

RUEY RICHARDSON— CHALETIAN

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

Author of **THE CHALET SERIES**



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RUEY RICHARDSON—CHALETIAN

By
ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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To
PHYLLIS
with love

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CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF RUEY

It was the night before term began at the Chalet School. Tucked up cosily in her little white bed in the pretty room which her guardians, Dr. and Mrs. Maynard, had bestowed on her when they brought her home to their house, Freudesheim, Ruey Richardson was wakeful for once in her life. She was trying to make up her mind whether or not she really looked forward to the school after all.

It is true that it was somewhat late in the day for this; but until that evening, Ruey had not fully realized exactly what going to boarding-school as opposed to day-school would entail in the way of rules governing out-of-school hours. She had been distinctly startled when Len, the eldest of the Maynard family—by a short thirty minutes or so—and about to become a bright and shining light in Form Va, remarked out of the blue, “We shan’t be sitting around out of bed like this *tomorrow* night. We all go early then. After that, though, you and Margot and the rest of us will have till nine-fifteen, Ruey—I mean,” conscientiously, for Ruey was still new to the Middle Europe way of naming the hours, “twenty-one-fifteen.”

Ruey stared at her. “What on earth do you mean?” she demanded.

“What I say, of course.”

Ruey frankly gaped. “Do you really mean we have to go to bed at nine—oh, well, twenty-one-fifteen, then!—whether we like it or not?”

“But what else did you expect?” queried Con, the second of the famous Maynard triplets, wide-eyed. “There must be at least a hundred in Senior School. We couldn’t possibly all go off to bed just when we pleased! It would make frightful chaos in the dormies and Matey would be hairless! Surely you don’t need to be told that?”

“Oh!” Ruey said. It was all she did say then; but she thought the more.

“And everyone has to get up at seven in the winter and half-past six in the summer,” Margot, the youngest of the triplets, gave this supplementary information with a broad grin.

Ruey took this in her stride. Early rising meant nothing to her, but this business of going to bed at nine o’clock did. She was the motherless daughter of a professor whose whole interest was dedicated to the idea of space travel. There had been a housekeeper, of course, in their home at Croydon, but Miss Wotherspoon, though efficient as a manager of housekeeping, had been totally unable to cope with Ruey and her two brothers and the three had been in the habit of going to bed pretty much as and when they chose.

Now she curled up wondering how she was really going to like having her actions hedged in as she quite saw they must be at a boarding-school.

“I wonder how the boys will like it?” she thought as she stared out of the open window opposite at the starry sky.

The door opened quietly and a head looked round it. Ruey sat up with a cry of welcome. “Auntie Joey! How decent of you!”

“I thought we might have a last private word or two together,” said the owner of the head, coming right into the room and closing the door behind her. “I’ve had a brief natter with each of my three and now it’s your turn. Move over and make room for me to sit on the edge of the bed. Oh, by the way, don’t you ever give me away to Matey!”

“Give you away? In what way?” Ruey demanded, as she moved over and Joey Maynard sat down and smiled companionably at her.

“Don’t let Matey know that I still keep up my shocking habit of sitting on beds. It’s anathema to her and the rows I used to get into for doing it when *I* was at school were little short of phenomenal. I never *could* remember! And there’s a tip for you, now I think of it. Keep off your bed if you want to keep the right side of Matey.” Joey wound up with a low chuckle.

“I’ll remember if I can. I do a lot of sitting on beds myself. At least I did when I was at home.”

“Home isn’t school! You remember what I say and then Matey will love you. Who knows? You may even become her blue-eyed pet!” Joey gurgled again. Full well she knew that she herself was the one person to have any claim to that status if Matron could ever have been got to own it.

Ruey giggled. “*That* would be a change for me! I’ve never been anyone’s blue-eyed pet in my life, so far as I can remember.” Then her tone changed. “Oh dear! What a frantic lot there is to remember!” she complained.

“Nonsense! It’ll come by degrees and before you know where you are, the whole lot will be sheer habit. Not worried about anything, are you?” Joey looked down at the thin freckled face against the pillow.

“Oh, no!” Ruey was quick to disclaim. “Anyhow, I’ll have Len and Con and Margot to help me out. I’m jolly lucky, if you ask me. Most girls I’ve ever known who went to boarding-school for the first time either had to go knowing no one, or else some girl who was years older than themselves and not much help. I’m to be in the same form as Margot; and Len and Con have both promised to tip me the wink if they see me doing anything out of the way.”

“And if things ever get beyond you, Ruey, go to Miss Annersley and ask if you may come and see me and I’ll do what in me lies to straighten you out.” Joey’s lovely voice had suddenly become grave. “But, my lamb, you don’t have to rely only on our help. You know that, don’t you?”

Ruey gave her a quick, shy glance. “Yes; but it’s almost as new to me as boarding-school will be. But I won’t forget that, either.”

“Then you’ll be all right. Now it’s getting very late and you ought to be asleep. Lie down and I’ll tuck you in. The days are still warm enough, but our nights at this altitude are apt to be chilly. Sure you’ll be warm enough? You wouldn’t like another blanket?”

“No thanks. I’ve heaps of bedclothes and I’m quite cosy, thank you.”

“Sure? We are accustomed to it after all these years, but it comes as a shock to most folk at first. Still, you *have* had over six weeks at the Tiernsee so you ought to have some idea of what it’s like. I’ll say good night then. Good night, my Ruey girl! God bless you and keep you!”

Joey kissed Ruey and crossed the room to make sure that the window was securely latched back. When she turned round again, the girl was on her side, her eyes closed and giving every indication that she was well over the border already. Joey smiled to herself and left the room for a final peep in the night nursery before she retired to her own well-earned bed.

Oddly enough, her visit had put all the questions out of Ruey’s mind and before her guardian had quitted the nursery, she was fast asleep and not even dreaming of the immediate future which lay before her.

Next morning, the pupils from Freudesheim carried over their cases and, having consulted the dormitories lists, proceeded to their own abodes and began to unpack. It was an unwritten law that all those girls who lived on the Platz should do this as it meant a certain saving of time next day when unpacking began in earnest for the school. All four were in Ste Thérèse’s House. Len, to her great consternation, discovered that she had been appointed dormitory

prefect in Gentian with Ruey at the other end of the long dormitory. Con and Margot were together in Alpenrose, also at either end.

Matron, a short, wiry woman in the early fifties, accepted the rapturous joy of the Maynards who had never been allowed to be so close together before. The usual thing was for two to be on one floor and one on another, generally in dormitories as widely apart as possible.

“Yes; we’re trusting you to be close this term,” Matron said. “We’ll see how you go on; but I warn you all here and now that any pranks on your part and you’ll be as widely separated as ever I can manage.”

“We’ll be angels!” Margot said earnestly.

“If so, it’ll be about the first time in your lives!” Matron retorted. Then she stopped dead and eyed Len’s pony-tail meaningly. “Better get your hair plaited properly before you do anything else, Len. Pony-tails are not allowed here.”

Len went scarlet. “I’m awfully sorry, Matron. I’ve been doing my hair this way all the holidays and I forgot.”

“Yes; well, go and do it properly. The only time you may please yourself is on Saturday evening as I ought not to have to tell you. Oh, by the way, apart from yourself, Ruey and Primrose Trevoase, you have mainly French and Swiss girls in here. The names are pinned on the curtains as usual. Two new girls—Renée Touvet who came last term, you may remember, and spent most of it in San, so she is practically new; and Geneviève Rosier who comes from Fribourg. The others are”—Matron paused to consult the list she carried—“Tina Harms—Marie Lemprière—Odette Mercier—and Maria Zinkel. Keep an eye on Primrose—though I must say she seems to have improved a good deal since our St. Briavel days.”

The triplets grinned at each other and Ruey gathered that the said Primrose must have been something of a firebrand when the school had been on the tiny island of St. Briavel off the coast of South Wales.

“After all, Matron, Primrose is fifteen now,” Len said in her most conciliating tones. “You do get *some* sense by the time you’re fifteen.”

Matron suddenly laughed. “I’ll grant you that you *ought*. But I’ve known girls of fifteen and sixteen who didn’t have very much more sense at that age than they did at thirteen. Well, do your best. You’re Va now, remember.”

She left it at that and turned to Margot and Con. “You two, your prefect is Heather Clayton. Mind you back her up, for she has five new girls besides yourselves.”

“And who else?” Margot asked eagerly. “Alpenrose is a twelve-bedder, isn’t it?”

