

JOEY GOES TO THE OBERLAND



**ELINOR M.
BRENT-DYER**

Author of the CHALET SCHOOL SERIES

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This time Joey overturned her coffee cup into her lap.

JOEY GOES TO THE OBERLAND

By

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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To
RUTH

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Chapter I

JOEY MAKES A BEGINNING

Joey Bettany, for nearly twelve years now Joey Maynard, plumped herself down on the edge of a big, empty packing-case and—promptly doubled up and disappeared into it! Her wild screams brought her triplet daughters flying from the nursery farther along the corridor, where they had been busy dismantling the first of their beloved dolls' houses, to stand goggling at her. They also brought her adopted sister, Robin Humphries, from the linen-room, where she had been equally busy, sorting out pillowcases. Robin's reaction was to double up also—with wild laughter.

'Ow—ow!' shrieked Jo. 'Help me out, someone—help me out! Robin! Don't stand there giggling like the village idiot! Come and give me a hand! I'm all doubled up and my arms are caught and I can't get out by myself!'

In reply to this pathetic appeal, Robin choked back her peals of mirth and advanced to the case. There she found that Jo had spoken only the sad truth. In going down she had somehow managed to get her arms caught with the sides and she was quite unable to do anything for herself. Only her feet were free, and she kicked wildly in her efforts to get out.

'For pity's sake stop thrashing about like that with your feet!' Robin cried. 'Keep *still*, Jo!' Then, as Jo obeyed her, 'Oh, my *goodness*! How, on this earth, am I to yank you out of this? Can't you possibly get even a hand loose? No; I see you can't. I'll have to have help. I can't manage you by myself—there's too much of you! Len, scoot as hard as you can to the kitchen and bring Anna. Between us, we may be able to do it.'

Len, the eldest of the triplets—by half an hour—swung round to tear off downstairs, but Margot, the youngest of them, stopped her at once. 'It's no good! Anna's not in the house. She said she was going down to Mr Thirlbeck's the shop'—the triplets had picked up this piece of Welshism, having lived so long on the borders of Wales—'to buy all the clothes-line she could to rope the cases as they were filled. I saw her going ten minutes ago out of the nursery window, and she had the pram and all the kids with her. There's only *us* in the house. Oh, whatever *shall* we do?' And she regarded her mother with blue eyes full of horror.

'I don't care what you do!' Jo snapped. 'You've got to manage it among you somehow. There's something digging into my spine and I've scratched or cut myself as well. I can feel the blood trickling down.'

'Could we push the case over?' suggested Con, the third of them. 'Then Mamma might be able to wriggle out somehow. We could help her—p'r'aps.' She finished up on a dubious note.

'No you don't! However uncomfortable I am, I'm not risking any of you wrenching or straining yourselves,' Jo said firmly. 'And Auntie Rob's ankle isn't good for an awful lot yet. It takes time for a break like that to heal. Besides, you couldn't do it anyway. I'm no lightweight! So let *that* idea alone, all of you, for I won't allow it for a moment!'

Something in her tone warned them that she meant every word she said. Meantime, she was turning dark red, and Robin, her giggles forgotten, was alarmed.

'We certainly can't leave you like this until Anna gets back! If she's got all the younger ones with her, goodness knows when that will be. What on earth—' She broke off as her quick ear caught the sound of a distant whistle from the far end of the drive. She gave a cry of,

‘Jack! Oh, thank Heaven! Fly, Len! Fetch Papa at once! Joey, you keep still, or you’ll make matters worse!’

Jo, who had given a violent heave at the news that her husband was at hand, became quiet, and Len tore off, followed by Margot, both yelling at the tops of their voices, ‘Papa—Papa! Come at once! Mamma’s stuck in a box!’

‘Well, that lets him know what’s wrong all right,’ Jo said faintly with the ghost of a grin.

‘He’ll be here in a second, Jo,’ Robin said anxiously. ‘Try to keep still, for pity’s sake, or you may wedge yourself tighter than ever. You—you don’t feel faint or anything?’ she added more anxiously than ever.

Jo glared at her. ‘I feel more like a stroke, if you really want to know!’ But her voice was still faint and Robin re-echoed her final remark of, ‘Thank Heaven he’s here!’ with all her heart.

Jack Maynard came bounding up the stairs, his long legs taking them three at a time, leaving his daughters toiling after him. Whatever he felt, he had both face and voice well under control, for as he entered the bedroom he merely said when he saw his wife’s dilemma, ‘Bless the girl! What on earth will you do next? Here; keep still a moment!’ For Jo at sight of him had begun her wild kickings again.

‘Get me out, Jack! Quickly! I’m going to have a stroke, I think!’ Jo gasped, becoming quiet again.

‘Not you!’ he retorted, deliberately unsympathetic. ‘*Your* blood pressure’s normal enough! Now let’s see. H’m! Well, we must do our best. Now keep quite still. I’m going to turn the case on its side first. Then I’ll try to ease you out. I—can’t—manage—this—way!’ He was suiting his action to his words as he spoke and gently lowering the case on to its side.

It was no easy matter, for, as Jo had said, her five foot eight was no light weight and the case was a very large, stout one into the bargain. At last he managed it and then looked up at the worried Robin.

‘Now, Rob, you take her legs and when I say, “Now!” bend them up while I try to free her. Better kneel down to it and *don’t* overbalance on to her, what ever you do. Jo, make yourself quite limp and leave it all to us.’ He knelt too, and, with some difficulty, got his hands under her shoulders. ‘*Now!*’

Between them, they bent her practically double. She shrieked again, convinced that she was being slowly tortured to death. There was a violent struggle for a moment. Then she suddenly shot out like the cork of a bottle, and all three of them sprawled on the floor with the force of her exit.

Jack was up in a moment and bending over her. Her face was scarlet and her eyes swimming with tears, but, so far as he could see, no real harm had been done.

‘How do you feel?’ he asked gently.

Jo pulled herself together. ‘As—if—I had been—well and truly—racked in the Tower!’ she gasped.

Her three daughters stood in the doorway, regarding her with awed eyes.

‘Are you—are you *very* badly hurt, Mamma?’ Len ventured at last.

Jo fought for breath. Then she replied, ‘Oh, dear no! I merely feel as if every bone in my body had been wrenched out of place! Give me a hanky, someone, please.’

Con produced a filthy rag that looked as if she had used it to wipe the floor. Jack, however, was first and he tucked a big linen square into her hand.

‘Take that awful thing away, Con. Is *that* the best you can do? Hold on, Jo. I’m going to lift you to the bed. Pull the pillows away, Robin. I want her flat.’

Robin, who was on her feet again, darted to the bed to haul out the pillows and, while Jo dabbed her eyes, he cautiously slid his hands under her and lifted her to the bed where he laid her down. She lay panting, for it had been an altogether breathless business. Her husband rapidly ran his hands over her and examined her. Then, satisfied that she had not really hurt herself, however she might be feeling at the moment, he proceeded to take the minds of the girls off the worst of it.

‘Rob, off you go to the kitchen and hot up some coffee for her. She’s had a shock, and a hot drink will do her good. Bring enough for all three of us. Con, go and get a glass of water. Margot set the windows wide open and let her have air, and you go to the study and fetch my case, Len. Take it easy, Jo. You’ll feel better in a few minutes. It was a nasty experience, but it’s over now.’

They fled to do his bidding, while Jo, her eyes dry now and her colour slowly returning to its normal healthy creaminess, heaved a deep sigh.

‘That’s better! Oh, what a shock I got! And there wasn’t a soul in the house but Rob and the girls. I thought I’d *die* before anyone could get here to set me free!’ Her voice was growing stronger now.

He laughed as he said, ‘It certainly was a most unpleasant predicament. How on earth did it ever happen?’

‘I sat on the edge of the case and I sat too far back—that’s all.’

‘You *would!* It’s a wonder my hair isn’t grey with all the alarms and excursions I’ve gone through since I married you!—Hello! Your arm’s bleeding!’

‘I know. I could feel the blood trickling down when I was in the case.’

He was examining it. ‘A cut—not much, but I’ll deal with it when Len arrives with my case. I’m going to give you a small dose, Jo, to settle you. You can spend the rest of the afternoon on this bed and you’ll feel all right by bedtime. Here comes my Con and the water. Take a sip or two, girl! The coffee will really be best for you, but a drink’s always a good thing after a shock. There; now lie quiet. Bring me that wrap thing, Margot. That’s right; lay it over her. Good girl! You did that beautifully.’

The coffee and the case arrived together. He made Jo drink the coffee first. Then he set to work to wash and dress the cut, which was a nasty, jagged tear, though not very deep. When he had strapped it up, he demanded to know if she had cut herself anywhere else.

‘No; but I felt as if something were being driven slowly into my spine,’ Jo replied. ‘However, that’s stopped, so I don’t suppose it really was.’

‘I’ll just slip your frock off and take a dekko. Come on, Rob; give me a hand. I don’t want her to move more than is necessary for the moment.’

Between them, they stripped off her frock, but all that was to be seen was a slight discoloration. Later, he found that a stick of wood had been leaning against the side and she must have been resting her entire weight on it. However, once more, no harm had been done.

Meanwhile, Jo was recovering her usual form, and when he had bathed the place with a soothing lotion and laid her back with the remark that he would now give her a tablet to calm her nerves and she could stay where she was, she twinkled up at him with dancing black eyes.

‘I’ve heard before of folks getting themselves into a fine box, but I never experienced the reality myself until now. I’ll take jolly good care where I sit and *how* I sit in future! Once of this is just ten times too much for my liking!’

‘It’s a thousand times too much for mine!’ Robin said with decision. She was still looking pale as a result of her fright. ‘If this is the sort of thing that’s going to happen while you’re getting ready to go to Switzerland, I think we’d better go the whole hog and have professional packers to do the job.’

‘Do you indeed?’ Jo was getting well into her stride now. ‘And who’s going to pay for it, may I ask?’

‘I will! I’d rather, than go through this sort of experience again!’ Robin retorted. ‘You might have broken your back or your neck, doing a thing like that!’

‘Today’s happy thought!’ Jo murmured as she finished her coffee. ‘Sorry to give you such a shock, precious! It won’t happen again, I can assure you.’ A sudden thought struck her and she sat up. ‘Listen to me, all of you! Not a word about this out of any one of you! I’m *not* going to be chaffed to death about it and if it goes any farther than this room, it’ll go the entire round. Do you hear, you three? You’re to tell no one.’

‘Lie down,’ Jack said, enforcing his words and laying her down. ‘No one will say anything. It’s our own secret—isn’t it, kids?’

‘Yes,’ they murmured—Margot with some reluctance. She had seen herself making a marvellous tale, out of it. However, if both their parents insisted, that was that. All the Maynard children had been trained to obedience and their training would hold good, much as she longed to be able to describe the scene to her best friend, Emerence Hope, at any rate.

‘Good! Then off you go and get on with whatever it was you were doing. You needn’t worry about your mother. She’ll be all right after she’s had a rest.’

They ran off to the nursery again and Jack poured out cups of coffee for himself and Robin after he had given Jo her tablet.

‘Thanks,’ Robin said as she accepted hers. ‘I can just do with that.’ Suddenly she began to giggle. ‘I might have known how it would be! I’m almost sorry now that I agreed to stay and help you get off. I’m sure Reverend Mother would have welcomed me at the convent, even if I’m not to be allowed to enter until the Feast of the Assumption.’

‘Go, if that’s how you feel,’ Jo said haughtily. ‘I can manage very well by myself, if that’s all.’

Robin stopped laughing and eyed her anxiously. ‘You aren’t right yet. Should we draw the curtains and leave you to rest? What do you say, Jack? She *must* be feeling ill when she says she doesn’t want me, even though she knows that when I do go, it’ll be good-bye for keeps unless you turn up in Toronto again some time.’

Jo gave her a look and relaxed. ‘Little idiot! As if I meant it! Oh, Rob, I’m going to miss you so much, darling! Still, it *is* your life. You must do as you want with it. I know that.’

‘I couldn’t do anything else,’ Robin said thoughtfully. ‘You know that, too, Jo. I’ve wanted it for years—far longer than I ever told anyone before. Only for such ages it didn’t seem as if it could be, there’s been so much bother about my health and so on. And then I knew how you and Madge always liked to have me around. I did try settlement work, but you know what happened. I thought then that it was all to be no good. And then everything cleared up with a bang—just like that—and I knew I couldn’t refuse any longer.’

‘So *that’s* why you went in for that all hot and strong!’ Jo exclaimed. ‘If only I’d known! Rob, we love having you with us. You know that, don’t you? But if you felt the Call, then you’d no right to try and put us first. And after all,’ she added, ‘it hasn’t done any good so far as that’s concerned, for you’re going in the end. Quite right, too. Couldn’t you trust us?’

Robin flushed. 'Of course I could! Only—well, there seemed so much against it. Now I know I was only imagining things. I've had to give up in the end. You see, Jo—and Jack, too,' she went on, looking from one to the other, 'you people have all been so endlessly good to me, ever since I first came to the Chalet School. That's nearly twenty years ago. I did wonder if I owed it to you to—to stay out. But it was a losing fight. I just had to give in. And oh, if you only *knew* how happy I've been ever since I did!' she wound up. 'Everything seems to have cleared up for me and, though I shall hate saying good-bye, I'm just longing for the time!'

Jack, who was sitting on the side of the bed, put out his hand and pulled the slight girl down beside him. He smiled down into her lovely face with its dark, starry eyes and frame of curling dark hair. Then he said, 'We can guess, Rob. You've looked a different being these past few months. And don't worry about your health. Humanly speaking, you've outgrown your childish delicacy. Canada suits you, with its dry cold in winter. You'll love the teaching side of your work as well as the other. You've every chance of making really old bones. In fact, I'll venture to prophesy that you're as likely to reach extreme old age as Sœur Marie-Claire. Ninety-odd, isn't she? Well, I can say no more.'

Jo had been growing drowsy under the influence of the tablet, but she roused up sufficiently to say, 'I agree with all that. And now, if you *don't* mind, I could do with a snooze. Go and talk somewhere—e-else.' Her voice trailed off as her long lashes swept her cheeks.

Jack laughed as he got up and pulled Robin up with him. 'And that takes *us* off with two kicks and a laugh!'

He marched her out of the room and they went along to the nursery just in time to prevent a riot, for the triplets were making for the door, talking all at once.

'Anna's coming up the drive and she must have bought every clothes-line in the shop! They're looped all round the pram and you can't *see* Felix and Felicity for clothes-lines!'

'The pram looks like a travelling clothes-line van!' Margot added, giggling.

'O.K.—O.K.!' their father protested. 'We'll go downstairs and view the show. But go quietly. Your mother's asleep and I don't want her roused.'

Chapter II

A NEW USE FOR BLACKLEAD!

Joey appeared at breakfast next morning looking her usual self, apart from the strapping on her arm and faint shadows under her eyes. She said that she felt a trifle stiff and sore still, but that was all. It was clear that she had taken no real harm from her mishap of the day before and Jack's tablet had given her nerves a chance to recover. She had slept solidly until ten o'clock the evening before, when she had roused sufficiently to take a light meal, undress and go to bed properly in her own bed. Then she had drowsed off again and, according to her husband, slept like a baby all night.

'What do you propose to do today?' he asked as he enjoyed his poached eggs and coffee. 'Whatever it is, may I advise that you beware of packing-cases?'

Jo made a face at him. 'It's easy to be wise after the event. However, to answer your question, we intend to pack the linen—Len, wipe Mike's chin, will you? It's all yolk of egg. Mike, if you can't learn to eat tidily, you'll have to have breakfast in the nursery again until you do.'

Mike, who had only recently been promoted to breakfast downstairs, hurriedly dabbed at an eggy chin with his feeder. Len, who sat beside him, took it from him and proceeded to scrub him vigorously, much to his disgust. But he had no wish to be sent back to the nursery with the babies again, so he said nothing, though he glared at his eldest sister with angry blue eyes.

Until they were four, Jo kept her children to nursery meals, but, beginning with the triplets, on their fourth birthdays, each one had begun to come down to the family breakfast—this being the one meal when Jack could rely on seeing them all together. So far, Mike had been the only one to make a nuisance of himself. The three girls had always fed daintily and Stephen and Charles were as tidy as you could expect small boys to be. But Mike was a restless boy, always eager to be on the go, and meals where you had to behave with decorum struck him as a sheer waste of time, though he had not yet realised his feeling. As a result, breakfast was all too often punctuated by injunctions to him to eat nicely, sit still, and wait quietly until everyone else had finished.

'If that kid didn't try to *shovel* his food into his mouth all at once, things like this wouldn't happen,' his father said, regarding him with frank disgust. 'Hi! Don't bolt your milk like that or you'll have it all over yourself. A sip at a time, please. No one's going to take it from you.'

Mike set his mug down and, warned for the moment, went on with his egg more carefully. Len had already cut his toast into small pieces for him, so he had no real excuse for the awful mess he made.

'Mamma, we've packed all the furniture from La Maison des Poupées in the box you gave us,' Margot remarked. 'What should we do today?'

Jo finished pouring out her husband's second cup of coffee before she replied. As she handed it down the table she said, 'I think I should collect all the dolls' clothes together and wash them. You want to take them away all clean. It's going to be a lovely day, so you could do it in the orchard. Don't forget to put on your rubber aprons, though. We don't want any more washing of *your* clothes than can be helped. See you get everything, as well. This'll be your only chance.'

Con and Margot gave each other a conscious look at the mention of rubber aprons. The last time they had had a washing-day they had omitted this precaution, and by the time they had finished, their own clothes had been nearly as wet as the dolls' laundry.

'Well, that'll keep them busy for the rest of the morning,' Robin said, passing her own cup. 'I'll give you the soap and starch after breakfast, girls. I promised Anna the scrubbing-soap then, so one of you come to me in the storeroom.'

'I'll come, Auntie Rob,' Len said. 'Margot and Con can get the tubs and clothes-line out.'

'Then that's settled,' Robin replied, receiving her cup again. 'Thanks, Jo!—And I'll start on the table-linen, shall I? I finished the bed-linen last night and it's all ready to pack into the cases.'

'Good for you!' Jo nodded her thanks. 'The sooner we get the linen-room cleared out, the better. What are *you* doing today, Jack?'

'I'd better make a start on the study, I think,' he said. 'I finished up at San yesterday. Jem agreed that I'd better end then and be on hand to help you out, seeing that Madge is *hors de combat*. So I'm entirely at your disposal, girls, from now on. I'll be in the study if you want me. What are the boys doing with themselves?'

'Helping Anna pack the cake-tins and patty-pans and things like that,' Stephen told him. 'She says she's got them all sorted out now and she wants to pack the ones she's taking to Switzerland. So we're helping her.'

'Well, it's *her* business,' Jo said, regarding her sons thoughtfully. 'Mind you're good boys and do as she tells you. Then that's all the family fixed up. I'll wash and dress the twins, and after they've been fed they can go into the play-pen till it's time for their mid-morning nap. By the way, Rob, Mrs Evans has arrived and is going to start the scrubbing, so the sooner we can get the linen-room cleared out the better. Until that's done, she can help Anna in the kitchen. Goodness knows, there's any amount to do!'

The morning's chores having been settled, they finished breakfast in short order. Then Jo went to attend to her babies while Robin and the triplets made beds and tidied bedrooms. The children were all brought up to make themselves useful, and the three girls were quite efficient bed-makers.

When Jack had agreed to accept the position of head of the new sanatorium he had told Jo that it would mean leaving England and making their home in the Oberland for at least ten years. They had decided, however, to spend all the summer holidays at their beloved Plas Gwyn, the old house where the three elder boys had been born and which was now their settled home in England. Part of it was to be let to the new vicar and old friend, Ernest Howell, since he had refused to live in the old vicarage, an enormous place with stone floors on the ground floor and ten bedrooms as well as all the sitting-rooms. A new vicarage was to be built and, until it was ready, Mr Howell and his young step-sister Gwensi would use part of Plas Gwyn. The rest was to be kept in order for the Maynards holidays. Therefore Jo was leaving only a minimum of household goods behind her and taking most of the rest to the new home at the Görnetz Platz.

Luckily, the Chalet School had also decided to move out there—or most of it, at any rate—so school for the girls would be no difficulty. Stephen, now eight, was to go to his prep school next term, but Charles and Mike were too young for that, the doctor had decided, and he had engaged another Old Girl of the Chalet School, one Beth Chester, to go with them as governess to the two boys and help to Jo. With her would come a younger sister, Barbara, whose school-days were to begin with the new term. Hitherto she had been too delicate for

school; but the past year had seen her making strides, and the doctors all said that life in the Alps ought to consolidate all she had gained. It would be a great advantage if her eldest sister was with her, especially as Nancy, the second of the Chester girls, was to be at the branch at Welsen a few miles farther down the mountainside.

For the first term or two Barbara was to live with the Maynards and go to school daily, as Jo's own girls would do. Jo had suggested it, saying that Barbara would find it an easier breaking-in to school ways, which she would find hard enough after fourteen years of home as a semi-invalid.

Jo had expected help from her elder sister, Madge Russell, when it came to packing-up, but, unfortunately that lady had begun German measles, of all things, ten days before. It had been a bother all round, for school had broken up three weeks earlier than usual, owing to the removal, so that none of the young Russells could go home until their mother was out of quarantine, and that would not be for another week or so.

'Whatever possessed Madge to go and get German measles?' Jo demanded of Robin as, her eleven-months-old babies safely disposed of in the play-pen in the garden, she entered the linen-room, to find her adopted sister hard at work. 'It's beyond me!'

Robin chuckled. 'Jem was on the phone last night and he says she's hopping mad. She's not ill now, though she was very uncomfortable at first, and now that her temp has gone down, she's nearly dancing at being out of the fun.'

'What *I* can't understand,' Jo said as she tried to force two pairs of sheets into a case already crowded to the limit, 'is where on earth she got it. This isn't sickness term and, so far as I know, there isn't another case within ten miles of the Round House. It must be natural depravity!'

'I wish she could hear you!' Robin retorted feelingly. 'It's no earthly use trying to squeeze those sheets into that case, Jo. It's chock-a-block already. Hand them over and I'll put them in here with the pillowcases.'

Jo handed them over and they went on with their work, chattering idly, mainly about past events. Suddenly Robin glanced at her watch.

'I say! Isn't it time the twins were put down for their nap? You go and see to it while I finish this shelf. And you might make a cup of coffee. I'm parched!'

'O.K. You carry on here and I'll see to twins and coffee,' Jo agreed. 'Also, I think it's about time I took a dekkko at the girls. The boys will be all right; Anna can handle them. But the girls have been left on their own quite long enough. I *don't* see what mischief even Margot can get into when they're washing clothes, but you never know.'

'You don't!' Robin was at one with her on this point.

Jo left the room and Robin went on with her packing. Jo was gone a long time and the younger girl was beginning to wonder vaguely if anything had happened when she arrived in the linen-room, bearing a small tray on which were two enormous cups which sent forth a delicious aroma of coffee.

'Here you are! And here are the biscuits,' Jo said briskly, setting her tray down on one of the empty shelves. 'Give it a rest, Robin, and come and have some refreshment.'

Robin looked at her. There was an odd tone in her voice and her black eyes were dancing wickedly. It was quite plain to the experienced Robin that *something* had happened. But she knew better than to ask yet. She laid down the towels she had been tying up and came to sit down on the case of sheets.

'Your hair's coming down,' she said.

‘Oh, *bother* my hair!’ Jo exclaimed. ‘For two pins I’d cut it short again—only it grows so fast and costs so much to keep cut,’ she added. Then, still with that light in her eyes, she looked round at the empty shelves. ‘My one and only Aunt Jemima! Do you mean to say you’ve packed all that? Rob, you deserve a leather medal! We’ll have this place done before lunch at this rate.’

‘Well, look at the time you’ve been,’ Robin pointed out as she tasted her coffee and helped herself to biscuits. ‘What on earth have you been doing?’

‘Oh, this and that,’ Jo said vaguely.

Robin was longing to keep silent, but her curiosity overcame her. ‘Such as what?’ she demanded.

Jo began to laugh, and laughed so violently that she nearly upset her cup of scalding coffee over herself.

‘Look out, you idiot!’ Robin shrieked, catching it just in time. ‘Oh, Jo, what an ass you are! You nearly gave yourself a coffee-bath then!’

When things were righted and Jo was calm again, the girl asked curiously, ‘What’s been happening?’

Jo giggled again. ‘Just about everything, I should think! To begin with, Felix suddenly decided that he didn’t want to stay in the play-pen. It was just outside the study window, as you know. Felix, it seems, started in by burbling. No one took any notice of that, so he took to shouting, and Jack went to see what was wrong. The moment the twins saw him, they both began to yell, and he lifted them out and took them in beside him. Felicity is as good as gold as a rule, but Felix looks like becoming a second Mike, as you know yourself. The first thing Jack knew, he was trying to tilt the big stone jar of ink—over himself, of course! Jack says he squawked and leapt to the rescue, and only just in time. While he was removing the jar from Felix—who naturally yelled at being deprived of such a lovely new toy—Felicity had crawled over the floor to where he had set a great bundle of papers and so forth to be looked through at leisure, and when he had time to turn round, there she was, sitting bubbling to herself and tearing them to shreds.’

‘But why on earth didn’t he yell for one of us to come to his rescue?’ Robin demanded between her giggles.

‘Said he thought he ought to try to manage, by himself, seeing we’re up to the eyes in work, anyhow,’ Jo replied.

‘Oh, I see. Well, at least it’ll have given him a faint idea of the sort of thing you have to tackle all day and every day,’ Robin said. ‘That’s so much to the good, at any rate.’

Jo grimaced at her. ‘Don’t you believe it! Like most other men, Jack has a pathetic belief in the ability of mothers to keep their offspring in hand by sheer instinct.’

‘Well,’ Robin said consideringly, ‘you do manage wonderfully, you know.’

Jo bounced up from the soiled-linen basket on which she had perched and swept a low court curtsy. ‘Many thanks for the flowers! I don’t know *how* I manage, if you want the real truth. I had plenty of practice with the girls, of course, and as they were all the same age, I was able to keep a much firmer eye on them than I’ve done with the rest.’

‘*That* wasn’t the only happening, though,’ Robin said. ‘That’s the sort of thing that happens any day in the week. What were you really shrieking about just now?’

Jo began again and this time overturned her coffee-cup—mercifully, nearly empty now—into her lap.

‘Oh, well, it’s a soiled frock, anyhow,’ she said with cheerful unconcern. ‘Don’t fuss, Rob. I’m not taking it away with me—it’s eight years old and on its last legs. That’s why I was wearing it for this job.’

‘But it’ll stain through to your undies!’ Robin protested.

‘I hadn’t thought of that!’ Jo stood up and wriggled out of the frock post-haste. ‘Bring me the old jade cotton from the back of the door in Jack’s dressing-room, will you? It’s another that will only make dusters by the time we depart. It’s seen the same hard wear and is the same vintage year.’

Robin ran off and presently Jo, presentable once more, was standing adjusting the elderly cotton with quick, deft fingers that had the French gift of settling her clothes to the best advantage. Robin gave her an admiring look.

‘That frock always did suit you, Jo. Well, now that you are once more clean, clothed and in your right mind, get cracking and tell me the latest joke.’

‘I’ve grown fatter since this was made,’ sighed wicked Jo, still busy with her dress. ‘It used to be quite loose on me, but now it *fits!*’

‘Don’t side-track!’ Robin retorted sternly. ‘You sit down and tie up those towels ready for packing and tell me what’s been going on downstairs.’

Jo gave up lamenting her increase of flesh and began to pile the bath-towels into neat packets of six while she told Robin the awful tale of Two Bad Boys and the Tins of Blacklead.

‘I ran round to the orchard,’ she said, ‘but the girls were hard at work *and* all had on their rubber aprons. They were barefoot, but it’s hot enough, goodness knows, and it’s just as well for Margot was using the dolly and sending the soapsuds flying in every direction.’

‘The grass was smothered in soapy water and their aprons were dripping, I suppose?’ Robin remarked with a chuckle as she began to tuck Jo’s bundles neatly into a fresh case.

‘How right you are! Margot and the dolly can make more mess than almost anything else I know. I commended their efforts and told them to go and get their milk and biscuits from the dining-room. Then I left them to it.’

‘Well, there’s nothing much there—nothing to make you scream with laughter like that,’ Robin said. ‘What next?’

‘Well, I thought I’d walk round to the kitchen premises and see how Anna and Mrs Evans were getting on. I had to go past the barn, of course, and I was about twenty yards away from it when I heard that bubbly chuckle of Mike’s coming from it. You know how that always spells trouble! As Shakespeare has it, I stood not on the order of my going. I just made a bee-line for the barn, and when I got there, what did I see?’ Jo paused with dramatic effect.

‘Well—go on!’ Robin said impatiently when the pause threatened to become too lengthy. ‘What *did* you see?’

Jo’s answer was totally unexpected. ‘Two little nigger boys!’

‘*What?*’

‘You heard, sugarpie! Two—Little—Nigger—Boys!’

‘What on earth are you talking about?’

‘What I saw.’ Then Jo relented. ‘Believe it or not, Charles and Mike were there, both naked and both as black as the ace of spades!’

‘*Black?* But—but *how?*’ Robin stared at her adopted sister blankly.

Jo finished tying up another bundle, which she tossed over. Then she condescended to explain in full.

‘About two years ago, a man came to the door selling tins of blacklead, both paste and liquid. I thought the liquid might save Anna trouble, so I invested in half a dozen tins and a brush as well—this was at Carnbach, by the way.’

Robin nodded. ‘I remember. Anna wasn’t in the least grateful to you, either. She told me that she preferred paste and brushes. You couldn’t get what she called a real *shine* with these newfangled things. I had it all from her when I went to the kitchen for something. She was quite eloquent for her.’

‘Yes; well now she knows better,’ quoth Jo darkly. ‘Oh, she tried the stuff once or twice to please me. Then those tins disappeared and we went back to good old paste and elbow-grease. Talk about conservatives! Anna’s a conservative of conservatives! She hasn’t the smallest use for modern gadgets.’

‘Never you mind Anna. Go on and tell me the rest of this woeful history.’

‘Well, when we cleared out Cartref at Carnbach, those tins turned up in a box and I just shoved them in with a lot of other oddments. After all,’ Jo added defensively, ‘I’d spent good money on them and I thought they might come in handy, if not for the grates, then for something else. Anna, I may add, knew nothing at all about it.’

‘I rather wonder she didn’t do away with them earlier.’

‘No; she would never do that,’ Jo said with decision. ‘I’d bought them, however ill-advised I may have been to do so, and they were mine; not hers. She’d have asked me first. I suppose she forgot all about them, out of sight being out of mind. Anyhow, when she began turning out here, she seems to have come across them—in the wash-house, with a lot of other junk. She set them aside with a pile of other things we’re sending to the jumble sale next Saturday and thought no more about them. I rather gather,’ Jo went on as she tossed over the last bundle of bath-towels and set to work on bath-sheets, ‘that she found Charles and Mike more bother than they were worth in the kitchen—Mike, anyhow. She sent them out to the barn to play, and their idea of play was to turn all the junk upside down. They found those tins!’

‘They *would!*’ Robin said it with deep conviction. ‘I suppose they decided to adorn themselves on the spot? Whose bright idea was it?’

‘Believe it or not, it was Charles’s!’

‘*Charles’s!* But—but he’s generally so good!’ Robin cried incredulously.

‘I know. But every once in so often, just in case we may be afraid he’s turning into a plaster saint, he breaks out and is as bad as he can possibly be. This is one occasion. He proposed to Mike—who was all for it!’—‘Well, naturally!’ came from Robin with a chuckle—‘that they should make themselves black and then go and startle the girls. Those two little wretches didn’t stop at doing their faces and arms and hands, which would have been bad enough, anyhow. They stripped themselves naked and have used up practically *all* that blacklead in blacking themselves. You never,’ said Jo, giggling wildly, ‘saw two more *awful* little objects! It goes glossy as it dries, Anna to the contrary, and there they are, two shiny black visions, and *how* we’re ever to get them clean again is more than I can tell you!’

The linen-room rang with their peals of laughter at this point.

‘Where are they now?’ Robin asked as soon as she could speak.

‘I left them in the scullery in a huge tub of hot water, being scrubbed by Anna and Mrs Evans. If that doesn’t do it, we must try something else, though what, I haven’t the smallest notion. I must ask Jack, I suppose. Honestly, Rob, they are simply *ghastly!* I don’t know which looks the worse of the pair!’

‘I’m going to see for myself!’ Robin flung down the bundle she had been holding and raced off downstairs, where she found that Jo had indeed told the truth when she said that two more awful little objects had never yet been seen. Perhaps Mike was a shade the worse. Charles had black hair and very dark grey eyes which were darker than ever as he stood, being scrubbed by Mrs Evans and contemplating the probable consequences of his last crime. But Mike’s yellow curls and blue eyes made a startling contrast with the general blackness.

With a mighty effort Robin controlled her giggles. ‘You naughty boys! You deserve to be well spanked, both of you, for giving so much trouble just when we’re all extra busy. *What* your father will say when he sees you, I *don’t* know!’

She knew in another minute, for Jack, fetched by Jo to see his sons’ latest effort, stalked into the scullery and stood gazing at them. His face stiffened as he stared and both Charles and Mike, under the impression that he was exceedingly angry with them, howled loudly.

As a matter of fact, he was on the verge of wild laughter. He contrived to keep a straight face though. He even managed to say severely, ‘I’ll see you two in the study when you’re clean again!’ before he left the place and bolted to the front garden, well out of hearing, where at last he was able to give his consuming mirth rein before he choked.

Jo and Robin had followed him, leaving Anna and Mrs Evans to deal with the two blackamoors, and they joined in his laughter until both were red and tearful.

‘Jack, however are we to get them clean again?’ Jo managed to ask at last.

‘I don’t know. You’d better try turps or paraffin. Or no; I’d rub them with olive oil. That might do it. The only other thing I can think of is sandpaper!’ He paused to yell again. Then he added, ‘Really, Jo, your sons are the limit!’

‘*My* sons, indeed!’ Jo cried indignantly. ‘They’re your sons just as much as they are mine! What’s more, my lad, you can do *all* the dealing with them! *I*’m not going to interfere, I can assure you. It’s *your* job this time!’

Chapter III

AN INTERLUDE

Jack found it quite unnecessary to mete out any more punishment to his two sons than they had already brought on themselves. When he recovered from his fits of laughter, he suddenly remembered that hot water and soap were the last things to use to remove blacklead and headed back to the scullery again.

‘It’s no go, Anna,’ he told that faithful factotum who was rapidly passing to a state of utter despair as all her scrubbing made not the slightest difference to the coal-black objects in the tub. ‘Hot water’s no earthly use—the other way on, in fact. It’s just driving the blacking into their little pores. We must try oil. What have you in that line? Where’s the salad oil?’

Anna got up from her knees, leaving the still-howling Mike to his own devices while she found the big bottle of olive oil she always kept well filled.

‘Stop that bawling, Mike!’ his father said unsympathetically. ‘You’ve got yourselves into this mess and you must just take your medicine like men. Give me that towel, Anna, will you. Now then!’ And he lifted his small son out of the tub, rubbed him dry—the towel was never fit for use again!—and began to wipe him carefully with the oil and a piece of rag Anna supplied.

