She said it wouldn’t be worth while coming to school at all this term if we didn’t come now. So we had to come away without seeing him, and I think it’s awfully hard lines. But she said we’d be better at school, and she’d have so much work to do. She’s making her own wedding-dress, and heaps of other things. The harvest has been so good, after all, that she thought the farm could afford to send Jock and me to school, and Rob’s working at home for a bursary—but you won’t care about all that! Well, I’m jolly glad to get back, but the nicest thing of all is that now I’ve got a home to go to in the holidays, like the rest of you. It’s the loveliest place! I’ll tell you all about it by degrees, and about the fine times we have together—Mysie and I, and Madge and Jock, and Ninian and the Shilfie, and Antony and Cleopatra. I’ve heaps to tell. Oh, I’ve had jolly holidays, I can tell you!’

‘And we’ve had an exciting evening,’ laughed Jill Colquhoun.

[The end of *Schoolgirls and Scouts* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]