“It is. The others are Nancy Wadham—Enid Matthews—Marie Walther—and Francie Wilford. Now that’s enough. I have my hands full as it is. Unpack your cases and put the things away *tidily*. Len, show Ruey how to arrange her drawers. When you’ve finished with your cases, you may come to the trunk-room and see to your trunks. Then tomorrow you’ll be free to help with other people.”

“Are we the only ones from the Platz this term?” Con asked.

“Renée Touvet has been staying up here, of course, to be near her aunt; but she isn’t coming until this evening.” Matron paused a moment before she added, “You’ll be sorry to hear that her aunt has been very ill indeed and Renée is with her as much as they allow. Now be off with you! When you’ve finished all the unpacking, you had better go down to the office and ask Miss Dene if she can find any jobs for you. I expect she’ll be glad of help with the stationery.”

She departed with a great rustling of starch and the four were left alone.

“Gosh!” Margot said when they were sure that she had gone. “Fancy you a dormitory pree, Len! You *are* coming on! The first of us to hold that sort of job. Mind you back her up all you

know, Ruey. Come on, Con! We'd best be getting down to the unpacking or Matey will be wanting to know *all* about it!"

She went off, followed by Con who only waited to say, "Good luck, Len!" before she, too, vanished and Len and Ruey were left alone.

"What did Matron mean about showing me how to arrange my drawers?" Ruey demanded as Len tucked a hand through her free arm and led her off to the far end of the room.

"Which drawer to put what in," Len explained succinctly. "Here you are! Come in and I'll show you."

She led the way into the end cubicle, set down her case and proceeded to drop the dividing curtains so that Ruey, with a little exclamation of surprise, found herself in a tiny room containing a narrow bed, a wicker chair and a long, narrow bureau with two small drawers and two long ones above a shelf. Another shelf ran above the head of the bed and there was a small lattice window which she later discovered to be only half a window, the other half being in the next-door cubicle. The curtains, when she had time to look at them, were delightful—a creamy ground with clusters of deep blue gentians scattered here and there: the reversible rug at the bedside matched them and the bed was covered with a counterpane in the deep gentian blue.

"Here's your bureau," Len said. "This half," lifting the top, "is for your brush and comb and so on. It's a mirror on the inside, you see. You can keep photos or ornaments or one or two private books on top of the other part if you want to. This case sort of affair lifts out and you keep your stockings in the well. Your hankies and collars and cuffs for your evening velveteen in this drawer, gloves and ribbons and oddments in the other. Your blouses in the first long drawer and underneathies in the second. Hang your dressing-gown on that hook and in the morning, put your bedroom slippers on that shelf when you've finished with them. Now come and I'll show you The Closet."

Ruey meekly followed her out of the cubicle and up the long dormitory to the deep closet where groups of pegs, four to each group, awaited frocks, coats and skirts and tunic. A wide shelf ran round the walls above the hooks and here, as Len explained, they kept their Sunday hats.

"What about woollies?" Ruey asked.

"Well, no one has a lot of those and they live in the same drawer as your blouses. And one thing, Ruey, you've just got to keep your drawers tidy or else!"

"Oh, glory! How ghastly!" Ruey said dismally. Her usual method was to stow things away where she could squeeze them in.

"Don't worry! You'll soon get accustomed to it," Len said soothingly. "Now is there anything else? Oh, yes; your towels and sponge-bag. Come on!"

She led the way back to the cubicle and pointed out a second hook on another of the tall standards that held the curtains. "Hang them up here. That's why all our towels have to have loops at one corner. Now I think I've told you everything you ought to know for the present. Get cracking with your case and I'll see to mine. When we're finished, we'll go to the trunk-room and empty our trunks. Give me a yell if you want me," she added as she went out of the cubicle. "Rules don't begin till tomorrow."

By eleven o'clock, the four had emptied cases and trunks and their tiny domains had taken on a lived-in look. Ruey had discovered that the shelf over her bed was for her Bible and Prayer-book and any special photos or ornaments. She set the only photo she had of her mother—a snapshot taken by Roger a few weeks before she died—in the middle, her Bible at one end and her Prayer-book at the other. She tucked her pyjamas under the pillow, hung up towels and sponge-bag and after a final look round, decided that there was no more to do and ran along to see how Len was faring.

That experienced young woman had everything in apple-pie order and when they went to summon the other two, they found them in the same condition. Ruey heaved a deep sigh that seemed to come from the soles of her shoes.

“What’s the why of that?” Margot asked, tucking a hand chummily through the new girl’s arm.

“I suppose you folk always keep your cubicles like this?” Ruey said despondently.

“*Len* does,” Con returned, mischief dancing in her eyes. “Mamma says she’s the only tidy member of the family. I’d better not say too much about myself. Bad example to a new girl, you know!”

Margot chuckled. “It all depends on whether I’m in a frantic hurry or not. Sometimes you can get away with it—but not often. Mamey’s awfully on the spot.”

“Thank you, Margot!” said Matron herself just behind them. “It needs me to be on the spot, as you say, to keep upsides with some of you young monkeys. Let me see your cubicles—and your drawers. Yes; very nice indeed. Just see if you can all keep them like that for the rest of the term. I’ll look at yours, Len and Ruey, and then you may run down to the kitchen and Karen will give you your elevenses. Hurry up! Miss Dene wants you four as soon as you’ve finished, to help her check on the stationery.”

She swept out of Alpenrose, Len and Ruey at her heels. The other two stayed where they were. Margot was still speechless from the shock of knowing that Matron had heard such a candid opinion of herself and Con decided to stay with her. The inspection in Gentian did not take ten minutes and then they were all shooed off downstairs to seek the big kitchens and get their beakers of rich creamy milk from Karen, the cook. She also provided tiny fluffy spongecakes in lieu of the three plain biscuits they usually had and was cheered loudly by Margot who had recovered herself by that time and was insouciant as usual.

After that, they went to the office where pretty Miss Dene, the school secretary and a very Old Girl, as Con privately told Ruey, kept them hard at work for the remainder of the time. Finally, at six o’clock, they were sent off to make themselves tidy, for the motor-coaches from the valley were due in half-an-hour.

Ruey was secretly greatly excited. She wondered what it would be like, living with crowds of other girls, many of whom were not British. When the coaches began to roll up and the girls formed their lines on the lawns before the school, she was even more thrilled. For one thing, though she had liked the uniform from the beginning, to see it in the massed rows like this was a delight. Under the evening sunshine, the vivid gentian blue looked bluer than ever, and the crimson and silver touches relieved it most artistically. Margot had towed her along by this time and Ruey found herself standing immediately in front of Len and another girl, while a fair-haired young person of her own age or a little older stood at her right hand. Margot came on the left and next to Margot, there was, by dint of a little pushing and squirming, another girl with a clever face lit by a pair of grey-green eyes, who had given the youngest triplet a look which had caught the new girl’s attention. She wondered what it meant. Then the last of the Junior Middles had taken her place and Miss Annersley, the Head, who had been standing in the doorway, backed by a solid phalanx of mistresses, stood forward and welcomed them before issuing commands to go to their splasheries and change quickly, for Abendessen—which Ruey now knew meant “supper”—was almost ready and she was sure they were ready for it, too, after their long journey.

It was not, however, until they were all in the long Speisesaal or dining-room, setting to work on their platefuls of salad and cold roast veal, that she saw the other girl again. Then Margot paused between two mouthfuls to say, “Oh, Francie, this is Ruey Richardson who’s come this term. She lives with us in the hols as Mother and Father are her guardians, and she’s going to be in Vb with us. Ruey, this is Francie Wilford.”

Ruey smiled at Francie across Margot and got the shock of her life. There was no answering smile. The grey-green eyes were pure green just then and in them was a look of bitter resentment which froze on her lips the few words Ruey had meant to say. Margot, who had been attracted just then by a grin from the pretty prefect at the head of the table, never saw it. But Ruey, stunned with surprise, realized in that moment that there was going to be no friendliness for her from Francie Wilford.

CHAPTER II

DISAPPOINTMENT FOR FRANCIE

Francie Wilford had returned to school after the summer holidays in a very cheerful and optimistic mood for her. She had always been one of the worst of the school's stormy petrels. She defied all authority—except the Head; and even Francie dared not go very far with *her*. She worked or not just as she chose and neither kindness and encouragement nor severity seemed to have the slightest effect on making her do better. The one made her go to even greater lengths of bad behaviour and the other turned her sullen and impudent. The Staff disliked her and the prefects loathed her. Her own crowd found her moody and difficult. As Priscilla Dawbarn, one of a pair of twins who had made a certain amount of school history themselves, had once remarked, you never knew where you had her. She *might* be quite pleasant—or she might not. The chances were about even.