Anna did the same by Charles while Mrs Evans, who had never ceased cackling her horror at the naughty boys until the master of the house appeared, cleared the tub and soap out of the way. Charles was not crying, now, but his eyes were wide with fear lest they might have to stay that way for the rest of their lives. Jack glanced at him and guessed that under the black he was white enough.

‘It’s all right, Charlie-boy,’ he said quietly. ‘If we can’t get it off with one thing, we’ll try another until we do succeed. Only it may take time.’

Charles’s lower lip quivered, but he blinked back his tears. Papa was not angry any longer, which was one good thing. And if he said the black would come off, then come off it would. He had utter trust in his father’s word.

The oil made no visible difference, though the rags were filthy in no time. Jack tried paraffin and then turpentine, still with no result. Jo came back to the kitchen quarters to ask Anna what she was doing about lunch to find her small boys still as black as Egypt’s night and Jack himself beginning to look worried.

‘You’ve done it this time, you two,’ she told them. ‘It looks to me rather as if you’d have to wait until the stuff wears off of itself. Anna, how long *does* it last? Have you any idea?’

Anna owned that she had no idea. She had never given herself much chance to find out. She went on working faithfully on Charles, who put up with it in silence, though Mike was complaining loudly that he was sore with rubbing.

‘I suppose it’ll take a fortnight to three weeks,’ Jo mused aloud. Then she stopped, for at this dismal prospect, even Charles’s fortitude gave way and both boys began to howl again.

‘All right!’ she said, kissing first one and then the other with small regard for the black with which her mouth was instantly smeared. ‘Papa will find something to help. It won’t be as long as that, so stop crying.’

It was at this point that the triplets arrived, bearing their miniature clothes-baskets piled high with clean dolls’ clothes ready to be sprinkled and folded and looking very smug and

pleased with themselves. Thanks to the india-rubber aprons which covered them from throat to hem, they were dry, and they felt they had done a good morning's work.

At sight of their brothers they dropped the baskets and shrieked simultaneously. Before they could burst into questions or teasing, however, Jack had stopped them. He felt that the pair had had enough to go on with, as he told Jo and Robin later on.

'Yes,' he said, neatly forestalling the storm of remarks and queries he saw impending. 'Charles and Mike are as black as the scuttle. We know all about it and that's all that matters. Pick up those duds of yours before you make them dirty again, and carry them to the kitchen. Then you can go and lay the table for lunch. Now not a word out of any of you, please!'

'B-b-but—' Margot began, her eyes wide with amazement.

He glanced at her. 'You heard what I said?'

The naughtiest, in some ways, of all the Maynards, went red. 'Y-yes, Papa.'

'Then be off with you! All three of you! Jo, this stuff doesn't seem to be a particle of use and I don't much like using turps, anyway. We don't want to have them *skinned* as a result of a silly prank. Wipe it off Mike, will you? Anna, you clean up Charles. Then go over them both with olive oil again while I see if I can get Jem on the phone and ask *him* what he can suggest.'

Sir James Russell, on hearing of the latest effort at Plas Gwyn, let off a bellow of laughter that made his brother-in-law remove the receiver a good yard from his ear. When he thought it safe to do so, he tried again.

'Stop bellowing like a bull, man! This may be serious. Their pores must be all choked up with the beastly stuff. We've tried olive oil and turps and paraffin—oh, and Anna had a go at them with hot water and soap. None of it's been the least good. They're still as black as your shoe, and I'm worried. Can *you* suggest anything?'

'It must be heredity,' the irrepressible uncle chuckled. 'Remember how Jo dyed herself green the night before Steve was born? Now keep cool! I've got a lotion that ought to do the trick. I'll make up a bottle for you and call in with it on my way to San. Keep them well oiled to soften the stuff and we'll see what my mixture can do. Be seeing you!' Then he hung up, leaving his fuming brother-in-law to go and tell Jo that Jem would bring something that would do it.

Jem turned up after lunch, complete with an enormous bottle which he presented to his sister-in-law, who had heard him coming and run down from the nursery to welcome him.

'Hello, Joey! Here you are,' he said cheerfully. 'That *should* do the trick. But I warn you that it has a vile smell. No; I can't stay for more than a few minutes, thank you. I'm due at San for a consultation at half-past three and it'll take me all my time to get there and hunt out the papers about the case before our consultant turns up. Madge sends her love and condolences. She's only sorry that she can't come over and inspect for herself. I was to see the culprits and report later. Where are they? I've just enough leeway to take a dekko at the beauties. Then I must go. Lead the way!'

'They're in the nursery,' Jo said as she turned to go upstairs. 'Don't rag them, Jem. Mike has been bawling more or less steadily ever since we caught them and Charles has wept at intervals. Poor lambs! They've had a doing of it!'

Sir James obediently controlled his love of teasing, though he gasped loudly at the two spectacles that met his eyes. The boys had stopped crying now. A good meal had helped to make things seem brighter and they had absolute faith in what both parents had said, since neither father nor mother had ever told them anything but the truth since they were born.

‘Well,’ he said, his eyes twinkling as he gazed down on them, ‘you’ve done it this time, haven’t you? Whose was the great idea?’

‘Mine,’ Charles confessed, tears beginning to well up into his eyes again. ‘Oh, Uncle Jem, have you brought the stuff to take it off? Mamma an’ Papa said you would. Where is it?’

‘Now don’t cry,’ his uncle said cheerily, clapping him on the shoulder. ‘I’ve brought the stuff with me—your mother has it—and it’ll clean you up in a day or two, I hope. But I’m sorry to tell you that until you’re looking like Christians again, you won’t be able to be with your family.’

Both boys stared at him. ‘But—*why?*’ Charles demanded.

‘Because nobody will love you while you smell of it.’

‘I should just think not!’ cried Jo, who had taken a cautious sniff while he was talking to his nephews. ‘Jem Russell! It’s utterly disgusting! Do you mean to say my poor babies have to put up with going round in a cloud of *that* until the black’s off them? Oh, my poor brats! No one need say anything to me about punishing you! You’ve punished yourselves good and hearty this time!’

She spoke only too truly, as they all found. Jem’s mixture quite literally stank, and as long as they were using it, the pair were kept at arm’s length by most people. However, it certainly did the trick handsomely. By bedtime the next day they had begun to turn blackish-grey. The next night saw them plain grey, and by the end of the week, apart from nails and sundry odd corners where the blacklead still clung, they looked like themselves again. But both Charles and Mike had learned their lesson. Never, as long as they lived, would they want to paint themselves again!

By the time this happened, Jo and Robin had packed all the household linen Jo meant to take with her and were tackling the books. Jack had managed to go through his papers and the discards were burned on the garden bonfire in one glorious blaze. The triplets had wheeled the big family pram down to the village hall after cramming it with ‘junk’ for the jumble sale. Jo had followed with her little car piled high with spare chairs, stools, crockery, and battered kitchen utensils that were still useful if unbeautiful. On the Saturday afternoon, Howells village turned out to the jumble sale of its life and the new vicar informed those at church next day that the sum total had reached the handsome amount of fifty-two pounds one shilling and tenpence.

Sunday at Plas Gwyn was spent quietly, with the sinners restored to the bosom of their family. In the morning, everyone went to church except the twins, who were left to Anna’s care, that young woman having gone to eight o’clock Mass while the rest attended eleven o’clock. The afternoon saw Jack stretched at length in a hammock, fast asleep under the *Observer*, while Jo and Robin sprawled in deck chairs, each with a drowsy twin on her lap, and the rest of the children lay about on the grass, reading or chattering. Anna had gone to a farewell tea-party with friends in the village, but she returned at six and whisked off the babies to bed.

‘Why didn’t you take the evening, Anna?’ Jo inquired as she gave up Felix.

‘Ja, meine Frau, but I have had my tea and said adieu, so why should I wait for more?’ Anna demanded as she turned to the house, a baby under each arm.

Jo laughed when she had gone. ‘Anna is the most matter-of-fact person I’ve met in my life. Boys, don’t squabble. It’s much too hot, and, anyway, Anna will be calling you shortly for bed.’

After supper, those left adjourned to the grassy terrace round the house again, Jack, only, excusing himself on the grounds that he wanted a walk. Robin and Jo settled down in their chairs while the triplets curled up on the grass near them with their favourite Sunday book, *Lives of the English Saints*.

‘Just ten days left now,’ Jo yawned.

‘Just a week for me,’ Robin corrected her. ‘This time next week I’ll be all packed up and ready to go. I wish I could have stayed to see you off properly, Jo, but it can’t be done. Jen said he’d booked the last seat going on any plane for the next fortnight, so I’m bound to go now. You’ll come to Canada again sometime, won’t you, Joey? And bring all the kids, too. I’ll want to see how they’re growing up and I can’t come to you, you know.’

‘We’ll come,’ Jo promised. ‘Though goodness knows when it’ll be! Not till next year, anyhow, and quite likely not even then. This removal is costing the earth and we shan’t have many spare pennies for quite a time once it’s over. I shall have to get down to a new book when we’re properly settled. It’s a mercy I managed to finish the last one when I did. Otherwise, I’m afraid it wouldn’t have gone off for some months to come. I don’t expect to be able to tackle anything like writing books until Christmas, if then.’

‘What will it be?’ Robin asked eagerly. ‘You’ll go on sending me copies of each book as they come out, won’t you? Nuns don’t read novels, of course, but the girls will like them. They have every book you ever wrote in that school library at La Sagesse.’

Jo laughed. ‘You’ll certainly receive a copy of each one. As for what the new one will be, I haven’t much choice. It has to be a juvenile, for I’m behind with my annual school-story. I’ve got the title already and part of the yarn, too, thank goodness! Not much difficulty there. Oh, I suppose a day will come when I just can’t help myself. I’ll have to sit down at my typewriter and be a loud-speaker again.’

‘That’s what you always say,’ Robin returned thoughtfully. ‘Do you really and truly feel that way about it, Jo?’

Jo nodded. ‘Exactly that. The people in my stories are there, alive and kicking and longing to make friends in *this* world. They tell their own story. I’m just the—the instrument used for broadcasting it.’

‘I see. And I rather think that’s why your story people are always so *alive* to me. I always feel I might meet them anywhere at any time. What’s the new title?’

‘*Audrey Wins the Trick*. It’s a school-story about older girls, this time.’

Len, who had been giving half an ear to all this, looked up. ‘Can we read it as you do it, Mamma? Oh, do lets!’

Jo gave her firstborn a startled look. ‘Won’t it be rather beyond you, sugar candy? It’s about quite big girls like *Bride* and *Nancy Chester*.’

‘Of course not! I’ve read most of your school-stories, anyhow,’ Len said with dignity. ‘We have them in the library at school, you know. I like *Dora and the Lower Fifth* best, so far. I wish you’d write another book about her. I like *Dora*, Mamma.’

‘So do I,’ Robin agreed. ‘But what on earth made you hit on such a ghastly name for your heroine, Jo? I’ve always loathed it.’

Jo chuckled. ‘Well, Madge started ragging me about the fancy names I gave my girls—story girls, I mean—so I vowed I’d write a book with not one fancy name in it. I did it, too!’ There was supreme satisfaction in her voice. ‘I chose the plainest names I could find—*Dora*—*Mary*—*Jane*—*Agnes*—*Susan*—’

‘Hi! Don’t go through the lot!’ Robin protested. ‘I’ve read the book and I know exactly what you called every blessed girl. Is *that* why you dedicated that book to Madge—and with such a dedication!’

‘To my sister Madge, who prefers names of the Plain Jane variety,’” Jo quoted with a chuckle. ‘It definitely is. Wasn’t she mad, though!’

‘Oh! So that’s the why of that. I’ve often wondered.’

‘That’s the why of it. What’s the time? Half-past seven? I must go and hear prayers and say good-night to the boys. Steve thinks he’s getting rather big for such things, but I shall keep it up until he goes away to school. Then, I suppose, I’ll really have to drop it. Heigh-ho! Why do children grow up so quickly?’ Jo got to her feet as she spoke, stretched and bent down to ruffle Len’s ruddy mane. ‘Before I know where I am you girls will be Sixth Formers and prefects and then you’ll be saying that poor Mother’s getting on now!’

‘Oh, no we won’t!’ Len cried. ‘I—I don’t believe you’ll ever be like that. You’re not the getting-on kind!’

The other two joined in. ‘All the aunties say you’ve never really grown up and you never will,’ Con remarked. ‘I heard Auntie Hilda saying it to Auntie Doris when she came to bring Mary-Lou’s new frock.’

Margot regarded her mother with wide blue eyes. ‘I hope they’re right and that you never will. We’d hate it if you went all proper and old like—like Auntie Doris, f’rinstance. She never plays with Mary-Lou.’

‘Auntie Doris is ten years older than I am and was much older when she first had Mary-Lou than I was when you three arrived. And then she’s had rather a sad life,’ went on Jo, who believed in talking to her girls seriously if they asked for it. ‘Mary-Lou’s father was killed when she was only ten and he and Auntie Doris had never had a lot of time together as Papa and I have had. Auntie Doris was often very lonely for him and it helped to make her grown-up, as you call it. Don’t worry, my lambs! I haven’t the faintest intention of turning elderly on you much before I’m sixty—and by that time, you’ll probably be married ladies with long families yourselves and I shall be a *grannie*! You’d want me to grow up then! Now I *must* go or those boys will never get to sleep tonight!’

She laughed, pulled one of Margot’s red-gold curls, touched Con’s round pink cheek and took herself off thinking that even if she did have to leave the home she loved so dearly and say good-bye to the girl who was fully as dear to her as her real sister, Madge Russell, she was still a very happy woman. She had her long family round her still and a husband with whom she scrapped almost every day of the week but who, she knew, regarded the spats as she did—just an overflow from the happiness and laughter that filled their lives.

Chapter IV
JO THINKS OF *EVERYTHING!*

‘It’s bad enough to have to move house clear out of one country to another. When you’ve got a wedding thrown at you unexpected-like in the middle of all the scrum, it puts the tin lid on everything else!’ Jo declared as she settled her big green hat at an angle which her husband eyed dubiously.

‘Will that thing stay on your head like that?’ he demanded. ‘I ask because I’m not going to be made a show of at anyone’s wedding, and that titfer of yours seems to be perched most precariously on about three hairs, so far as I can see.’

For reply, she picked up two rhinestone-headed hatpins lying on the toilet table and proceeded to ram them home. ‘“Children and fools,”’ she quoted when it was done and the hat secured. Then she surveyed herself in the mirror once more and nodded. ‘Well, that’s that! I’ll just take a dekko at the bride and make sure that she’s all according to Cocker and then I’ll collect Steve and Charles and go on to church. For Heaven’s sake see that the girls are all present and correct, won’t you?’

‘I’ll do my best. I suppose you’ve seen to it that they’re all dressed and ready? I mean I couldn’t be responsible for putting their hats on.’

She nodded. ‘They’re ready to the last hair. I gave them books and told them to sit in the drawing-room and wait till they were called. I warned them of awful consequences if they got themselves messed up, so they’ll be all right. Robin and Primula have too much to do for Daisy to bother with them and Prim’s on the verge of weeps, anyhow. She says she knows she isn’t *really* losing her sister today, but she won’t feel safe until the honeymoon’s over and they are all settled down in the new house. Poor little Prim!’ Jo’s face softened as she thought of Primula Venables, whose only sister was being married today. Then she recovered her usual form in a hurry. ‘Well, I’m off now! Oh, by the way, if the bride seems likely to faint, threaten to drop her into the brook as you go over the bridge. That should do the trick. She’s terrified of anything happening to that precious veil!’

She left the room, laughing as she went, and made her way down the corridor to the one where Daisy Venables, niece of Sir James Russell, was standing, ready for her wedding. Daisy looked charming in her picture frock of white brocade with the loveliness of the family veil of delicate point d’Alençon caught back over her fair hair with posies of daisies, pink and white, holding it at either side. She and her sister Primula were orphans and had been brought up first by Madge Russell and later handed over to Jo when Madge’s second daughter, Josette, had a bad accident which involved a long illness and occupied her mother fully. Daisy’s wedding was to have taken place from the Round House, the Russells’ home; but Madge’s German measles had forced them to revise their plans in haste and Jo and Jack were to play parents to her, and the reception was to be held in the village hall at Howells village instead of the Round House’s beautiful garden.

Beside Daisy stood Primula, a tiny creature of eighteen, as fair as her sister, and very dainty and spirituelle in her white georgette frock and big hat. Robin, in the same garb, and the only other grown-up bridesmaid, was carefully redraping the veil. When Jo entered, she looked up with her mouth full of pins.

‘Robin Humphries! Take those pins out of your mouth at once!’ Jo commanded. ‘You’d look well if you swallowed one and started appendicitis in the middle of the night, wouldn’t you? That’s better!’ as Robin obeyed her with the remark, ‘I’ve finished, anyhow! Now stand away and let me see THE BRIDE!’

Daisy went pink, but Jo took no notice. She walked round her slowly. Then she stopped in front of her and nodded with satisfaction. ‘Lovely, Daisy-girl! You make a beautiful bride, my child.’

Daisy went pink. ‘I feel a complete show, if you want to know. Oh, *why* didn’t I stick to my first idea and have an early-morning wedding in my going-away kit?’

‘Because you weren’t let,’ Jo said promptly. ‘As if the first wedding in the family could be allowed to be a hole-and-corner affair like that! Madge, I may inform you, is eating her finger-ends off with rage because she can’t come. She’s quite fit now, but her quarantine isn’t up till tomorrow and no one is going to let her break it—not with all the kids underfoot! Jem sends his love, and if he can possibly get back from San in time, he’ll come. But he knows that you understand that no doctor can ever call his time his own. No one expected such an emergency to arise as an operation for lung resection. Since it has, he has no choice but to go. I promised to tell you all this, Daisy, and to say that he sends you his blessing.’

Daisy nodded, her eyes very grave. ‘If I miss him, Jo, tell him I fully understand and—and I think he was right. A human life comes before even my wedding.’

Jo stooped to kiss her. ‘Good for you! Now what else? Oh, Mary-Lou and Verity-Anne rushed over an hour ago to say that the church will be full and they’ve spent all their week’s wealth on rose-petal confetti, so you’re for it, I’m afraid.’

‘I expected that,’ Daisy said, her face brightening. ‘Oh, well, it’s only once in a lifetime, thank goodness! I wish you’d hinted to Mrs Trelawney—I mean Carey!—that it would be as well to dock pocket-money for that pair this week.’

‘It never occurred to me,’ Jo said airily. ‘Besides, why should I spoil their little pleasures? Now I must go. Bless you, darling! May you be as happy as I am—I can’t say more!’ Jo kissed the bride again with motherly tenderness but due regard for her priceless lace and then fled to collect Stephen and Charles, who were to go with her to church. Mike and the twins would be brought down to the hall for the reception later on by the faithful Anna.

Robin made certain that everything was as safe as human hands and pins could make it. Then Jack shouted for the bridesmaids and she ran downstairs with Primula to get into the car with the triplets, who were wild with excitement and had to be warned sternly that if they didn’t calm down they would be left out of the procession altogether. They were whirled away to the old village church and ten minutes later the bride came, accompanied by Jack, who was to give her away.

Far from showing any signs of fluster now the moment was on her, Daisy paused to hiss at the maids that they were all to behave themselves and no one was to start crying. ‘And don’t forget you have to stand next me to take my gloves and flowers, Prim,’ she added to her sister. ‘O.K., Jack; I’m ready. For pity’s sake keep clear of my train and veil when you’re walking behind me, everyone!’

With this final injunction, she took Jack’s arm and swept into the church, her head held high, even if her cheeks were much pinker than usual. The two elder bridesmaids followed at a safe distance and the three little girls came next.

In the church Jo, standing in the front pew to the left, unashamedly turned right round to watch the bridal procession coming up the aisle. The bridegroom and his best man moved

forward, waiting. Jo, satisfied that it was all right, turned to push her sons farther along and make room for their father when his duties should be ended. She had been vaguely conscious of a stir behind her and now she learned the reason. Charles, standing on the far side of the pew, was unable to see anything and he had climbed up on to the seat and was anxiously bobbing about trying to catch a glimpse of Daisy through the sea of big hats behind.

Jo went pink, not, as most folk thought, with horror, but with suppressed laughter. She reached along and firmly lifted the young man down. Then she drew him to her other side so that he could stare down the aisle to his heart's content.

'And why I hadn't the sense to think of it sooner is beyond me!' she muttered to herself as the procession reached the end of the pew where Jack stood, still and Daisy moved forward to join her bridegroom at the chancel steps.

The vicar, standing waiting, spoke: 'Dearly beloved, we are met together in the sight of God and of man—' and the service had begun.

Luckily, Charles was enthralled by it—it was his first wedding—and he behaved perfectly. Stephen could always be relied on, and the three girls were too much taken up with their own part in it to do anything but be good.

When the question, 'Who giveth this woman to be wedded?' was asked, Jack, who was apt to be shy in public, whatever he was like in private, cleared his throat loudly and then said in a high, unnatural voice, 'Me—I mean, I do!' which came within an ace of reducing his wife to uncontrollable giggles and brought the first smile to Primula's grave little face.

Having finished, he thankfully moved into the pew—nearly trampling on his second son as he did—and presently the vows were being exchanged that made Daisy and Dr Laurence Rosomon one. Mr Howell said a few words to the young couple, but, with an eye to the crowd of children present, kept it short. Finally, the organist, who had pulled back the curtain to see it all, sat erect, laid her hands on the keyboard and obviously prepared to peal forth the wedding march. Nothing happened. The organ blower had sneaked away from his duties to see what he could. The organ emitted a loud and hollow groan and that was all. Mrs Pugh glared round at the shock head protruding round the corner and made a violent gesture. Daisy, no longer Daisy Venables, but Daisy Rosomon now, had seen it all as she turned from the altar, her hand on her husband's arm. She stopped dead. Laurence Rosomon had eyes for his bride only, and had seen nothing. *He* tried to go on, with the result that, to those who could see, it looked exactly as if Daisy were trying to yank him back. Jo choked into her handkerchief and Jack nudged her sharply with his elbow, making her bite her tongue with a smartness that brought tears to her eyes. The result was that when at last they had reached the vestry, almost the first thing Daisy said before ever she signed the register was, 'Josephine Mary Maynard! I thought I warned you all that I would have no crying at my wedding?'

'Crying? Who's crying? I'm not!' Jo retorted. 'If *your* husband had just nearly *dunched* your ribs in with his elbow and made you bite the end off your tongue, you'd be having tears in your eyes, too! But don't you flatter yourself that I'm *crying*! It's your fault, anyhow. If you and Laurence hadn't tried to indulge in a kind of tug-o'-war at the altar steps, it wouldn't have happened. What on earth were you both thinking about?'

Laurence Rosomon, who had sized up Jo very early in their acquaintance, grinned at this; but Daisy cried in shocked tones, 'I didn't—oh, I *didn't*! But I saw that wretched Cyril Powell's head poked round the corner of the organ and I knew Mrs Pugh couldn't play a note until she'd got him back on the job. I just stopped short and Laurie hadn't seen a thing and went on.'

Laurence chuckled. 'I thought perhaps the poor thing was shy of promenading down the aisle with everyone staring at her and I was trying to encourage her.'

'Well, all I can say is that it looked exactly as if you were starting your married life with a scrimmage in church,' Jo said sweetly. 'And you're not properly married yet, either. You've got to sign the register first. Get on with it, Daisy, and have some consideration for all the folk who are hanging on in church and dying to get going with the confetti.'

'You *would* think of that!' Daisy retorted as she bent to sign her last 'Margaret Cecilia Venables.' She stood up and lifted her face for her husband's first kiss. Then she had to go the round, being kissed by all and sundry to exclamations from her of, 'Mind my veil! It's got to do Primula when her turn comes and then there are Auntie Madge's girls!'

Jo signed the register and went to rearrange the precious veil. 'Stand still a moment! One of these clusters of daisies is loose. They look very sweet, Daisy. It was a brainwave of yours to have your veil caught back with posies of your own name-flower. There; that's all safe now! Come along; we've got to have the reception and a meal and you two have to be off to catch the afternoon plane to Berne, so there isn't any too much time.'

'You seem in a mighty hurry to be rid of me!' Daisy said in mock-injured tones. 'What have I ever done to you that you should treat me like this?'

'Nothing—nothing. I don't mind admitting that it's been rather a scrum to get your wedding fitted in when we're all up to the eyes, anyhow. Still, it's nearly over now, and it was high time that long engagement of yours was wound up. You can have a nice holiday to yourselves with nothing and no one to worry about while the rest of us cope with the packing and clearing. Ready? Are you ready, bridesmaids? Then form up in a nice procession. On your way, Laurence.'

As the parish hall stood next the church, it had been decided that when the ceremony was over everyone should just walk there through the churchyard unless it was raining. Daisy took her husband's arm, the bridesmaids formed up and the bridal party led the way out of the church, where at least half the village was waiting to pelt them with confetti, paper rose-leaves and armfuls of flowers. Being hampered by the swelling skirts of her picture-frock, Daisy was unable to take to her heels and she and Laurence had to make their way through a perfect storm. They reached the safety of the hall at last, where they found Jo and Jack, who had slipped out of a side door and run for it so as to be ready to welcome their guests. The breakfast had been 'done' by a good caterer from Armiford, the county town, and Jo and the girls had been busy all the afternoon before putting out the wedding-presents on the card-tables, which were usually devoted to other uses. They had also decorated the hall with festoons of leaves and flowers and the rather dingy place presented quite a festive appearance for once. In fact, the president of the local W.I. was caught gazing round thoughtfully and murmuring to herself vows for future events!

The wedding had been at eleven and, warned by Jo's last remarks, Laurence Rosomon kept an eye on his watch. When the cake had been cut, the toasts drunk and the speeches made, he hinted to his bride that she had better hurry off and change or they might miss the plane. Jack had been about to make the same suggestion, so Daisy rose at once.

'I've had a mere *crumb* of my own wedding-cake,' she complained to Jo. 'You might see that the kids don't make away with the lot before we come back! Prim—Rob! Come along and help me to get out of all this glory, will you?'

The two girls followed her out of the main hall to one of the little side rooms, where her suitcase and a temporary toilet-table were waiting. Jo would have liked to join them, but she

stood in the place of the bride's mother, so she gave it up and circulated among her guests, playing hostess with a charm that was all her own.

Her girls were here, there, and everywhere and she thought to herself as she glanced Con's way once, how pretty all three looked in their white georgette frocks and the big hats with wreaths of green leaves round the crown. The frocks had sashes of green to match the leaves, and the choice suited Margot's red-gold fairness as well as it did Len's chestnut hair and grey eyes or Con's black locks and deep brown eyes. Green was Daisy's favourite colour, and though she had consented to be all white herself, she had insisted that her maids should have touches of it. Jo's own green outfit had been the result of her wishes as well.

A cousin of the bridegroom was standing near. 'Those are your little girls, aren't they?' she gushed. 'How very sweet they looked in church—really lovely I thought. Yes,' to Len who came up at that moment and slipped her hand through her mother's arm, 'I was just telling your mother what a trio of regular little beauties you and your sisters are, my dear.'

Before the annoyed Jo could think of anything to say, Len spoke for her.

'"Praise to the face is open disgrace,"' she quoted severely. 'And anyway *we* can't help our looks: we're as God made us.' This last with a sudden remembrance of one of Anna's favourite dictums.

The stunned lady gasped and Jo choked audibly. Before she could do anything more about it, however, Robin appeared to say briefly, 'She's ready!' and Daisy, gay and sweet in her green linen suit with shady white hat wreathed round with pink-tipped daisies, appeared just as Laurence Rosomon came from his room, very smart, as Jo said, in his grey tweeds.

This was the moment Daisy had dreaded most. Good-byes can be sad things, and she knew that her young sister was tearfully inclined. She had warned Primula that weeps were to wait till bedtime if at all, and she hoped her warning would hold.

'Good-bye, Joey dearest,' she said as she hugged Jo with small regard for that lady's fineries. 'It's been a lovely wedding! Thank you so much! And we'll be seeing all your crowd next week sometime, shan't we? We're going to be at the Platz to welcome you to your new home.'

'Are you? Why?' Jo demanded suspiciously. 'Look here, Daisy, no tricks, please! I'll be just about hairless, anyhow, and I couldn't cope with much more after taking a family of eight halfway across Europe. So just behave yourselves!' But her hug and kiss were warm and close.

Daisy laughed and turned to her sister. 'Prim, darling, I'll be away only three weeks, and when we come back, you'll come to us and we'll have our *own* home at last! Thanks for giving me away, Jack. You did it beautifully, whatever Jo may say! Robin—' she faltered, for she knew that this good-bye was probably good-bye for always.

Robin came up to scratch at once. 'No, Daisy; we'll say "A Dieu." That's much better. And you never know. You may find yourself on the plane for Toronto yet.'

'I'll start saving up for it as soon as I can,' Daisy assured her.

Then she had to go. But Jo had not finished yet. Heedless of everything else, she snatched up a hastily wrapped parcel from a nearby table and raced after the pair, who were just getting into their car which was surrounded by laughing crowds showering them afresh with confetti and good wishes.

'Hi—catch!' she cried as she tossed it through the window.

Daisy fielded it neatly and, as the car began to move, hung out to demand, 'What is it, anyhow?'

Jo had the last word. ‘Chunk of your own wedding-cake to make up for what you couldn’t grab at the breakfast!’ she called, her golden tones carrying all round. ‘Don’t you ever dare to say I didn’t think of *everything*!’

Then she took time to straighten her hat, which was hanging over one ear in a most intoxicated fashion.

Chapter V

JOEY HAS AN IDEA AND SIMONE IS MYSTERIOUS

Daisy's wedding-day was ended and Jo had been having a long talk with her husband in the study. She emerged from it looking, as he informed her before she shut the door, like a cat that had just absorbed a brimming saucer of cream. Everyone else had gone upstairs an hour ago and was supposed to be in bed, though she wondered if all of them were sleeping. She had her doubts about Robin and Primula. The latter, who had come with her sister the day before and was to go to the Round House on the morrow when Lady Russell's quarantine would be ended, was, Jo imagined, most likely to be weeping.

'Poor little soul!' thought Jo, her motherly side uppermost as she made her way quietly through the hall and up the wide, shallow stairs so safe for small folk to negotiate. 'She's tired out, anyhow, for it's been a long day as well as an exciting one. She'll miss Daisy badly and be feeling all by her lonesome. Well, I *think* what I've got to suggest will help that very nicely. But we'll see!'

She paused in her journey down the long corridor which she had reached, opened a door and peeped in on her sons. They were sleeping profoundly and so were the three girls in the room next door. As she thought to herself, she would have known *all* about it if either of the twins had been wakeful, so she passed her own door, turned the corner and came to the room which Daisy and Primula had shared the night before and where Primula was alone now.

As she turned the handle and tiptoed in just in case she had been mistaken and tired Primula had fallen asleep after all, she suppressed a giggle. When it came to making up the big double bed for the two girls, it had been discovered that, in an access of zeal, she had packed every large sheet she owned. In fact, the only bed-linen left was what was already on the beds and the cases had gone with the rest of the furniture the previous week.

'We haven't time to send all the way to the Round House,' Jo had said desperately. 'What on earth shall we do now?'

'It's exactly like you!' Robin had informed her; which hadn't helped matters.

It was Len with her usual common sense who had saved the situation. 'Wouldn't Auntie Doris be able to lend you some?' she asked. 'I'll go over and ask her, shall I? It's quite near, anyhow—just across the meadow.'

'They'll never let me forget it,' Jo had replied. 'You'd better go, though. We can't let Daisy and Primula come and find no bed to sleep in—or only the old dust-sheets on it. Off you go—and take Con with you. Ask her to lend me a pair of double-bed sheets and a counterpane—oh, and some pillowcases, too. Say I'll send them to the laundry before we go and I'll be everlastingly obliged.'

The pair had gone racing off to return triumphantly with all that was needed and a message to say that Jo was not to bother about the laundry, but just return them when she had finished with them.

'And that's just as well in present circumstances!' she thought as she bent over the big bed where the only sign of occupation was a hump in the middle.

Jo stooped down and pulled the bedclothes back firmly. At once Primula started up, dabbing at her eyes with a very damp handkerchief.

'Jo!' she said; then she gulped.

Jo sat down. ‘Thank Heaven for somewhere to sit! My legs feel rather as if they belonged to someone else—and I’m not sure that I don’t wish they did!’ she added as an afterthought. ‘Oh, how I do *ache* with tiredness!’

Primula lay back against her pillows. ‘I hadn’t thought of that!’ she said in conscience-stricken tones. ‘Do go to bed, Joey. You must be nearly dead!’

‘I am; and I’m going to bed presently. It seems the most desirable place of all just now. But I’ve just had a brainwave, Primula, and I simply had to come and see if you were awake and tell you all about it.’

‘Wh-what is it?’ Primula asked with another gulp.

Jo surveyed her thoughtfully. ‘I think a nice cold sponge would cool your face and help you to listen more intelligently. Up you get and take it! Go quietly, though. I don’t want any of the family roused if it can be helped.’

Greatly wondering, Primula scrambled out of bed, hitched her kimono round her and departed to the bathroom, whence she returned, still flushed and with her eyes rather swollen, but looking decidedly better. She had had time to wonder what on earth Jo’s brainwave at this hour of night could be and her curiosity had helped her to overcome her tears.

Jo, who had been improving the shining hour by taking down the heavy plaits she wore coiled over her ears, looked at her and nodded. ‘That’s *much* better! Now, Prim, get back into bed and if you feel you’ve really got to let off steam in a wild screech when you hear my idea, you can turn your face into your pillow to do it. I don’t think I *could* cope with a suddenly-startled-out-of-sleep infant at this present moment,’ she wound up plaintively.

Primula settled down against her pillows and lay looking at Jo expectantly.

‘I had to talk to Jack first, of course,’ that lady began most maddeningly. ‘Then we had to ring up your uncle and aunt at the Round House, for I couldn’t say anything unless they agreed. However, it’s all right. They think it a brilliant idea and are all for it!’

‘But what is it?’ Primula demanded with uncautious loudness as she sat bolt upright.

‘H’sh-sh! I *told* you to be quiet! Now then, hold your horses and *don’t* yell! What do you say to coming out to the Platz with us when we go and staying there until Daisy and Laurence have finished their honeymoon? You could go back with them—I expect they’ll have got over their first wild raptures by that time—and I could do with your help very nicely on the journey—oh, and during the first days, too. Daisy said they’d be there to welcome us, so you’d see her for a day or so. I don’t suppose it’ll be longer. They’ll go off again. But it would give you a break and I’ll guarantee to keep you so well and truly occupied after they’ve gone that you’ll have no time to fret. Now what about it, Prim?’

Primula’s eyes were shining, even if her lashes were still damp. ‘I think it’s just too marvellous for words and exactly like you! Oh, Jo, you *are* a gem! How do you manage to think of things like that?’

‘I don’t! They get up and hit me in the face,’ Jo said in her airiest manner. ‘Besides,’ she added most immodestly, ‘I always was renowned for having brainwaves.’

‘Well, this is one all right! I’ll simply love to come with you!’

‘Then *that’s* settled! You can go to the Round House as we planned until Sunday. They’re all coming over on Sunday morning to spend Rob’s last day with us, you know. When they go back at night, you’ll remain. Mind you have all your clothes clean and in good order. You’d better spend Saturday washing and ironing. That’s what Anna proposes we should do. We don’t want to have to begin laundry work for at least a week after we arrive. Jack’s going on Saturday, you know. The furniture leaves England tomorrow and one of us must be there to

receive it. I'll have Anna with me, of course, but I'll be thankful to have you as well to help with the children. Jack talked of flying back to fetch us all, but it would be an appalling waste of time and money and I've talked him out of that. Besides, we've no means of finding out how long it's going to take the vans to get there. I only hope we've allowed enough time for them!