She was a clever girl, which made it more maddening for the mistresses who had dealings with her. She could turn out work that was brilliant on occasion. On the other hand, she would show up exercises that would have disgraced a Junior. And, which worried those in authority more than all the rest, in all the years she had been at the school she had never made one real friend. Most of the rest chummed together in twos and threes, but Francie—never.

The truth of the matter was that years ago she had taken a deeply hidden fancy to Margot Maynard on first setting eyes on that insouciant young woman. Why this should have been, even Francie herself could hardly have said. Margot took no more notice of her than of the majority of her compeers. Partly it may have been the other girl's beauty. Francie had a passionate love of beauty in every form, though she never showed it if she could help it, and Margot, with her delicate features, red-gold hair, deep blue eyes and flower-like complexion was lovely enough to attract anyone at first sight. Partly, it may have been a mixture of the likeness and unlikeness between the two of them. Margot was gay and laughter-loving and even her nearest and dearest could never describe Francie in those terms. Also, she was casual and, to be quite frank, don't-carish at times and that, Francie certainly was not. Whatever the magnet that drew the elder girl to the youngest of the Maynard triplets, she had gained nothing from it. There had been times when Francie had felt she would have given almost anything to be really chummy with Margot; but Margot already had a bosom friend in Emerence Hope and, apart from her sisters, wanted no one else. Heedless and unnoticed, she had never had the slightest idea of how Francie felt about her and it is doubtful if she would have cared very much if she had.

As long as Emerence was at the school, Francie knew that she had no chance of getting her wish. It had been a real relief to her when the news had leaked out halfway through the previous term that it was to be Emerence's last. From that moment, Francie had allowed herself to hope that when the next term came Margot, missing her *alter ego*, might be ready to accept herself instead.

"I don't expect her to think as much of me as she does of Emmy Hope," Francie had told herself in bed on the last night of the holidays. "I don't suppose she could. They've been so all in all to each other. But she's bound to feel lonely with Emmy gone. Len and Con have their own pals, even though those three are awfully matey for sisters as a rule. Margot will want someone to share things with. Oh, I do hope there's a chance for me now! I'd even turn right round and be an angel if it could only happen!"

Buoyed up by this hope, she had been so unlike herself throughout the long travelling to the Görnetz Platz, high up in the Swiss Oberland, that some of the others had remarked on it among themselves and Prudence Dawbarn had been moved to wonder if Francie Wilford had come into a fortune during the holidays!

It hadn't been just a flash in the pan, either. She had kept it up throughout the journey—until, in fact, she saw the Maynards coming from Ste Thérèse's to take their places in the long lines drawn up in the drive to hear the Head's welcome and with them was a strange girl. What made things worse to Francie was that Margot had her arm slung through the new girl's and kept her with her.

During the two or three hours between their arrival and bedtime, she gleaned the information that this was a girl the Maynards had met while on holiday at the Tiernsee in Tirol. They seemed to be all very good friends and then something Con Maynard said told the rest that Ruey Richardson was a ward of the elder Maynards and would make her home at their pretty house, Freudesheim, for the next few years.

There was just one faint chance left—that the new girl would be in Va with Len and Con; or it might be Inter V with none of them. That was ended when the roll was called after Prayers that night and it turned out that Ruey was to be in Vb, along with Margot and herself.

"It *would* happen that way, of course!" Francie told herself dearly as she got ready for bed. "Just my usual luck! Everything always goes wrong for me! It surely isn't *much* to ask that I might have just *one* real pal!"

She forgot that to have a friend you must *be* a friend. All her school life she had gone about with a chip on her shoulder and that is attractive to no one.

She got into bed, feeling that the whole world was against her and wondering why it should be. Her mother had died when she was born and her father had married again two years later. Her stepmother had been delighted to take the child to her heart, especially as she had no babies of her own, and the first eight years of Francie's life had been happy ones. Then trouble came. Her father was drowned in a yachting accident on the Norfolk Broads and eighteen months later, a former sweetheart of the second Mrs. Wilford's had come into her life again. They had married and Francie, a jealous little creature, had loathed her stepfather with her whole soul. He, on his side, had been prepared to accept her as if she were his wife's own child, but Francie's attitude had prevented that. There was no peace in the house when she was in it and finally, so outrageous did her behaviour become, that Mr. Vigors put his foot down and insisted that she should be sent away to boarding-school to see if that would help to improve matters. As a result, Francie had come to school slightly warped and as she carried this kind of thing on among her own kind, it was hardly a matter for surprise that most of the others left her to go her own way.

The Vigors saw to it that she had everything she could need. She was as well supplied as anyone and week by week, her stepmother wrote her long, loving letters, but so far, she had not responded very greatly to anything, though her conduct at home during the holidays had certainly changed for the better in some ways. She no longer flew into rages when her stepmother had to set her wishes to one side if they clashed with her stepfather's—though, to be sure, he was not that and Francie never recognized him as such. There was a kind of armed neutrality between them and that was the best that could be said for it.

Lights Out sounded and everyone else settled down and was soon fast asleep. Most of them were tired out by the long journey and ready for bed. Francie, one of the unfortunate people who, the more tired they are, the wider awake they become, lay awake. While the rest were fathoms deep in slumber, she twisted and tossed and turned until her bed was a sight to behold.

Normally, Matron would have been along about ten o'clock to look in on them and make sure that all was well. But just before Abendessen, she had slipped on the stairs, falling the whole length into the hall below and crashing up against the old Welsh dower chest which stood there. She had ricked an ankle and sustained slight concussion and when Dr. Maynard, who had been instantly summoned from next door, arrived, he ordered the week-end in bed. Mately, as they all called her, had had a nasty knock and when she came round, it was to an outside in headaches. She must submit to being treated as an invalid until Monday, at least. Matron Henschell, Matron of St. Agnes, would see to the unpacking at Ste Thérèse's next day and the girls were all put on their honour to keep to rules without any more oversight than their prefects might give them. That, the Head decreed, was quite enough.

Matron would soon have heard Francie's antics in bed. Her room was not far away and she was credited with having ears that could hear the grass bend in the breeze! She would have come along to investigate and would soon have straightened the bed and given Francie a drink of hot milk and even, if she had thought it needful, a small dose to calm the girl's nerves. As it was, Marie Zetterling, the prefect on duty, had merely looked in to ask in her low, pleasant voice if everyone was all right. As no one replied, she assumed that nothing was wrong and withdrew as quietly as she had come. It never occurred to Francie to call her and Marie might have been stumped if she had. This was her first term as prefect and though she was a steady, responsible girl, she would hardly have known what to do.

So Francie was left to toss and turn until her pillow slid to the floor with a "flump!" that did rouse someone—no less a person than Margot Maynard herself.

As the Maynards had gone to bed at their usual hour the night before and had had no journeying at all, that young woman, who was a light sleeper, roused at once and sat up to listen. Her thoughts flew to her sister Con. Con had walked in her sleep at intervals ever since she was a small girl. Under the impression that this was happening again, Margot slid out of bed, wriggled her feet into her slippers and herself into her dressing-gown and left her cubicle as quietly as she could.

"It'd be just like Con to sleep-walk when Mately's on the sick-list!" Margot thought. "Oh, well, I can get her back to bed all right. No need to dig Heather out and I'll bet she's dead to the world after all that journey."

However, when she peeped between Con's curtains, she saw by the clear moonlight that her sister was in bed and sleeping peacefully. Margot let the curtains fall and stood thinking. She had certainly heard something go bump! Could it be that one of the new girls was another sleep-walker?

With Margot, to think was to act. She tiptoed along the aisle, peering in at each cubicle only to find everyone blamelessly in bed and asleep until she reached Francie's domain. There she found that young woman sitting up in bed and trying to straighten her bedclothes without getting out. When Margot's red-gold mop appeared between the curtains, she stopped with an exclamation.

"Margot! What on earth do you think you're playing at?"

"'Sh!" Margot breathed, stepping inside and letting the curtains fall behind her. "Don't yell or you'll wake everyone! What are *you* playing at, if it comes to that? Was it you chucked something on the floor just now?"

"My pillow slid off and my bedclothes are every which way," Francie explained. "I was trying to tuck them in again. That's all."

"I'll give you a hand," Margot proceeded to tug at the sheet and blankets and off they all came in a heap.

"Oh, gosh!" But Francie contrived to remember to keep her voice down. "I might just as well have got up and made it properly in the beginning. I'll have to do it now."

“Sorry! I didn’t mean *that* to happen!” Margot muttered as Francie heaved herself on to the floor.

Between them, they remade the bed and Francie got in again.

“Why weren’t you asleep?” Margot murmured, standing beside her and staring down at her. “It must be frantically late!”

“Couldn’t sleep,” Francie said laconically.

“Why not? Don’t,” Margot began to giggle under her breath, “tell me you have an uneasy conscience this early in the term! You couldn’t possibly!”

Francie grinned. “How right you are! Oh, I suppose it’s just that I’m too tired to sleep. I go like that, sometimes. Look, Margot! It must be all hours and we’re both breaking rules to the absolute limit. There’ll be a fearful how-d’ye-do if you’re caught in here. We’d both be for it! I’m all right—honestly.”

“Sure?” Margot looked at her doubtfully. The light of a full moon was streaming through the uncurtained window; it took all the colour out of Francie’s face and the shadows under her eyes gave them a sunken look. “You don’t feel headachey or tummyish or anything? I could fetch someone to you if you did.”

“Thank you for nothing! It truly is just tiredness. I’ll drop off presently, I expect. You go back to bed before anyone hears us and comes.”

“Try shutting your eyes and counting sheep. That might help.”

“Not it—it never does. Do scram! I know Matey can’t come. If she could, she’d have been bouncing in here ten minutes ago. But you never know who else may wake up suddenly and come to make inquiries.”

This was so true that it sent Margot to the curtains where she paused to make a friendly grimace at Francie and wave her hand before she slid through and went back to her own bed, where she speedily fell asleep again.

Francie grimaced after her and lay down again. Whether it was the result of the unexpected little friendly interlude or whether tired Nature had been forced to give way, she never knew, but she was asleep almost at once and knew nothing more until the rising bell clanged out its imperative summons and the girls, with sundry grumblings, tossed back their bedclothes and scrambled out.

From the cubicle at the far end where Heather Clayton, the dormitory prefect slept, came a call of, “Show a leg, there! Show a leg!”

This was something that had been instituted by Clem Barras a few years ago when *she* had been dormitory prefect and it had spread right through the school. It saved the prefect’s time, for if she saw a pair of curtains with no leg showing, she knew exactly where she was and could take measures accordingly. Further, it ensured that no one slept on. By the time you had left your bed to stick a leg out into the aisle, you were wide awake and, in any case, would not go back to bed again.

This morning, all legs were well in evidence and Heather, satisfied, dived for her spongebag and towel and streaked off to the bathroom, followed by everyone who was down for first bath. Francie, despite her short night, was up with the rest, as wide awake as anyone. She performed all her duties at top speed and when the bell sounded its second summons to send them all downstairs, she was dressed, her bed stripped and left airing, her prayers said, and all the other before-breakfast chores properly done. She tossed up her curtains with their pretty powdering of alpenroses on a soft, creamy ground, over the standard; saw that her window was as wide open as possible and joined on to the line already forming by the door.

Margot followed her a second later, but as the silence bell rang just then, there was no chance of talking and they could only grin meaningly at each other. Heather surveyed the cubicles to make sure that all was as it should be and then came to lead them to tail on to the

line leaving Clover next door. They marched down the corridor and the stairs, promenaded along the bottom corridor and finally arrived at the Senior Common Room where they might talk until the gong sounded for Frühstück (or breakfast) and Margot, giving Francie another grin, headed for the new girl, Ruey Richardson, and Francie was seized on by Penelope Grant and Primrose Trevoase. All the same, she felt a little happier this morning. Margot had been unusually friendly for her and Francie began to hope again.

As a matter of fact, if she had not promised her mother to keep an eye on Ruey, Margot would have joined Francie. But this was the first time Ruey had been to boarding school and Joey Maynard had rubbed it well into her three that they must do all they could to help her to settle down happily and quickly.

Not having had the long journey from England, any more than the Maynards, Ruey was able to inform the three that she had slept like a top and felt ready for anything.

Francie paused in the middle of her chatter with Penelope and Primrose to glance wistfully at the little group made up of the Maynards, Ruey, and two friends of theirs, Ted Grantley and Odette Mercier. She would have liked to join them, but she had never been in the habit of pushing herself among any of the cliques and chummeries and she felt she could hardly begin now. She stayed where she was and responded to the gossip of the other two with unusual complaisance for her. All the same, she still felt hopeful. Perhaps Margot might find time for her after all. And at least Emerence, with whom she had been all in all up to the present, was not there and not likely to be. She had *left!* It seemed unlikely that the youngest of the triplets would make any other very close friendship, at least for the present. That meant that there might be a chance for Francie herself.

“Oh, I do hope it happens like that!” she thought fervently as the gong sounded and they formed into line, ready to march off to the Speisesaal. “It would be too—too *fabulous* if it did: but what a difference it would make to my last years at school!”

CHAPTER III

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Ruey sat in her form-room and, in the intervals of writing down lists of the books Vb would require this term—she was thrilled to note that one of the set books for literature was *Peveril of the Peak* which she had already read three times—and then going with Margot Maynard and Francie Wilford who sat on either side of her to help carry the piles from the stockroom, she was looking round and taking mental notes.

The Maynard trio had told her that if Miss Ferrars was form mistress of Vb this year, they would be in luck. Miss Wilmot was another favourite mistress and Miss Charlesworth wasn't "too bad". They had Miss Ferrars and Ruey liked her on sight. She looked so very trig and fresh with her shining brown hair worn in a thick, straight bob, her pink cheeks and her deep brown eyes. She was small and slight—the Maynard triplets were half-a-head taller than she was—but she held herself with such dignity that you never noticed that. Under her B.A. gown, she wore a pale yellow jumper and well-cut black skirt and though Ruey cared as little about clothes as a tomboy of nearly fifteen could, she realized dimly that there was something very attractive in Miss Ferrars' smart but simple kit.

Then there was the school uniform, so fresh and gay with the gentian-blue tunic worn over a cream blouse with trim collar turned down over the school tie with its blue ground striped with narrow stripes of crimson and silver.

"Much jollier than that everlasting navy we had at the High," Ruey thought. "And I must say I prefer collars to square-necks."

Some of the girls wore skirts instead of tunics and Len Maynard had told her that when you were fifteen, you were allowed the tunic for games and gym only. In the wardrobe in Ruey's room Freudesheim, a smart skirt was hanging ready for use when her own fifteenth birthday should arrive, but Aunt Joey had said it would be wiser to leave it there until half term as her birthday did not take place till December 11th, and, since home was just next door to school, there was no point in having the skirt at school all that time for no purpose. The triplets, who would be fifteen on November 5th, had done the same thing. These four and four other girls were the only ones in tunics, Ruey noted, so that meant that everyone else was fifteen already. She found time to wonder when Mary Allen, Briony Quest, Primrose Trevoase and Odile Paulet would have *their* birthdays. Then she was recalled to matters in hand by Miss Ferrars.

"I have one thing to say," the mistress said in the French that was the language for the day. "As you will see, you are having a new set of algebras. Now please, everyone, take fair warning. No doodling, no turning down the corners of pages and no scribbling in them. Remember that other people have to use them when you have done with them. Some of the old ones were a perfect disgrace to a decent school!" Her eyes danced as she spoke and one or two people blushed furiously, notably, a cheeky-looking young person of fifteen who had been named to Ruey as Prudence Dawbarn, one of twins, though her sister was in Va with Len and Con and their friends.

Having uttered her warning, Miss Ferrars called on Margot and a serious-looking girl called Penelope Grant to distribute the algebras and turned her attention to the pile of arithmetics which stood by them. They were the last of the mathematical books to be given out and Ruey looked with interest at the set books for English, French, German and Latin which were all that remained.

Besides the Scott, she found herself possessed of an anthology, a *Twelfth Night* with notes and glossary, a copy of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* and a German story, *Das Buch von Trott*. For Latin, they were doing *De Bello Gallico, Book II* and Ruey made a face at it when it was handed to her. She had not the smallest interest in *Caesar's Gallic Wars*. That was the last. When everyone had been supplied, Miss Ferrars told them to put everything away in their desks.

"And tidily, please," she added. "I'm coming round in a minute or two to inspect. Please keep subject books together so that you don't have to hunt wildly for books you need for any stated lesson."

Some of the girls had already taken the precaution of doing this. Ruey, whose drawers and cupboards were usually chaotic, nevertheless had a tidy mind, and was among them. Quite a number of the others, however, had simply put the books in according to size and now had to take time to sort them out properly. It was done at last and the last desk-lid was closed. Miss Ferrars got up and came round to inspect each desk. She had just finished when a tap at the door was followed by the entrance of the Head Girl, Josette Russell. As Ruey knew, she was a cousin of the Maynards and second daughter of Lady Russell who had founded the Chalet School years before on the shores of the Tiernsee in Tirol.