Primula suddenly laughed. 'What *will* you do if you haven't?' she asked.

'Go to the school, of course. Miss Annersley and the rest are there now—their possessions went three weeks ago and I had an airmail this morning saying that everything had arrived safely and everyone is up to the eyes getting straight. The Head offered ages ago to house us if anything like our own furniture not arriving on time should happen. We're not taking an awful lot, in case you haven't realised that. Beds and tables and chairs—oh, and bookcases—are the main items. Most of what we have will stay here and we'll get the other things we need by degrees. Well, that's all I wanted to say just now and it's time we were both asleep. Lie down and I'll tuck you up. Funny it's turned so chilly when it's been such a lovely day!'

'I'm so glad it was,' Primula said as she lay down obediently. 'Daisy wanted a sunny day for her wedding, and she got it.'

'Are you telling me! If she'd *ordered* it she couldn't have had it better.' Jo tucked in the sheet and blanket and pulled up the light *couvre-pied*. 'Sure you'll be warm enough, precious?'

'Quite, thank you!' Primula yawned widely. 'I'm so sleepy now. Good-night, Joey.'

'Good-night. Sleep well and God and Our Lady bless you,' Jo said, using her usual good-night blessing for her children. She dropped a kiss on the broad brow under the straight primrose-fair fringe and left the room, satisfied that the girl would be asleep before ten minutes were up.

Primula Venables had always been exceedingly delicate, and they had all been afraid that when her sister had really gone she might make herself ill with fretting. The tie between the two of them was peculiarly deep and strong. They had been fatherless since Primula was a tiny baby and motherless for the last twelve years. Lady Russell and her husband had done their best for his sister's children, and Jo had carried on with the work when the reins had, perforce, fallen from Madge's hands. But, as Daisy had once said wistfully, the nicest aunt in the world couldn't make up for your own parents and, since their mother's death, they had never felt that they had had a home of their own. Hence the great idea which, as Jo had claimed, had hit her in the face. There would be no fear of trouble now, for the girl would be kept busy until Daisy sent for her to go back to England.

'It'll be easy enough to find an escort out there for her,' Jo thought as she went to say good-night to Robin. But Robin was as soundly asleep as the children, for she was tired out with the day's excitements. Telling her of this wonderful new plan must wait until the morning. Jo crept out of her room again and went to her own. The twins had to be attended to, and when they were once more asleep in their cots in the dressing-room, Jo yawned, stretched, and made for bed at top speed.

Next morning, when Primula had set off for the Round House, three or four miles away, Jo told Robin her plan for Primula. Robin was loud in her approval of it.

'It's the very thing, Jo! She loves Madge and Jem and you and Jack, but she adores Daisy. I know she'd have fretted herself into a fever if she hadn't this to think about. It's just like you, though!'

Jo laughed. 'Don't praise me, Rob. It really is a case of six and two threes! I shall be thankful of help with the children on that long train journey. I'm not exactly looking forward to it, even now. It'll be very much better, though, with another grown-up to help out; and we *are* breaking the journey at Paris, though how Simone thinks she's going to crowd all the lot of us into her *appartement* is more than I can tell you! Still, it *is* only for one night and she seems certain she can manage easily. I rather think she must mean to make us sleep heads to tails!'

'Well, it would have been ghastly trying to do that long journey by night and arriving in Basle somewhere between five and six in the morning,' Robin said decidedly.

'I know it. As it is, we'll leave Paris in the morning and reach Basle somewhere in the late afternoon. Jack will be there with the car and it's quite a short run to Interlaken. We are going up by mountain railway, then. If the furniture's arrived, well and good. If not, equally well and good! We park ourselves at the school and wait till it does come. Either way, it saves a night in the train with all the brats reminding us that life is real, life is earnest!'

Robin laughed at her conclusion. Then she said thoughtfully, 'You know, I'm not sure it wouldn't be just as well if the furniture *hadn't* arrived. In any case, if they'll have you, I think I should go to the school for the first two or three days. It would give you a chance to get the new house straight without having the children underfoot the whole time.'

'Robin! That's a marvellous idea! I'll send Hilda an airmail today and ask if we can do that. I was rather dreading the first days, but if we're at the school, we can manage quite easily. I told you Jack had engaged Beth Chester to come to us as nursery governess—they wanted to have one of the family with Babs for her first school year and Beth's the obvious one, of course—but she won't be coming till the end of August. Bill told me that domestic help is almost as sticky there as it is here. Most of the girls go to the big hotels, you see. I'll have Anna, of course, but she and I will be up to the eyes the first two or three weeks and Mike is one person's work at any time, not to speak of the others.'

'Charles, for instance?' Robin queried with a chuckle.

Jo shook her head. '*Not* Charles; not for some time to come now. Usually, he's the best-behaved of all the family. When he breaks out, it's generally something startling, but it happens at rare intervals only. He'll be a little angel for months to come now. Mike is like Margot—on the outlook for every single piece of mischief he can get into at all times!'

Robin laughed. 'Poor old Jo!' she said, regarding her adopted sister with dancing eyes. 'Those two do keep you on your toes!'

'Are you,' Jo demanded, 'telling me! The only wonder is my hair isn't white already. Well, now, I suppose, we'd better go and fish out the trunks and cases. Whatever else I may leave behind, every rag of clothing must go. We'll take the largest trunks and pack them to their limit. I don't want to have to bother with more luggage than I can help. Oh, by the way, before we go atticwards, I had the most mysterious letter from Simone this morning. I couldn't make out what she was getting at.'

'How do you mean? Can I see it?'

'*May* you, you mean!' Jo gave her a wicked look, and Robin blushed.

'Oh, bother you! Well, *may* I, then?'

Jo went and fished it out from behind the dining-room mirror. 'Here you are. Read it and see if *you* can solve the mystery.'

Robin perched on the edge of the table, with it while Jo decided that a cup of coffee would not come amiss and plugged in the electric percolator.

Simone de Bersac, once Simone Lecoutier, was one of Jo's oldest and dearest friends. In the days when the Chalet School had been in Tirol, they two, together with Frieda Mensch and Marie von Eschenau, had formed a quartette which had gone steadily up the school together. Now they were all married and had been parted for some years. Simone lived in one of the suburbs of Paris, Frieda and her husband, Bruno von Ahlen, were in the *appartement* in the Mariahilfe of Innsbrück where Frieda's elder sister, Bernhilda, had begun *her* married life; and Marie, who was now the Countess von und zu Wertheim, dwelt in the Count's old castle of Wertheim together with her rampageous family. It was three years and more since Jo had seen any of them, but never for a moment had they lost touch with each other. All of them wrote regularly and exchanged news and snaps, and one of the most joyful parts of going to the Oberland, where Jo was concerned, was that they ought to be able to meet much more often now.

Simone, on hearing the news, had written to insist that Jo and her family should break the journey out and stay for at least a night with them in Paris. She had added that she was longing to show Jo the baby son who had arrived early in the year when Simone and André de Bersac had just been resigning themselves to the fact that their daughter Tessa looked like being an only child.

Frieda and Marie had both sent word that they would come to the Platz for visits. And, of course, since the school was so much nearer at hand, all the girls in the families would go there as soon as they were old enough.

Robin read the letter carefully and then sat thinking hard while Jo rummaged in a cupboard for cups and saucers and a tin of biscuits.

'I agree that she's being very mysterious,' she said finally as Jo handed her the coffee at last. '—Thanks Jo. Yes, I'll have a biscuit, thank you!—but I haven't the least idea what it's all about. *Something* unexpected has happened—so much is clear, even though Simone ties herself up into a fine old series of knots, trying not to hint too openly at you! She's as cryptic as—as the worst kind of crossword! You'll have to wait until you get there, my dear; that's all! It's less than a week now, anyhow. Mind you write me by airmail and tell me as soon as you possibly can. I'll be eaten up with curiosity until I hear.'

'You're not much help, are you?' Jo grumbled as she sat down with her own coffee. 'Oh, I'll write as soon as I can and tell you all the hanes—that, I promise you. Well, now I suppose we'd better wrap ourselves round this and then go and dig out those trunks. What about your own packing?'

'Finished, my dear. I've handed over a lot of things to Primula, seeing she's the only one of you near my size,' said Robin, who was on the same miniature scale as Primula, though she could boast of an inch more in height. 'I haven't a lot to take. Oh, and Joey, I'm going to hand over my trinkets to you for your girls. Keep a share for Felicity, won't you? Len is to have the Belsornian pearls that the King gave me at the same time he gave you yours—remember? There's that opal ring Daisy brought me from Australia for Con, and Dick and Mollie's emerald brooch for Margot. Give Felicity my watch when she's old enough. Meanwhile, if you *can* remember, you might keep it in going condition.' She wound up with a chuckle, for Jo was famed for never remembering to wind her own watch.

'I'll do my best, and saints can't do more. We won't talk about it any more,' Jo replied.

Robin glanced at her. 'Very well. I'll pack the case in one of your trunks and you can look through it later when you have time.'

‘Just as you like. Give me that letter to put away and then come on. Those trunks and cases won’t sort themselves out—that’s certain. As for Simone, I’ll talk to her when I see her! Keeping me on pins and needles like this!’

Chapter VI
THE MAYNARDS SET FORTH

‘Now, let’s see. Have we everything? Stand still, all of you, while I count.’

It was the day of departure and Jo was standing on the terrace, surrounded by her family; all the Russells and Bettanys had come to see them off; her friend from across the meadow, Mrs Carey, with her own girl, Mary-Lou Trelawney and her step-daughter, Verity-Anne Carey; the vicar, Ernest Howell and his young step-sister, Gwensi, who was a great chum of Daisy’s and who was to keep house for her step-brother in the part of Plas Gwyn that had been let to them. They would be moving in next week, but, as Gwensi had said with emphasis, it would have been so much more fun if the Maynards had been staying on.

Robin had set off for Canada on the Monday and they had had a cable already to announce her safe arrival. She was staying with friends in Toronto until the Feast of the Assumption, when she would be received as a postulant in the convent of La Sagesse, so they had no need to worry about her.

Lady Russell, none the worse for her tiresome experience of German measles, gave a deep sigh when Jo spoke. ‘It’s nothing but parting! Robin’s gone and you’re going!’

‘And what price the year that you marched off to Canada with Jem, taking my Margot with you?’ Jo demanded. ‘At least I’m leaving your family to you. You *can* talk, my dear!’

‘I left you David and Sybil in exchange,’ her sister told her.

‘I daresay. Did you find Margot such a good exchange for Sybs, may I ask?’

Lady Russell laughed. ‘One up to you, Jo! I did not. Margot knows I loved having her,’ she paused to flash a smile at Margot, ‘but it wasn’t the same as my Sybs. And I’ve got to part with both her and Josette before very long. I had a letter from Hilda Annersley yesterday and she says they’re nearly shipshape now and they expect to start term on September 24th. *That* won’t leave us much time now.’

Jo looked at her calmly. ‘You wait till the girls are grown up and going off getting married. You can talk then,’ she said.

Madge Russell gave a squeal of horror. ‘*Jo!* They’re only children still. Even Sybs isn’t sixteen yet. And Josette is just twelve! If you come to that, you’ve howled enough about your own family beginning to grow up. Just you wait till your triplets insist on a triplet wedding! Won’t I crow over you, though!’

Mollie Bettany intervened. ‘Sure, you’re both talking nonsense,’ she said firmly. ‘If anyone has a right to complain, it’s me. At least you’re keeping young Ailie in England, Madge; but both Bride and Maeve are off in September to Switzerland. Well, I’ll have Peg, at least.’ And she glanced complacently at her eldest daughter.

Peggy Bettany, a slight, very fair, very pretty girl of eighteen, gave her a return smile and then set to work to help her aunt to count.

‘One—two—three—four trunks—I wouldn’t be *you* at the Customs, Aunt Jo!—six cases—two bags—and a sweet variety of satchels. How on earth will you manage?’

‘Goodness only knows! The best way I can, I suppose. Primula and Anna must look after the brats while I cope with the Customs,’ Jo replied airily. ‘You wouldn’t like to come out with us by any chance to lend a hand, Peg?’

‘Talk sense!’ Peggy’s father, Dick Bettany, took a hand. ‘In the first place there’ve been no arrangements made for her and in the second she’s wanted at home at this present moment.’

‘Oh, well, I hadn’t much hope—and here comes Jem with the car, so we’d better stop talking and see how we are going to get all this lot and our noble selves fitted in. I suppose you *can* manage it, you two?’

Dick grinned. ‘I’ve handled worse in my time. Jem, suppose we each take two trunks on the carriers at the back? Then the cases and the rest of the impedimenta must be packed into the cars somehow.’

‘Are you referring to me and my family?’ Jo asked awfully.

‘What else? Oh, we’ll throw in the cases and the rest of your bags. Now don’t rag, Jo; there’s a good girl. Jem, we must get cracking.’

‘O.K.; if we *can*. Joey, *must* you take all this lot with you?’

‘Well, you tell me what else I can do!’ Jo retorted. ‘I’d be thankful to leave some of it behind, but it’s clothes mainly, and clothes for this crowd take some packing, I can assure you!’

‘I believe you! Come on then; we’ll see what we can do. We’ll load you up first, Dick, I think. Your carrier is wider than ours, so you’d best have this wicker affair and that wooden case. I’ll take the two trunks—and I could add that big suitcase as well. Come on!’

The two men, assisted by Dick’s boys and Madge’s eldest son, set to work to load up, and Rix Bettany was moved to remark detachedly that it was as well that both cars were big and powerful. Otherwise, they would lie down on the job at the first hill!

‘You stop chattering and give that strap a good pull,’ his father said in exasperated tones. ‘This pile still isn’t secure. Help him, John!’

Between them all, it was done. The remainder of the cases were laid on the back seat of Jem’s car, while the satchels and bags were packed into the back of Dick’s. Then, after everyone had exchanged kisses and hugs, the triplets were hoisted on to the cases in Jem’s Napier and Charles and Steve were packed in with them with instructions to behave nicely. Anna took the front seat with Felix on her lap and a bag, containing her knitting, attached to her belt.

‘Now for us!’ Dick said as he shut the doors with a bang. ‘Jo, you’d better sit beside me. Primula, you go to the back and take Mike with you. Can you manage?’

‘Yes; if I have Mike on my knee,’ Primula said doubtfully as she surveyed the very small space left clear.

‘*No!*’ Jo said with emphasis. ‘*That*, I won’t allow! You may take Felicity and I’ll have Mike; but you’re not travelling with that heavy boy sitting on top of you, Prim, so don’t argue about it. Get in and I’ll give you Felicity.’

Primula climbed in and managed to settle herself comfortably. Jo laid her youngest daughter in the outstretched arms, saying, ‘Thank goodness she’s as good as gold, mostly. And she *is* small.’ She glanced at the very fair baby sitting upright in Primula’s lap. Felicity gave her mother a beaming smile and Jo turned to her own part of the affair. ‘I’ll get in and someone give me Mike when I’m settled.’ She inserted herself carefully and then held out her arms for the boy, who was lifted in by his Aunt Madge.

‘Now is *that* all?’ Dick demanded, looking round. His eyes fell on an enormous basket on one side. ‘What’s that thing over there, Jo? Has it to come, too?’

‘Don’t leave that behind whatever you do!’ Jo shrieked. ‘It’s the spare eats and table games and things like that for the journey tomorrow. Can’t you put it on top of the satchels?’

She craned her neck round to inspect the heap beside Primula.

‘Well, it’s the only place for it if you *must* take it,’ he told her.

‘Of course I must! Don’t be silly! How do you think I’m going to cope all those hours in the train if I’ve nothing to keep the brats occupied?’

‘O.K.—O.K.; keep your wool on!’ he said soothingly. ‘Now is *that* all?’

‘Yes; I think so,’ Jo said after a glance round. ‘I don’t *see* anything else.’

‘Right! You get off first, Jem, and I’ll follow. Stand back, everyone!’

Madge Russell and Mollie Bettany crowded up to the door to give Jo final kisses.

‘Now then, I thought you’d done all that some minutes ago!’ Sir James observed from his car. ‘Shut those doors and let us get off or Jo will miss the boat, and a nice thing *that* will be!’

Madge gave her sister a final hug and reluctantly slammed the door shut. The small crowd stood to one side and the cars moved off slowly down the drive, the Russell car leading the way. The children hung out of the windows, waving and calling good-byes until a curve in the avenue hid the standing group from sight. Then they sat back and prepared to make the best of the long run to Folkestone.

It was very early yet, barely five o’clock in the morning, for Jo was making for the two-o’clock ferry to Boulogne. Before long the children, tired with excitement and early rising, turned drowsy and the small ones were soon asleep, not to awaken until they drew up before an hotel at Windsor where Jem proposed to give everyone a second breakfast, the first having taken place at four. The children quickly roused and tumbled out, glad of the chance to stretch their legs. As Jo said in an aside to the two men, they had really been very good, considering that they could hardly be comfortable, perched up on all those cases.

‘The boys have slept practically the whole way,’ Dick informed her. ‘Your troubles are about to begin, my girl! They’ll be all bright and wakeful from now on.’

‘You *would* think of that!’ Jo said with a grimace at him. ‘Oh, well, they can exercise on the boat. And the journey to Paris won’t be too bad. They’ll be on seats, at least. Mercifully, they’ve had so much travelling lately that they’re more or less accustomed to it.’

They went into the hotel and had their breakfast in a sunny room, though Jem eyed the sunshine dubiously.

‘I don’t much like the look of that sun. If you ask me, we’re in for a thunder-storm before the day’s out.’

‘Think so? Oh, well, I expect we’ll run out of it,’ Jo said optimistically as they left the hotel and made for the cars.

‘We *may*. On the other hand, it wouldn’t surprise me if we didn’t. I was talking to the head waiter when I paid the bill and he told me that the eight o’clock forecast promised thunder-storms all over the south.’

‘How nice of him! Let’s hope he and the weather prophets are all wrong.’

‘Well, we can only wait and see. To change the subject, do you think you could squeeze Charles in beside you, Jo? I want to try to upend those cases and see if we can make it better for the kids.’

Jo nodded. ‘Plenty of room for a little ’un! There’s not much of him, anyhow.’

‘Hop in, then,’ his uncle said to the small boy. ‘You can sit between Mamma and Uncle Dick. Dick, don’t you think we could set that basket the other way? Then Felicity could sit up at the window and look out. It would take her weight off Primula, too. Yes, Prim; I know she’s not heavy, but we’ve at least three-and-a-half hours’ run before us and your arms will ache if you have to hold her again all that time. Let’s try it, anyhow.’

Ten minutes later they set off with things readjusted and everyone considerably more comfortable. Jem and Dick made all the speed they could with an eye to the clouds beginning to gather in the west. But, as Jo had prophesied, they ran out of the threatened storm, at any rate for the time being, and were presently heading through Surrey into Kent, where the hopyards were heavy with the ripening bines and apples were beginning to redden among their leaves.

Felicity was wide awake now and she babbled incessantly to all and sundry. Both she and Felix were talking hard nowadays, though not everyone could understand what they said. Dick turned to smile over his shoulder at his youngest niece as they waited at a level-crossing for the gates to open.

‘She’s a talker all right,’ he remarked. ‘But you know, Jo, those two should belong to Mollie and me. Felicity is the image of what Peg was at her age.’

Jo laughed. ‘I know. They’re not in the least like the rest. But we couldn’t spare them, could we, boys?’

Charles, who adored his baby sister, looked at his uncle with solemn grey eyes.

‘If you want more twins, you must ask God to let you and Auntie Mollie have some, Uncle Dick. He might have them to spare. You can’t have ours.’

Mike, with no idea of what was meant, chimed in. ‘Vey’re *ours!*’ he said.

‘There you are!’ their mother said. ‘Now you know. Hello! Here she comes! Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia! What an old tin-kettle of an engine!’

An elderly engine pulling a train of empty waggons rumbled slowly past, watched by Charles with fascinated eyes. He and Stephen were, as their mother said, quite mad on trains, and she had had to pack the last extra of their Hornby set to take, to Switzerland. Mike, on the other hand, was not in the least interested. He liked to be up and doing, and the absorption with which his elder brothers built and rebuilt their tracks, loaded their trucks and manipulated crossings, signals and points left him quite cold.

‘Nasty old puffer!’ he said.

Then it was past, the gates opened and they sped on their way once more.

It was eleven o’clock now, and after Jo had given the boys chocolate biscuits as a treat, Mike consented to settle off to a nap. Primula had Felicity in her arms again and the silver-fair baby was sound asleep.

‘I wonder what they’re all doing at Howells now?’ Jo said as she put an arm round Charles and drew him closer to her so that he could drowse comfortably if he liked.

‘Got over their weeps, anyhow, I hope,’ her brother said. ‘I saw it impending with both Madge and Mollie, at any rate. By the way, Jo, it’s not at all unlikely that Mollie will come to stay with you later on. She’s made a marvellous recovery, but Grafton Mann saw her the other day and he says she’ll be better out of England during the worst of the winter months, anyhow.’

Jo’s eyes sparkled at this. ‘Oh, Dick! How gorgeous! And you’d come out with her, of course. Peggy could come, too. We’ll have heaps of room. The place Jack has taken for us used to be a small but select *pension*. There are *ten* bedrooms! Not that we’re furnishing anything like all of them. The three girls will share one room and Steve and Charles another and Anna insists on having her nursery with Mike and the babies. We’ll have Beth and Babs Chester, but even so, there’ll be any amount of room. I’ll hold you to that, my lad. You can bring Mollie out when Bride and Maeve come back to school for the Easter term, and when

you go home, you can leave Moll with me. I expect, though, that young Peg will insist on going home with you to look after you.'

'No need. Bridgie will still be with us,' Dick said, referring to his widowed sister-in-law, who was making her home at The Quadrant at present. 'In fact, if Mollie hadn't been building so much on having Peg with her, I'd have sent that young woman back to Welsen for a second year. She's not nineteen till the end of January and the extra school wouldn't hurt her. But Mollie is longing to have her and—well, there you are.'

Jo nodded, but said nothing. She knew very well that her brother would not refuse anything his wife asked if he could give it to her. In the previous November Mollie had undergone a very dangerous operation and for days it had been touch and go whether she came through or not. That she had done so and made an amazing recovery into the bargain made it all the harder for him to deny her anything.

'All the same,' she thought as she moved Mike carefully to ease her aching arm, 'I'll bet that Mollie will begin to think of it for herself before term begins again. Peg's too young to leave school yet and she's not really needed at The Quadrant, now that Bridgie's there to see to things. And Mollie herself told me that Pat and her husband won't have Pat's mother out in Kenya until things have settled down there. Bridgie's likely to be a fixture at The Quadrant for some time to come.'

An hour later, just as Felicity and the boys were rousing up, they came within sight of the sea and presently they were running along the wide road to the harbour.

As they were crossing by the afternoon ferry, the trip through England had been timed to allow of their having a meal before they went aboard. Everyone was very stiff with the long sitting by this time and Mike was inclined to be fretful. However, a lunch which included roast chicken with lashings of bread sauce and wound up with ices did a good deal to brighten his view of life, and by the time Jo was marching her tribe off to be washed and brushed before going aboard, he was his usual chuckly self.

When they came out of the hotel, she looked anxiously round. The sun had vanished, the sea was a heavy grey and great clouds were rolling up over the blue sky.

'I hope we aren't going to have a gale,' she said to her brother.

'Not you!' he replied. 'What you *are* going to have is that thunder-storm Jem was yarning about or I'm a Dutchman!'

'Oh, well, that won't matter. We've all got good macs with hoods to them,' Jo said comfortably. 'Anna,' she turned to that faithful maiden, 'where are the macs? The children had better put them on at once.'

'Bitte, meine Frau, I know not,' Anna said. 'You said that you would take them.'

'But I didn't!' Jo exclaimed. 'I thought in the end we agreed that *you* would see to them and I was to have charge of the basket. I never gave them another thought!'

'Perhaps the girls know where they are,' Dick suggested. 'Hi, Primula! Do you or the triplets know where the macs are?'

Primula turned a startled face on them. 'But Aunt Jo said she or Anna would see to them,' she said. 'I haven't got even my own and I don't know where they are.'

The triplets took an interest. 'They were all on the dining-room table this morning,' Len said thoughtfully. 'You put them there last night, Mamma, so's we shouldn't forget them. Don't you remember?'

'Did you see anyone move them?' Jo asked, frantically casting about in her mind for some sort of substitute, since she had no wish either to stay in the saloon herself nor confine her

family there, short though the crossing was.

‘No, Mamma. They were there just before we—I mean us three—got into Uncle Jem’s car, ’cos I saw them as I went past the window. I thought when you went back into the house that you’d gone to get them.’

‘I didn’t. I suddenly remembered that the tap of the gas cooker might have been left on as I was boiling water at the last moment to wash Mike with and I went to make sure it was all safe,’ Jo said. ‘I didn’t think anyone else would be likely to bother with it after we’d gone. I wish you’d called after me, Len, though it’s no one’s fault but my own. Jem—Dick! What *are* we to do? There isn’t time now to rush the children to the nearest shop to buy new ones, is there?’

‘Not much use if there were. The shops are all shut at this hour,’ Jem reminded her. ‘Haven’t you umbrellas?’

‘Yes—in the bottom of the wooden case!’ Jo threw out a dramatic hand in its direction. ‘I didn’t want the bother of looking after them during the journey so I just packed the lot. They’re *there* all right—and completely ungetatable!’

‘Then I’m afraid all you can do is stay under cover on the boat if it comes on to rain at all heavily. Really, Jo!’

‘It’s raining now,’ Con said, tilting her small face upwards. ‘I felt a spot on my nose—oh, and there’s another! It’s going to rain *hard!*’

It was only too true. The rain was beginning to fall in great drops and, judging by the look of the sky, there was plenty more to come. Everyone was wearing a summer coat and a beret, but that was no protection against thunder rain. Jo had to face it. They must all stay in the saloon as long as it rained. She groaned loudly, but there was no help for it.

Jem insisted that they should hurry to the dock and go aboard, where they would at least be under cover before the storm really was on them. The thunder was growling away in the distance and the heavy clouds were slashed across and across with swords of blue lightning.

‘Come on, Joey! Staring at it won’t magick it away. You were bound to forget *something!* Let’s be thankful it’s no worse. It might have been your passports and then you’d have had it!’ Jem said unsympathetically. ‘As for the macs, Madge can pack them up and post them to you tomorrow.’

‘Don’t you worry,’ Dick put in. ‘I’ll bet you any money she and Mollie made the rounds at Plas Gwyn once we were off, just to make sure that everything was shipshape and Bristol fashion. I’ll bet those macs are in the post already.’

And, to anticipate a little, that was exactly what had happened. The parcel arrived at the Görnetz Platz the following Monday. In the meantime, the two men ushered Jo and her party on board the ferry and saw to the luggage for her. When they had done everything they could, they prepared to leave, for the boat would sail very shortly.

‘Now you’re sure you’ve got everything else?’ Dick asked. ‘Passports—money—’

‘Everything except those wretched macs,’ Jo said. ‘It *would* happen like that! Oh, well, we must just put up with it. Luckily, there don’t seem to be a great number of passengers. Must you go now? Oh, well, then, good-bye, Dick—good-bye, Jem! Write soon and write often. Give Madge and Mollie my love and say we’ll be all right and our house will be open to any of you who like to come any time.’

Jem kissed her and loosed her arms round his neck. ‘Cheer up, Joey! Keep cool and don’t worry. You’ll be seeing some of us sooner or later. Good-bye, kids!’ He kissed them all round hurriedly and then followed his brother-in-law across the gangway. Jo sent her children to the

saloon with Anna and Primula. She herself, regardless of the rain now falling heavily, stood at the rail, waving to Dick and Jem. At the last moment, just as the men were casting off the hawsers, Dick framed his mouth with his hands and sent a final message to her in a good, hearty bellow. ‘You go below, pronto! You’ve forgotten your mac! You’ll forget your head next!’

The tears had been in Jo’s eyes, but at this cheerful insult they dried and she shouted back across the widening space between the ferry and the quay, ‘Most unlikely! I’m not you!’

Chapter VII
ONE SURPRISE AFTER ANOTHER!

The storm lasted for three-quarters of an hour. Then, as suddenly as it had come, it passed and the sun shone out again over a blue sea. Jo thankfully chased her brood on deck for what was left of the crossing and she and Primula strolled about, Mike between them, while Anna sat by the rail, a twin on each knee, and kept an eye on the other five.

‘Let’s hope,’ Primula said suddenly, ‘that the storm hasn’t gone on to Paris and we arrive there to find it going full tilt!’

‘What charming thoughts you have!’ Jo cried. ‘I don’t suppose, however, that we should find it raging when we got there. We’ll be hours behind it. Now look here, Prim; I’m going to give you the passports and the landing-papers so that I can give my whole mind to the Customs. Here you are. I’ll keep the tickets, though—Mike, my lamb, don’t hang on so; walk properly.’

‘I wants to go wif Steve an’ Charles,’ Mike said.

‘If I let you go, will you promise me to do as Steve says?’ his mother asked.

Mike considered. Once he had promised he knew he must keep it. He also knew that his eldest brother would never allow him to enjoy himself in his own way. But neither would Mamma, and her talk with ‘Aunt Primula’ was very dull.

‘All yight: I plomise,’ he said, looking straight at her with blackly lashed blue eyes.

‘Steve!’ Jo called Stephen to her. ‘Take Mike with you and Charles for the rest of the way, will you? He’s promised to do as you say, so that’ll be all right. Anna or I will take him, once we’re ashore.’

‘O.K.,’ Stephen said. ‘Come on, kid!’

They went off together and Jo grinned at Primula. ‘The complete elder brother! Still, he’s to be trusted anywhere, and that’s all that matters. He and Len are the most responsible of the whole eight. I can always trust either of them to look after the rest.’

‘You don’t know yet what the twins may be like,’ Primula pointed out.

‘True for you! But it’ll be a few years yet before they are old enough to take care of anyone or anything but themselves. Here’s the harbour-mouth. We’ll be ashore before long, now. Squat on that trunk, will you, while I call the family. I know what French harbour porters are like and you don’t!’

Primula obligingly ‘squatted’ and Jo went to collect the children. She gave each of the eldest five a trunk or a case to sit on, and summoned Anna for the big wicker basket-trunk while she stood guard herself over the remainder. That this was a necessary precaution, Primula saw at once. The moment the gangway was in position, blue-bloused porters swarmed up it and made for the luggage, seizing on various pieces. Two men made for their group, and while one produced a long strap with which he strapped the cases together, hauling them up over his shoulder, the other began piling the trunks on a handtruck he had wheeled aboard.

‘Your numbers, please?’ Jo said in her rapid, fluent French.

The men showed the numbered discs they all wear at the landing-stages, and she nodded and left them to it while she ushered her crowd off the boat and on to the quay, where they stood staring round with interest at all they saw.

'Now listen, family,' Jo began; when a slender young lady, dressed with extreme chic suddenly came flying across to her and grabbed her wildly.

'Joey Bettany! Well, this is the shock of the season, I guess!' she cried in a voice that left no doubt as to her nationality. 'My, Joey, how like you to give a fella a shock! Right now, you hoe in and tell me what you're doing here!'

'Evvv Lannis!' Jo retorted. 'You begin that way yourself! I thought you were in the States.'

'I guess I've as much right in France as you! Say Joey, what's all this bunch of kids? Don't say they're all yours?' as her eyes wandered from the three little girls to Anna and the twins. Then she gave a cry. 'Why—Primula Venables! It *is*, isn't it? Primula grown up! My! Isn't that swell!'

Primula laughed. 'No one could forget you, Evvy. You and Corney Flower are a legend in the school. You're still talked of with bated breath—and a few other people, too, of course.' She gave Jo a twinkling glance. 'Have you been in France long?'

'We came by air six weeks ago. Say, Joey, is all this lot yours?'

Jo nodded. 'Eight of 'em! How's that for a family?'

'*Eight!*' Evvy Lannis paused a moment. 'Well,' she said finally, 'I guess it's just what anyone might have expected. You always were wholesale.'

Jo grimaced at her. 'I don't see it myself. Anyhow, come along and meet them. Girls! Do you remember Evadne Lannis at school years ago when it was at Plas Howell? This is her!' with a sublime disregard for good English.

'Are you telling me that these are the babies I used to cuddle? My, how they've grown!'

'It's a good many years since you left school,' Jo said, mildly. 'They're eleven in November. This is Steve. I think you saw him as a tiny baby. And here are Charles and Michael. And these are my twins.' She beckoned to Anna who came forward, beaming, a baby over each shoulder.

Evadne burst into a peal of laughter. 'Triplets—and now twins! No wonder you've eight! I remember Anna, anyhow. How are you, Anna?'

Anna replied that she was well and then Evadne remembered that so far Jo had not said why they were all in France and repeated her query.

'We're going to live in the Oberland,' Jo explained. 'The San authorities are opening a branch up at the Görnetz Platz and Jack's to be in charge. And that reminds me, I must go and cope with the Customs.'

'Now that's where I come in. Poppa will see to it for you. He's just over there. I was half-expecting a friend by this boat, but I guess the storm frightened her, for she hasn't come. Come on to Poppa and we'll turn him on to the *douâniers*.'

'You folk wait here,' Jo said to her family. Then, with sudden recollection, 'On second thoughts, I'd like to show some of you at once to Mr Lannis. Margot and Mike, you come with me. The rest wait with Aunt Primula and Anna.'

When she had shaken hands with the kindly gentleman who had known her since her own schooldays and presented her two 'specimens' to him, Evadne broke in with a demand that her father should see to Jo's luggage and he promptly agreed to take all that trouble off her shoulders. He asked for the numbers of her porter's and then vanished into the *douâne* while Jo and Evadne proceeded to bring each other up to date with all the news they could cram in.

'Say, we're here till day after tomorrow. Can't you all come and have a meal with us before you go on?' Evadne asked hospitably. 'Momma would love to meet you again.'

Jo shook her head. 'It's awfully good of you, Evvy, but Simone is expecting us by the boat-train, so we must go. But when we're settled out at the Platz, you must come and stay with us for a week or two. The Abbess would be thrilled to see you after all this time—and so would a lot of the rest of the staff.'

'I guess you don't have to ask me twice,' Evadne said fervently. 'But it can't be for a while yet. Poppa's got a house 'way down, on the Breton coast for the summer, and we've a gang of folk coming for the next few weeks. I'll write you and let you know when I'm free, though. Thanks a million!'

Mr Lannis, having got the luggage through the Customs, now arrived to suggest that Jo and her family should come back to their hotel and have a meal. Jo gave him the explanation she had given Evadne, and he nodded.

'Then, at that rate, I guess you'd best make tracks pronto,' he said. 'C'mon, Evvy. We'll give Jo a hand with all she's got.'

He was as good as his word, and Jo found that the difficulties she had been dreading were all smoothed away. When the train finally steamed off, the family were all settled comfortably. Every one of them had a basket of big ripe raspberries and a bottle of lemonade by way of refreshment, and such luxuries as pillows had been provided for the babies.

'Well, what d'you know about *that*?' Jo gaily asked Primula as she fished a bunch of old horn teaspoons out of her food-basket and handed them round before she set to work to feed Felix with the fruit. 'Fancy meeting Evvy Lannis the moment we set foot in France!—Slowly, pet; you'll choke if you gobble like that. Watch Mike, Len, and see that he doesn't smear his face from hair to chin with squashed rasps!'

Primula turned wide blue eyes on her. 'You know, Jo, I have a feeling that from now on we're going to pick up a lot of threads we've had to drop. Evvy's the first and Simone will be the second—'

'What are you talking about?' demanded Jo, outraged. 'Simone and I have *never* dropped any threads as you say! We've written every fortnight ever since she and André packed up and went back to Paris.'

'*You* may have, but the rest of us haven't!' Primula retorted. 'It was fun meeting Evvy after all these years. I hope we'll meet crowds of the others, too.'

'Oh, well, so do I.' Jo put the last rasps into Felix's open mouth and then wiped him off with her handkerchief. 'Finished yours, Prim? Then take him while I have mine. He'll want to sleep presently and then we can use the pillows.'

Primula lifted the boy from Jo's lap. He gurgled and kicked delightedly and nearly overturned his mother's basket of fruit on to the floor. She gave a squawk and just caught it in time.

'Quietly, you monkey! Mike over again—that's what you are, my lad!' She settled herself comfortably and began to enjoy her own rasps. 'These are delicious and most refreshing. Anna!' She bent across to the far corner of the compartment where Anna was sitting enjoying her share of the fruit. 'How are you managing?'

'Bitte, meine Frau, but very well, danke sehr. I have our Blümchen fed and now I feed myself, ja wohl.' And Anna beamed broadly at her mistress.

The elder children gazed out of the window for a while, but the landscape was not exciting enough to hold their attention long. Jo produced 'Snakes and Ladders' from her basket and set them to playing it. The babies, full-fed and sleepy as they had missed their after-dinner nap,

were soon slumbering sweetly and Mike, very tired now, crawled along the seat to his mother, curled himself up with his yellow curls on her lap and fell fast asleep.

‘Poor little man! He’s worn out,’ Jo said as she eased him into a more comfortable position with her free hand. ‘I shall be thankful when I get them all safely at the Platz and we can go back to regular hours of bed and meals. Not so much *noise*, you folk!’ As Margot gave a squeal of dismay at the prospect of slithering right down the longest snake to the very first square. ‘Don’t disturb the babies, whatever you do.’

Luckily, the three were far too deeply asleep to be disturbed and, in any case, were all accustomed to sleeping through any amount of noise at home. Jo herself began to feel drowsy, for though the thunder-shower had cleared the air, it was still very hot and she had made an earlier start than anyone else, even Anna.

‘I *shall* be glad of my bed tonight,’ she thought dreamily as she sat back in her corner, cradling Felix against her, since Mike took up the space where she had meant to lay the baby. ‘I only hope Simone will understand and not want to sit up till all hours gossiping, for I can’t do it.’

A few minutes later Primula, who had been deep in *Emma*, glanced up and saw that she was nearly asleep and that Felix was dropping perilously near Mike’s head. Quietly, she reached out and lifted the baby. ‘You have a nap, Jo,’ she said. ‘You’ll be all in if you don’t. I’ll keep an eye on the brats.’

Len caught what she said and looked up from her game. ‘Is Mamma sleepy? Then do make her rest, Aunt Primula. We’ll be good—honour bright, we will.’

Jo gave her a drowsy smile. ‘It’s all right, honey-bird. I can manage.’

‘No; but Papa would say you ought,’ Len returned. ‘We won’t make any row at all if you’ll try to have a sleep—will we?’ she gazed round her brethren.

‘We’ll be angels, Mamma,’ Margot said earnestly. ‘You do look awful! Your eyes are like saucers. You go to sleep and us three will look after the boys.’

Jo was really as worn out as she could be. Her eyelids were dropping again in spite of herself. She gave up the argument, settled back in her corner and almost at once was as sound asleep as the babies. The rest went on with their game quietly. When ‘Snakes and Ladders’ began to pall, they squeezed close together and Con told stories in low tones. At long last they left the country behind and began to run through the suburbs of Paris. Primula, with a now-awakened Felix on her knee, closed her book, leaned across and touched Jo. That lady started awake at once. She had always been a light sleeper and years of keeping one ear open for a baby’s cry had accustomed her to rousing on the spot. She stared wildly round, wondering where she was. Then she laughed and stretched and rubbed her eyes.

‘Good Heavens! Do you mean to tell me I’ve slept most of the way!’

‘You needed it,’ Primula said as she began to rouse Mike. ‘You looked a regular scarecrow. You look pounds better now.’

‘I feel it. Children, get your caps and coats. We’ll be there almost at once. Anna, have you the facecloths and towels? Give them out then and all of you wipe your faces. A grimier set of brats I never beheld! I must say I wish they didn’t use soft coal on the Continental trains! Come here, Charles, and let me take the thick of the dirt off your face and hands. Will you see to Mike, Prim?’

Anna had produced damp facecloths and pieces of old towel, one for each child. They all used them and Jo combed out untidy locks so that a fairly respectable pack of children left the train when it came to rest in the station. Another minute, and Jo was in Simone’s arms while

the latter's husband and Anna attended to the luggage. Primula called all the children together and kept guard on them.

'Oh, Joey!' Simone cried in her pretty French. 'How I am rejoiced to see thee! But oh, how tired you must all be! Come with me, all of you. I have the car and two taxis waiting and soon we shall be home. This way!'

'Oh, Simone!' Jo cried. 'I'm so thankful to be here at last! But,' her curiosity came uppermost at this point, 'how on earth are you going to sleep all this lot—eleven of us!'

Simone gave her a sidelong glance. 'Oh, I did not tell you, but we have left the *appartement*,' she said demurely as she held out her arms for a twin. 'Yes; André has been fortunate—but very, *very* fortunate! We do not live in Paris now but outside, and we have a much larger home as you will see for yourself soon. We have plenty of room for you all. And Tessa is longing to see your girls and Stephen again. She has talked so much of you all. And for me, I am longing to show you Pierre. Oh, Joey, he is so beautiful!'

'And what do you think of *my* latest effort?' Jo demanded as they began to move slowly towards the entrance.

Simone looked from Felix in her own arms to Felicity in Jo's and laughed. 'But they are lovely babies, my Jo, only so different from the others. How have you managed it?'

'Everyone asks me that, and I didn't "manage" at all!' cried Jo indignantly. 'I took what I got and was satisfied. What's your Pierre like? Dark, I suppose? You and André are both so dark, and so is Tessa. What does she think of him, by the way?'

'She was delighted. Now she keeps asking me when she can have a sister,' Simone said, laughing. 'I tell her we must wait until Pierre is at least two years old, but she is very impatient.'

By this time they had emerged from the station, Anna following with Margot and Mike on each side, while Primula was escorted by Len and Con, and André, striding ahead of a truck laden with luggage, had Charles and Stephen, who were chattering as hard as they could go.

'Now, where are Jean and the car?' he said as he came up with the main body. 'Ah!' He signalled, and a big Citroën drew up beside them. The chauffeur, a pleasant-looking young fellow in somewhat shabby uniform, got out and waited.

Jo's eyes nearly fell out of her head at the sight, but Simone gestured to her to get in, so she said nothing, but climbed in and sank into a corner with a sigh of relief. 'This feels like getting near a bed! I don't mind telling you, Simone, that I've slept all the way from Boulogne to Paris—or very nearly. I was up at three this morning and we've been on the go ever since.'

'Never mind,' Simone said soothingly. 'When we reach home, you shall have a meal and a bath and go straight to bed. We can talk tomorrow morning.'

Jo sat up. 'Can we, indeed? Have you forgotten that we're catching the six-something train from the Gare de l'Est tomorrow morning?'

Simone made no reply. She settled herself in the other corner and Primula followed her in and sat down opposite them. Then André lifted Charles and Mike into the front seat beside Jean and shut the door.

He came to the other door. 'I will talk to you when we are at home, Joey. Jean will drive you all there now. Anna will follow with your little girls, and Stephen and I are taking your big trunks and cases to the Gare de l'Est. En avant, Jean!'

They drove off, Jo still gasping with astonishment. When last she had talked to Simone, there had been no hint of any such change in the de Bersac fortunes. André had been in a minor post in his great-uncle's business and they had lived very quietly and carefully.

Simone gave her no chance of questioning. 'We will talk at home,' she said firmly. 'Oh, Joey! To have you again! It is wonderful, chérie! And how you have grown up, Primula! You grow very like Daisy, ma petite.'

Before Primula could do more than smile shyly, Jo was talking. 'It's wonderful all right,' she said in tones full of meaning. 'Oh, all right! We'll leave explanations until we reach your new abode, but I can see that something weird has happened. Oh, Simone, who do you think we met on the quay at Boulogne? I'll give you three guesses!'

'I have no idea,' Simone said, abandoning her native French for English, which she spoke as fluently as Jo did either French or German. In past days, all pupils of the Chalet School had been drilled in those three languages until any one of them came naturally. 'Tell me, Jo; who was it?'

'Believe it or not,' Jo said solemnly, 'it was Evvy Lannis, looking like a million dollars in the very latest! But she's the old Evvy underneath. Her father was there, too—they'd come to meet a friend off the boat, but she didn't appear. He was a prince! Saw the luggage through the Customs for me and put us safely into the train and everything. Was I thankful! I'd been scared stiff of it! Evvy's coming out to the Platz for a visit when we're settled. I want you and your family as well. I'm going to write to Frieda and Marie and scare up anyone else I can manage who was at school with us and we'll have a joyous reunion if I have to borrow beds all round! Oh, and what is all this nonsense about tomorrow?'

'Your Jack rang up André at his place of business,' Simone explained. 'He asked if we could keep you all for a day as he thought the journey would be too much for you if you tried to go straight on after just one night in between. But we're doing better than that. André is taking everything but the cases you need for tonight and tomorrow to the Gare de l'Est and forwarding them by the seven train this evening. Jack will be at Basle to meet it and take charge of them. You are all staying until the day after tomorrow and then we shall run you in the car to Belfort, where André has to go on business, and you can catch the train to Basle. It is a trip he often takes and he knows all the shortest routes, and you need not start too soon and will catch the afternoon train. I believe you reach Basle at six in the evening.'

Jo stared at her incredulously. Then she gave what was almost a sob of relief. 'Oh, Simone! What a relief! You don't *know* how I was dreading having to go on tomorrow, though the brats have been as good as gold, really. But can you actually do with us for all that time?'

'Oh, yes,' Simone said, her eyes dancing suddenly. 'And I have so much to tell you, my Jo. I think that even if we had been living in the old *appartement* I should have managed it somehow. We turn off here,' she interrupted herself, 'and soon we shall be out of Paris. We are living about fifty miles out, you see. I am so glad. It is much better for the children, and Tessa will board at her convent school during the *sémeestre*. But I see you are very tired—all eyes, as you always did look when you were tired!—so I will say no more and you must rest until we reach home.'

Jo gave her a weary smile, but fell in with her wishes and, as Primula was always inclined to be a silent person, there was no talking at all until, after passing along wide roads bordered with poplars and with fields and woods spreading on either hand with here and there a village, they turned finally into one that led through a wood. They came out before a high wall, pierced by great iron gates which stood open and the car rolled through into a cobbled courtyard.

Jean got down and lifted the small boys out on to the cobbles. Then he came round and opened the door. Simone got out, followed by Primula and then Jo, very stiff and aching in

every bone, but nearly crazy with curiosity and excitement, passed Felicity to Primula and descended herself. She stood staring round. Then she turned to her friend.

‘Simone de Bersac! What is the meaning of all this? Where are we? What has happened?’ Her words tumbled over each other in her eagerness.

Simone laughed before she replied. ‘You are at the Château Blanche fleur, which belonged to an old uncle of my belle-mère—the same in whose business André was. There are no more men left—only André and now our little Pierre. When l’Oncle Pierre died, we found that he had left everything to André, including his business and *this*! Now you can see for yourself that we have room and more than room for every one of you!’

And Joey, staring up at the old château with its mullioned windows and many chimneys, hinting at more rooms than there had been even at her beloved Plas Gwyn, could only agree.

Chapter VIII
SIMONE'S SURPRISE

Once inside the château, Jo found that she was to be well and truly looked after and would have no say in the matter. Anna had already taken Felicity from her. Now a fresh-coloured, sturdy *bonne* appeared, whisked Felix out of Simone's arms, took Michael's hand with her free one and, with a smile at Anna and the other children, said, 'Venez, mes petits!'

'This is Babette,' Simone said. 'Go with her, Anna. She will look after you. Jo, the twins don't really need you any longer, do they?'

Jo shook her head. 'Oh, no; they're well away on soup and strained vegetables and solids now. They're eleven months old, my dear!'

'Then see to them, Babette,' her mistress said in French. 'Get them to bed as soon as you can—all of them, in fact. They must all be very tired by this time.' She turned to the children and said in her English with its slight intriguing foreign accent. 'Go with Anna, darlings. You shall see Mamma in the morning, I promise you. But now both she and you are very tired and must sleep.'

They *were* very tired—too tired even to argue. They trooped off after Babette and Anna after Jo had kissed them good-night all round.

When they had vanished round a corner, Simone suddenly exclaimed, 'I forgot! Jo, can Anna speak *any* French?'

'Bless me, yes!' Jo said, trying vainly not to yawn. 'In Canada I had a Canadian-French girl as hired help and Anna simply *had* to learn some French or the Tower of Babel would have had nothing on our household. Don't worry about that, Simone.'

'No; and now we will go upstairs and you can see your rooms. I've put you side by side,' Simone said.

Jo gave her a grin. 'Does that mean one room with twin beds or twin rooms?'

Simone blushed. 'But how silly you are, Jo! Of course I meant a room each, but they are next each other and your room opens into the night-nursery at the other side. Come this way. We keep Tessa—and Pierre, when he is big enough—to the back stairs; but we will use the front ones.'

She led the way across a square hall, stone-floored and hung with old tapestries, and up a narrow winding flight of stairs that explained to Jo why the children were kept to the back staircase. The château was clearly a very old building and its owners had done nothing about improving the staircase. They came to a corridor with doors at one side and pairs of slender, lancet-shaped windows at the other. Simone took them halfway down it, pausing before two doors.

'Here are your rooms,' she said. 'Jo, you are in here, and this is yours, Primula. Come into Jo's room, petite. It has a door into yours.'

They went into Jo's room. It was long and narrow, with the same lancet windows—three pairs of them and a door in each side wall. The one which was half-open led into Primula's room. The other was shut, but Simone opened it and Jo found herself looking into an even longer room with narrow beds and a crib running down the inner wall. There was a door at the farther end and the crib stood near it.

‘Isn’t this the queerest old place?’ Simone demanded in French again. ‘We’ve only been living here for a month and it’s more or less as we found it. I wanted your advice before we did anything about it. This has always been the children’s bedroom. Come and see our son, Joey and Primula.’

They tiptoed down the shining boards. In one of the beds lay Tessa, the elder of the de Bersac children. She was fast asleep and Jo paused to look at her with a reminiscent smile.

‘She’s scarcely altered at all, Simone,’ she said in the low tones that schooldays had taught her were far less likely to carry than a whisper.

Simone pushed the silky black hair back from her daughter’s sleep-flushed small face. ‘Only to grow taller. You will see a change there, though. Do you remember how tiny she always was? When I got out her last summer’s frocks, I got a shock, I assure you. Not one of them would fit her. I tried the longest one after I had unpicked the hem and she was positively *indecent!* It meant buying all new ones.’

‘Isn’t it *awful* when they do that? I had the same bother last summer. When Felicity grows to them, she has a dozen and a half pretty frocks awaiting her—unless I cut them up for anything else before that,’ she added, as they left the sleeping Tessa and went on to the crib.

Simone drew back the muslin curtains, and then stood, looking at Jo proudly.

‘Here! Take that inanelly self-satisfied expression off your face!’ Jo protested. ‘Other folk have had sons besides you. I’ve four of my own this minute!’ Then as her friend gave her an indignant glance, she bent over the crib. ‘All the same, he really is something to be proud of. What a lovely boy, Simone! And what a size! He’d make two of my Felix at the same age! He’s very like what Tessa was—except for size.’

She touched the little olive-tinted cheek with a gentle hand.

‘Nine months old,’ his mother said proudly. ‘He weighs—one moment—twenty-one pounds. And look at his curls and his lashes!’

Jo nodded. ‘Firm as a rock, too. I’m awfully glad you have him, Simone. I know it’s always been a grief to you that you had only Tessa when the rest of us were steaming ahead with *real* families! Let’s hope,’ she went on cheerfully as they turned and went back to her own room, ‘that’s the beginning of yours. You may have five more if you want ’em. Then you’ve got to stop. If you don’t,’ she added warningly, ‘I shall go on and see about those quads I promised the staff of the Chalet School last term.’

It was just as well they were back in Jo’s room and Simone had shut the door, for she first stared wide-eyed at Jo and then went off into shrieks of laughter at this awful pronouncement.

‘Oh, mon Dieu, Jo! Quelle folie!’ she gasped between her peals.

‘Not madness at all,’ Jo said calmly. ‘I’ve got the lead and I jolly well mean to keep it. You have been warned!’ She sat down on the white bed and looked longingly at it. ‘Oh, I’m so *tired*, Simone! *Must* I bother to wash before I have a meal?’

‘But of course,’ Simone, said sobering quickly as she gave Jo a quick glance and saw that her eyes were enormous with blue rings round them and her naturally creamy skin was pallid with fatigue. ‘You will undress and take a sponge-down, for that will refresh you. Then you will go to bed, and when you are in bed, I shall bring you a tray. After that, you will go to sleep. Please do not argue with me!’ for Jo had opened her lips and looked mutinous. ‘My mind is made up. Truly, you would not wish to arrive at your new home so tired that you were only fit for bed and could do nothing—but *nothing!*’

‘No-o-o,’ Jo said slowly. ‘O.K.; I give in. I don’t mind telling you that every inch of me is one huge ache and I feel like yawning my head off.’

‘Then come with me—and you, too, Primula—and I will show you the bathroom.’ Simone went to the door leading into the corridor and then turned to add with mischief in her eyes, ‘And do prepare yourselves for a shock.’

‘Why on earth?’ Jo demanded in some surprise.

‘Wait until you see it! It is the first that was ever put into the château and l’Oncle Pierre added a shower to it at the beginning of the century. Since then, nothing more has been done. There is another in the north wing, but it has not even a shower. Down this passage. Now! What do you think of *that*?’

Jo and Primula pressed forward eagerly. The next moment they were staring with dropped jaws at what was surely the great-grandfather of all bathrooms!

The bath itself filled one side and was completely enclosed in cleating of some dark wood. The cleating had been carried on up the back of the bath and at its head it towered up and curved over to form a kind of canopy with a leaden ring pierced with holes in the centre. An enormous tap at the side could be turned to make the water either hot or cold, and Simone showed how a kind of shutter could be drawn round to prevent splashing the floor. The bath taps were equally huge, of brass and with brass tablets depending from the necks. One was marked ‘chaud’ the other ‘froid.’

‘I must warn you,’ the hostess said, ‘that when the hot water comes, it is scalding hot. Also, it gushes out like a cascade.’ She turned one of the taps to prove her statement. ‘Now I have told you all, I think.’

‘I’m like the Queen of Sheba,’ Jo said weakly. ‘There is no more spirit left in me! If I were you, Simone, I’d have this out and present it to some museum or other. I’m certain it’s a museum piece!’

Simone giggled whole-heartedly. ‘Yes; I thought it would be a shock,’ she said demurely.

‘Shock! I’ve had shock upon shock since I reached Paris. Bed’s all I’m fit for now. I’ll go back and collect my towels, etcetera, and then I’ll return, use this—this mausoleum, and retire for the night!’ She paused. Then she asked solemnly, ‘Do you think Noah had anything similar in the Ark?’

‘If he did, I don’t know where he found room for all the animals!’ Primula said crisply. ‘Simone, she’s so tired, she’s capable of standing here half the night talking rot! Can’t we get her off to bed, somehow?’

‘We can—and we will!’ Simone took her friend by the arm and marched her back to her bedroom. ‘There are your cases, so André is arrived with the boys. I expect they are in the nursery with Babette and Anna, enjoying a good supper.’

‘Not too good, I hope?’ Jo said as she began to unfasten her case. ‘We shall have a series of nightmares in that event.’

‘You *are* insulting! Of course it is a proper supper—soup and scrambled eggs and fruit and milk. Are you satisfied now?’ Simone asked, laughing.

‘Quite! I couldn’t have chosen better myself.’ Jo was pulling out her light cotton kimono and following it with her nightdress and toilet articles. She tossed them all on the bed and then turned to Primula. ‘What about you, Prim? Are you dead tired, too, or will you wait up till you’ve had a meal with Simone and André?’

‘Wait up. I’m not nearly so tired as you. For one thing, I haven’t spent my last four or five weeks packing up. For another, you made me go to bed at nine last night and I had seven hours’ solid sleep, while you managed about three all told. I’ll just wash and tidy, Simone, and then I’ll come down.’

‘Ah, c’est bien! Come to your room, then, and we will leave Jo to undress. There is water here, so you need not use the bathroom until later.’

Simone and Primula vanished into the latter’s room, Simone firmly shutting the communicating door. Left to herself, Jo shed her garments with her usual speed, pulled on her kimono and moccasins, snatched up her towels and sponge-bag and went along to the amazing bathroom where she had a rapid sponge-down and found that her friend had been quite right. She felt much better as she made her way back to her own room, where she found that someone had turned the bedclothes back, switched off the centre light and turned on a small table-lamp, which was the most modern-looking thing in the room.

She took down her hair and brushed it out, tying it back loosely with a piece of string since her usual ribbon seemed to be missing. Then she knelt down for a few minutes to thank God for bringing them safely so far. That done, she got into bed and stretched herself out with a sigh of satisfaction. As Primula had said, she had had a very busy five or six weeks, complicated by a mixture of emotions to which she could not give rein for fear of upsetting other folk. Now she could relax.

‘And thank goodness for that!’ Jo murmured to herself. ‘It’s to be hoped Simone isn’t too long with that tray or I shall be asleep before it comes and once I *do* get to sleep, I’m prepared to bet that a whole *shower-bath* of cold water wouldn’t wake me in a hurry!’

A tap at the door heralded the arrival of Simone with a big tray which she set on a table by the window. ‘Sit up, Jo,’ she said. ‘I’ve brought you soup, and you certainly can’t drink that lying flat like that!’

Jo sat up and the hostess piled up the big square French pillows behind her back. Then she vanished through the door to the night-nursery, to return presently with a contraption which she wheeled over to Jo’s bed. She touched a spring and a flat leaf of wood came down across that lady’s knees. Over this, Simone spread a fresh napkin. Then she set out a covered cup of bisque soup, a plate with delicate slices of chicken adorned with frills of pale green lettuce and a little dish of custard and stewed cherries. She completed her task by setting a light roll and a pat of butter at one side and a long, graceful glass filled with wine at the other.

‘Simone!’ Jo spoke with a gravity that might have been appropriate to a world-shattering announcement. ‘I didn’t realise it fully before, but I’m famished! This is a meal fit for a queen!’

‘Then finish every bite of it—and drink every drop of the wine,’ Simone said. ‘No, Jo; I will not stop to talk now. The children are all in bed and they might hear our voices. Con and Len were not asleep when I went through for the bed-table. They may be now. I will look and see.’

She slipped through the door, to return a minute or two later and announce that Len and Con were sleeping as soundly as the rest.

Jo heaved a deep sigh and began on her soup. ‘This is luxury, my dear! I’ve been rushing from pillar to post for the past few months. First we had the removal from Canada. Then we had to start in as soon as we reached Carnbach and sort out there. Finally, it was Plas Gwyn. Thank goodness with any luck once we’re settled down in our new home on the Platz it’ll be for at least ten years! What soup! Nectar—or do I mean ambrosia?’

Simone laughed, softly, for the sake of the slumbering children next door. ‘Neither, I hope. I always thought they sounded most insubstantial. Go on with your chicken, Jo. I want to see you lying down before I leave you and the gong may sound for *le dîner* at any moment now.’

Jo buttered her roll and set to work to clear her plate. When she had finished she lay back. 'I honestly don't think I've room for any more. Can't I leave the fruit and custard? Oh, what a beastly bully you've grown! Well, I'll do my best. It looks delicious, anyhow.'

'It isn't too much for you, even if you *are* tired out,' her friend said. 'You'll sleep much better for having had it than you would if I'd let you go to bed on an empty stomach. It's all very light, you know. And honestly, Jo, when I first saw you I had ideas about making André phone to Jack that we were keeping you for the rest of the week. I don't think I've ever seen you look so completely worn out before.'

Jo cast her thoughts back over the years. 'No,' she said finally between two spoonfuls of custard and cherries. 'You didn't see me after we escaped from Tirol when that brute Hitler marched in.^[1] I was done in then if you like! We all were, so far as that goes. And filthy! Even Bill looked as if she'd never set eyes on a bath in her life. If you'd met us then, you'd have turned up your nose at us and refused to know us!'

[1] *The Chalet School in Exile.*

Simone laughed. 'I hope not! I don't *think* I'm a snob. The Chalet School gave no one much chance of growing up that. Do you remember Thekla von Stift?^[2] She was the only specimen of that that I ever knew there.'

[2] *Exploits of the Chalet Girls.*

Jo nodded and laid down her spoon in the empty dish. 'Do I not? I wonder what became of her? How Marie loathed her, cousin or not! Well, I've finished everything and I must admit you were quite right. I feel tons better.'

'You will sleep well now,' Simone said as she lifted the tray to the table and then wheeled the bed-table out of the way. 'Now listen to me, Jo! In the morning you are to stay in bed until you have had your *petit déjeuner*. I will bring it myself. *Then* you may get up and you shall see all over the château.'

But Jo had suddenly thought of something. 'I say, Simone, are we near any shops?'

'Shops? What kind of shops do you want?' her friend demanded.

Primula, who had changed into a pretty summer frock and come into the room in time to hear this, began to giggle. 'You'll have to own up now, Jo.'

'It was the sort of accident that might happen to anyone,' Jo said with much dignity. 'The fact is, Simone, we've left all the raincoats at Plas Gwyn so I'd like to get new ones before we go on. You never know what you may meet in the way of weather.'

'O-oh! I see. Well, the nearest place for anything of that kind would be Provins. That is about ten miles away. Jean shall take us there tomorrow and you can supply yourselves. But oh, Joey! It is so like you!'

'Yes; isn't it?' Jo said calmly. 'Well, I'm well-fed and desperately sleepy. If you two don't mind, I'll turn over and go to sleep. Bid André good-night for me, Simone. I'll see him tomorrow.'

She pulled out her pillows, lay down and turned over on her side, complacently aware that she had taken the wind completely out of their sails. Simone bent over her, but the long curling lashes were down and Jo never moved a muscle.

'It's no use,' Primula said. 'She's going to sleep, and—My goodness! She *is* asleep! I told you she was tired to death!'

'Then come along,' her hostess said, picking up the tray. 'Open the door for me, Primula, and then come back and switch off the bedside lamp, will you? There is the gong, so we must

hasten!’

Laughing under her breath, Primula did as she was asked and then followed Simone downstairs, leaving Jo to her well-deserved slumbers.

Chapter IX
SIMONE EXPLAINS

Jo slept dreamlessly all night. She never stirred, even when the next morning brought the sounds of subdued laughter and chatter from the night-nursery, followed by the clatter of many feet as the children ran from the upstairs regions down to the *salle-à-manger*, where they had breakfast with Simone and André and Primula, who owned to having slept from the moment her head touched the pillow until Babette came to call her.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Jo finally opened her eyes to find Simone standing by her bed and the sun streaming in through the windows.

'Hello!' she murmured foggily. Then, as she fully woke up, 'Goodness! Whatever time is it?'

'Just a quarter to ten,' her friend said, showing her watch. 'The children are all out in the garden with Babette and Anna to look after them. The babies are all out as well, and Primula has taken measurements all round and gone off to Paris with André to buy those raincoats. Eh bien, how do you feel now?'

'Fit for anything! Oh, how tired I was! But I feel thoroughly rested now. I could even go on if it were necessary.'

'It is *not* necessary and you do not go till tomorrow,' Simone told her tartly. 'I am going to bring your *petit déjeuner*. There is water in that ewer if you wish to sponge your face while I am gone.'

She vanished, and Jo jumped out of bed and went to the window to look out. A flower garden in much need of careful cultivation lay below. There was a big double swing at one side where the triplets and a sturdy girl, much darker than any of Jo's children, were enjoying themselves. A big rockery was at the other side and Stephen and Charles were scrambling about it with shouts of laughter. The three babies were sprawling on a big rug which had been laid on the sunburnt turf inside a play-pen and Mike was squatting just outside it very busy with something. Jo could just see his yellow head bent over what he was doing, but he was out of mischief and seemed to be happily employed. She heaved a sigh of relief and turned back into the room. She was completely rested. There was no journey to worry about today and she was with her old chum after so many years. She went across to the old-fashioned washstand with its pretty floral ware and proceeded to splash her face and hands thoroughly with the cool, velvety-feeling water. When Simone arrived with coffee and croissants and a big pat of fresh butter, she was back in bed, fresh and glowing and owing to an appetite.

'Yes; you must be hungry,' Simone agreed in her own tongue as she wheeled up the bed-table and set her tray on it. 'I thought only a light meal last night as you were too tired to digest anything else. You must make up for it today, though. Lizette, our cook, has been making great plans for feeding you.'

Jo poured out her café-au-lait and began to butter a croissant. 'You've got piles of explaining to do, I hope you know. However, we'll take it by degrees. You were quite right, Simone. Anything like a full meal and I'd have been having nightmares of the worst kind! However, I slept like a log all night and I feel ready for anything this morning. I'm bound to say, though, that I'm not sorry to think I've another day without travelling,' she added as she bit into her lavishly buttered croissant.

Simone pulled up a chair, produced a bag of mending and settled down to talk.

‘It was just like you to think of such a mad thing as trying to do a journey of that kind in two days with all those children!’ she said severely. ‘André was horrified when he read your letter. In fact, I may as well confess now that it was he who rang up Jack and said that you must all stay with us for at least a full day. He told Jack our news, by the way.’

‘Quite so! Well, now you can tell *me*,’ Jo said, eating as if she had had nothing for a fortnight. ‘You gave me only the barest outline last night.’

Simone laughed. ‘You were too tired and sleepy for anything else, *ma chère*. You were asleep before Primula and I left the room. By the way, how very pretty she has grown. She is tiny, still, though. Do you remember how Daisy suddenly began to grow and no one could keep pace with her in clothes? I thought of it when I saw how Tessa had sprung up during the winter.’

‘Oh, Daisy is nearly as tall as I am now. She made a lovely bride. I wish you could have come to the wedding. She was thrilled with your lovely gift, Simone. And *that* puzzled me a lot,’ Jo added candidly. ‘I didn’t see how on earth you could afford such a thing and I was so afraid you were cutting out something for yourselves to send her that exquisite brooch.’

‘Oh, that came from the family jewels. I remembered her taste for green and told André and he agreed with me that it was the best to send. There were two or three much more valuable ones, but so ugly! But I’ll tell you about those later and you shall see them. We think of selling most of them, for we don’t want them. However, they are not really important just now. But before we begin, I must tell you, Jo, that your girls are really lovely. I can see, though, that Margot is still an imp.’

Jo nodded. ‘Always will be, my dear! Poor lamb! She does try, and she really has gained control of her temper wonderfully well; but it’s a hard row to hoe. Queerly enough, Charles is the one who has most influence on her—on all of them, for that matter. I’ve seen him give Margot a certain look when she was on the verge of flying off into a paddy and she pulls up at once. Well; that’s enough about them for the moment. At present, you go ahead and tell me your yarn. I’m all set to hear it!’

‘Well,’ Simone began, relapsing into French once more, ‘this old uncle of *belle-mère*’s was the head of her family. He was an old bachelor, hated women, and I never saw him, for he refused to have anything to do with me. He used to send for André at intervals, but he treated me as if I didn’t exist.’

‘Rather galling, wasn’t it?’ Jo had satisfied her appetite and lay back, her black eyes dancing with excitement as she listened to Simone.

‘Oh, I didn’t mind,’ Simone said placidly. ‘André had told me what he was like, so I did not expect anything else. Well, when André had finished his army service, the great-uncle offered him a small place in his business—that, as you know, is manufacturing soaps and perfumes and creams and cosmetics generally. André was glad to take it. He had Tessa and me and it was not easy to get work then. We were poor, but we managed. The great-uncle told André that it made no difference that he was the last male in the family; he had to begin at the beginning and work his way up. It was hard work and long hours and I have often felt indignant for André’s sake, but it was the best thing he could do.’

‘I should think the old boy was trying André out,’ Jo suggested.

‘Yes; that is quite right,’ Simone assented. ‘He left a letter for André in which he said he had found him to be a hard worker and steady, so now he had his reward. He also said that he was glad we had given our son his name and, you know,’ she looked at Jo solemnly, ‘we never

thought of it when we had him baptised. He is Pierre Jacques André, and Pierre is my favourite man's name after André and I never meant to have two André's at once in the family.'

Jo chuckled. 'When we got André's cable in Canada, he never mentioned the boy's name, but I said to Jack, "So she's got her little Pierre at last!" You always used to say that if Tessa had a brother that was what he should be called.'

Simone laid aside the sock she had just darned and took up another. 'L'Oncle Pierre was very pleased, however. His lawyer told André that he sent for him the next week and had him draw up a new will, leaving André every single thing. Before that, he had left him only a quarter-share in the business. Practically everything had been left to political causes. It was a real shock, Joey, when M. Dupin called and told us that it had all been changed and André inherited the business, the château and all.'

'I should think it might be.' Jo rolled out of bed, fished her cigarettes out of her bag, wrapped herself in her kimono and sat down in the sunshine by the window. 'Chuck that darning or whatever it is and come and have a cigarette with me.'

Simone laughed, but she gave in and Jo heard the rest as they sat sunning themselves to a background of children's shouts and laughter coming up from the garden below.

'Well, now I come to the trials. You see, Jo, though the great-uncle lived here, he kept it mainly as it had always been. You've seen the bathroom, and that is a specimen of it. He had electric light put in and, later, a telephone, and he saw that it was kept in repair. But he did nothing else at all, and honestly, the whole place is so dreadful we don't know where to begin.'

Jo broke into delighted laughter. 'Oh, you poor dears! What a position! Oh, if I were you, I'd choose the rooms I meant to use as a general thing and do what's necessary to them. I should shut up the rest for the time being, at any rate. From our own experiences after Jack's brother died, I should say there won't be much to come and go on for at least a year. How long is it since the old boy died?'

'Six months—a little more. We had to give six months' notice for our *appartement*. That's why we've only just come here to live, though we have been going backwards and forwards whenever we could manage it during the time. And help is hard to find. I have Babette and her sister Lizette, who is our cook. Besides those two, there is only Ursule and Mme Naudet, who comes from the farm to help. It's a big place, Joey. There are thirty-two proper rooms and all the attics as well. It's better outside. We have Jean, who drives the car and helps in the garden, and there are half a dozen others besides—there's the farm as well, you see—but it will all need very careful management.'

'I'm sure it will! And it's such a rambling place, judging by what I've seen of it! And that's an idea! I'm going to get dressed. We'll take a dekko at the brats and then you shall treat me to a personally conducted tour of the whole establishment. I can tell better than what to suggest.'