Josette was a slightly-built, very pretty girl and Ruey, looking at her, admired her short black curls, vividly blue eyes and pink cheeks. She was also, from all accounts, a very clever girl and there was plenty of character in her well-cut mouth and firm little chin. She came up to the table where Miss Ferrars had seated herself again and asked in French in a sweet, clear voice, "May all those girls in Vb who have not already unpacked go to Matron for unpacking now, please, Miss Ferrars?"

Miss Ferrars turned to the girls. "People who have not already unpacked, go to Matron quickly, please," she said. "Don't loiter and be as quick as you can. I want to hold the elections for form officials before Break if we can manage it, so hurry up over your unpacking."

The girls rose and went to line up at the door and Josette, with a murmured, "Merci beaucoup, Mdlle!" to the mistress, led them off. Only Margot, Renée Touvet, and Ruey herself were left, their unpacking being already done. Miss Ferrars left her table and came to perch on top of a desk and chat gaily with them until the others returned.

"I'm afraid we're too few to do anything useful at the moment," she remarked, laughing. "How is your mother, Margot? And the twins, too?"

"All of them very well," Margot replied in the easy, fluent French Ruey so envied in all three of the triplets, "Geoff and Phil have grown and Mamma says she thinks Geoff must be starting to teethe because he dribbles so much. Did you have good holidays, Miss Ferrars?"

"Excellent, thank you. I went for a Scandinavian cruise with my uncle and aunt and we had a very good time. No, Margot. I'm telling you nothing about it yet. I'll reserve it for one of our geography lessons. But I've brought back a charming piece of Copenhagen ware for the Sarah Denny Museum, and some bits of rock for the geology cases. You'll see them in due course. What about you? How did you enjoy the Tiernsee?"

"Oh, very much!" Margot returned eagerly. "We had a glorious time, didn't we, Ruey." She shot a dazzling smile at Ruey, who nodded.

"Yes; most of it was great fun," Ruey rejoined in her careful French. She felt very thankful that the Maynards had done their best to help her pick up both French and German during the holidays, especially when it was decided that she was coming to the Chalet School with them. At least she had not to remain entirely dumb at times!

Miss Ferrars smiled at her. "You can speak French, then," she said in her own prettily accented French. "That's a good thing. It'll make things just that much easier for you from the

start. What about German?"

"I can speak that a little, too," Ruey replied. Then, with the honesty which they were to find was characteristic of her, she added, "But if it hadn't been for Len and Con and Margot and everyone else, in fact, I'd have done very badly. I didn't know much at the beginning of the holidays. Only when we knew I was coming here, Aunt Joey said we were to take days about with each so that I should know enough to manage from the start."

"If you had Len to help you, you ought to manage it quite easily, my child," Miss Ferrars said with a bubble of laughter. "She's a born teacher and, I believe, terribly strict into the bargain."

"Oh, it was everyone," Ruey replied. She had forgotten the first shyness she had felt of the mistress. "Aunt Joey said the boys needed it as much as I, so she made us all do it—a day for each language in turn."

She stopped there and wondered at herself. She had had no idea that she knew so much French. There was no doubt about it. All that practice in Tirol had taught her a lot. And how *awfully* friendly Miss Ferrars seemed. She couldn't imagine any of the mistresses at the High chatting so easily with the girls.

Renée laughed, too. "I was staying with Mme Graves for the holidays and she did the same thing with me—made me talk German and English day about. I am sure I can do much better this term than I did last, I know so much more."

Then the door opened and Francie came in, followed by Penelope and a Swiss girl, Maria Zinkel. After that, the room filled up rapidly and when the last girl, Tina Harms, had taken her seat, Miss Ferrars got down to work at once.

"Voting for form officials now, girls. Have you all got scrap paper—and something to write with? New girls, I'm afraid you can't take part in this as you don't know everyone. Never mind! It'll be your turn next time. Now listen. Mary Allen is form prefect and her second is Margot Maynard."

The girls broke into clapping at this. Prefect and second were always Head's appointments and they had been wondering who had been chosen. Mary was known to be a steady, responsible person and Margot Maynard was a favourite with most people. Ruey gathered that everyone was pleased about this. As for Mary and Margot themselves, both went red and Margot looked startled.

Miss Ferrars hushed the clapping after a few moments and went on: "We have to choose monitresses, now. You will find there are not so many as in the lower forms. Here, we have Staff monitress whose duty is to collect written prep and take it to the Staff room, see that chalk and so on are ready every day, and generally look after the mistresses: Flower monitress who must see to the flower-vases and the plants: and Magazine monitress. Whoever is chosen must collect in all articles, stories and poems and hand them in to who ever is Magazine prefect."

"Who is it this term, Miss Ferrars?" Penelope asked.

"I can't tell you. So far as I know, the prefects have had no meeting yet. You must keep your eyes on the Hall notice-board. I expect the list will be up some time today. Josette will want all that sort of thing settled as soon as possible. Now let's think of our own elections. Write the three offices down and then add the names of the girls you think most suitable for each post. Please remember that neither Mary nor Margot is eligible. They will have quite enough to do as it is."

She sat back and for the next few minutes there was silence as the girls thought things over and wrote down the names of those they chose. When everyone had finished, Miss Ferrars told Mary to collect the slips and called Margot to join her and act as teller with her.

"You may talk *very* quietly, the rest of you," she added as Margot came out to join Mary at a spare desk in a corner and the pair of them got to work. "Remember, there are other people besides ourselves in this corridor!"

The girls relaxed and a low hum of chatter sounded. Francie Wilford had been addressed by the girl at her side, a bespectacled person Ruey had heard called "Joan". Margot had left her for the moment, so Ruey was alone. She occupied herself with gazing at the people within sight, which was not many, as she was sitting in the second row of the three.

That was something fresh for her. At the High School, no form had had less than thirty-five girls and most of them had had forty at least. Here, there were only twenty-seven and she had heard some of the others say that was two more than usual.

She had been accustomed to form-rooms with five or six rows of desks. Here, there were only three rows of nine desks each and they were well spaced out. Ruey decided that it would be very difficult to rag or play about when the mistress could see everyone at almost a glance. Not that she had been in the habit of doing either much. No more than the average girl had she loved lessons; but her attitude had been, "It's got to be done somehow, so let's get on with it and get it over." It might not make for the best work, but it did mean that she got something done. As she was far from lacking in brains, she had done well for her age or she would not have been in Vb at the Chalet School.

Mary and Margot finished their votes and brought the final result to Miss Ferrars to check over. The three heads, Mary's mousey-brown, Margot's glowing red-gold and Miss Ferrars' gleaming brown with golden glints where the light caught it, bent over the papers for a moment. Then the mistress nodded and sent the pair back to their seats. The chatter had stopped as soon as the two had gone to the table. Everyone was gazing eagerly at the mistress.

Miss Ferrars smiled at them broadly. "All on tiptoe with excitement?" she asked teasingly. "Well, I won't keep you on tenterhooks," with a glance at the wall-clock. "The bell will be ringing for Break in another two minutes. Staff mistress is Primrose Trevoase."

"*Me?*" gasped Primrose, looking literally stunned with surprise.

"And why not? You ought to do very well. You've been at the school for years and should know all about it by this time."

Primrose subsided, still looking as if she couldn't believe her ears and Miss Ferrars continued tranquilly. "Flower mistress is Odile Paulet."

Odile, a French girl with sparkling black eyes and a face that, the others declared, must be made of india-rubber, so many and varied were the grimaces she could accomplish when she chose, said "Merci bien, Mdlle!" and sat down again, looking very pleased.

"And for Magazine, the lot falls to you, Eloïse," Miss Ferrars wound up. "Congratulations, all three of you. Eloïse, you had best have all contributions in by the end of the second full week in October. And girls! I want a *good* contribution from this form, please. You really are seniors now, and we depend mainly on the seniors for most of the magazine. See what you can do about it." She glanced at Eloïse Dafflon, a Bernese, with a mischievous smile. "Harry them, Eloïse! You have my full permission!"

Eloïse, pink with pleasure, stood up. "I will do all my possible," she promised, looking demure.

"It will be good practice for you," Miss Ferrars proceeded; and the rest went into peals of laughter. It was well-known to most of them that Eloïse meant to follow in the footsteps of her father who was editor of an important Swiss weekly.

"Then that is all, I think." Miss Ferrars looked at the clock again and then at her watch. It was nearly twenty-five to eleven and the bell for Break had not sounded yet. Something must have happened. She was about to send someone to make inquiries when the door opened and one of the prefects came in.