'You are not to do too much walking,' Simone warned her. 'You still have the rest of the journey to come and you must be as fresh as possible for it. We'll leave the attics, at least. I refuse to do anything about them. Some day, perhaps, I'll have a grand turn-out and get rid of all the rubbish, but it won't be yet. There's one thing we're going to do, Joey. André suggested it. Maman and Papa are longing to leave Quebec and come back to la belle France. We have written to offer them a suite of rooms where they will be quite on their own. They will not live with us, but they will be under the same roof. Then when they get old, we can see to them.'

Also, they will see their grandchildren, which they have not done as yet. Andrée, as you know, is married and her husband has an important post in Ottawa, but André suggested that they should bring Maman and Papa over and spend their vacation with us, and we hope that is what they will do.'

Jolly good notion!' Jo was collecting her towels and sponge-bag. 'I'm off for a cold splash. Give me a quarter of an hour and then I'll be ready for you.'

'Oh, you may have twenty minutes,' Simone smiled as she slung her mending-bag over her arm and picked up Jo's tray. 'I will come back for you then.'

She was as good as her word. In twenty minutes' time she was back and Jo was ready for her, fresh and trim in her frock of jade-green cotton, with a cardigan over one arm. 'I know what these old châteaux can be like for temperature!' she said darkly as they left the sunny room.

It took all Simone's firmness to keep her energetic friend within bounds. Jo was anxious to see everything there was to see and they nearly had a squabble when Simone flatly refused to tackle the attics.

They began by running down to the garden, where they were welcomed by a small tornado of children who all came tearing over the grass to fling themselves on them. Jo's triplets were very anxious to know that she felt all right again. They had had it firmly impressed on them that 'Mamma' was terribly tired and must be allowed to sleep. Their long months in Canada where children are independent and grown-up at a much earlier age than English or French children had given them a sense of responsibility which startled Simone, though Jo was used to it now.

'Yes, precious honeybees! I'm as fit as the Irishman's flea!' Jo informed her daughters in reply to their queries. 'You feel fit, too?'

'You bet!' Margot gave her mother a naughty look. This was a forbidden expression.

Jo laughed. 'You wait until we reach the Platz, my lady! I shall take your language in hand very thoroughly then. Well, enjoy yourselves with Tessa. You have only today; though Papa and I are hoping that she will come with Tante Simone and Oncle André to stay with us before very long. Would you like that, Tessa?'

Tessa's grave little face dimpled as she replied, 'But yes. I should like it very well, Marraine.'

Jo kissed her god-daughter before she went the rounds. She was secretly longing to know what it was that kept Mike so good and quiet. She found that he was playing with a great pile of wooden bricks, planning out a whole fleet of ships, big and little. Luckily for his purpose, the bricks included arches of all kinds as well as straight slabs, pillars, and cubes.

'When we crossed to Canada,'^[3] she told Simone as they finally left the family to its own amusements, 'the captain told me that Mike ought to be a sailor, and I'm inclined to think he was right. He's not interested in trains or anything the other boys like. Boats and the sea are his main preoccupation.'

[3] *The Wrong Chalet School.*

'Then I should certainly let him go,' Simone said. 'But Jo, I want to know where on earth you got that awful expression of yours?'

'What awful expression?'

'Fit as the Irishman's flea,' Simone quoted. 'You talk about Margot's language, but she does not use anything worse than you do.'

Jo laughed, though she looked rather ashamed. ‘Oh, that! I picked it up from Madge’s help in Toronto. Canadian expressions are awfully infectious. I didn’t acquire the accent, but I’m bound to admit I did learn quite a good deal of slang. I must be more careful, though. We’ve had an appalling time with Margot’s English. I needn’t make it any worse for her, poor brat!’

Simone laughed, too, and left the subject as they reached the hall. Indeed, their excursion through the château gave them so much to discuss that they forgot the time, and when the gong rang for *déjeuner* they were hot and untidy and dusty. They had to rush to the bathroom to make themselves fit to be seen, but the children were in the same straits, so the two mothers were in the *salle-à-manger* first.

Lizette had put her best foot foremost, and from the creamy delicious soup to the peach ice-cream with its covering of hot chocolate sauce, everything was, as Len remarked gravely, ‘simply super!’

‘But this is because *you* are here,’ Tessa told her. ‘This is our fête-day *déjeuner*. Maman, what saint’s day is this?’

‘St Cajetan’s,’ Simone said.

As no one knew anything about him, no one was any the wiser just then, though Len of the inquiring mind demanded a Missal after lunch and discovered that he was the Founder of the Theatine Order of monks and lived at the same time as Martin Luther.

By that time, Jo and Simone were off on their tour again, so Len had to content herself with passing on her information to the rest.

Meanwhile, Simone and Jo were continuing their inspection. It was four o’clock before they had finished, but at last it was done, since Simone had flatly refused to climb the attic stairs herself or allow Jo to do so.

‘It is quite enough,’ she said. ‘We will go to the salon and Lizette shall send us coffee and cakes. I am tired.’

‘My own legs are aching,’ Jo admitted. ‘Your stairs are horribly steep, Simone. Oh, very well; we’ll call it a day. Let’s go and wash and change and then we can have our Kaffee und Kuchen in peace. The horde will be upon us shortly, I expect. My family expect to have me to themselves from tea till bedtime.’

‘So does Tessa. When she was old enough, I remembered how you always had the girls with you then unless it was impossible, and I thought it a very good idea. Will you have the bathroom first, Jo?’

As a result, when André and Primula came back from Paris at half-past seven, bringing with them a selection of raincoats that would do very well, they were met by two ladies who looked as if they had spent their day sitting in the salon.

‘The children have just gone upstairs to supper and bed,’ Jo told Primula in response to that young woman’s query as to where the family was. ‘Had a good time, Prim? What have you seen?’

‘Oh, Notre Dame, of course, and the Madeleine and Notre Dame des Victoires. We had an hour in the Tuilleries, too. This afternoon, André took me to Versailles, and the fountains were playing and it was lovely. What have you done, Jo?’

‘Explored the château—all that Simone would let me, that is. We left the attics severely alone. You’d better run, or you’ll be late for dinner.’

After the meal, however, Primula pleaded fatigue, and went off to bed while Simone and Joey went to hear prayers and confessions and tuck up their offspring. When that was done and the children were all either fast asleep or well on the way they went downstairs again to

the salon, where André was sitting reading. He glanced up as they entered with a question as to whether the children were all settled for the night and then suggested that they should take their coffee out on the terrace, since the evening was hot.

‘What about mosquitoes?’ Jo asked cautiously.

‘We all smoke. I do not think they need trouble us and we shall be more at our ease there while we talk. I have set chairs in the far corner, Simone, and also the little table. I told Ursule to bring the coffee there when I rang.’

‘It is all arranged. Come, Joey!’ And Simone led the way to the corner her husband had set for them. When they were all settled with coffee and cigarettes, he turned to Jo and demanded her opinion of his new home.

She looked thoughtful. ‘We-ell, it could be a lot of a white elephant, but Simone has been telling me some of your plans, and those will help out.’

He nodded. Then he turned to his wife. ‘I saw Maman today, Simone. She has made up her mind. She is very lonely in her *appartement* now that we have left Paris and she agrees that it would be as well to join us.’

‘Oh, I am so glad!’ Simone exclaimed. ‘Then that will take another suite. Now, Joey, we shall have two suites occupied which we shall not trouble about. We shall give belle-mère the rooms in the south wing below those we have allotted to my parents.’

‘That’s a really good idea! Well, that will practically take that whole wing off your hands. So far as the rest of it goes, André, I’ve been advising Simone to settle with you which rooms you want to occupy and shut up the rest for the present. You’ll have to go slowly, won’t you? Anyhow, there’s an awful lot of junk in some of those rooms. I’d sort it out by degrees if I were you, dispose of the rubbish and furnish your own part with the best.’

‘Yes; I agree with you. Has Simone told you about the jewels also?’

Jo nodded and laughed. ‘My dear, I’ve even *seen* them! I don’t want to be rude, André, but what frightful taste in jewelry your ancestors seem to have had! I quite agree with her that most of it had better go and the money be spent on getting what you really need. After all, Simone *doesn’t* want a ruby parure and she *does* need a carpet in the salon—oh, and curtains as well! And most of the tapestries are just dropping with dirt. I’d take them down, have those that will stand it cleaned, and where the others have been I’d put fresh, pretty wallpapers. And if the money will run to it, I’d have some of those stone floors boarded over. They must be icy cold in winter!’

‘They are!’ André said feelingly. ‘I know. I’ve stayed here in the winter!’

‘There you are then! Sell what you don’t want of the jewels—they ought to bring a good price if you send them somewhere good—and make the château cosy with wooden floors. And when you sort out the furniture, I’d sell all that’s possible of what you don’t want—some of those awful mahogany articles that look like pantechicons themselves, for instance! The value of the wood ought to be something, for timber is at a premium just now and they *are* good and solid. Lots of the smaller stuff is worm-eaten, though, and I’d have a gorgeous bonfire in the courtyard with that. You might even add a bunch of fireworks and give the countryside a treat!’ Jo added with a chuckle. ‘Anyhow, if you do all that and shut up the rooms you don’t need, it will solve the question of domestic help enormously. And Simone, there’s just one thing you’ve simply *got* to have, and that is a modern cooker. I don’t know if you can get Agas or Esses in France, but that’s what would be best. It’ll halve Lizette’s work and save a small fortune in fuel, I should think!’

Simone laughed. ‘Oh, Lizette mostly cooks on her small charcoal stove. I don’t know about those makes you mention, Jo, but I can find out—or André will.’ She gave her husband a smiling look and he nodded.

‘Well, you asked for my advice,’ Jo said, smothering a yawn, ‘and you’ve got it. I hope you’re satisfied!’

‘We’ll think it over,’ Simone said. ‘Yours are good ideas, Joey. Perhaps next summer you could bring the children and stay with us for a few weeks and help me with the furniture, as you say. But most of the jewels may go at once. What do you say, André?’

He nodded. ‘The sooner the better. I should like to have those wooden floors you speak of laid down as soon as possible. It will not be so long before Pierre begins to run about and, apart from the cold, a little child could hurt itself if it fell down on the stone floors. We are much better off than I ever hoped we could be, but we are too poor, even so, to revive old glories. Far better to make all comfortable and safe.’

So it was settled, and, since the Maynards must be off in good time next day, Simone proposed bed and they parted for the night.

Chapter X
ANOTHER SURPRISE FOR JO

Next morning they were all up and about early. *Petit déjeuner* was served at seven, and by eight o'clock Jo and her family, rested and refreshed, were climbing into André's big Citroën after hugs and kisses all round. Jo was in front with André, Felix in her arms, and Mike tucked in between them. Anna and Primula occupied the middle of the back seat, Anna with Felicity on her lap. The three girls were sitting somehow on the two tip-up seats facing them. Stephen and Charles had each a corner.

André had stowed away the two small all-night cases under the back seat and Simone, with shrieks of horror, had confiscated Jo's enormous basket, put the games in a flat case and the books in another and provided food for the journey in three flat fruit cases which went under the front seats. Jo had submitted to her friend's strictures with a broad grin and raised no objections. The less she had to bother about the better, from her point of view, and the children could take charge of the small cases. As for the new raincoats, everyone had to be responsible for his or her own.

'Adieu, Joey chérie!' Simone said as she held up Pierre for a final kiss. 'Come back soon and see how we are making our alterations, won't you?'

'Not before next summer,' Jo said firmly as she returned the big, laughing boy to his mother. 'It's your turn to do the next visiting. Wait until we are settled and I'll write and see what we can fix up. But I'm doing no more travelling than an occasional jaunt down to Interlaken or, *perhaps*, as far as Berne for a good twelve months to come, and so I warn you!'

Then André warned them that they must set off if they were to catch the train at Belfort without a scramble, so Simone shut the door and went up the steps to stand waving with her free hand, Tessa at her side waving, too, until they were out of sight.

They set off through a heavy heat-haze, but as the morning advanced, it vanished and they were running along under a blazing sun. André then proceeded to show what his car could do, even when heavily laden. As they shot down the winding roads with their borders of poplars and chestnuts, Jo occasionally held her breath. But André was a practised driver and knew what he was about. The result was that by the time noon came and he called a halt near a little wood for *déjeuner*, they were well on the way to Belfort. He turned them all out, much to the joy of the children, who were growing tired of sitting so long, and took them a little way into the wood where the shade of the heavy foliage was very pleasant after the glare of the white roads and the August sun.

'We will sit here,' he said. 'We can see the car and it is cool. Here are the baskets, Jo.'

'You and Simone are awfully good to us,' Jo said gratefully as she opened up the baskets. 'Ooh! Consommé—salad—rolls and butter—and peaches! What a gorgeous feast! Simone's a crackerjack! Sit down, brats! Here, Len, hand out these little bowls. That's right! Now I'll fill them.'

She filled them from the big thermos jar, which was full of iced soup. It was still reasonably cold and very delicious. The salad proved to have salmon in it and the rolls were crusty and holey and filled with butter. There was a big flask of ice-cold milk for the children and Primula and a small bottle of white wine for the grown-ups.

‘This,’ said Jo, as she bit into a large, juicy peach, ‘is luscious! Wow! For goodness sake, family, tie your hankies round your necks and try to avoid *washing* your faces in peach-juice! They’re positively dripping with it!’

André grinned. ‘My great-uncle almost lived on fruit and eggs the last few years of his life. He saw to it that the fruit-orchards were thoroughly well cultivated. It is a pity, Jo, that you were too late for the strawberries. You would have enjoyed those! I do not believe I ever saw such large ones. But the apricots are ripening fast now. I must see that you have some next week when I have to go to Mühlhausen. I can carry them with me and put them on the train for Basle if someone can be there to meet them.’

‘Thanks a million! That would be gorgeous.’ Then Jo changed the subject. ‘You seem to have to do a lot of gadding about?’

He nodded. ‘There are a good many branches and I am still trying to visit each one before the end of the year. When I have done that, I shall leave it to our visiting manager. But I felt that I ought to try to see each one as soon as possible.’

‘You’re right there.’ Jo threw her peach-stone into a clump of ferns and wiped her fingers on her handkerchief. ‘I suppose there isn’t any water near at hand where we could rinse our fingers—and our faces?’ she inquired as she surveyed her family, who were hilarious and sticky. ‘Of all the messy-looking brats! Actually, the twins are the only clean ones among you!’

‘That’s ’cos Anna and Primula fed them. *We* fed ourselves,’ Len explained with much of her mother’s calm.

‘Well, what about it, André?’

‘There is a little stream not far away—and Simone gave me a large towel and washing things,’ he added with a grin. ‘We have done this journey ourselves and she knows what it is like. Carry those empty baskets to the car, boys, and then all of you come along with me and I will show you. No, Joey; the car is safe enough, once I have locked it. This is a—what you call a by-road, n’est-ce-pas? I took it because it cuts seventeen kilomètres off the journey.’

Stephen and Charles carried the empty baskets back to the car, and when he had locked it, he led them through the trees to a little brook with a clear, sandy bottom. He produced not only the towel, but a couple of face-cloths and a cake of soap, and Jo set to work to wash her brood.

When everyone was clean and tidy again, they piled into the car once more. André drove them down one by-road after another, so they were well-shaken up, as Jo complained after one especially badly rutted stretch. But the result was that when they reached the busy streets of Belfort they had plenty of time to catch their train and he was able to settle them comfortably before it steamed out of the station, leaving him waving good-bye.

‘The last lap!’ Jo said as she wriggled comfortably into her corner. ‘Give me Felicity, Anna, and I’ll get her off to sleep. Mike, would you like to cuddle up to Mamma and have a short nap? You would? Then come along. Snuggle down here. We’ll soon be in Basle now, and then Papa will be there to help us.’

It had been impossible with their large party for them all to be in the same compartment, but when Felix had dropped off too, Anna laid him down in her seat and went along to return presently with the news that Fräulein Primula was reading to the triplets and Stephen and they were all good.

‘Let’s hope it lasts!’ said Jo. ‘Tired, Charlie-boy?’

Charles shook his head. ‘No, Mamma.’

‘Come along, then, but mind you don’t tread on anyone’s toes,’ Jo said with an apologetic look at the elderly German who had the opposite corner. He paid no heed, but stared stonily ahead and said nothing.

Charles came carefully and presently was leaning against his mother’s knee and gazing out with eager eyes. Belfort lies in a hilly district, but the line makes a long loop north to Mühlhausen before dipping sharply south to Basle across a plain. Once the hills were out of sight, the small boy squeezed down into the window-seat beside Jo, who was now well-jammed in by him and Mike. He sat quietly, and Jo, glancing down at him, saw that he was turning drowsy. She shifted Felicity to the other arm, cuddled him to her and presently he, too, was asleep.

Jo was thankful for this. Travelling with a pack of small children can be very trying, and the longer her small fry slept, the better she would be pleased. In point of fact they had left Mühlhausen before anyone roused and, by that time, the elderly German had gone and so had the other occupants of the compartment. She sent Anna to bring Primula and the rest of the family when this happened, so they were all together when the train finally fussed into Basle.

This was the moment that Felicity, usually the best-behaved baby imaginable, chose to begin to whimper and Jo, much to her fury, was obliged to stay where she was to pacify her. For the first time in her life she felt sorry that she had always set her face firmly against rubber soothers. But it was no use. When her youngest daughter began that particular whimper, it meant that unless she received immediate attention she let the whole world know of it. So Jo, with a passing thought that it was a mercy that the train went no farther, had to let the rest of them stream out of the carriage while she made Felicity comfortable.

Then a beloved voice said, ‘Well, Madame! Do you intend to take up your abode here?’

Jo promptly dumped her daughter down in the corner, jumped to her feet and fell into his arms. ‘Jack! Oh, Jack!’ she said ecstatically.

The ecstasy lasted barely two moments. Felicity, outraged at being treated in this cavalier fashion, lifted up her voice and yelled her woes at the full pitch of excellent lungs. Jo hurriedly freed herself and picked up the indignant baby.

‘Take her, Papa! Poor mite, she’s tired of travelling and she wants her tea and her own nice cot. Never mind! A good meal and bed will cure all her troubles. Have we a breathing-space between trains, or must we fly?’

‘Neither,’ he said as he climbed out again, rocking Felicity in his arms. ‘There, there, pet! Papa’s darling! Don’t cry!’ Then as the shrieks continued crescendo and sforzando, ‘Stop it, I say! Oh, hang it all, Jo, you’ll have to take her yourself!’

Jo grabbed her handbag, Anna and Primula, helped by the triplets and Stephen, having taken charge of everything else. She slung it over her arm and took the baby from him. ‘Come along, precious! There, there! It’s all right! Mamma has you!’

Felicity stopped yelling to draw fresh breath and Jo took advantage of the momentary peace to ask, ‘Jack, what on earth do you mean—*neither*? What *are* we doing, then?’

Fresh squalls arose, Felicity having got her breath again. ‘We’re staying with friends in Basle,’ he yelled, raising his voice to make himself heard above the shrieks. ‘Oh, Heavens! Let’s get out of this, pronto! Give me your tickets, Jo, and the rest of you keep close!’

‘You’ll have to fish for them in my bag, then,’ Jo gasped. She was having her own difficulties with Felicity, that young lady having decided to show that she was no baby angel, however she might behave as a rule. ‘Here! Take it before I drop this bad girl! She’s wriggling like a demon in a fit!’

He found the tickets and handed them over. Then, to the accompaniment of howls from both twins—Felix had been infected by his sister—they left the station, where they found the elder children exclaiming delightedly at the sight of their own car.

‘In you get!’ Jack said grimly to his excited family. Like most men he detested being made an exhibition of and people were turning to stare at the screaming twins. ‘Anna, you and the girls and Primula in the back. Boys, you squeeze in, too. Sit on the floor. We haven’t far to go. Now Jo, you get in front. Can’t you smother that kid?’

For reply, Jo scrambled in, sat down, and when the door was slammed, reversed her daughter over her arm and administered a smart spank.

‘Waugh!’ said Felicity; and stopped screaming.

‘There!’ said her mother severely. ‘That’s what happens to bad girls! Those last yells of yours were nothing but temper.’

Felicity opened wide the blue eyes she had been screwing up into slits. They were wet with tears and her little face was wet, too. She lifted her pouted lips for a kiss, saying with a penitent gulp, ‘Goo!’

Jo most reprehensibly laughed and then kissed her. ‘It’s all very well, but you were a very bad girl for a few minutes. Oh, well, I wouldn’t really like a nursery full of little angels! They’d be so monotonous!’ She glanced over her shoulder. Felix had stopped howling when his twin did and the rest of the children were all squeezed into the car somehow.

‘O.K., Jack,’ she said. ‘We seem all set after that little display.’

Jack laughed as he got in. ‘I can’t congratulate you on your youngest daughter’s début in Switzerland, my dear. What a paddy! I didn’t think she had it in her!’

‘Oh, well, now we know, we can see that she learns to keep hold on it,’ Jo said serenely. ‘And now that the twins seem to have made up their minds to behave like Christians, suppose you explain yourself. *What* friends have we in Basle? None that *I* ever heard of!’

‘You wait and see,’ he said. ‘—Ah! At last!’ as the traffic jam which had been holding them up began to sort itself out and he was able to move off. ‘Now we shan’t be long! All right behind?’

A chorus assured him that they were, and he swung into the traffic stream.

Jo waited until they were running smoothly along. Then she tried again. ‘No, really, Jack! Who is it?’

‘A very old friend,’ he said, his eyes twinkling. ‘We are all stopping with them for the night. Tomorrow, I’m taking Primula, the girls, Anna and the two boys up to the Platz and leaving you and our three youngest with—er—that is, you’re staying till Monday when I shall come down to fetch you.’

‘Oh, no I’m not!’ Jo retorted. ‘I’m coming up with you and the brats!’

‘Oh, yes you are! I’m not having you with us. There’s no point in your coming yet and you can do with the rest. The furniture hasn’t arrived and isn’t likely to before Tuesday, so I’m informed. They’re up to the eyes at the school and Hilda Annersley says if you and the twins arrive, no one will have wits for anything but baby-worship. On top of all that, you’ve had a hectic journey—or I miss my guess. You can just take it easy with—well, with our friends. I may say,’ he added, ‘that when you see them, you won’t object in the least to remaining for the week-end.’

Jo gave him a puzzled look. ‘How do you know that? I can’t think of anyone it’s likely to be who could make me not want to come up to the Platz with all my family at once. I wish you’d stop teasing, Jack, and *tell* me!’

‘You’ll see in a few minutes—say ten, with any luck,’ he told her as he swung the car out of the Sehengraben into St Jakobstrasse, where the traffic began to thin out a little. Thence, he turned into a cross-street and from there into what Jo recognised at once as a residential quarter. They passed two or three hotels and then, turning another corner into a very quiet road, were running between tall blocks of flats, obviously fairly new. Before one of the largest, he drew up.

‘Well, here we are!’ He leaned back and opened the door for the children. ‘Tumble out, brats! Your journeying’s over for today. Wait for us by the entrance.’

Jo gave him the now chuckling Felicity to hold while she stepped down. When she turned, he put the baby into her arms. Then he descended himself and locked the car securely.

‘Are you leaving the car here?’ Jo asked doubtfully.

‘For the moment. It’s safe enough. I’ve locked it and Hans will keep an eye on it for me. I’ll run it round to the garage presently. Give me Felicity since she seems disposed to behave like a lady now. You might drop her!’

‘Drop her? Drop one of my babies? Is it likely? Look here, Jack, what *is* all this in aid of?’

‘I told you if you waited you’d see. It’s only a minute or so now. Come along, folks. Through the swing doors. Mind Charles and Mike, you four!’

The passage through the doors was safely negotiated and they found themselves in a wide entrance hall with a big staircase at the back and a series of lifts at one side. At the other was the office of the concierge, who looked out as they came in and greeted Jack.

‘You are expected, mein Herr,’ he said, smiling broadly at the cluster of children.

Jack nodded and smiled and ushered them all into one of the lifts.

‘It’s on the fifth floor—well up, you see. Nice and airy and quiet, which is just as well as they have a young baby. This isn’t what you’d call a noisy street, but up there, they’re right away from any noise there is. Br—I mean our friends really wanted a top-storey *appartement*, but it couldn’t be managed. However, they’re very well situated where they are and lucky to get it, considering they had to move at short notice. Here we are! Mind how you step out, Mike. Shut the doors, will you, Jo? Now then! Along this corridor to the far end and round the corner. It’s the first door on the left.’

Silent from sheer amazement, Jo walked along at his side. The children followed, chattering excitedly, and Anna and Primula brought up the rear. As they turned the corner, the door he had mentioned flew open, showing a sunny little hall full of the evening light. After the much dimmer corridor, Jo was dazzled for a moment. She stood blinking at the slender figure which had appeared in the doorway. Then she took a hesitating step forward.

A well-known voice cried, ‘Joey, geliebste! At last!’ and her hesitation was gone.

She sprang forward to engulf the slight form in her arms, crying as she did so, ‘Frieda! Oh, Frieda! It’s *you!*’

Chapter XI

FRIEDA!

Jack Maynard knew his wife well enough to realise that the shock of meeting her old friend again after some years had brought her to the verge of tears. He acted promptly.

'Here!' he said, giving the pair of them a gentle push. 'In here, you two, till you're ready for general society again! That's better!' He shut the door firmly on them and turned to the startled children. 'Now then, folkies, you come along in and we'll find someone else for you.'

As if in answer to this, a big, strapping fellow suddenly appeared at the far end of the hall and came forward with a shout. 'So you are arrived! But where are Jo and Frieda? And this is —no; not Daisy! Is it Primula? Come in, all!'

'That you, Bruno? I thought the Bank had sent you off to Zurich and you weren't likely to be back till all hours,' Jack said cheerfully. 'Here are the triplets, who have certainly grown out of *your* recognition—and Steve. These two are Charles and Mike, and here are the twins. As for this young lady, you're quite right. Primula it is! Oh, and you'll remember Anna.'

'But what have you done with Joey and Frieda?' Bruno von Ahlen demanded when he had greeted all his visitors and welcomed them to the flat.

'Well, I guessed that weeps might be the order of the day, so I just shoved them into that room on the right of the front door to get it over in private.'

Bruno stared. 'The room on the right, you said?'

'Well, it was the nearest,' Jack explained apologetically.

'But my dear fellow, that is the bathroom!'

Jack's jaw dropped. 'The *bathroom*?'

'Yes; the bathroom. Had you forgotten what we told you—that all our living-rooms are at the back, the bedrooms at the side and only the kitchen and bathroom at the front?'

'I had.' Jack shut the front door and stood facing his friend. 'Oh, well, it may be just as well. If they shed floods, they can mingle them in the bath!'

Bruno went off into a roar of laughter, which brought two sturdy, fair-haired boys of ten and eight round the corner to inquire what the joke was.

Margot promptly swooped on them. Shyness was an unknown quantity to her. 'I know who you are!' she exclaimed. 'You're Louis,' pointing unashamedly at the elder, 'and this one is Gerard. Do you remember us, Louis? Gerard won't. He was a tiny wee baby then. Tante Frieda used to let us take it in turns to hold him if we sat on a stool.'

Gerard reddened at this, but his brother looked slightly alarmed at Margot's forthcoming manner. 'Aber nein; ich gedenke nicht!' he said flatly.

His father chuckled and clapped him on the shoulder. 'Louis is not accustomed to such tactics. Our Gretchen is a very small girl and they have not many girl acquaintances. But mind thy manners, my son,' he added in German to Louis.

'Ja, mein Vater,' Louis replied, looking at his brawny father with fearless eyes. He turned to Margot and said with some effort, 'You are all very well come by us.'

'Well, now come into the Saal, all of you,' Herr von Ahlen said. 'Frieda will be here soon, I don't doubt, Jack; but we must give her and Joey a few minutes alone together after all this time.'

Meanwhile Jo and Frieda were not weeping, though Jack had not been far out when he told Bruno that they probably were. Jo, at any rate, had tears in her eyes, though she managed not to let them fall. As for Frieda, her lips quivered and she was unable to speak for a moment or two. At last she found her voice.

‘Oh, Joey! After all these years! And now, at least, we shall be in the same country and near enough to visit each other quite often. Stand back and let me look at you, Hertzchen!’

Jo dashed the back of her hand across her eyes. ‘Mad of me, but it was so unexpected! Jack wouldn’t say where we were going except that it was to friends. And I never dreamt you were any nearer than Innsbrück. And—well, it has been rather a hectic year, taking it altogether. You’ll have to forgive the very damp greeting I gave you. It isn’t like me, as you very well know!’

Frieda smiled. ‘It certainly isn’t. Now let me see you. Come out into the hall. Why Jack should push us into the bathroom of all places, I simply don’t know. We have *much* better rooms than this as you will soon see.’

Jo was herself again. ‘Nearest place, my dear. You ought to know Jack by this time. He has a horror of tears—like most men—and I know he thought we were going to let loose the floods. Well, I don’t mind owning I came a lot nearer it than I’ve been for some time; but it didn’t come to the real thing.’

While she was talking, Frieda had pulled her out into the hall, which was lighted by a window at the far end, and was surveying her critically. ‘You are not so thin as you were when I last saw you, Joey,’ she said.

‘I’m not exactly *fat!*’ Jo said defensively. ‘But you can’t say as much. Frieda, what *have* you been doing with yourself? You look a regular scarecrow, my dear! And what’s the meaning of these lines in your face? What’s gone wrong?’

‘We have had a very worrying time with Gretchen,’ Frieda explained, ignoring the insulting epithet Jo had bestowed on her. ‘They all had measles in the winter and she was very ill with it.’

‘Yes; you told me that at the time. But you said they were all out of quarantine when you wrote, and all convalescent.’

‘Yes; but she only went so far. The boys recovered completely, but she remained poorly and weak long after they were back at school. She has never fully recovered. Indeed, that is mainly why we are here. But I’m being a shocking hostess,’ she added. ‘You must be dead tired and hungry into the bargain. And the others will be wondering where we are. Come along to the Saal and you shall have Kaffee und Kuchen. I have provided Abendessen for the children, but you and Primula and I and the two men will have our meal later. But I never knew you when you refused coffee and a cake or two!’

‘How true! O.K.! Bring on your bears! I’m ready enough!’

Frieda tucked her hand through Jo’s arm and led her down the hall. A passage ran across it and the hostess turned to the right and opened the door to the big, sunny Saal facing west, where they found the family all waiting for them.

‘Well,’ said Jack, as he and Bruno rose, ‘is the bath full yet?’

The two stared at him. ‘Full? What do you mean?’ Jo demanded.

‘I rather thought you’d be having a nice howl together and the bath might be handy,’ he said calmly. ‘Apparently, it wasn’t needed, though.’

Jo gave him a look of exasperation. ‘Oh, *you*—! Neither of us shed a single tear. Handkerchiefs were *not* used!’ Then she grinned as she remembered that the back of her hand

had been used. However, there was no need to mention that. She turned back to Frieda. 'Frieda, here are the family. You remember the girls and Stephen, but you have to meet the other four. Where are my babies? There! How's that for twins?'

Frieda exclaimed and admired, and when she had kissed Charles and Mike, she brought forward her own frail Gretchen, as fair as her two brothers. 'Carlotta is asleep in her cot. She is like Bruno—the first of them. You shall see her presently; but, as I've heard you say more than once, it's best to let sleeping babies lie. Now come to the Speisesaal and we will have something to eat. Show Joey the way, Bruno, while I go to see about the coffee.'

The table laid in the dining-room was loaded with good things, including eggs poached in milk for the children. Jo heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction when she saw the plates piled high with cakes and twists of fancy bread. At the same time she managed to give her family a warning look.

'One cake each and *two* twists,' she said to those in immediate hearing. Aloud, she added, 'Frieda, I'll have Mike next to me, if I may, and Margot likes to sit beside Papa.'

Frieda nodded and seated the big tableful. When everyone was busy, the elders started a conversation in which most of the remarks were prefaced by, 'Oh, do you remember—?' or 'Have you heard—?' for the most part. As some of the memories were distinctly funny, the children enjoyed it as much as their elders. Jo gave the latest news of Simone, surprising Frieda, who had heard nothing about it so far. The triplets and Stephen added comments of their own to Louis and Gerard, who were fast losing their first shyness, though little Gretchen had nothing to say and sat silent next her mother.

Jo, glancing at her covertly, no long wondered that Frieda's fair face was shadowed. The child was clearly very fragile. She was very pretty, too, with her long fair hair in two plaits, her blue eyes and her transparently pink and white skin.

'Too transparent by half!' Jo thought to herself. A sudden pang shot through her as she remembered the years of anxiety she and Jack had endured with Margot. She glanced across the table at that young woman, who was laying down the law about something to Louis and smiled suddenly.

'What do you think, then?' Frieda asked.

'I was just remembering the awful shock I got when I first landed at Toronto. I'd sent off the most ghastly little misery you ever saw a year before with Madge. Never,' Jo said dramatically, 'shall I forget what I felt when a Bouncing Bet of a girl hurtled across to me and nearly strangled me on the spot! That was Canada and its dry bracing cold, my dear. It proved the turning-point for Margot. She's fit as a fiddle now. Just look at her!'

Frieda looked down the long table and smiled; but her smile faded as her eyes returned to her own small daughter. Jo saw it and promptly plunged to the rescue.

'You know, I think this is a very wise move of yours, Frieda. I love Innsbrück, but it *is* relaxing. If Gretchen doesn't pull up here, you must let me have her up at the Platz for a month or two. I'll guarantee to send her back to you as plump and rosy and boisterous as Margot!' Then she suddenly gave Gretchen a horrified look. It was quite against her principles to talk about children before them.

Frieda guessed what she was thinking. 'Oh, it is all right. Gretchen has practically no English yet and would not understand. More coffee, anyone? No? Then we will finish. Gerard, say the thanks to God,' she added in German.

They all stood while Gerard repeated the Latin grace that was always said at school and which Frieda had taught her family. When that was over, the hostess explained her

arrangements for the night.

‘We have only four bedrooms,’ she told Jo, ‘though two of them are very large. Still, I’m afraid we shall be rather crowded. Jo, I have given you and Jack the room next to ours, and I’m sorry, but I’m afraid it means putting Mike in with you as well as the babies. Then I’ve set up a spare bed we have in the boys’ room for Steve and Charles and they must sleep heads and tails. Gretchen is coming in with us and Carlotta, and the triplets will have her room and I’ve had to put Primula in with them. As for Anna,’ she smiled at that worthy creature, who had a baby on each arm, preparatory to taking them off for baths and bed, ‘it’s really only a very large cupboard, Anna, but it just holds a bed and a chair and it has a window. I’m sorry, everyone, and I do hope you’ll be able to manage for one night.’

‘My good girl, have you forgotten how we had to crowd at Many Bushes years ago when we spent the summer up on the Yorkshire Moors?’^[4] Jo demanded. ‘And those rooms were at best no more than half the size of what you seem to have here. We were there for weeks and it didn’t seem to hurt any of us. Of course we can manage! Don’t be an idiot, Frieda!’

[4] *Jo to the Rescue.*

‘Then come and I’ll show you the rooms,’ Frieda said, turning to the door.

‘With pleasure, my love! And while we’re about it, it’s more than time the twins and Mike were in bed. Give me Felicity, Anna, and I’ll undress her while you see to Felix. Mike, come along, sonny. Say good-night and come with Mamma.’