“Matron sent me, Miss Ferrars, to say that something seems to have gone wrong with the bell mechanism,” she announced. “It won’t sound and she is sending to Interlaken for the electrician to come up and see to it at once. In the meantime, as Break is five minutes late, it may continue till ten-fifty. A handbell will be rung until the proper bell is put right.”

“Oh, thank you, Clare,” the mistress replied. “I wondered why it wasn’t ringing, for I did not think that both the clock and my watch could be five minutes fast.” She nodded smilingly at Clare who smiled back and went out while Miss Ferrars sent the girls to line up by the door and ordered them to march out to the Speisesaal for their lemonade and biscuits or buns. After that, they might go out.

Arrived in the Speisesaal, Ruey found another difference. Glasses of delicious home-made lemonade awaited them with twists of fancy bread. Margot explained to her that when she had finished, she must put her glass on one of the great three-tiered trolleys with wire netting at the sides and then go to the Splashery, as the school always called a cloakroom, put on her blazer and change her houseshoes for the slip-on casuals they wore in the garden and then go out until the bell rang again for lessons.

“We always go out if it’s a decent day,” Margot said. “You see, when the winter really begins, sometimes we’re tied to the house for days on end. Come on and I’ll show you round. We’ll look for the others. Len said she wanted to know how you got on.”

In less than three minutes, they were outside in the open air and Margot led the way round the building to a narrow path bordered with bushes. They came out at the head of a short flight of steps leading down to a sunk rockery garden. Len and Con with two or three other girls were standing near the foot and, at sight of them, waved vehemently. The pair ran down the steps and Len, tucking a hand through Ruey’s arm, proceeded to introduce her all round.

“I say, everyone! This is Ruey Richardson who lives with us now,” she announced. “Ruey, this is Rosamund Lilley, Ted Grantley, Ricki Fry and Odette Mercier. Rosamund, Ted and Ricki are English—though you mightn’t think it with Ricki’s name. Odette is French, but she can speak English and understand it.”

Ricki, a tall, slim young person with big, blue-framed spectacles perched on her pretty nose, made a face at Len. “Keep your comments on names to yourself, young Len!” She turned to the new girl. “My name is really Richenda, Ruey, but these people said it was too long for everyday, so they shortened me to Ricki—at least, Con did the shortening and everyone else took it up, even the mistresses.”

Ruey laughed. “It’s a jolly name,” she said.

“Which?” Con asked anxiously.

“Both, I think. I never heard Richenda before, though.”

“It’s a very old Quaker name,” Ricki explained. “We’re Quakers—at least, my father is. Nanny generally took me to church with her, though.”

“You might have guessed from her surname,” Rosamund Lilley said.

“Fry? Oh, are you a descendant of Elizabeth Fry, the great prison reformer?” Ruey asked eagerly.

“Not that I know of. Oh, I suppose we’re some sort of connection. All the Frys are. But I’m not her great-great-great-granddaughter, if that’s what you mean. What’s Ruey short for?”

Ruey grinned suddenly. “That’s exactly what Margot asked me the first day we met.^[1] Said Ruey just wasn’t a name that she’d ever heard. Believe it or not, it’s Ruhannah, after my father’s mother. She was an American.”

[1] *Joey and Co. in Tirol.*

“It’s as weird as Richenda,” Ted observed with a toss of her short black hair. “I’m Theodora, really, Ruey, but don’t ever dare to call me that! I loathe it! I’m Ted!”

"I don't blame you!" Ruey retorted. "You're lucky in your short. They might have made 'Dora' of it."

"Lawks! What a ghastly suggestion!" Ted looked horrified.

"Look out, Ted! This is French day!" Con said quickly, for Ted had spoken in English.

"Sorry! I forgot!" Ted returned in French as charming as any of the Maynards'. "All right, Con. I'll remember."

"How have you got on?" Len asked, changing the subject.

"Very nicely, thank you. I sit between Margot and a girl called Francie Wilford and we've had all our books given out and elected form officials," Ruey replied. "There hasn't been any time for anything else. What are we likely to do next, please?"

"Short twenty-minute lessons with some of the mistresses who'll take us on Monday. They set us prep and so on. If there's time, some of the others come in as well. We start lessons proper on Monday," Len explained. "We've had an algebra prep and an arithmetic already. Willy barged in on us for the last twenty minutes before Break and dished it out—oh, sorry!" as she recalled herself. "I mean," and she turned it into French, "She set us preparation for the week-end. This afternoon, we shall go for a ramble. We always spend as much time out-of-doors as we can this half of the Christmas term. Once November comes in, *anything* may happen in the way of weather and then we can't go out."

"Snow, do you mean?" Ruey asked.

"It might be; but it's far more likely to be rain," Rosamund said decidedly. "Sometimes, even when it's fine, we can't set foot out-of-doors, for the whole Platz is just a sea of mud. We don't get much snow before Christmas. It's next term that we have to look for it—and Winter Sports."

"Goodness! I thought the winters here were snowy!" Ruey exclaimed.

"So they are, when winter really begins. There's the bell. We must go! Come along, Odette!" And Con took an arm of the silent Odette who had scarcely opened her lips the whole time, and set off with the rest following in her wake. They were not the only ones. Quite a number of the girls had been airing themselves in the rock garden and they all hurried, for punctuality was one of the minor virtues insisted on at the school.

As Ruey changed back into her house-shoes, she thought to herself that she was going to find quite a number of differences between the Chalet School and the High. On the whole, however, she fancied she was going to like it.

CHAPTER IV

ECHOES

Ruey found that after Mittagessen, as the midday meal was called, the order of the day was a half-hour's rest in a deck-chair. Since this was the first day of term, they might talk, as long as they did it quietly. Ordinarily, as Con explained, they were expected to read if they did anything.

"Only we can't today," observed Ted Grantley who was with the Maynards as usual. Ricki Fry was there too, and one of the new girls, a jolly-looking young person of Ricki's age, whom the latter had introduced as "Susan Mason my best friend from my prep school".

"Why not?" Ruey asked involuntarily. She had one of Joey Maynard's books with her and would have been very well pleased to go on with it.

"No library yet, of course," Ricki returned. "We'll have it tomorrow morning. Until then, most of us haven't anything much to read, so we can talk. I'm glad. I want you people to get to know Sue. She would have come the term before last, but she had 'flu and then bronchitis and was so unwell that Dr. Mason said she must go away for a decent holiday. She certainly couldn't have done anything like *work*! You never saw anything limper than she was at Easter. But she's all right now, so she's come this term. Let's pull these chairs together and then we can talk. Where's Ros, by the way, Len?"

"Coming," Len said. "She stayed behind to help one of the new kids to find something she'd lost—here she is!"

Rosamund Lilley, a tall, graceful girl with deep grey eyes set wide apart in a heart-shaped face, came quickly up to them. "Sorry, everyone," she said in French, "but I found one of the new Juniors hunting for something and on the verge of tears, so I stayed to help her. Who got my chair? Thanks, who ever it was." And she sat down.

"It was Len," Margot said with a quick smile. "She knew you were looking after one of the little ones. Ros, you've met Ruey Richardson, haven't you? You'll know Sue Mason; she's in your form, isn't she?"

Rosamund nodded. Then she smiled at Ruey. "Len has told me about you, Ruey. Can you understand my French?" she added anxiously.

"Enough to go on with," Ruey replied. "We talked a lot of French and German, too, at the Tiernsee after it was decided that I was to come here."

"What about you, Sue?" Margot asked.

Sue chuckled. "I've started German and I've been having French lessons, too," she explained. "One of my father's patients is a French lady who teaches languages and when I told him what Ricki said about having to talk one or the other *all* the time, he said I'd better take lessons. My piano was cut out," she added exuberantly, "and *that* was no grief, I promise you! I've been going to Mme le Brun for lessons ever since Mother and I came home from Devonshire, so I know *some* of each, anyhow."

She finished in English, her French being unable to stand the full strain of this speech, and Josette Russell, passing their group at that moment and overhearing, stopped to say, "Who's that talking English—or semi-English?" she added with a grin.

"Me," Sue admitted looking sheepish. "I—I don't know a lot yet."

"Oh, a new girl! What's your name?" Josette's very blue eyes were friendly and Sue's cheeks cooled as she replied, "Susan Mason, but please, I'm to be called Sue."

Josette nodded. "I'll remember. Well, Sue," she spoke slowly and carefully, "if you will take my advice, you will do your best to speak the language of the day all the time. It makes it so much easier and though you new girls are excused fines for the first fortnight, after that, the rules apply to you like everyone else and fines do run away with one's pocket-money." She smiled at them all and passed on.

Len made haste to change the subject by wondering aloud when Gwen Parry, the Games prefect, would begin to arrange for hockey and netball tests before settling the various teams.

"Is that what we play?" Ruey asked.

Francie, sitting near, looked at her with smouldering fire in her eyes. "Not quite good enough for you?" she said. "I suppose *you're* accustomed to something *much* more high-class!"

"What's wrong with *you*?" Len demanded when she had recovered from the shock this gave her.

"Nothing—and mind your own business!" Francie snarled.

"Well," Sue butted in hurriedly, for Len was beginning to look angry and she felt that someone had better do something about it, "it makes no difference to me. I don't play hockey either, Ruey. Daddy's a doctor and he said it was bad for growing girls. It made you—what's the French for 'stoop', someone?"

"Se baisser'," Len informed her. "What did you play then, Sue?"

"Netball—a jolly good game!"

"What did *you* play, Ruey, if not hockey?" Con demanded.

"Oh, it was hockey at school—but I'm no star," Ruey said.

"Marvellous!" For the life of her, Francie could not help remarking.

Con shrugged the comment aside. "Did you play something else *out* of school then—and do pipe down, Francie! If you don't like the conversation, don't listen to it!"

Francie subsided as Ruey replied eagerly, "Lacrosse. I belonged to a private club I only joined last season, but I did like it!"

The others glanced at each other. Margot spoke first.

"We used to play it here. We dropped it when, when—when was it, someone?"

"The term after Mary-Lou was so nearly killed," Rosamund said.

"At lacrosse?" Ruey asked, startled.

"No; it was a bob-sleighing accident." Con looked round the others, her dark eyes brilliant. "I hadn't thought of it before, for it didn't affect our crowd. You had to be fifteen before they let you play."

"I wonder if they'd let us start again?" Len said. "I'd love to play myself." She looked at her sisters. "Remember how we used to watch the matches when we were at the convent in Toronto? I always used to think I'd play myself when I was old enough."

Margot nodded. "So did I. So did you, Con. Wouldn't it be miraculous if we could begin again?"

Francie suddenly decided that she had better alter her attitude, though she loved Ruey no better for starting up all this.

"What about getting up a deputation to someone to ask if we may start again?"

"It's an idea—a jolly good one!" Margot spoke with approval. "We could send a deputation to the prees and they could depute to Burnie and the Head."

The rest giggled at the new verb, but before anyone could say any more, the bell rang and they had to jump up, fold up their deck-chairs and carry them to their cupboard where two of the prefects were waiting to pack them away. Len and Con were ready at the same moment and they sped along together to where Gwen Parry and Catriona Watson were hard at work,

packing in the chairs. Con, saying the first thing that came into her head as usual, tackled Gwen on the spot.

“Gwen, do you think the Head would let us start laxe again?” she asked as she handed over her chair.

Gwen, not ceasing her labours, replied, “I couldn’t possibly tell you out of the blue like that. What put it into your head, anyway? Aren’t hockey and netball enough for you?”

“Those chairs aren’t even,” her fellow prefect interrupted. “Give them a shove at that end, Gwen. The rest won’t fit otherwise and it’s a tight squeeze at the best of times. You let laxe alone just now, Con. There isn’t time to discuss it. Come to Gwen when she is free and can attend to you properly. Chair, please, Francie!”

Francie handed over her chair and Ruey came forward with hers. No one could say whether it was accidental or not, but in turning away, Francie cannoned into Ruey. Between the pair of them, the chair fell, landing on Catriona’s foot. It hurt and she flung an angry word at the new girl.

“Really, Ruey Richardson, surely there is no need for a girl of your age to be so clumsy! Pick up that chair and hand it to me properly, please!”

Red to the tips of her ears, Ruey meekly picked up the chair, and handed it over. Catriona took it with a severe look and Ruey made haste to depart. Therefore, she did not hear what came next.

Len had been waiting for the rest. She turned gravely to Catriona before she went off after them, to say, “That wasn’t Ruey’s fault, Catriona. Someone bumped into her.” Then she turned on her heel and left Catriona fuming.

However, though no one was to know it then, Ruey and the others had started something. When the last chair was in place and the door of the cupboard locked, Gwen turned to Catriona. “Those kids have got hold of something,” she said, most reprehensibly in English.

Catriona’s temper never lasted. She nodded with interest. “I agree. I’ve often wished we hadn’t dropped laxe when we did. I wonder why it was?”

“Not enough people keen on it, I fancy. Mary-Lou had that accident and she was out of all games the whole of next term. I think Kat Gordon couldn’t make up her first team so they let it slide. It’s quite an idea, isn’t it?” Gwen turned with Catriona and they swung, side by side, down the corridor to the Splasheries.

“We might bring it up at the meeting tonight,” Catriona suggested.

“We’d better see what some of the others think. Hockey is my game, of course; but some of the rest might like the idea of reviving the laxe. It’s worth discussing, anyhow.”

“Well suppose we tackle some of them while we’re out for the walk this afternoon? Then we could put it up to Burnie and see what she thinks.”

“Right! We’ll do that and I’ll ask Josette to put it on the agenda—though it’s a bit late, I admit.”

“Oh, rubbish! It can come under ‘any other business!’”

“O.K. We’ll leave it at that. Where are we going, do you know?”

“Josette said something about the Auberge and back. I hope we do. I’ve brought something new to try out on the echoes.” Catriona forgot to be so very grown-up.

“Good! Let’s hope no one else is inspired to choose the Auberge for their ramble! And before I forget, do you realize that this is French day and we’ve been talking heavily in English?”

“Heavens! I forgot! Oh, well, no one heard us so it hasn’t been a bad example to the younger girls, as the Head says.” Catriona dropped into the fluent French of most Chalet girls who had been at the school any length of time. “I say! At least half our crowd is outside already! We must hurry!”

They hurried, but were unable to get off as soon as they hoped for the Head had sent for Maeve Bettany, editress of the school magazine, to give her one or two instructions and their talk was interrupted three separate times by phone-calls which the Head had to take herself. However, she released the inwardly fuming Maeve at last and the prefects were able to set off ten minutes after everyone else.

Meanwhile Miss Ferrars, who was escorting her own form and Inter V, was inquiring where they would like to go. She received an almost unanimous reply of, "The Auberge, please!"

She laughed. "Very well; I've no objections. But if we're going there, you must step out and the sooner we start the better. All got your partners? Lead on, then, Primrose and Tina. Francie and Briony, keep me company. Come along!"

All this was in French, of course. Miss Ferrars had come to the school two years before, speaking both French and German with considerable fluency, and since then, she had improved vastly in both accent and intonation and, to Ruey's ears, at least, she spoke like a native. That young woman, marching along with Margot who had claimed her as a partner, heaved a deep sigh.

"Even the mistresses!" she said sadly.

Margot, who had been describing the joys of the Auberge, gaped at her. "What *are* you talking about? What *about* the mistresses? Why 'even them'?"

"Talking like natives," Ruey explained. "They all do it."

"Well, what else do you expect? They wouldn't be much use to us if they couldn't. I do know that it's one of the things that gets them a job with us. I once saw the slips that are sent to the agencies and it said at the bottom in large letters, 'Conversational French and German essential.' Why are you fussing about it, anyhow? You can talk enough to go on with and you're getting better every day. Forget it!"

"Talking about the Staff," observed Prudence Dawbarn who was immediately ahead of them with her twin sister Priscilla, "does anyone know anything about the new art mistress?"

"Miss Yolland?" Margot said. "Well, don't you remember her?"

"Remember her? Ought I? She doesn't mean anything in my young life so far."

^[2]"*Prudence!* She was one of the prefects when my cousin Bride was Head Girl and she was in the Fifth when we were Juniors. I remember her quite well from that last term at St. Briavel's and so ought you!" Margot spoke severely.

[2] *Bride Leads the C.S.*

Prudence turned to grimace over her shoulder. "I wasn't interested in the prefects in those days—except when they jumped on me for something."

Priscilla laughed. "I wasn't much more. But now you mention it, Margot, there *is* something familiar about her."

"She hasn't changed from what I remember," Margot said as they turned to march down by the side of the mountain railway. "She looks quite grown-up, of course, and she's grown her hair. When she was at school, it was bobbed and stood out all round her face like a halo. I remember thinking her awfully pretty."