‘I don’t want to go to bed!’ Mike complained fretfully, rubbing his eyes with his fists. ‘I want to stay up.’

‘Not tonight,’ Jo said firmly. ‘Besides, I’ve told you before that “I want” never gets you anywhere, and never will.’

Mike turned his blue eyes on her beseechingly; but she was not to be coaxed. He recognised her expression and took her outstretched hand without any more fuss.

‘Some day when we’re safely in our new home, you shall sit up till nine o’clock!’ Jo promised him as she followed Frieda. ‘I mean that. Until then, you must come to bed at the proper time so you can grow up to be a husky man like Papa.’

‘And ven can I frow Felicity up like Papa does me?’ he demanded.

Jo suppressed a grin. ‘Yes, if you want to and she’ll let you,’ she agreed gravely. As Felicity would probably be ten or eleven before the condition could be fulfilled, she felt safe in making the promise.

Frieda took them to peep into the pleasant rooms where the elder children and Primula would sleep. Then she led them back and along the passage past the Saal, round a corner, and there were two doors.

‘This is our room,’ she said, indicating the first. ‘You are in the other.’ She opened the door to show a large room, very fresh and pretty, with a big wooden bed running down to meet a small stretcher bed prepared for Mike and a huge old double cradle that Jo had known for many years, set at the wall side of the bed.

Jo looked round with a reminiscent smile. ‘I recognise a lot of this. How nice it all looks and how exceedingly lucky you’ve been to get such a jolly flat! These rooms are so big and airy and then, being so high up, you don’t get any of the street-noises.’

‘I know,’ Frieda agreed. ‘It’s only for twelve months, of course, but we’re hoping to find something right on the outskirts by the time our lease is up. I want a garden for the children.’

They've never had that and I remember what fun yours have in your garden at Plas Gwyn—and at Many Bushes.'

Jo nodded. 'I couldn't agree more.—Oh, are you going?'

'Yes; it's time Gretchen was in bed, too. I'll just call her and bring her in here to undress and we can pack her in at the same time as Mike. Carlotta will be rousing up then and demanding her feed. I'll be back in a minute.'

Jo plumped down on the bed as she left the room, laid Felicity among the pillows and called Mike to her to unfasten his buttons. 'There! Now you can pull your clothes off like a big boy,' she said. 'I'll open the cases and get out the nighties and sleeping-suits.'

This was a great game, and one that Anna never allowed. Mike forgot that he had wanted to stay up and began to haul his little silk shirt over his head. Jo fished out the night-clothes and toilet articles and then sat down to undress Felicity. By the time Frieda came back with Gretchen, Mike was wriggling out of his knickers and the baby was kicking on her mother's knee, completely undressed.

'There! She's ready when Anna comes,' Jo said, tickling her small daughter. 'What do you think of my baby, Gretchen?'

Gretchen gave her a shy look, but said nothing. Frieda laughed. 'She will make friends presently, Jo. I'm afraid she's very shy.'

'She'll grow out of that,' Jo prophesied. 'Remember how awful Con used to be? I never knew why she suddenly started, for she'd been as friendly as the other two up till the time she was four. But for a whole year after the tears used to come if any stranger spoke to her. She grew out of it after that. As for young Margot, she's never known the meaning of the word. Jack calls her a forward young hussy!'

Frieda was pulling off Gretchen's garments, but she looked up to say, 'But she always was!'

'That's what I'm saying. Here come Anna and Felix. Come here, boy, and let me see you! Yes; clean and fresh as a rosebud! Felicity's ready for you, Anna, There's the shawl at the foot of the bed. I'll just pop Felix into the cradle. You know, Frieda,' she went on as Anna went off with Felicity, wrapped in the old Indian chuddah which Jo had brought from India after her one visit there the year she left school finally—'learning or teaching,' to quote herself—and cuddled Felix to her for a minute, 'Your family must have had gigantic babies! I know these two are on the small side at present; still, they are eleven months old and they'll fit into that cradle with room and to spare. Come along, precious.'

She stooped to lay the drowsy baby in the cradle and draw the sheet and light blanket over him while Frieda, having inducted her daughter into her nightdress, began to undo the plaits and then brush them until they lay in a gleaming fleece over the small shoulders.

'She's got your "mermaid's pride of hair,"' Jo said as she went to help Mike finish. 'Come on, Mike! I can't stay here all night! Charles should be in bed, too. There! Now you're ready for your tub.'

Frieda finished her brushing and tied up the long locks for the night. 'She's ready now. Kiss Tante Jo good-night, mein Blümchen, and then we will go.'

'What about her bath?' Jo asked. 'Mike can wait till she's done.'

'No; I bathed her this morning,' her mother explained. 'She can have her face and hands washed and that will do for tonight. But I knew all yours would need baths after all those hours of travelling.'

'O.K.; just as you say.' But Jo's eyes thanked her friend for the kindness.

Frieda bore her small girl away and Anna arrived with Felicity and took Mike off for the tub he needed. Jo tucked Felicity in beside her twin, and when she had heard Mike's prayers and packed him into his bed, she drew the curtains and left the room, her labours at an end, for Anna would see to the others so far as they needed it.

She slipped into the next-door room where Gretchen was already asleep in her cot by the wide-open window and Frieda was sitting in a low chair, Baby Carlotta on her knee. 'Come along, Joey,' she said in lowered tones. 'This girl is nearly finished and then you shall have your god-daughter.'

Jo sat down at the foot of the bed and began to laugh softly. Frieda looked up.

'What is the joke?' she asked.

'You!' But when her friend demanded to know what she meant, she only shook her black head and refused to say anything more.

However, when the baby had finished and Jo was holding her, looking down at her with dancing eyes, Frieda once more requested to be told the cause of the laughter.

'As I told you—you! She's a lovely baby, Frieda. I do feel proud of my god-daughter. But it's the joke of the season to see you, of all people, with a little nigger-girl!'

'What do you mean? She is no such thing!' Frieda said indignantly. 'She is exactly like Bruno, and you know how dark he is!'

'Oh, the very image,' Jo agreed. 'But it *is* awfully funny to see you with an infant as dark as this.' She looked down at the little head with its fuzz of black hair, the big eyes as black as her own that were already sleepily opaque, and the little round face with its clear olive tints.

'It's no funnier than seeing you with two such very fair babies as your twins!' Frieda snapped back.

'Oh, they've been the joke of the season. Dick swears that it was a mistake and they ought to be his and Mollie's. They're both so exactly what Peggy was when she was a baby. Remember her?'

'Of course I do.' Frieda forgot her indignation. 'She was the sweetest thing! How has she grown up?'

'Exactly that. She's still sweet—but a very practical young woman into the bargain. She made a splendid Head Girl and she's most capable at running a house. You'll be seeing her before too long, I expect. She's supposed to have left Welsen, but I miss my guess if she doesn't go back in September after all for a second year. She's not nineteen till January. This girl is well away. Shall I lay her in her crib?'

Frieda, who had been tidying the room, nodded. 'Yes; do. And then we must go and see what the others are doing.'

Presently they went along to the Saal, where they found that Anna had abstracted Charles, and Primula told them that Bruno had sent Gerard and Stephen to bed. The triplets and Louis were finishing a game of ludo and the two men had gone out for a stroll.

'And if you don't mind, Frieda,' she wound up, 'I'll go when the girls do. I'm awfully sleepy and I might disturb them if I went later.'

'That'll be as soon as the game ends,' Jo said, glancing at her watch. 'It's half an hour past their bedtime now. Still, we haven't got to rush off first thing in the morning. Frieda, are you sure you want to keep me and the babies? I'd love to stay if it'll be O.K. by you. We've heaps to discuss still.'

'Of course I'm sure! Anyway, you cannot go racing off tomorrow after a journey like today's with two babies and a small boy. You never had a lot of sense, Jo! You'll stay till

Monday, and as much longer as you like.'

'It can't be any longer—not this time. The furniture is supposed to be arriving on Tuesday, so I must be there to tackle it. But once we're straight, you and the kids must come up and stay with us, Frieda, if it's only for a week or two.'

Frieda's blue eyes glowed. 'That would be delightful. And Bruno could come, too, at the week-ends. He won't have his holiday till December this year as he has only just joined the Basle branch.'

'Yes; you never told me how that happened,' Jo said, her eyes on the players. 'Is that the end of the game? Who won?'

'Margot—and Louis was next,' Len said. She caught a look on her mother's face and picked up the counters and dice. 'I s'pose you mean it's bedtime?'

'My precious sweetie-pie, it's nearly an hour past bedtime! Say good-night, you three, and go with Primula. She's coming, too, as she's so tired.'

Jo's children had all been trained to implicit obedience, especially when they were away from home. They said good-night prettily and went off with Primula, Jo promising to come along presently for their usual talk.

'You still keep that up?' Frieda asked when Louis had gone, too.

'Well, I don't hear their prayers now—not unless they ask me to. But we generally manage to have a few words at bedtime. We were all too tired last night and the night before; but it isn't often we miss it. Now tell me how you come to be here at all.'

'As I told you, it really is because of Gretchen. The doctor told us that Innsbrück did not suit her and Bruno applied for a transfer at Easter. Then, one Wednesday, he was told that he was to come to the Basle branch of the bank and be ready for work the next Monday.'

'Heavens! What an appalling scramble you must have had!'

'Oh, we couldn't come with him. We had nowhere to go. He went on ahead and for the first fortnight after he got here he spent every spare moment trying to find somewhere for us. Then the chief Kassierer—what you call cashier—told him that friends of his had this flat but wanted to sublet it for twelve months as they were going to America to visit their married daughter. Bruno told me that he just rushed off the first moment he had and took it over. It's a bigger rent than we paid at the Mariahilfe, but we can manage. And the schools are so good. I do think it's beginning to help Gretchen already. She sleeps better and her appetite is improving.'

'I expect she'll do as I said and outgrow this delicacy. Try not to worry, Frieda, though goodness knows it's next door to impossible. I know! I had years of it with Margot! But look at her now—big, bouncing, and bonny! We'll see how real mountain air affects her when you come to us—in about three weeks time, with any luck. Then we'll make our arrangements. You'd trust her to me, wouldn't you, Frieda? And Jack would be there, too.'

Frieda nodded. 'Yes; it would be hard to do, but I could do it. Now I must go and see about our Abendessen. The men will be in shortly. And when we have had it, you must go to bed and rest. Are you coming to help me? Oh, good!'

Chapter XII

THE LAST LAP

‘Good-bye, Gretchen darling. You’ll be coming to stay with us soon and we’ll have lots of fun! Jo lifted the small Gretchen, who had lost all her shyness with ‘Tante Jo’ during the week-end and now flung her arms round her for a violent bear’s hug.

‘And will the triplets let me play with their Hausen von Puppen, Tante Jo?’

Jo nodded. ‘They certainly will. They’ll be delighted—or Len and Con will, anyhow. Margot doesn’t play with them so much nowadays. She’s turning into a tomboy and prefers boys’ games to playing with dollies. Mind you drink all your milk, though, and eat everything die Mutter gives you, or you won’t be well enough to enjoy yourself properly.’ She gave Gretchen a last kiss and set her down before she turned to Frieda. ‘I’ve had a marvellous time, Frieda. Jack was quite right when he said I wouldn’t mind staying down here while he went on with the others. I *think* we’ve managed to get level with all the news now!’

Frieda laughed as she kissed Jo. ‘We’ve talked enough, anyhow. And you do look fitter to tackle a removal now, Liebchen. Remember; any time you want a holiday your room will be waiting for you here.’

‘And the same to you!’ Jo returned. ‘You’ll have your own room at the Platz. From what Jack says, there’s any amount of room.—O.K., Jack; I’m coming! Oh, aren’t men the impatient limit? I suppose that’s why they’ve always made such a fuss about Job. A really patient man was such a curiosity, they simply had to make a song and dance about one when they found him!’

With this last irreverent remark, she bestowed a final hug on Frieda, kissed her tiny god-daughter again and then clambered into her husband’s car, where the twins were already settled in the back on movable basket-seats which were buckled to the upholstery and supplied with harness so that the tinies could move if they wished, without being able to try any perilous experiments. Mike was beside them, having given his word that he would be a good boy and not tease Felix. Felicity he adored; but he had shown signs of being jealous of his younger brother.

‘*At last!*’ Jack said as he leaned across Jo to slam the door shut. ‘Of all the women! You’ve taken a good twenty minutes to say good-bye, let me tell you! Now are you all set? Sure? You wouldn’t like to hop out for another kiss all round or anything like that? Then off we go! Good-bye, Frieda! Good-bye, Gretchen! My salaams to Bruno! A thousand thanks for all you’ve done for this girl of mine.’

He released his clutch and the car sailed off, Frieda and Gretchen waving to them from the entrance to the flats until it turned the corner. Jo and Mike had been responding frantically, but when they turned the corner of the Vögelstrasse, Jo stopped waving, leaned back to raise Mike’s window to a safe height and then sank back into her own seat with a deep sigh.

‘The last lap! And I warn you, I’m on tiptoe with excitement already. I’ve loved being with Frieda again after all these years, but I do want to be settled down in our own house and know for a fact that we *are* settled for the next ten years or so and needn’t worry about moving around any more. You’re *sure* the furniture will arrive tomorrow, Jack?’

‘I’m sure of nothing where that’s concerned,’ he informed her. ‘All I know is that it *ought* to be. However, the first job is to get you up there. It’s roughly about a hundred and forty

miles, some of 'em up fairly hefty gradients, so we won't be there much before four, if then. I propose we lunch in Berne before we go on, so we've got to allow for that.'

Jo nodded. 'Can do. Later on, when naptime comes, we'll take Mike between us and lay the babies down on the back seat. Which way are we going?'

'The shortest I've been able to work out. South until just before Laufen. Then we turn off to Balsthal and run through Langenthal and Burgdorf to Berne. From Berne we run up the Aar valley to the head of Lake Thun and take the north bank to Interlaken. After that, it's by the one road there is up the mountainside—at least, the one road that's open to cars.'

'Well, I only hope you know the way,' Jo said. 'I've no wish to be lost anywhere in a strange country.'

He looked at her. 'Of all the insults! Pray, am I in the habit of losing you?'

'No; but you don't know these parts, and it's awfully easy to make mistakes on the road,' said Jo, who was famed for doing that very thing unless she had someone with her to keep her straight.

'You *can* talk! Who was it who undertook to drive me from Cheltenham to Howells village only a couple of months back, and lost us three times on the way?' demanded Jack, who believed in carrying the war into the enemy's country.

Jo gurgled infectiously. 'Wasn't it funny! And weren't you mad!' she added.

'I'd every reason to be, hadn't I? I had an appointment at the San and Jem was to run me over. He was kept champing at his bit for a good hour and a half and I've often thought we'd never have got home that day if I hadn't given up the effort to go through my notes and insisted on taking over the wheel myself.'

'I remember! You talked enough at the time. But Jem, thank goodness, was speechless with wrath when we did arrive, so I never heard his views on the subject till much later on. And it didn't matter then as he'd had time to simmer down. O.K.; I'll resign us to your care, and pity help you if you make any mistakes.'

It was Jack's turn to chuckle. He glanced at his wife as she sat comfortably in her seat at his side. She had lost the heavy shadows under her eyes and her cheeks were faintly pink. Not that he needed to look at her to know that she was really rested now. Her conversation was Jo at her best and breeziest.

'I'll not lose you; don't you fear,' he said as he swung off round a corner into a side street which was almost empty of traffic.

'Is there any speed-limit in Switzerland?' Jo asked a little later when they had left the suburbs behind and were humming along the high-road through the country.

'None; but you're expected to use your common sense when you're going through towns or villages. Also about overtaking. But if you ask me, the gradients hereabouts help to put a limit on any sort of road-hogging—except in parts like this where you're down on the plain,' he added. 'And you mayn't overtake at railroad crossings, on bridges, or round curves.'

'Who in their senses would ever try to do such a mad thing?' Jo demanded. 'Unless, of course, they were determined suicides. There's always that.'

Jack laughed, and a small voice demanded from the back seat, 'What's a susyside, Mamma, please? Is it something to eat?'

'Oh, my goodness! I forgot Mike!' Jo murmured sotto voce. Then she said aloud, 'A suicide—not "susyside"!—is someone who is silly enough to want to die.'

'But s'poin' vey was bad?' Mike argued, standing up and leaning heavily on his mother. 'Ven vey would go to Hell an' vat would be worsen'n bein' alive. Can I have some chocolate,

please?’

Jo promptly produced the chocolate, though she disapproved of it as early in the day as this as a rule. Still, anything to get Mike’s attention off her own careless remark! She was thankful that he seemed to be satisfied. He scrambled back to his seat and went on looking out. Suddenly he gave an excited squeal.

‘Ooh, Mamma! Look at ve goats! Oh, aren’t vey *lovely*! Oh, *can* we have a goat of our own to keep?’

Jo, glancing out of the window, beheld a small boy herding goats along the road. ‘Darlings, aren’t they?’ she said. ‘We’ll see about it when we are really settled in. I can’t promise you this minute.’

‘You and Mike!’ Jack muttered as his son returned to his window-gazing, satisfied for the moment. ‘Who’s going to milk the thing, d’you think?’

‘Anna, of course. She used to do it in Tirol and I don’t suppose she’s forgotten how. Goats’ milk would be good for them all, anyhow.’

He subsided, and there was peace in the car, apart from the murmuring and chuckling of the babies and little snorts and cries of excitement from Mike. After a while, Jo glanced at her watch. ‘Jack! It’s nearly eleven. Time the brats had their milk and biscuits. Frieda gave me a flask of coffee and some cakes for us. Can’t we pull in somewhere? When we start again, I’ll put the twins down for their nap. Mike might take one, too.’

‘You’ve got a hope where he’s concerned, haven’t you? We can’t stop around here, but you keep your eyes peeled for a good place. I could do with a cup of coffee and a smoke. We’ve made very good time, so far. We’ll be into Berne by half-past twelve with any luck, so we could spare twenty minutes or so now.’

Jo kept an eagle eye for a suitable picnic spot and presently they came to a broad grassy verge where Jack drew the car in and they all got out. Jo took the precaution of keeping the twins in their harness and attaching the long reins to it. They had found their feet, even if they were still a little unsteady, and she had no wish to have to dive into the middle of the road after a straying baby!

When they had finished their elevenses and Jack was smoking his second cigarette, she took Felix and Felicity back to the car, where she made nests on the back seat for them with the baby-pillows she carried and rugs. She laid them down and had the satisfaction of seeing them drop off quickly. But when it was suggested to Mike that he might do the same thing, he protested loudly and shrilly.

‘Oh, Mamma! Must I? I’m everso, neverso wide awake! Look!’ He opened his blue eyes until they looked as if they might drop out.

‘Hi! You be careful!’ Jo exclaimed. ‘You’ll be dreadfully tired when we get to the Platz if you don’t have a nap,’ she went on coaxingly.

‘No I won’t—I p’omise you! Honest inion I won’t!’

‘Honest *what*?’ Jack demanded.

‘“Honest Injun,” of course, fathead!’ Jo retorted in the same undertone that he had used. ‘He’s picked it up from Steve and Charles.’ Aloud, she said, ‘Very well. You can come in front with Papa and me, but you’ll have to be very quiet so as not to wake the babies. *They’ll* be tired without their nap, whatever you may be. And that would mean they’d be cross. Jack, oughtn’t we to be moving on now? I don’t want to rush you, but we want to get to the Platz some time today.’

‘O.K.—O.K.! Give a feller a chance!’ he complained, stamping out his cigarette. ‘Come along, Mike. In you get! Now remember what Mamma said and sit quiet until the babies wake again. Can you manage, Jo?’

‘Easily!’ Jo sat down and proceeded to settle Mike and herself comfortably. ‘He’s only small yet, and if I *have* put on ten pounds or so this last year, I’m not *fat*, whatever other folk may say! All right, Mike? Can you see?’

Mike, squeezed in between her and the door, nodded. ‘Yes, fank you. Where are we goin’ now, Papa?’

His father made sure that the door was secure before he replied. ‘To a town called Berne, where there are lots of bears. We haven’t time to take you to see them today, but when Gretchen and the others come to stay, we’ll all go down and you shall have buns and feed them if you’ve been a good boy. And that means keeping your fingers off the door-handle. Keep a grip on him, Jo. It should be safe enough, but you never know and we don’t want an accident to start our life in Switzerland.’

‘I’ve got him,’ Jo said.

Mike paid no heed to this. ‘What are we doin’ in ve town?’

‘We’re going to have a nice dinner.’

‘An’ ven we’ll go up an’ up an’ up into ve clouds,’ Mike said happily.

His parents did not answer this aspiration. In fact, no one talked and a quarter of an hour later, Jo bent down over him and lifted him into her lap.

‘Drowsy?’ Jack murmured.

‘Asleep already,’ she said smiling down at the tanned and rosy little face against her shoulder. ‘I *thought* it might happen. Just as well, too. When Mike’s tired there’s always the risk that he’ll go off into a royal rage for the least thing, and I’d rather be excused.’

‘Sure you can manage him? I can stop while you shift him into the back seat.’

‘No; don’t do that. He might wake up again. It’ll be only half an hour or so. He never naps long in the middle of the mornings now.’

As it turned out, Mike slept on this occasion as long as the babies did, and they had reached the suburbs of Berne when he finally stirred, dug his fists well into his eyes and sat up, very brisk and refreshed, to demand, ‘Where is we now?’

‘We’ve just got to Berne. In a minute or two we’ll be having dinner,’ Jo told him as she slid him off her lap into the corner again and turned to look at the twins, who were making little murmuring noises. ‘Do you know where we’re feeding, Jack? I mean, those two are going to wake up properly in a minute and demand all sorts of attention, and if they don’t get it, they’ll yell. I don’t exactly want to walk into a hotel or a restaurant with a howling baby under each arm.’

‘I thought we’d go to a place Bruno told me about near the Kirchenfeld Brucke. He says the food’s excellent and there’s a magnificent view and it’s all on our way. Suppose I stop here and let you get in beside the twins to see to them?’

‘That’ll do very nicely. I don’t want a repetition of Felicity’s *début* at Basle if I can help it.’

As a result, they reached the restaurant with two chuckling babies, very fresh and cheerful and both gurgling happily.

‘Let’s hope the restaurant folk will understand and let us have some soup or what-have-you for the infants!’ Jo said as they sat down at a table set in a far corner by a window overlooking the river.

The waiter who attended them proved to be father of a young family himself and he took a deep interest in the twins. Little bowls of consommé were provided for them, followed by potato and gravy, and when the others had finished their ramequin au fromage—a typically Swiss dish, by the way—and were looking for their japoñnais, which proved to be small rounds of pastry with layers of rich cream, he arrived with two small cups of egg-custard, ‘with the felicitations of the chef,’ he explained. Jack had ordered milk for the small fry and a glass each of white wine for himself and Jo.

‘Let’s have coffee to wind up with,’ she suggested.

‘O.K.,’ he agreed. ‘All the same, my girl, you can limit yourself to one cup. I know you!’

‘You’re just as bad as I am when it comes to coffee,’ she said indignantly. ‘And why this sudden attack of caution, anyhow?’

‘Because, my love, coffee is an extra in Switzerland, and here it comes—at seventy centimes per cup.’

Jo’s black eyes opened widely. ‘Seventy centimes? How much is that in English money?’

‘Oh, round about a shilling, I suppose,’ he said.

‘*What!* A shilling for a cup of coffee! Well! Carry me out and bury me dacinly! ‘was her immediate reaction. Then, after she had sipped at hers, ‘All the same, it’s worth it. But I’ll restrict my longings for coffee to home for the most part, I think. Drink up your milk, Mike. Jack, give Felicity the last of hers, will you? Felix has finished his.’

She wiped her tiny son’s lips with her table-napkin as she spoke and Jack, setting down his coffee, attended to his daughter. Felicity, a born flirt, was making eyes at the waiter over the rim of her glass, and he smiled and said something to Jack, who nodded and laughed.

‘Yes; you’re quite right,’ he said. ‘Felicity likes men—she’s accustomed to any number of them. Drink your milk, poppet.’

‘What did that man say to you about Felicity?’ Jo asked as, their meal ended, they made their way back to the car.

‘Just that she would break hearts by the score later on. If she goes on as she’s begun, she certainly will. Brazen little hussy! That’s what you are, Miss!’

Jo laughed tolerantly as she fastened the young lady into her chair. ‘She’ll get more sense as she grows up,’ she said. ‘Jack, I think I’ll sit in the back with them and let Mike go with you. They’ll be turning drowsy before long and I can put them down at once without any fuss. Mike, if I let you sit alone in front with Papa, will you promise me not to play with the door-handle and not to lean against it?’

‘*Raver!*’ Mike was charmed at this. He had never been allowed to do it before, Jo having fears, all too well founded, as to what he might do.

‘That’s a promise,’ his father said.

‘Yes, Papa. I’ll be good as—good as—as a pussycat!’

‘O.K. But if you’re not, that finishes your sitting alone beside me again until you’re as old as Steve.’

That was quite enough for Mike. He settled back in the seat and Jack, having made certain that all was safe, drove off carefully, for the traffic was heavy in the city.

‘We must have a day down here some time with the brats before school begins,’ Jack said as they reached the outskirts and began to leave the busy streets behind. ‘They ought to see Berne properly. It’s a lovely old city.’

‘It certainly is,’ Jo agreed. ‘I’d like to explore it myself.’

He swung out on to the great motor highway running up the valley of the Aar. ‘Now we shan’t be long in reaching Interlaken!’

‘How long?’ she asked, keeping an eye on the twins, who were beginning to look drowsy.

‘Oh, about an hour and a half, I suppose. We go right along Lake Thun when we leave the Aar.’

Jo turned her wrist. ‘At that rate, we ought to be at the Platz ages before four o’clock,’ she observed. ‘It’s barely twenty past one now.’

He grinned at her over his shoulder. ‘Quite so. But we’ve a *peach* of a road to climb first, let me tell you. We shall be running in bottom gear the whole way up, and that’s something. I grant you that once we’ve reached the shelf it’s only a matter of three miles to our end of it. The road comes out at the Sanatorium end.’

‘Oh, well, there’s no real hurry. It isn’t as if we had to be there to receive the furniture,’ she said comfortably. ‘We’ll go straight to the school, I suppose, and have Kaffee und Kuchen. After that we must go and take a dekkko at the house. This is getting most exciting. You’re the only one—or no: the rest have seen it by this time, of course. What was their reaction to it?’

As she spoke, she began to free Felix from his seat. The hour for afternoon naps had arrived. He waited until the twins were lying comfortably on their pillows before he replied, which he did with a chuckle.

‘I should describe them as varied. Margot wanted to know what would happen if the rocks on the roof ever slipped off and rolled down. Steve and Charles merely requested to be told which room they could have for their railway. Len was the funniest, though. She solemnly counted all the windows in front and then turned to me with a look of frozen horror to inform me, “Well, Mamma will just *have* to have different kinds of curtains all at once with all those! There are *twenty-two* windows!” So much for your craze for having all windows matching!’

‘Jack Maynard! You’re exaggerating! There can’t be!’

‘Oh, no; she was quite right. There are twenty-two. I told you it used to be a *pension*, you may remember.’

‘My only Aunt Jemima! Who’s going to clean them, may I ask?’

‘Anna and the Coadjutor.’

‘The *who*?’

‘The Coadjutor. That’s what Nell Wilson said when she told me that she’d persuaded the young sister of one of their maids at Welsen to come to you. “I’ve got a Coadjutor for Anna, you can tell Jo,” she said. The girls were there and heard her and took an immediate fancy to the title. They’ve called that unfortunate kid nothing else ever since—Primula among them!’

‘I’m surprised at Primula! How old is the girl, by the way?’

‘Nell didn’t say. Sixteen or seventeen, I suppose. She’s a younger sister and she looks about that. Nell brought her up to introduce her to Anna. Luckily, they seemed to take to each other on the spot.’

‘That’s something to be thankful for! If Anna hadn’t liked her that would have been the end of her. As it is, what with her and Beth Chester coming out in September or thereabouts, we ought to be able to manage nicely.’

They had reached Lake Thun by this time and Jo stopped talking to feast her eyes on its beauty. Mike, who had been sitting quietly up to this, snatched the opportunity to ask his father one question after another until that gentleman revolted and put a stop to the merciless flow by remarking, ‘You’ve talked even on for the last twenty minutes. Now see if you can hold your tongue for as long.’

Mike gave his father a little grin and subsided as they passed through Unterseen, which used to be a separate village, famed for its beauty, but which is now a suburb of its sister-town. They passed down the long main street, which Jo fully agreed was one of the most attractive she had ever seen. On one side there are good shops and fine hotels, since Interlaken is a tourist centre for the Oberland. The other is flanked by an open park. Halfway along, Jack pointed out the Kursaal with its fine gardens and ornamental flower clock. Then he stopped the car and bade his wife turn to look out of the other window.

Jo obeyed, and a cry of startled delight broke from her. 'Oh, Jack! How—how wonderful!' Then she fell silent with the beauty of it. Before her towered in all its majesty the great snow-crowned Jungfrau with its glacier falling like a bridal veil over one shoulder.

Jack gave her a minute or two. Then he drove on again, smiling to himself at her delight. She remained silent a moment or two longer. Then she leaned forward. 'Why is she called the Jungfrau, Jack?'

'Well, there are various explanations. The most reasonable seems to me to be that the big convent in Interlaken pastured its cows up there. The mountain was called after the Jungfrauen—the nuns.'

'I see. What a wonderful welcome to our new home!'

'I thought you'd like it. Now I'm going to hog it a bit because the next bit is going to take us all our time.'

Jo agreed with this when they began to climb after leaving the plain. Up and up they went in what she later described as 'a thoroughly corkscrewy fashion.' The road zigzagged from side to side in a dizzying manner, but, for the most part, she was occupied in trying to keep the twins on the seat. They had roused up just as the car left Interlaken and had both been seized with a sudden desire to bounce. They bounced up and down on the seat till she took one on each knee.

'Hurry up and get us there quickly, Jack,' she said in resigned tones. 'These two seem to imagine they've been changed into rubber balls.'

'Strap them back in the seats, then.'

'Not worth it. We'll be there presently, won't we?'

'Just one more zigzag,' he said as he swung the car round the bend and she groaned and panted her way up a gradient that made Jo wonder if they would do it. But she was a good car and the engine was equal to it. They came out of the mountain walls which had blocked their view and reached the shelf at last.

Jack changed gears thankfully and then nodded towards a very big building standing back in a garden gay with Alpine flowers. 'That's the San. Looks all right, doesn't it?'

Jo looked with interest. Then she turned to glance out of the other window and a fresh cry of joy broke from her. 'We see her up here, too! Oh, Jack, how wonderful! This is lovely!' She paused to draw in deep lungfuls of the air. 'What gorgeous air! Talk of champagne!'

'Well, don't sniff like a dog sniffing for a bone,' he said calmly. 'You'll have all the next ten years to breathe it, remember. Ah! Here comes the school! And the whole crowd seem to be on the look-out to welcome us!'

They were! As he drew up and Jo got out, a baby tucked under each arm, she was mobbed by an excited crew, headed by the usually stately Head of the Chalet School, Miss Annersley. Everyone assaulted her with a series of exclamations of which she could make neither head nor tail until Miss Annersley suddenly cried, 'Be quiet, all of you! Jo, give me Felix! Rosalie, take Felicity from her before she lets her drop. Now, Jo! There's been a mistake somewhere.'

You'll have to have your Kaffee und Kuchen as quickly as you can and then hurry over to your own house!

‘What on earth for?’ Jo demanded as she relinquished the babies. ‘What’s happened now?’

They told her—with one voice. ‘The furniture vans arrived at noon today and the men are waiting till you come to unseal them and put the furniture in!’

Chapter XIII

THE NEW HOME

As Miss Annersley said later, Jo's reaction to this unexpected piece of news was exactly what you might have expected from her—*un*-expected! They had all anticipated that she would be overcome with horror. What she actually did was to look at them dumbfoundedly for a moment. Then she went off into peals of laughter, and laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.

Jack, on the other hand, said what he thought in good plain Anglo-Saxon. Why, in Heaven's name, did people try to make a fool of him? He had been assured that there was no chance of the vans arriving before Tuesday. What the deuce did they mean by turning up today? And what were the men going to do? It was after four now. With all the speed they could make, they couldn't hope to unload even half by nightfall. What was going to happen about the rest?

Jo mopped her eyes, got up from the big stone on which she had dropped in her first paroxysms and proceeded to pour oil on the waters.

'It's just what we might have *known* would happen when it was us! Don't go up the walls like that, Jack. It might have been worse. The things mightn't have shown up for another week and *then* we'd have had it. I think you'd better go and show yourself to the men. Have you got the firm's receipt handy? Then you pop off and come back as soon as you can. The men can be opening the vans and beginning to unpack. They can set the first oddments on the lawn till we arrive and say where they're to go. Hilda, who's going to look after the family for me? For I can see I'm going to be up to the eyes till all hours.'

'We'll attend to them amongst us,' the Head told her. 'You needn't worry about your family. Won't the girls and Steve go with you, though?'

'The girls may—until their bedtime. Steve—' Jo paused. 'No; I think he and Charles had better stay with Mike and look after him.'

'Very well. But you've no thing to worry about. You're all sleeping here tonight and tomorrow night, too, if it's necessary.'

'That's awfully good of you. Hilda, but if we *can* get into our own house, I'd rather. In fact, "The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep!" as Kingsley so beautifully says!'

'Well, you're far enough now from any harbour bar with its moaning,' Jack interjected with a grin, his grievances forgotten for the moment. 'I'm off to set the men going, Hilda. I'll be back in a few minutes. Coming, you two?'

This last was to Steve and Charles, who gave yells of joy and chased after him as he strode off down the road while the rest escorted Jo into the school in triumph.

Jack was back in ten minutes' time to announce that the men were already fixed up for the night and had had coffee and cakes and were quite willing to unseal the vans and begin getting out what they could until the master and mistress of the house arrived to direct their labours.

'Wouldn't you *know* this is the sort of thing that would happen to me?' Jo sighed twenty minutes later as she set down her coffee-cup and stood up in readiness to go to the new house. 'Girls, if you like to come and help with your own room till bedtime, you may. Primula, *you're* coming, of course. No, Steve. I want you and Charles to stay here and play with Mike. You can all come down tomorrow—except the twins. We'll park them here and Auntie Hilda

can keep an eye on them. Oh, by the way, Hilda,' she drew her friend aside, 'Keep an ear well open when you hear Mike's prayers. He puts up some startling petitions if he thinks you are not really listening. The other night, he prayed for the Devil!'

She scurried off after that, leaving a convulsed Miss Annersley to send the little boys out to the garden to play. The triplets and Primula had already gone on, and Jack, having paused to borrow sundry tools, raced after her and caught up with her just as she reached the gate.

'Jack,' she said as he opened it for her, 'How on earth did the vans get up here? Don't tell me they came by the same road as we did, for I wouldn't believe it. If it took the car all its time to make it, those vans wouldn't have a prayer of getting even a third of the way up!'

'They didn't. They came by a road from the valley at the other side which leads to the big Dorf just there. The road runs on to the Platz and it's all downhill, so they could manage it. They'll go down the road, though; but that'll be easy enough.'

'Let's hope they've got good brakes!' Jo said piously. 'I shouldn't like to hear of a holocaust when they were going back.'

'Really, Jo! What ghastly ideas you do get!'

She chuckled and slid her hand through his arm. 'That's just to lighten your life, my dear. Oh, is this the gate? What lovely silver birches! And they do shield us from view, don't they? Quite a nice garden, too. Oh! The house! Our new home! Stand still a minute while I have a good look.'

Jo stopped short in the middle of the broad pathway and stood gazing. She saw a very big, four-storied house with plastered walls, frescoed and banded by three balconies reaching from the ground floor to the third floor. The wooden posts were carved and the close-set railings were high enough to prevent any accidents with heedless youngsters. The deep-pitched roof was weighted with heavy stones, roped on in the usual fashion of the Alps, and there were four dormer windows set in it. Beneath it came six small ones of the lattice type. The main bedroom floor had French windows opening on to the balcony, and on the ground floor there were three windows on each side of the door. The house stood on a little eminence and the front door was reached by half a dozen steps built sidewise to the house.

On the path in front stood the two big furniture vans from England, with the lawn in front of the house scattered over with such things as small chairs and tables and a pile of rugs. The removal men were hard at work getting out some of the beds and the Maynard girls were busily untying the rolled-up rugs to find out what they were.

'Well!' Jo said when she had taken all this in, 'staring at it isn't going to buy the baby a new hat! Come on, Jack! We'd better go all over it first of all and decide which rooms we're going to use. That's the first thing to do.'

Primula, who had come to meet them had overheard this. 'If you'll fix on the drawing-room, Jo, the girls and I can begin carrying in some of those chairs and other oddments belonging to it,' she suggested.

Jo laughed down at her. 'With pleasure, my lamb—except that in Switzerland you don't talk of drawing-rooms—or even lounges, horrid word! You call 'em Saals.'

Primula had not known Jo for fifteen years of her life for nothing. She remained quite impervious to this rebuke, merely remarking, 'O.K.; Saal, then, since you're so fussy.'

'Right! It *would* be as well to get these things inside. At present it looks as if we meant to have an auction—or a jumble sale.' Jo mounted the steps, pushed open the door which Jack had unlocked the first time he was down and went in. Jack himself came striding after her. He had been having a few words with the foreman.

Jo found herself in a square hall with a door opening on either hand and a passage running across the back of it.

‘*This* isn’t a proper chalet,’ she said.

‘As I keep telling you, it was a *pension*,’ her husband said, exaggerated patience in his tones. ‘It was built for that purpose—and very well built, too, I may add. This room on the right used to be the Speisesaal, and as it has a hatch through into the kitchen, I vote we keep it the Speisesaal.’

‘I couldn’t agree more. Then which was the Saal?’

‘Well, this one on the left was. You must make up your mind whether you’ll use it or the big room at the end for that. Come and take a dekko at them and then you can decide.’

They went into the room on the right. It was a big, square room, with two windows. The plastered walls had been colour-washed a light green and the moulded cornices had been picked out with gilding on white. In one corner stood the big porcelain stove, at present cold and empty, though in the winter it would warm the room very pleasantly. Jo looked round.

‘It’s very nice,’ she said. ‘I’d better see the other, though, before I finally decide. We have to go round, don’t we?’

‘No; this door here leads into the cross passage.’ Jack threw it open and she found herself in a narrow passage lit by a window in an alcove. At the end was another door, standing ajar. She slipped across and found herself in a long narrow room, parquet-floored and with a lattice window at either end while at the side was another French window. Jo went to the window looking on to the front garden and nodded. Then she moved round to the side and found that she was gazing on a handsome cabbage-patch. But when she reached the one at the back, she gave a cry.

‘Oh, Jack! There’s no question, of course! *This* is the one for the Saal. We must just remove the cabbages. How could you ask when it has that view of the Jungfrau? Primula, we’ll use this as the Saal. You and the girls can begin to bring in the light furniture. Mind; none of you may tackle any heavyweights!’

‘What do you propose to do with the old Saal?’ Jack asked as Primula ran off.

‘Study, I think. It faces north-west, so it won’t get much in the way of morning sunshine; but it’ll be all right for that in the afternoon and evening and it isn’t often I get a chance to do much work in the mornings. Are there any more rooms on this floor, Jack—apart from the kitchen premises, I mean?’

‘One that used to be the office—a smallish affair behind the study on the other side of the passage. I thought I’d keep that for my own den. At the top of the house there’s a huge attic-place where they used to have half a dozen beds for emergencies. That would make a grand playroom for the kids. Then I propose you and I take the bedroom over your study. We can turn the one over the front half of what you’re making the Saal into a night-nursery—jolly handy, for there’s a bathroom bang next it, between it and one that would do for Primula. Three bedrooms on the other side of the upper hall. One biggish one and two smaller.’

‘Oh, well, we’ll fix those up when I’ve seen them. What else is there upstairs?’

‘A bedroom over the kitchen and a couple of bathrooms next door. Then another small bedroom. Seven more on the next floor and two bathrooms. On the top floor the big dormitory-attic and a whole nest of little rooms and closets and whatnots.’

‘Good Heavens!’ Jo sat down limply on a handy box. ‘I didn’t know I was coming to a *mansion*!’

‘Not much of the mansion about it! And those rooms at the top are mainly of use for storing things—oh, yes; and the biggest of the lot is the drying-room.’

‘The *what?*’

‘The drying-room—you know, dearie: where you dry the clothes in winter. You can’t hang out your washing with the thermometer well below zero, so there’s this place all fitted up with lines and racks and with a stove in one corner.’

‘*At the top of the house?* Do you mean to say Anna will have to lug the heavy baskets of wet washing right up there? Over my dead body!’ Jo said dramatically. ‘We’ll have to manage better than that, my dear, for I’ll never agree to it.’

‘I’d thought of that one myself. Well, come on and see everything and we can discuss all that later. There’ll be no washing done this week, anyhow.’

From attic to cellar they went, Jo pausing now and then to criticise or admire.

In the long room she found that Primula and the triplets had already laid down some of the rugs and arranged a few of the lighter articles of furniture. Pictures were piled up in one corner and Con was putting a bunch of cushions, which had just turned up, in the old accustomed places.

‘Fine!’ the mistress of the house said. ‘We shall have somewhere to sit when we’ve any time for sitting, and that’s something. But just for the moment, give this a rest and come on up and see what we’ve chosen for your bedrooms. The men are beginning to carry the bedsteads up and will set them up. As soon as the bedding appears, we’ll get it on and shove hot-water bottles—when *they* come to hand—into each one, just in case of any dampness.’

‘Jo! With the sort of weather we’ve been having ever since we left England! Is it likely?’ Primula demanded with some scorn.

‘I know,’ Jo returned meekly, ‘but it’s better to be safe than sorry. And though *you* mayn’t mind a nice little go of rheumatic fever, I’d mind it horribly for any of the brats. You’ll let me have my way, won’t you, Prim—’

She got no further. Primula had seized one of Con’s cushions and flung it at her with deadly aim. ‘You stop being sarcastic. And don’t start pillow-fighting or we’ll get nothing done tonight. Come on, you three! We’ll go and do as we’re told.’ She wound up with a laugh at Jo, who laughed back as she picked the fallen cushion from the floor and tossed it on to a nearby chair.

‘O.K.; we’ll say no more on the subject—or not at present. We’ll go and see how you like your proposed rooms. Come on, everyone!’

She led the way upstairs and explained the arrangements she and Jack had considered. The three girls were to have the big room on the left of the upper hall and Primula the largest of the three looking towards the Jungfrau wall. The other two rooms at the front were to be given to Beth and Barbara Chester when they arrived. The boys were to have the room behind the night-nursery. Anna had already laid claim to the small chamber over the kitchen and reached by a funny kind of open ladder from there.

By the time this was settled, the men were carrying up the bedsteads. Jo left the triplets and Primula to tackle their own and retired to the big bedroom Jack had earmarked for themselves. She found him hard at work setting up their bedstead and plunged in at once.

‘I’ll give you a hand. You can’t possibly manage alone and the men are busy with the girls’. I told them to arrange their room as they like so long as they don’t squabble about it. Are we having the bedhead against this wall?’

‘Well, I thought so? Any objections?’

‘Not really. But if we have it against the other, I’ll be nearer to the night-nursery and the boys, and that might be quite useful. I say, Jack, I’ve thought of something.’

‘Oh? What’s that?’

‘You haven’t any dressing-room. How will you manage?’

‘I thought of using that little middle room on the other side of the passage. It’s quite close at hand and I must be able to go to bed without disturbing you if I don’t happen to get home till the small hours of the morning. I’ll have the telephone extension put there, too.’

‘That’s a blessing! It can’t disturb the babies, then.’ Jo looked at him and began to laugh. He guessed what was in her mind and laughed, too.

‘There’s one thing about this place! No one is likely to mistake our number for a taxi company’s and keep *on* ringing us up in the small hours of the morning!’

‘How absolutely raging I was!’ Jo said reminiscently.

‘I’ll say you were! I wonder how the unfortunate man at the other end felt when you finally cut him off? You must have nearly taken the skin off him!’

‘That, my lad, is something we shall never know. As you may remember, I left the receiver off for the rest of the night. I’d had enough by that time.’

‘I didn’t blame you.’ Jack chuckled as he recalled that memorable night. ‘The blighter had rung us up five times and roused Mike on each occasion.’

Jo giggled. ‘Judging by his voice, I should say he’d been dining far, *far* too well and certainly not wisely. He hadn’t an S to his tongue. What really got my goat,’ she added as she helped him to screw the frame of the bed together, ‘was that last time when he began, “Shee here, lady—if you’re a lady wh-whish I doubt—” That was where I let fly!’

Jack, remembering the cutting remarks she had made on that occasion before she had slammed down the receiver with a vim that set the telephone bell vibrating, agreed with this remark. He laughed as they got the spring mattress and fitted it on. When that was done, he shook the bed violently.

‘What’s that for?’ Jo asked, watching him with interest.

‘Just to make sure it’s firm enough to stand up to Mike’s favourite early-morning trick. I think it’ll take it now.’

‘I hope so, I’m sure. I don’t want to be landed on the floor at seven in the morning. I prefer to get up in a reasonably ladylike way.’

‘That is something you rarely get the chance of doing, what with all the brats ramping round to have buttons and strings fixed or their hair brushed or the backs of their necks and ears looked at.’

‘Oh, well, once Beth gets here, she’ll take over all that so far as the babes are concerned, and the girls and Steve will be at school. I look forward to a life of simple leisure—comparatively—after that. Let’s go along and see what the girls and Primula are up to. I’m interested to see what those three do to their room. They protested loudly to me about having their beds in a straight line and I promised them they could do as they chose here. I only hope their ideas aren’t too wildly bizarre!’

However, when they reached the big sunny bedroom where the triplets were to sleep, they found that the worst of it was that Margot insisted on having her bed drawn across a window while Con had had hers set between the two windows so that it was going to be difficult to manage about opening the one. Len had hers on the far side of the second window, so Jo decreed firmly that they must be satisfied with having only the one window open so long as they had their room arranged this way.

Margot's face fell considerably at this. 'But, Mamma, that was partly the idea. I mean it would be *just* like sleeping outside in very fine weather. Oh, can't I have this window open, too, please?'

'Yes; if you can find a way to do it without moving your bed back and forwards,' Jo said calmly. 'I won't have that. You'd end by breaking the window, not to speak of the scratching the floor would get. Make up your mind, Margot. If you want to have both windows open, then you must move your bed and keep it moved. If not, you must content yourselves with just the other one.'

She left them to it after that and went along to Primula's room, where she found Jack helping that young lady to put the mattress on her bed. Primula had elected to face the window. 'Then I can see the Jungfrau the minute I wake up,' she said ecstatically.

'Yes—when it's a clear day,' Jo said. 'I'm afraid you'll find that there's quite a lot of mist at times, Prim. We used to get blanket-thick mists at the Tiern See, and it's the same in all mountain districts. However, on clear days you will have a magnificent view so it'll be worth it.'

She went back to her own room to find the men standing there with her toilet-table, and set to work to get it and some other articles of furniture, which had arrived while she was with her daughters, into place. By the time Jack, who had been hard at it here, there, and everywhere, came to suggest that it was time they called it a day and went back to the school, she not only had most of their own bedroom furniture in place, but the cots in the night-nursery had all been set up and the two little beds in the boys' room.

'This will do for them for the present,' she told Jack when he came in. 'But when Mike is old enough to join them, it'll mean using one of the bigger rooms upstairs. However, by that time, Steve will be ten or so and he's a sensible little chap and luckily Mike has a great admiration for him, so I imagine they'll behave themselves all right.'

'Quite so! Well, my love, I hate to interrupt your dreams of the future, but it's ten to twenty o'clock—'

'What? Speak English—do!'

'My good girl, you are now in Switzerland, and in these parts they use eastern European time as you very well know. Since you're so dumb, I'll say it's ten to eight and Hilda said something about Abendessen at half-past. I'm filthy, and you could do with a wash and brush-up. What about calling it a day and going over there?'

'I'd no idea it was so late! The girls ought to be in bed in ten minutes' time. I hope someone's seen that the boys went in decent time? O.K.; give Prim and the girls a yell and I'll go down and talk to Anna. She's been hard at it in the kitchen for the past hour and a half—I've heard her at intervals. How does she like her kitchen, by the way?'

'Oh, thrilled to bits! It has the latest of everything in the way of cookers and gadgets, not to speak of about a dozen cupboards.'

'Then she *will* be in her glory! Right! We'll be pushing off.'

Jo departed to seek her faithful handmaid, and Jack, after calling to the four girls to run across to the school at once, went to discuss business with the foreman of the removal men and presently the new house was silent once more.

Chapter XIV SETTLING IN

Everyone slept profoundly that night, as well they might, for everyone was tired out, what with travel, excitement, and making a beginning in the new home. But when next morning came, Jo was up at five. She dressed noiselessly and slipped out of the school by way of a window in the Head's study. Then she scuttled off down the road at top speed, expecting to be called back any moment. However, she reached the house in safety, and as she had contrived to abstract the keys from Jack's bunch which he had laid on the bedside table last thing as usual, she let herself into the hall, which was cluttered from end to end with everything they had hurriedly pushed in out of the garden the night before. By the time Jack had awakened to the fact that his wife had deserted him, she was busily shifting odd chairs and small tables into the various rooms for which they were intended.

Silent as her exit had been, it had roused Jack, and once he grasped what had happened, he was after her in short order. He also used the window, which he left wide open—Jo had closed it and it was the click of the latch which had wakened him.

Accordingly, just as she was tackling a small but awkward three-cornered cupboard, he walked in on her and stood glaring at her.

'Really, Jo, you are *the* complete ass!' was his greeting. 'Have you *no* more sense than to start off at this hour to do heavy work on an empty stomach?'

'I didn't!' she cried indignantly. 'There were two of those cakes Frieda gave us left and I ate them while I was dressing. I know just as well as you that it's mad to try to work with a big vacancy in your interior!'

'And I suppose two of those tiny cakes would fill the said vacancy?' he said sarcastically. 'Well, you come on back to the school and get some milk and rolls and butter inside you. Karen is up, I know. I heard her clashing sauce-pan lids in the kitchen as I came downstairs.'

Jo laughed. 'She would! She always did first thing in the morning. It was as good as a second rising-bell at Ste Thérèse's. Honestly, Jack, I'd a lot rather go on. Frühstück is at half-past eight and I can hang out till then quite well.'

'Woman! Will you do as you're told? It's not six o'clock yet, and if you think I'm going to let you hurl masses of furniture about when you've nothing in you to hurl them about *on*, so to speak, you've missed your guess! March!'

'Oh, Jack, what a beastly bully you are!' But Jo 'marched,' all the same. He took her back to the Chalet School, where Karen had just discovered the open window and had made up her mind that they had been burgled during the night! The arrival of the pair came just in time to stop her hurtling upstairs to Miss Annersley with the information.

'It wasn't burglars, Karen; it was us,' Jo confessed in some trepidation. Like all her compeers at the Chalet School, she had always stood in awe of Karen, who was a strapping, brawny Tirolean, giving to speaking her mind freely.

She did so now—in German, be it understood. She could speak English, since she had accompanied the school to England when it left Tirol; but she was able to express herself much better in her own tongue, and she knew that both the Maynards would understand her. To her, Jo was still not much more than the tiresome schoolgirl of earlier days and, as Jo complained later, she ignored the fact that the lady was not only a wife but the proud mother

of a long family and scolded her roundly. Nor did Jack get off; for as he stood listening with a grin to his wife being rated like a naughty little girl, she suddenly swung round on him and gave him his share. After that, she stalked off to the pantry to emerge with pint mugs of creamy milk and rolls and butter, which she planted down before them on the kitchen table.

‘It’s worth a ticking-off just to have got this, anyhow,’ Jo muttered to her husband when Karen had added black cherry jam to the supplies and left them to make a meal. ‘What nifty jam this is!’

‘How outrageous your English is!’ he retorted. ‘You might be a schoolgirl!’

‘Blame Karen, not me. That’s the effect she always has on me,’ Jo grinned. ‘Besides, that’s all I am to Karen. You and the children are just passing incidents! So far as she is concerned, I don’t believe I’ve ever aged much beyond sixteen. Oh, well, she’s a good scout, if she does take your head off at times. Isn’t this milk gorgeous?’

He nodded, looking at her with satisfied eyes. She looked as fresh as a daisy with her pink cheeks and glossy hair. As a child, Jo had been extremely delicate, and though she was strong and wiry now, mental stress tended to wear her out, even yet. And he knew she had endured a good deal during the past weeks. However, she was looking like her old self, now.

‘The mountains always did suit you best,’ he said as he munched his crusty roll lavishly spread with butter and jam.

‘Any air that’s dry and bracing,’ she said, finishing her milk. ‘Aah! I don’t mind admitting I feel pounds better for that. Come on! It’s nearly half-past six and the men were to be on the job by seven. I want to get the hall cleared before they arrive.’

‘O.K.; but what about the brats?’

‘They may sleep for the moment. I’ll come back when the men come and see to them. You can remain in charge. Come on! We’ve lots to do!’

They went back through early-morning sunshine, though, as Jo pointed out, down in the valley everything was shrouded in mist. ‘It’s going to be a baking-hot day later,’ she prophesied. ‘I’ve a good mind to have all the bedding spread out on the lawn to air and not bother with hot bottles. I wish they’d get busy with the second van. All the linen-cases are in there.’

‘They’ll get on to it at once, I expect,’ he said as they entered the house again. ‘I’ll speak to the foreman when he turns up.’

‘Yes—do! Once the beds are made, the bedrooms will begin to look habitable, and we shall feel we are that much nearer having the place ready to live in.’

They turned to, and when seven o’clock brought Primula and the triplets, who had wakened early, the hall was nearly clear.

‘Have you had anything to eat?’ Jack demanded as they came in.

‘Yes; Karen gave us mugs of milk and rolls and butter,’ Margot cried. ‘Oh, Mamma, what a lot you’ve done! This place looked like a junk-shop last night.’

‘Well, something had to be done about it, or the men wouldn’t have been able to fight their way through the litter,’ Jo said. ‘What’s the time, someone? My watch seems to have stopped.’

‘Probably you haven’t wound it,’ Jack said with a grin. ‘It’s two minutes to seven. You’d better be haring back, my girl. Seven is Mike’s hour for waking, isn’t it?’

‘He was sound asleep when we left,’ Primula said. ‘I peeped in at him and the babies in case they were moving; but they were all dead to the world.’

‘Still, that doesn’t mean they won’t all three be stirring at any moment now,’ Jo remarked. ‘I’ll leave you people to get on with this job while I pop back and attend to the rest. Don’t forget that Frühstück is at half-past eight and you’ve got to allow for time to wash your hands and faces.’

With this parting shot she left them and ran back up the road to see what was happening to her sons and Felicity. She met Steve and Charles at the gate, kissed them good-morning and sent them off to help with the clearing of the hall while she hurried on and upstairs to the dormitory where the youngest members of her family were, as she had forecast, all wide awake. Mike was dancing about with his shirt in his hands, trying to find which end went over this head. The twins were sitting up and demanding milk. She slipped the shirt over Mike’s head and left him to pull on his little knickers while she ran downstairs to beg milk for the twins from Karen.

She came back to find that Mike was preparing to slip away without washing.

‘Oh, no you don’t, my lad!’ she exclaimed, catching him. ‘You come back and wash properly. I haven’t time for your bath, for I *must* get back, but you’re not going out unwashed, so don’t think it. Come along to the bathroom.’

She hurried him along. The twins were being good at the moment, but she knew that that was not very likely to last for long. Mike was scrubbed, brought back to the dormitory to have his curls brushed, and then packed off downstairs with strict injunctions to go to Karen in the kitchen and ask nicely if he might have some milk.

‘Then, you can come back here,’ she wound up. ‘Once the twins are ready, we’ll all go down to the house.’

Mike trotted off and she turned her attention to the babies. Felix had a beguiling trick of holding out his hands and saying, as fast as he could, ‘Minka—minka—minka! ‘If his wants were not supplied, the word rose in pitch and, given time, ended in loud yells. Felicity only demanded ‘Mink!’ at long intervals; but she, too, could be relied on to protest loudly if neglected. Jo’s first job, therefore, was to give them their milk. That done, she bathed them and dressed them, which was a rapid process just now, since three little garments and loose frocks were all they needed at the moment. When she had them finished, she picked them up and set off downstairs.

At the foot of the stairs she met the Head. Behind her was Jo’s old friend Rosalie Dene, now secretary at the school.

‘Good morning, Jo! What time did you get up?’ Miss Annersley asked severely.

‘About five,’ Jo said, following her into the study. ‘Don’t say I disturbed you, Hilda, for I’m certain I didn’t. I made no noise at all.’

‘*You* may not have, but who left the window open? I heard Karen’s exclamations.’

‘Don’t blame me, blame Jack,’ Jo said, basely giving away her husband. ‘He hunted me back, though, to get something to eat, and we stopped her bundling upstairs to alarm you with horrid tales of burglaries!’

‘Where are you off to now?’

‘Back to the house, of course. I left Jack and all the girls hard at it. The men were arriving as I left and I want to be there to see that they put the things in the proper places.’

‘That will do after breakfast. In the meantime, I’ve some news for you.’

Jo sat down, relinquishing Felix to Rosalie and Felicity to her future Headmistress. ‘Oh? What’s that?’

‘Daisy rang up a few minutes ago to say that she and her husband were on their way to Interlaken and would be with us tomorrow morning. They’re in Innsbrück at the moment, so won’t get to Interlaken in time to come up this evening.’

‘Well, that’s something! Did she say what sort of a time they’d had?’

‘She was bubbling over,’ the Head admitted.

‘Oh, good! Primula will be thrilled. Not that she’s had any time to fret. *I* saw to that. But she does miss Daisy, poor lamb!’

‘That was to be expected. However, she will have her for a day, and when they go home she will have a few weeks with them before she has to come back to school.’

‘Yes—and in a home of their own. And that means more to Primula than most. But I can’t sit here nattering! I’ve *work* to do, my dears! Give me my infants and let me depart. I wish the men would get out the play-pen. It’s an awful nuisance to know what to do with these two at the moment.’

Miss Annersley laughed. ‘It’s your own fault. You *would* have twins—’

‘Not! They were wished on to me. I wasn’t asked,’ Jo told her calmly.

‘And now you wish they hadn’t been?’ The Head’s blue-grey eyes were mischievous.

‘Oh, I wouldn’t go as far as that. After all, they *are* rather nice!’ Jo lifted Felicity and kissed her rapturously. ‘Give me my youngest son, Rosalie.’

Before Rosalie could do so, there was a clatter outside and loud shouting. Clutching Felicity to her, Jo made for the window. ‘What are those imps of mine up to now? Just listen to the row! They’ll have the whole Platz raised!’

Up the drive came a wild procession, led by Con and Margot harnessed to the big double pram, which was wheeled by Len. The three boys followed, cheering at the tops of their voices. The two horses made for the walk round the house and pulled up before the open window.

‘Here you are, Mamma!’ Len cried. ‘The men have just got this out and they’ve got the play-pen out, too, and one of the men is busy putting it up, so Fee and Flixxy are fixed for the day!’

Jo stood looking at her eldest daughter with an odd smile. Len caught her eye and suddenly went red and stared hard at the ground.

When this happened, Jo said sweetly, ‘I thought I told you people that the twins were to be called by their full names? If you go on like this with “Fee” and “Flixxy,” before you know where you are, you’ll be putting an L into “Fee” and a nice sound *that* will have! Besides, what’s wrong with their names, anyhow?’

No one spoke. She gave them another thirty seconds and then said in different tones, ‘Well, that’s settled for the future. Felix and Felicity, and no more nonsense, please! I’ll call you three by your full names if you prefer it,’ she added with a sudden grin at her triplets.

The three looked horrified. ‘Oh, *no*, Mamma!’ Margot cried. ‘That would be plain *awful*! I guess we none of us want *that*!’ She looked at her sisters.

‘We don’t,’ Len said with decision. ‘But there’s just one thing, Mamma.’

‘What’s that?’ Jo asked as she began to settle Felicity in the pram.

‘Well, may we call you “Mother” sometimes instead of “Mamma” now we’re getting older?’

‘I said ages ago that you might. The one thing I won’t stand for is “Mom” and “Pop.” We made it “Mamma” and “Papa” when you were little because you all found it so hard to say your “t-h.” But you’re past that now.’

‘Oh, thank you!’ The triplets spoke together as Miss Annersley said in an aside to Jo, ‘And, incidentally, you did it to make a sensation. I know you, Jo!’

‘Well—perhaps. But I really *was* thinking about the difficulty of the words as well,’ Jo protested.

The Head laughed, and then Jack himself arrived, looking hot and sticky.

‘Hello, Hilda! The top of the morning to you! Isn’t breakfast—I beg its pardon, Frühstück—nearly ready? I’m a working man and I need my meals at regular intervals. Here, you kids, scoot and wash!’ And he hunted his family off to the bathrooms, while Jo rescued Felix and tucked him in at the other end of the pram.

‘That will settle them till we’ve finished. They’ve both had milk and a rusk, so they’ll do for a while. Frühstück must be nearly ready, anyhow. I smell coffee!’

‘So it is! Come along in and sit down. Your wild family will be down presently.’

After Frühstück, Jack took the elder children off again, but Jo sat down to feed her twins with lightly boiled eggs broken over breadcrumbs and cups of milk before she went to seek her big hat.

‘Well, this is good-bye for the moment,’ she said to Miss Annersley after she had seen that the canopy over the pram was safely locked. ‘Anna told me last night that she had got in meat and vegetables and stewed cherries and we must stand on our own feet now. It’s been wizard of you to keep us and I’m more grateful than I can say. What about you and Rosalie coming along for Kaffee und Kuchen this afternoon? I bought cakes in Berne yesterday, and Jack says the crockery cases are all out of the vans and he would open them first thing. Come along about four—er—sixteen o’clock and help us christen the house, won’t you? What about Matey?’

‘She’s not coming up until tomorrow. Are you sure you can do with us, Jo?’

‘Shouldn’t ask you if I weren’t,’ quoth Jo. ‘That’s O.K., then. We’ll expect you about then.’

She waved good-bye to them and set off down the drive, wheeling the big pram and talking to her babies as she went. Steve and Charles were watching for them at the gate of the new house and came racing up the road to beg permission to push the pram.

‘All right; but mind how you go. This isn’t exactly like the Carnbach pavements,’ Jo said, relinquishing it to them.

‘O.K.; we’ll watch out,’ Steve said. ‘Come on, Chas!’

They reached the new house, where they found that the play-pen had been set up in the shade of some bushes. Jo looked thoughtfully at those same bushes, for they were very thorny.

‘I think we’ll dispose of those as soon as there’s time,’ she said. ‘I can just see some of you people tearing yourselves—skin or clothes—on them. However, that can’t be this week, anyhow. Steady the pram, Steve, while I lift these two out. Is the ground-sheet down, do you know?’

‘Yes; Papa spread it and tied it to the rails. And Margot put these things in for them to play with,’ Steve replied, pointing to a big ball and a couple of old tin trays and kitchen spoons.

Jo chuckled. ‘They’ll be happy all right for the present. One of us can run out to see to them now and then. Come along, boys. There’s heaps to do!’

In the house she was met by Margot, who was carefully carrying a pile of plates to the kitchen. She stopped her a moment. ‘Thank you, sugar-pie. That was very thoughtful of you. Felix and Felicity will be quite cheerful till naptime.’

Margot gave her a beaming smile. 'I knew you'd want them to have something to play with and we haven't really opened the toy-boxes yet; but that big ball was in the waste-paper basket from the study and Anna found the trays and spoons.'

Jo pulled one of her red-gold curls and passed on to the study, where she found everyone hard at work with the crockery. Even Mike was carrying pie-dishes and basins out to Anna.

It was a busy day. At eleven o'clock, Anna went to bring in the babies and put them down for their naps. The bed-linen had been unearthed and lines stretched between the trees at the back of the house on which it was airing finely in the hot sun. Much of the china had been unpacked and stored in its various cupboards and racks, only the ornaments being left for the present.

'Time enough for those tomorrow or next day,' Jo said. 'Leave the books alone, Con. We can't bother with them, either—nor with the pictures. The music-box, Len? In the Saal, near the piano. Ask the men to set it against the wall. Wait; I'll come and show them.'

At half-past twelve Anna summoned them to Mittagessen, and after that Jo called her own girls and Primula and they all turned to and made the beds. As Jo had said, once that was done, the rooms did begin to have a finished look.

At fourteen o'clock a call came from the Sanatorium for Jack, where a new and very bad case had just arrived. He went off, leaving the rest to go on with hanging curtains and generally getting things into order. Jo sent the children up to the play-room, where two cupboards had been taken, with orders to unpack the toys and put them neatly away.

'I'm going to give you boys one of the rooms on the floor below for your trains,' she told Steve, 'but there isn't time to see to it today. Just leave those boxes untouched and you can do it tomorrow. Oh, and don't bother with the dolls' furniture, girls, That's another thing that can wait. But the rest of the things had better be got out of the way. Anyhow, the men want the boxes to take back to England, so they *must* be emptied.'

When the two visitors arrived for Kaffee und Kuchen, they found that the Saal was finished and so was the Speisesaal, except for the ornaments and pictures. In the study, the furniture had been placed, but as the boxes had had to be unpacked, the books were standing everywhere in piles. Jo looked at the confusion with a despairing look and then shut the door firmly.

'We can't do anything about *that!* I foresee a hair-raising day or two while we get them sorted out. Thank goodness, once it's done, it's done for the next few years. But the rest of the house isn't too bad now. Come along, folks. Anna has set Kaffee und Kuchen for the brats in the Speisesaal to give us a rest. *We* are going to be ladies and have it in the Saal. And I'm not sorry!'

'Where's Jack?' Rosalie asked as they sat enjoying Anna's superb coffee and their share of the cakes Jo had bought in Berne.

'Gone haring off to the San. A bad case arrived and they rang through for him. Goodness knows when he'll get back. But we've managed all right without him. The men had finished before he went, so he dealt with them.'

'What are you calling your house, Jo?' Miss Annersley asked.

'Haven't thought of it, yet. Any ideas on the subject?'

'None; so don't ask me. You ought to be able to think up something yourself.'

'What was it called before? Jack never told me and I forgot to ask him.'

'The Pension Wellington,' her old Headmistress told her solemnly.

'Suffering cats! Well, we certainly won't use that!' Jo said decidedly.

‘Jo! What appalling expressions you do get hold of! Well, what name do you choose for your house? We can’t go on calling it “The New House”!’

‘No; I suppose not. I must go into a huddle with Jack and see what ideas he has. But it won’t be Wellington House; I can tell you that beforehand!’

There they had to leave it, and as one of the maids from the school came to summon the Head home again to attend to a visitor, she and Rosalie left as ignorant as they had come.

‘All the same,’ said Jo to her husband as they sat together in the Speisesaal over their late Abendessen, ‘we’d better put our brains in steep and evolve something as soon as possible.’

‘I couldn’t agree more! No; no more coffee, thank you. What about yourself? Finished? Then come along to the Saal and we’ll have a cigarette before we lock up and go to bed.’

‘Very well. I’ll ring for Anna to clear and then *she* can go to bed. It’s been a long day. I can tell you that once I’m safely on my pillow you don’t prise me off it before seven tomorrow morning!’

But Jo was no prophetess, and circumstances certainly altered cases that night!

Chapter XV
THE NIGHT JO PASSED

Jo was tired enough to drop asleep almost as soon as she laid her head on her pillow. She had made the rounds of the bedrooms to find all the younger members of the family slumbering sweetly. Then she had curled up on her pillow and that was the last she knew for a couple of hours or so.

Shortly after midnight, the telephone downstairs summoned Jack to the Sanatorium again. The new case—which was a very bad one—needed his attention. He dressed swiftly and silently, scribbled a note for Jo in case she roused up, and went off. Meanwhile, in the night-nursery, all was not well.

Like a good many mothers of small fry, Jo contrived to sleep with one ear open, and when a whimper arose next door, she was out of bed, pulling on her kimono and shuffling her feet into straw sandals before she realised that she had the room to herself.

She was accustomed to this sort of thing. She saw the note Jack had left on her toilet-table; but the whimper was growing louder and she had no time to read it. She recognised both the voice of Felix and the cause of the trouble.

‘Oh, my only Aunt Jemima! *Teeth!*’ she thought to herself as she left the room, crossed the passage and went into the night-nursery.

Felix was tossing about in his cot and his fists were at his mouth. She stooped and lifted him out and he cuddled up to her at once, sobbing quietly. She cast a glance at her sleeping Mike and Felicity and then carried the boy to her own room. She had left the shaded night-lamp on and now she sat down with him beside it. His face was flushed and his eyes heavy. When she slipped a finger into his mouth, she found that the gums were burning hot. Well, she had tackled this sort of thing over and over again with both Steve and Mike. Luckily, in these days there were things which would soothe the pain for even a baby. She laid the partly calmed boy down on her bed for a minute or two, went to her little medicine cupboard and mixed a half-tablet with water. Then she came back with the glass, picked up her son, who was beginning to whimper again, and gave him a sip. Felix found it sweet and cooling and he took it avidly. Once it was down there was nothing to do but wait. Jo went over to the half-open window, pulled up a comfortable wicker chair and sat down, rocking the boy in her arms and murmuring love-words to him.

‘There, poor little man! Mother’s little Felix-boy! Never mind, precious; the pain will soon be better now.’

In about half an hour, the dose had taken effect and he was sleeping quietly. Jo waited a little longer. Then she carried him back to his cot and laid him in it, hoping that he would not rouse up. Felix was tired and his pain eased. The long lashes never quivered, and after standing there for five minutes, his mother took another look at the other two and then went back to bed.

She must have slept for about a couple of hours when a hand was laid on her shoulder and she was gently shaken. Struggling back to consciousness, she opened sleepy eyes to find that Len was standing beside her, looking alarmed.

‘What’s wrong?’ Jo demanded, sitting up and swinging her feet out of bed.

‘It’s Con, Mamma. She’s gone and I can’t find her anywhere. She must be walking in her sleep again.’

‘I see. All right, honey-bud. I’ll go and hunt for her myself. Meantime, is Margot awake? Not? Then you stay here, will you, while I go over the house. Felix has been having trouble with a tooth and he may wake again. Call me if he does. Are you warm enough? Curl up in that chair, then. I won’t be long.’

‘Yes, Mamma.’ Len curled up in the chair Jo had left by the window and that lady herself hurried out of the room, more anxious than she would have liked her eldest girl to know.

Con had had bouts of sleep-walking before this and they came back whenever she was over-excited or over-tired. No doubt all the thrills of the past week had helped to bring on this one. All the same, it was alarming. As she looked through the bedrooms on that floor, Jo’s mind was running on all the unknown perils that awaited Con if she had managed to get out. She was nowhere to be seen, but when Jo got down to the ground floor, she found to her great relief that the front door was safely latched and the windows all shuttered. Con must be in the house. It was only a question of time before she was found.

Unfortunately, there was no sign of her on the ground floor either, though Jo went to such ridiculous lengths as peering into the case of the grandfather clock and hunting through all Anna’s crowded cupboards. Having made sure of this, she ran up the stairs leading from the kitchen to that worthy maiden’s eyrie and shook her awake.

‘Anna! Wake up! I want you! Con is walking in her sleep again and I can’t find her anywhere downstairs or on the bedroom floor. Come and help me hunt through the rest of the place!’

‘*Wie—Con—*’ Anna was still only half awake.

Jo hastily recast her sentence in German, and by the time she had done this Anna was out of bed and bundling herself up in an old scarlet shawl.

‘*Ich komme schnell,*’ she said.

Together they hunted through the ground floor again. Then they tried the bedrooms once more and Anna solemnly looked under all the beds, mercifully without waking anyone. No Con was to be found. Jo, looking in on the night-nursery, found that Felix was still sleeping and the flush had left his face. Faithful Len was sitting in her chair, trying hard to keep her heavy eyes from closing.

‘It’s all right, sweetie-pie,’ her mother said, touching a round cheek lovingly. ‘Felix is fast asleep and I don’t think he’ll wake up for a while now. You can run back to bed and don’t wake Margot if you can help it. Con isn’t downstairs, so she must be up, and that’ll take some searching, considering all the pigeon-holes and corners there are there. But we’ll find her soon, so don’t worry. There’s a jug of milk and a mug on the table at the head of the stairs. Take a drink and then try to go to sleep like a good girl.’

Len looked doubtful, but she was always the most biddable of Jo’s children. She looked up at her mother, saw that Jo meant what she said, and got up.

‘Shouldn’t I come with you, Mamma?’ she asked, yawning fearfully.

‘No, pet. I have Anna now. You can help most by doing as I tell you. Kiss me and then run along to bed again. You’ll wake up in the morning and find Con safe in her bed.’

‘Very well, Mamma,’ Len said submissively.

She went off laggingly, and when she had shut the door of their room, Jo ran upstairs to the third floor, where Anna was already hunting thoroughly.

By the time they had gone through every room and it was plain that no Con was there either, Jo was becoming very anxious. The doors and windows were certainly shut and Con would hardly have been unable to unfasten the front door, which had a tricky latch. At the same time, if they could not find her in the attics, it was hard to know what to do next.

‘I need Jack!’ Jo thought to herself. ‘Of course he’s out! He always *is* out when he’s specially wanted at home, it seems to me!’

‘She is not in the playroom, Madame,’ Anna said, coming out of it. ‘I will go to that end of the passage and look through all the rooms if you will take the other. We must look everywhere.’

They looked and looked, but no Con was anywhere to be found.

By this time Jo was growing frantic. ‘She *must* be somewhere in the house, Anna,’ she said. ‘She couldn’t possibly undo the front-door latch—it takes me all my time to turn it myself. And as for the shutters—’

She got no farther. At that point, a terrific bawling uproar answered one of their problems. Con was certainly not straying about the Platz, which was what they had both begun to fear, common sense and probability to the contrary. But where *was* she?

‘Ma-maa! Mamma-a-a! I want you! I’m frightened! Mam-maaa!’

‘Con, where are you?’ Jo shouted, heedless now of tire others. ‘Don’t be afraid! I’m coming!’

‘Ya-a-ah! I’m on the roof of the door! Mam-maa!’

Jo’s common sense had reasserted itself. ‘I’m coming! Hang on hard and stop that hideous noise!’ she commanded, bellowing to make herself heard above Con’s howls. ‘I’m coming now!’

She rushed downstairs to her own bedroom and out on to the balcony to peer through the grey dimness which betokened the coming of the dawn. Through that eerie quarter-light she could just distinguish a hump straddled across the steeply-sloped roof of the front door. That was Con, judging by the sounds coming from it. All the other children were awake, but Jo was beyond heeding the yells of the startled babies. She turned to Anna.

‘Hurry, Anna! Go and get the long ladder! I can’t possibly reach her from the balcony. The railings are too high to hang over and too close together for me to get my arm through. We’ll have to set it against the back of the porch and I’ll climb up and get her that way.’

Anna went hurtling down the stairs and Jo moved along the balcony until she was just above the door-roof. She hung over the railing and called to Con. ‘Con! Anna’s gone for the apple-ladder, and I’m coming up it to help you down. You’re perfectly safe so long as you hold on. Can you do that?’

Con turned a pearly-white face over her shoulder to her mother, who noted that she was safely astride the roof and clinging with both hands to the tall iron spike that crowned it. ‘You—you wo-on’t be long?’

‘Not a minute longer than I can help. Here are Len and Margot to talk to you till I reach you!’ Jo turned to the pair, who had skipped out of bed the moment their sister’s yells had risen and were now standing beside her on the balcony. ‘You two stay here and talk all the time to Con. Primula, for pity’s sake go to the babies and do what you can to hush them. Boys, you go and help Len and Margot to talk to Con.’

She was in her own room again, flinging off kimono and nightdress and getting into something more suitable for climbing a ladder and disporting herself on a roof. Then she shot downstairs, rushed out of the house and round to the back of the front door, where Anna had

set up the ladder. She skipped up it in short order and found that Con's nerve was going finally. She was still astride the roof, but she was lying down to it and sobbing pitifully.

'Now then, Con,' her mother said cheerily, 'here I am, just as I promised you! I'm going to get on the roof, too, and put an arm round you. Then we'll shuffle backwards till we reach the ladder and I'll put you on it, and once you're there, you can soon slide down to Anna. She's waiting at the bottom for you.'

But Con was beyond reason now. She sobbed and clung helplessly to the spike and Jo was at her wits' end to know how to loosen her grip. Con was too big to be lifted bodily, especially in that awkward position. The only possible way was the one Jo had outlined, but no one could do anything about that unless Con herself would co-operate. At the same time, it was clear that she was in a state of utter panic and it was only a question of time before she lost her head and with it her grip and rolled to the ground.

'I suppose I *must* try to lift her!' Jo thought desperately. 'There's nothing else for it.'

She looked round. The light was coming fast now, and that was a help. She was able to see clearly. She decided that her best plan was to get back on the ladder, go up another rung and then, making a long arm, grab Con by the back of her pyjamas and yank her forcibly backwards. It was a desperate remedy, but then it seemed as if nothing but a desperate remedy would succeed.

'Con,' she said quietly, 'I'm going back to the ladder, and when I say "Let go!" you are to let go at once. Do you hear me? I'm going to pull you to the ladder by your pyjamas, and once you're there, you'll be safely down before you can say "Blatherskites!" Now is that clear? For I'll have to take my arm from round you for a moment. But don't be afraid, I'll hang on to you somehow.'

The quiet, everyday tone helped Con a little. 'I'll t-try,' she said with a gulp.

Jo took her arm from round her, but still kept hold of the back of her pyjamas with one hand while she edged her way backwards to the ladder. There was one very trying moment when she had to find her footing without losing hold of the child, but she managed—and ever after thanked Heaven that she had very long arms.

That was the moment that Jack, satisfied that his patient was all right for the present, came striding down the road in time to see his wife perched on a ladder with Anna standing at the foot, gazing upwards, while on the roof of the door crouched a figure he had no difficulty in recognising as Con.

And then, even as he tore down to the house for the last part to the rescue, the thing happened. The ladder began to slip and slide sideways. Jo had the sense to let go of Con instantly, even as she yelled in horror. Anna squawked, the rest of the family let out a series of wild howls which Con, feeling herself loosened, completely outdid, while Jo was slowly and relentlessly swung across and then tossed into the very thorn-bush she had previously marked for demolition. She landed on her face, and her shrieks as her husband leapt the gate and came rushing to the rescue outdid anything that anyone else was producing.

'Never mind me!—Ow!—Go to Con!—Ow!—Ow!—Leave me alone and go to her.'

Someone else came hurrying to the rescue—two someones, in fact. The noise they had all made had wakened the peaceful sleepers at the school, and Miss Annorsley and Rosalie Dene, under the impression that murder was being committed at the very least, came flying down the road, weirdly and wonderfully attired. Jack left Jo to them and went to rescue Con. He was just too late. That young lady, certain that she was being deserted by her entire world, made up her mind that she must get to the ground somehow. She shut her eyes, let go her hold of the

spike, and rolled off the roof, plump on top of Anna, who sat down with a bang. Luckily, her bulk saved Con from the worst consequences of her fall. Both were bruised, but not too badly, and as Jack found out later, Anna had the worst of it.

By the time he had got everyone into the house, entrusted Con to her Headmistress, ordered the rest of the children to bed in tones that sent them scuttling there in short order, taken the thorns from Jo's wounds and given Anna a lotion for her bruises, the dawn had broken fully. Rosalie had raced upstairs to help Primula to tackle the screaming babies, and by that time they were asleep. So were the other children, including Con, who was cuddled up in her mother's arms. As for Jo, her face had suffered most and she looked as if she had been doing battle with a couple of tigers and a lion at the very least.

Anna, now fully dressed but limping a little, brought hot milk for Con and coffee for the grown-ups.

'Have some coffee yourself, Anna,' her mistress said. 'And then take off those clothes and go back to bed for the next three or four hours. It's just five o'clock and I don't care what anyone says. *No* one in this house is going to stir out of bed again before nine if I have any say in the matter.'

'I should say you all need the *day* in bed after this!' Miss Annersley said.

'Oh, no! A few hours' sleep will heal most of our troubles, though Con and Anna and I will no doubt need a little longer to recover. Hilda, thanks a lot for all you've done. You and Rosalie just saved the situation. But now you'd better go back and try to finish your own disturbed slumbers. I'm not being inhospitable,' she added calmly, 'but if I don't go to bed soon myself, I shall drop asleep where I am. Con *is* asleep, thank goodness! Here, Jack, take her and put her into her bed. And then you might show Hilda and Rosalie off the premises.'

'We'll put her in the bed in my dressing-room,' he said, lifting Con carefully out of her mother's arms. 'Later on, I'm going to see about fixing those French windows so that she doesn't get out of them again. Until I do that, she'll be safer across the way. As for Hilda and Rosalie, they may show themselves out. Good-bye, you two. We'll be seeing you later. Now then, Jo, into bed with you! I'll be back in a few minutes.'

Jo laughed wearily as she got up from her chair and went to the bed. 'Neither of us means to be rude,' she said to her friends, 'but we're both tired—and, oh, I am so sore!'

'Don't worry! We're going at once,' the Head said. 'This is no costume for a Head and her secretary to be seen promenading about in in broad daylight!'

Jo sat down on the side of the bed and began to pull off her frock. 'It *must* have given you a shock when you can condescend to such awful English construction Hilda! Where's my nighty?'

Miss Annersley passed it to her. 'I rather wondered just how you would celebrate getting into your new house, Jo. I admit I didn't realise it would take this form, but I did know it would be something sensational!' With which parting shot, she escaped and Jo, too tired to retort, gave a chuckle and went to bed thankfully.

Chapter XVI

FREUDESHEIM!

‘Joey—Joey! Where are you all? It’s us! We’ve come!’

It was ten o’clock and Jo, busied in pouring out coffee for the very late Frühstück which was the result of her decision to give everyone a chance for making up lost sleep, started violently and deluged the cloth with milky coffee.

‘Mercy!’ she cried. ‘It’s Daisy and Laurence! I’d clean forgotten that Hilda told me yesterday they’d be up today! So far as that goes, she didn’t give me any idea what time to expect them, but I really didn’t remember about them, thanks to the night’s excitements.’ She gave a rather pale Con a smile which that young lady returned unwillingly.

Primula had not stopped to hear any of this. At the first sound of her sister’s voice, she had leapt from her chair, tossed down her table napkin, and flown from the room, crying as she went, ‘Daisy! Oh, *Daisy!*’

Jo recovered her usual insouciant calm. ‘O.K.; let them have a few minutes together first. Stay where you are, Margot!’ Then, as her eye fell on the cloth, ‘Oh, my goodness! And it was clean on only yesterday!’

‘You jumped so when Auntie Daisy called,’ Len said soothingly. ‘It wasn’t really your fault, Mamma. I’ll just shove my plate under it to save the table.’

She suited the deed to the word and there was very nearly a second accident, for she forgot to move the honey-jar, which was half-full of clear honey, and if her eldest brother had not grabbed it, it would have gone over and its contents been added to the mess already on the cloth.

‘Good for you, Steve!’ Jo said. ‘If *that* had gone it would have just about put the tin hat on things. Len, my child, why don’t you look before you start shoving plates around? Well, never mind. No harm done this time! More coffee, Jack? Pass Papa’s cup, Margot.’

‘And hurry up about it,’ he put in as he gave the cup to Margot. ‘It’s awfully late and I ought to be at San now. However,’ he added philosophically, ‘they have Phil Graves and Frank Peters there already, so I suppose they can do without me for an hour or so. Danke sehr!’ as his cup came back to him.

‘Len, run and ask Anna for two fresh cups and saucers,’ Jo said. ‘Those two will be able to drink some coffee, even if they don’t want anything to eat.’

Len went to the hatch and presently returned with the cups. Jo felt her coffee pot and nodded. ‘It’s the second lot and boiling hot still, so that’s all right. I wonder how much longer they’re going to be?’

As if in answer to her query, the door opened and Primula came in, bringing with her Daisy and her very new husband in triumph. ‘Here they are!’ she said.

Jo jumped up from the table with outstretched hands. ‘Daisy-girl! Come here and let me look at you!’

Daisy came running, and after kissing her, Jo held her off at arm’s length and looked at her. ‘Yes; you look very fit and well. Freckled, of course,’ she added calmly, ‘but that’s to be expected with all the sun you’ve had.’

‘Oh, Jo!’ Daisy cried. ‘How exactly like you! And it isn’t such an awful lot,’ she added. ‘You just look at Steve before you start making remarks about freckles!’

Jo laughed as she glanced at her son, who was indeed freckled like a plover's egg. 'He always does freckle in summer—the result of a fair skin! Margot gets them as well, but not so badly as she does remember to keep her hat on.'

'Anyway, you always say they're just sun-kisses,' Margot cried defensively.

'Exactly! Well, Daisy—and Laurence—you find us late for once.'

'Yes; what is all this yarn Prim's been unloading on us? And for Heaven's sake, Jo, what *have* you been doing to your face? You look as if you'd taken on your own weight in wild cats and got the worst of it!'

Jo laughed. 'I'd forgotten what my face looks like,' she admitted.

'Forgotten it! The less you say about other folk's faces, the more you'll shine! Just look at her, Laurie! Go on, Jo; what have you been doing to it?'

'Oh, falling into a thorn-bush! That's all!' Jo responded airily. 'Didn't you say Prim had been telling you about our little excitement last night? Or, rather, it was early this morning. We had a thrilling time for a couple of hours or so and didn't get back to bed till broad daylight. That's why you find us breakfasting at this unearthly hour. Con and Anna and I all feel rather the worse for wear. Still, it might have been worse!'

'From what I've managed to make of Prim's yarn, it was bad enough,' Daisy said, sitting down in the chair Jack pulled out for her. 'Sit down, Laurie. We've got to hear the truth of this. When you've known us all a little longer, you'll know that the most unexpected is what you can expect where *this* family comes in!'

'Of all the insults! I've a good mind to ring for Anna to clear without giving you any coffee! Sit down, Laurence, do, and don't stand there looking as if you'd been asked and couldn't come! That's better. I'll attend to the coffee and you tell them the story, Jack.'

While she poured out fresh coffee all round—milk for the small fry—Jack told the tale briefly and pithily. Daisy doubled up when he described his feelings at seeing his wife flung through the air into a thorn-bush and his daughter straddling the top of the front door. She doubled up again when Jo added a lurid description of the appearance the Chalet School pair had presented when they came dashing to the rescue fresh from their beds.

'Well, I must say you seem to have gone all out to impress your neighbours,' she said when she had recovered.

'Mercifully, the school are—or should it be "is"—our only neighbour,' Jack said drily. 'I can only hope that no one else heard the yells and howls of the affair. I must say I should imagine they could have been heard over to the summit of the Jungfrau! The whole lot shrieked together!'

'It sounds like pandemonium let loose!' Laurence chuckled.

'It was! However, if anyone did hear—apart from the school, I mean—no doubt I'll hear all about it later,' Jack told him with a sudden grin. 'I only hope the whole performance doesn't earn me a reputation as a wife-beater!'

'But Jo, when they see your face, what *will* they think of you?' Daisy asked.

Jo, who had one long scratch down her left cheek, another across her nose, a third marring her brow, and sundry minor ones besides, chuckled. 'Probably that I've got a lot of Battling Butlers for a family and achieved these wounds in the course of yanking them apart. Have some more coffee, Laurence?'

He passed his cup with the remark that it went to the right spot and then turned to Daisy to ask, 'Hadn't you better warn Jo what lies before her in the near future?'

‘Presently,’ she said. ‘No thanks, Len. I enjoyed that roll, but I couldn’t eat another bite if you paid me. We had a good breakfast before we came up here.’

‘How long can you stay?’ Jo asked.

‘Only till Friday. We’ve got to go back then, worse luck!’

‘Got to go back?’ Jo exclaimed. ‘I thought you meant to have three weeks? What on earth has happened? You’ve had barely a fortnight now.’

Daisy nodded. ‘I know. But when we were at Innsbrück, Laurence had a letter from his locum to say that he can’t stay the full time. His mother’s been taken ill and has to have a major op. next Tuesday. She’s a widow, poor soul, and he’s her only child. We can’t do anything about it and certainly the practice can’t be left. We’ll just have to go. Laurie says we’ll have a week or so later on—perhaps in the New Year. Could you do with us for a week or ten days then? I’d love to have a chance to do some winter-sporting!’

‘Let’s hope they turn out better than your efforts during your school-days did!’ Jo observed wickedly. ‘Do you remember when we had that heavy snowfall at Howells and you and those other two beauties, Beth and Gwensi, made skis for yourselves out of bits of board and tried to go ski-ing on them and nearly broke your three silly young necks as a result? *I* haven’t!’

Daisy collapsed. ‘Do I not! Oh, how mad the Abbess was!’ To her husband she added, ‘That’s one of the yarns I *haven’t* had time to tell you yet.’

‘And there are dozens of those, I imagine,’ Jo chimed in. ‘Family, if you want to go, you may. Girls, you’d better make your beds. Steve and Charles, help Anna to clear the table. What’s that, Mike? May you go to the gate with Papa? Yes; but don’t go any farther. I suppose you *must* go now, Jack?’

‘Sorry, but I’m afraid I must. I had to leave the car at San last night as I picked up a puncture somehow and the spare wheel is away being mended. That means walking. I’m going to get a bike for emergencies, Jo. You’d better have one, too. We’ll see about them some time next week. Good-bye, you two; I’ll be seeing you later on.’

‘Come into the Saal,’ Jo said when the room had emptied and there were only herself and the Rosomons left. ‘I want to know what your mysterious remark about the near future means.’

She led them to the Saal and, ignoring Daisy’s exclamations at the amount they had managed to do, said firmly, ‘Sit down and tell me what you meant.’

‘Well, it’s just that when we go we want to take Prim back with us,’ Daisy said.

‘Do you really?’ Jo looked at her. ‘Wouldn’t you rather go home alone and have the first few days there together? I love having her, as you know; and goodness knows there’s any amount of room here! Besides, I expected to keep her till the end of next week and I don’t want to lose her.’

‘I know. But she’s going to Welsen when term begins, and that’s not so very far off now. This is the middle of August and they open round about the sixteenth of next month, don’t they? I want to see what I can do for her. We’ve been parted for those two years she was in Canada with Auntie Madge, remember. We’ll have all term-time to be alone together and we honestly do want her.’

Laurence Rosomon nodded as Jo turned to him. ‘That’s quite correct. You see, Jo, we want Primula to feel that our house is really her home now. If we go back on Friday—and I see no help for that—that would give her a month or so to settle down before she comes back for her

year at Welsen. And that's where I thought we might come to you after the New Year. We'd bring her back and then come on up here to wind up our interrupted honeymoon.'

'So far as that goes, you know you're more, than welcome,' Jo said. 'The trouble is, I didn't expect to have her rushed off so soon.' She got up and went to stand before the old oval mirror hung between the two front windows.

'What on earth are you staring at yourself like that for?' Daisy demanded.

'I was considering my honourable wounds. Mercifully, I always heal quickly. I *had* intended to give our house-warming party about the middle of next week, when I saw my face in all its beauty this morning. However, it can't be helped. Look here, you two, wait until Saturday and we'll hold it on Friday. I want you at it. And I *must* have Primula. Hang it all! She's been here with us throughout!' Jo sounded righteously aggrieved and Daisy began to laugh.

'What do you say, Laurie? Think we could manage it—you, rather?'

'Well, I suppose we could at a pinch,' he replied slowly.

'Of course you could!' Jo interposed quickly. 'You're flying, aren't you? 'Well, that'll be all right. We'll have the party on Friday—a *tea*-party because of the children—'

'I'd have said a Kaffee-und-Kuchen party,' Daisy interrupted her demurely.

'Same principle—and don't interrupt! You let me say what I was going to say. Then I'll sit back and listen to your comments, if any.'

'Pipe down, Daisy,' Laurence said lazily. 'Let her empty her mind before us.'

'That shouldn't take long!' Daisy said brutally.

'I've a good mind not to tell you!' Jo retorted. Then she began to giggle like a schoolgirl. 'What a rabid ass you are, my good girl! How do you put up with her, Laurence? I'm afraid she didn't get enough spankings as a kid!'

'Oh, I can handle her,' he said. 'Never mind that. Go on with your ideas.'

Jo gave it up as a bad job. 'Very well. Now listen, you two! We'll have the party on Friday afternoon, which will mean that it'll end by nineteen at latest. That'll give you plenty of time after Abendessen to pack, and if you catch the early train down you can get the morning plane, which will land you in London around one or thereabouts—I'm rather hazy over plane times.'

'I'm none too sure myself. I'll have to look them up,' he owned.

'Well, if you could manage that, you ought to be able to catch the Exeter train that goes somewhere around two—I believe it's rather later, as a matter of fact. Anyhow, it would get you there that evening, and I know it's only an hour's run home for you after that, for Daisy said so. That would give you the best part of Saturday evening and all Sunday to go through the case-book and so on with the locum. Wouldn't that be good enough?'

'Yes; we could manage that all right,' he agreed. 'What about it, Daisy?'

'It's O.K. by me. I don't *want* to leave Switzerland at all, but we can't help ourselves as things are. Yes; I'm willing, Jo.'

'Then will you agree, Laurence?' Jo turned to him again.

Before he could speak, Daisy had butted in. 'I wish you wouldn't always give him his full name!' she said plaintively. 'For goodness' sake make it "Laurie"!'

'Yes,' he assented. 'Make it "Laurie"—or I'll call you "Josephine" for evermore!'

'My only Aunt Jemima! Don't do that, whatever you do! No one ever calls me that nowadays; and they only did it when I was a kid if they were going to give me a good ticking-off!' Jo protested. 'I always shivered when Madge began, "Josephine—" I knew I was for it

then! “Laurie” it shall be—anything to oblige! Well, then, we can call that settled. Only we shall have to pitch in at the books. You two can just roll up your sleeves and give us a hand. We’ve done nothing about them yet, for there hasn’t been time. I felt we had to get our bedrooms and a sitting-room or two into order first. Just the same, the study looks like a junk shop at the moment, with books piled up from here to yonder. If we can do that and get the pictures and the ornaments set out, we’ll be all ready for Friday. My face should be a lot better by that time, and anyhow, it’s only old friends we’re having—apart from Phil Graves—’

‘Who on earth is Phil Graves?’ Daisy interrupted.

‘Daisy Venables—I mean Rosomon!—have you *quite* forgotten that Hilary Burn married Phil Graves rather more than a year ago?’^[5] He’s out here on the staff at San, and so is Frank Peters. So that means those two and Hilary and Phoebe, as well as such of the staff from both schools as happen to be handy. I *hope* Hilary will come. She’s very fit, and the baby isn’t expected before the end of October. Oh, and by the way, the Peters have adopted a little girl, since Phoebe won’t have any babies of her own, poor sweet! It is hard lines on her, but there it is. They’ve been married seven years now, and they want a family, so as they can’t have their own, they’re making do with adoptees. Lucy is the first. Next year they’re hoping to find a boy.’

[5] *Carola Storms the Chalet School.*

Daisy fell into the nearest chair with a gasp. ‘Heavens, Jo! How you do pile things on to one! So Phoebe and Frank are going in for adopting? Good for them!’

‘That’s what I thought.’ Jo was speaking rather more gravely. ‘You know, Daisy, when I remember Phoebe as she was when we first met her up on the Yorkshire moors and see her as she is now, I still have moments of amazement. She still suffers at times from rheumatism, but Frank has it under control most of the time. She’s been so marvellously happy with him, and having no children has been her one grief. Now she’s going to make up for that and, oh, I’m so *glad!*’

‘So am I! Phoebe’s one of the best—and Frank’s another.’ Daisy was in full agreement about this. ‘How old is this infant of hers?’

‘Two and a half. Frank wouldn’t agree to a tiny baby. He said it would be too much work and responsibility for her. So they’re starting off with a sturdy youngster who’s lost both her parents in a train-smash. She’s taken to them at once and Phoebe is one big beam of joy!’

Jo was beaming herself. It was she who had helped to rescue Phoebe when the girl, very poor and seriously crippled by inflammatory rheumatism, had been nearly at her wits’ end to know what to do.^[6] Getting Phoebe to the San in the Welsh Mountains had meant her meeting with little Dr Peters, who had made a special study of rheumatism. He had been able to do a great deal for her and they had wound up by falling in love with each other. Jo was wont to say that though she was no match-maker, she certainly took credit to herself for *that* match!

[6] *The Rescue.*

‘Well,’ Daisy said, getting up, ‘Having heard all this, I think I’ll go and hunt out Primula. She’ll have to do some packing, I suppose. Laurie, you help Jo with those books, won’t you?’

‘I don’t want him this minute. I’ve got to go and see to the twins first,’ Jo said. ‘When they’re all right, though, I’ll give you a yell and then you can come if you will.’

‘You don’t have to worry about those babes of yours at all,’ Daisy told her. ‘Anna’s just gone past with them and she’s settling them in the play-pen. Jo, they *are* lovely babies! Come on out and see them, Laurie!’

'This way, then! No need to go round the house!' And Jo led the way out of the French windows, past the cabbages, and to the lawn, where Anna had just finished putting the twins in the play-pen with balls, bricks, a rag doll, and a tin drum. She looked up with a wide smile as Daisy came, and that young lady had a few words with her before she came to pick up Felicity and hug her.

'Isn't she a little peach?' she asked her husband. 'And Felix is just as darling.—Jo, what *are* you doing with him?'

'Feeling to see if the tooth's come through,' Jo said. 'I can just feel a point, so it has. Thank goodness for that! Last night, I may tell you, began with weeps from him, poor little man. However, it's through and he looks all right this morning. But I thought I was for it as much as ever I'd been with Steve or Mike.' She smiled down at the cheerful youngster who was clutching at her hair. 'Oh, no you don't, young man! Here, go back to your pen! Shove Felicity in beside him, Daisy, and go and have your natter-match with Prim. Laurie, as they're all right, I can tackle those books at once if you like to help me. Jack will want to take you to San this afternoon and show you his new toy.'

They parted for the time being, and while Daisy caught up on all the news with Primula and gave some account of her own adventures, the rest worked hard. Jo and her helper set to work on the books and Jo found that she had reason to be thankful that Robin was a methodical person. Every case had been labelled with its own subject and, as she herself had seen to it that the books from each case were kept in separate piles, they found that their work was halved.

Upstairs, the young fry set to work on the play-room after their mother had called them together and explained that their house-warming was to take place so much earlier than they had expected. All the railway had been taken down to the room Jo had chosen for it, but she had advised against laying it out.

'I know you two!' she told Steve and Charles. 'Once let you begin on it and you'll be playing with it all the morning. No; bring it down in its boxes and you can lay it out next week. That's a promise.'

They had to make the best of it.

However, everyone pitched in and worked hard, and by the time Friday morning came the house was in order, although, as Jo said, there were any number of oddments still to be done. Primula was all packed up, ready to go back with Daisy, and, as Jo said regretfully, soon their last link with the old life would have left them.

'But then we begin with a new one,' Len pointed out. 'And we've still got Anna. *She* isn't going away.'

'Thank goodness for that!' her mother said devoutly.

They put all that out of their minds on Friday, though, and concentrated on preparations for the feast. Anna baked cakes of every kind. Jo turned to and cut sandwiches with as many different fillings as she could devise.

'Some of them are a trifle—unusual,' she remarked to Daisy, who was arranging little tables in the Saal and the study.

'Unusual? What have you been up to?' Daisy demanded with suspicion.

'Just trying a few experiments,' Jo said meekly. 'Will you and Laurie be dog?'

'I *thought* there was a catch in it somehow.' But Daisy obligingly helped herself from the nearest plate and nibbled cautiously.

Jo watched her while she chewed. 'Well?' she said.

Daisy looked at it. 'It's—peculiar,' she said.

'What's in it?'

'Mashed-up sardines and slices of banana,' Jo confessed.

Daisy gave her a horrified look. '*Jo!* Whatever possessed you to mix two things like that together? You'll have everyone sick!'

'Do *you* feel sick?' Jo demanded with point.

Daisy grinned at her. 'No; but *I* always did have the digestion of an ostrich. What's in this lot?'

'Cream cheese and chutney—Indian chutney. And these are egg and lettuce for conservatively minded folk—oh, and these are apple slices and garden cress.'

Laurie chuckled and helped himself to one made of rye bread. He took a healthy bite. Then he removed it rapidly.

'Oh, *no*, Jo!' he protested. 'Have mercy on your guests' mouths—and tummies! What under the sun have you put into this?' He removed the top layer of bread and examined it with interest.

'That's ham spread with curry.'

'*Curry?* Don't you tell me! There's a lot more than innocent curry in that!'

'Curry—and one or two red peppers,' she returned.

'Half a pound or so, more like! Hi, Jack! Come here! Your wife is trying to bump off her innocent friends with sandwich fillings! Come and stop her!'

'Well, you get so sick of the ordinary things,' Jo pointed out. 'I thought I'd be original. And there are some of the more ordinary kinds, as I told Daisy.'

'A lot too original by half if the thing I tried is a true sample. You'd better let us know the worst. What's this conglomeration, for instance?'

Jack came and peered at the creamy-looking pink mixture. Then he sniffed. 'Garlic, as I'm a living sinner! What else, Jo?'

'Finely minced beetroot. But these are ground peanuts and paprika pepper. You can't say anything about those,' Jo argued.

'And these?' Jack had opened yet another. He sniffed at it suspiciously. Then he tasted it. 'This isn't too bad. What is it?'

'Cream cheese and orange marmalade.'

'Well, I'll give you credit for being original if you like. But some of those mixtures of yours are the abomination of desolation!'

Jo protested, but the men were firm. They cautiously sampled all she had made and flatly declined to allow some of the more striking combinations to be used.

'You turn to and cut a lot of the ordinary kind that everyone likes,' her husband told her severely. 'And the next time you want to be original about sandwich fillings, just you come and have a heart-to-heart talk with me about it first.'

'There's any amount without Jo bothering to cut any more,' Daisy said. 'We've lots of wild strawberries—Miss Wilson brought them up from Welsen—and Anna's whipping the cream for them this minute. Shove all those weirder kinds into a cupboard somewhere, Jo, and I'll eat what I can of them. I detest waste!'

'Oh, no you won't!' her husband told her. 'We're going back to England tomorrow and I don't want to have you dying on my hands as a bright wind-up to the honeymoon! Jo can chuck them on to the bonfire. That's all *they're* fit for!'

Jack backed him up, so ‘the weirder ones’ were disposed of in the incinerator and Jo was left to bewail the waste of good bread and butter.

All the same, it was a very tempting feast she beheld when she came down to the Saal looking her very best in the green frock she had worn to Daisy’s wedding. Daisy herself was dainty in a frock of powder-blue, and Primula wore primrose yellow which exactly matched her hair. Jo had put her girls into white frocks, and the boys into blue knickers and white shirts.

‘What are we to do, Mother?’ Len demanded. The new vogue was in full swing though Charles and Mike stuck to ‘Mamma’ as being easier and the girls kept slipping at odd times.

‘Hand round cakes and sandwiches and talk nicely to anyone who talks to you. Don’t do all the talking, though. Let other folk get a word in edgewise now and then,’ Jo said, laughing. ‘Now here come Auntie Hilda and Auntie Rosalie. The party has begun!’

By the end of another half-hour, all the guests had assembled and Anna carried round trays of tea and coffee while the girls and Steve handed round fancy bread, cakes, biscuits, and Jo’s famous sandwiches.

‘I like the way your family wait on visitors, Jo,’ said pretty Hilary Graves as she sat in a corner with Jo. ‘You’ve really made a very good job of them!’

‘And pray what made you think I wouldn’t?’ Jo demanded indignantly.

Hilary gave a peal of laughter. ‘One up to me! You rose be-yewtifully! All the same, I *have* wondered whether, seeing you did such hair-raising things yourself in your extreme youth, whether—oh, bother! I didn’t mean that!—well, anyhow, I’ve wondered if you’d turn right round and be prim and precise and fussy!’

Jo was robbed of breath at this idea; but Con, who had come up in time to hear it, took up the cudgels at once. ‘Mother wouldn’t *dream* of being prim and fussy, Aunt Hilary! She—she just couldn’t!’

‘I believe you’re right at that,’ Hilary agreed. ‘Oh, what is Jack going to do?’

Jo forgot how she had just been insulted and turned to look at him. ‘If you wait you’ll see. Quiet, everyone, please!’

Only those near at hand heard her; but Jack took matters into his own hands. He had gone to stand on a little triangular dias which stood in one corner and now clapped his hands for silence.

‘One moment, please, everybody! On behalf of us all I want to welcome you here, not only today, but any time you feel like coming along. Presently, you’ll be shown over the house. As Jo says, it’s just as well you should see it in its pristine condition.’

There was a burst of laughter at this. He waited until it was over. Then he went on: ‘Before you begin the tour, we have decided that we should tell you the name we have chosen for our home in the Oberland. I may say it wasn’t decided on without any amount of argument. However, we’ve got it at last. We welcome you all to “Freudesheim.” We hope that for every one of you as well as ourselves it may be “Happy Home”!’

He stopped there; but Laurie Rosomon jumped up. Lifting his coffee-cup, he cried, ‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I may be the newest of the friends, but all the same I hope you’ll all join me in drinking to the future prosperity and happiness of Freudesheim and its occupants!’

The toast was drunk with cheers. Then, as Jo was making her way to collect her own party of tourists, Miss Annersley caught her. ‘Jo, it’s a beautiful name!’

‘Glad you think so,’ quoth Jo. ‘All I’ve got to say is that it’s time we settled down to a little solid happiness after all the alarms and excursions we’ve had in getting to the Oberland!’

[The end of *Joey Goes to the Oberland* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]