Prudence stopped dead and Ruey, just behind, nearly walked over her. "Sorry, Ruey!—Margot Maynard! You *don't* mean that she's *Rosalind* Yolland? But," as Margot nodded and pushed her onwards, "what's she doing teaching? I remember hearing that her people were frightfully rich and had a gorgeous place somewhere in Devonshire. What's happened?"

Margot opened her lips to reply. Then she closed them again. She knew, of course, but the three Maynards had had it well dinned into them from babyhood that they were not to talk to the other girls about anything they might happen to pick up about the Staff. The fact that Mr.

Yolland had had big money losses was no business of Prudence Dawbarn's or anyone else among the pupils. Ruey, who also knew something, came to the rescue.

"I expect she got sick of doing nothing. I remember when Aunt Joey read us that letter from the Head when we were at the Tiernsee she said—the Head, I mean—that when Miss Yolland applied, she grabbed her at once. Remember, Margot?"

"I do! And you said that in English. Now put it into French. I'll help you!" And in the time they spent helping Ruey to find the French for her remarks and then say it with a proper accent, Miss Yolland was forgotten.

Margot was quick to change the subject, once that was over. "I'll tell you something else. You know they're starting a Kindergarten for the babies at the Platz. Our first twins are going to it, and so is Mrs. Peters' Lucy and the three eldest Morris kids. They'll all be day-boarders as long as the good weather lasts and when the winter comes, they'll weekly-board."

"It'll be fun having the babies," Priscilla remarked. "We shan't see much of them, though, shall we?"

"No; I suppose not. But what I was going to say was that another Old Girl is coming to run it."

"Another Old Girl? Who? Do we know her?" Prudence asked eagerly.

"You ought to. It's Kathy Robertson—Mops Robertson."

"Mops? I remember *her* all right. She was a sport, even if she did jump on you with both feet when she felt that way," Priscilla said with a chuckle.

"Girls—girls! Turn here and cross the railway—and be careful how you do it. Keep on the safety boards and cross singly!" Miss Ferrars' voice broke across their chatter. "Join up on the other side and go as far as that rock. Wait there till I come and no fooling, please!"

They obeyed on the word. One by one, headed by Primrose, they crossed over and walked along the grassy path to the great boulder the mistress had indicated, where they clustered into a group, waiting until she came up with them. She nodded brightly at them when she reached them.

"Good! Now you may break ranks, but remember to keep to the mountain side of the path, and leaders, don't get too far ahead."

The leaders—Primrose and her partner and two or three more of their boon companions, set off and Len, Con, Rosamund and Ricki came back to join up with Ruey and Margot. Miss Ferrars paused to tie her shoelace and at a word from Len, the others waited for her. It was always a point of honour with the Chalet girls never to leave a mistress to herself on these rambles. Besides, Con had proposed discussing the lacrosse question with Miss Ferrars in the hope that if the question came up with the Staff, she might be prepared to back them up over it.

Ruey looked round. The path ran along the wall of the mountain on the right hand. On the left was a stretch of rough turf and stones, twelve feet wide in parts at others no more than three or four, and falling sheer down into the valley far below.

"You could get into a sticky mess if you fooled about here," she said.

"You could," Margot agreed. ^[3]"We once did almost have a nasty accident when Emmy Hope nearly went head-first over, gathering moss." She finished with a sigh. She and the said Emmy Hope had been bosom friends from the day they first met. Emmy or, to give her full name, Emerence, had left at the end of the previous term, being seventeen and with little prospect of ever being higher in the school than she then was. Her home was in New South Wales, but at present she was with her parents, touring the U.S.A., and though she wrote frequently, Margot was missing her very badly and probably would for the rest of her school life.

[3] *A Chalet Girl from Kenya.*

Len had told Ruey something about the friendship and the new girl looked at Margot with sympathy, though she knew better than to voice it. Margot was very proud and whatever she might feel, she was saying nothing. Luckily, at that point, Miss Ferrars reached them.

"Come along you people!" she exclaimed. "Thank you for waiting for me, but we must make haste or we'll never reach the Auberge." She glanced round the group with dancing eyes. "Have you told Ruey and the rest what awaits them there?"

"No!" they chorused. "We want it to be a surprise."

"A surprise?" Ruey repeated. "How a surprise? There's an inn, isn't there? At least, 'Auberge' means inn, doesn't it? What's there surprising about it?"

The others chuckled together, but no one would enlighten her, not even Miss Ferrars, who merely remarked, "Wait till we reach there and then you'll understand. Come along! The rest are getting rather too far ahead."

There was no more lingering, though Len and Con brought up the question of the lacrosse by way of a diversion. To the girls' delight, Miss Ferrars had been quite a keen player at her own school and agreed to back them up if the question came up at a staff meeting. She even said that if Miss Burnett cared, she would help with the coaching and from there till they finally reached the broad shelf where the Auberge stood, their party talked Lacrosse solidly.

Ruey stared round when they got there. The Auberge seemed no different from a dozen other Alpine inns she had seen. The walls were frescoed on whitewash and it had the usual deep, steeply-sloped roof whose timbers were roped, as well as weighted with great rocks, against the winter storms. It was railed off from the path with fencing painted white and in front of the chalet was a courtyard in which long trestle tables with forms on either side stood ready for any travellers who might ask for refreshment. A huge barn stood at the farther side and a little farther along, they could hear the tinkle of falling water, though as it was round the curve of the mountain, they could not see it. It was a delightful place but, so far as Ruey could see, there was nothing very special about it.

The others were waiting for them at the gate and as soon as Miss Ferrars and her party joined them, they all scuttled through into the courtyard. It was plain that no one had given the secret away to any of the new girls, for those young women watched in amazement as Margot Maynard ran across to the outer fence which stood inside a rough stone wall, put her hands to her mouth and uttered a long, musical yodel. As it ended, the sound came back to them in a long series of flying echoes which thrilled the new girls as the rest stood round, eyeing their surprise and delight with satisfaction until at last the transmuted sounds died away in silence.

"Oh, how wonderful!" Ruey exclaimed. "Oh, do let me have a go!" And she scampered over to join Margot and whistled a few bars from *Röslein Auf Der Heiden* which they had practised during the singing lesson which wound up the morning's lessons.

Back it came as if a whole chorus of fairy pipers were replying.

That was the signal for everyone to try and as some of them were far too eager to wait, a medley of sounds were tossed to the echoes which tossed them back gaily. They were still hard at it, when fresh voices sounded round the curve and then the prefects arrived in a body to stare disgustedly at their juniors.

"Heavens!" Barbara Chester cried. "You people here! We expected to have it to ourselves!"

CHAPTER V

PREFECTS' MEETING

Prefects at the Chalet School had a good deal of responsibility. They also had a good many privileges. One highly prized one was that, within limits, they might go unescorted on their rambles. They were all girls of eighteen or nearly eighteen and, as Len later explained to Ruey, regarded, therefore, as "semi-grown-ups". The Head Girl, Josette Russell, was the youngest among them this year, having celebrated her seventeenth birthday in the previous August. For all that, she was proving herself a born leader. She hushed Barbara's outcry instantly and turned to Miss Ferrars who was looking at the prefects with twinkling eyes.

"Sorry, Miss Ferrars," she said in the fluent French to be expected of a girl who had not only spent ten of her seventeen years at the school, but was the daughter of its foundress. "We had no idea you meant to come here or we would have chosen somewhere else and I'm afraid it's too late now for us to turn back."

Miss Ferrars laughed outright. "Quite all right, Josette. If you didn't expect to find us here, we certainly did not expect to encounter you. But there is plenty of room for everyone. Are you stopping here or going on?"

"Oh, going on. We thought we'd go as far as that shelf where you find all the alpenrose bushes. We only meant to pause and try the echoes as we passed through."

Barbara had flushed to the roots of her fair curls. "I beg your pardon, Miss Ferrars," she said quickly. "I never meant to be rude."

"Of course not!" Miss Ferrars gave the tall girl a friendly smile. Then she turned to Josette again. "I have just ordered lemonade for our party. Will you join us? You would have time for that, I think."

"Oh, thank you," Josette returned, "but I think we'd better not wait. We must be back in time for Kaffee und Kuchen, you know. We'll go straight on now, I think, and try the echoes as we come back. But thank you so much for asking us," she ended while the rest murmured their thanks in chorus after her.

The two Fifths had been standing in their groups, very properly quiet. Francie Wilford scowled blackly and Primrose, standing next to her, nudged her.

"Why the positively murderous look?" she demanded lightly.

"Barbara Chester does think herself someone!" Francie growled. "Why *shouldn't* we be here, I'd like to know? We have as much right as they have."

"I don't suppose Barbara meant anything. Ferry took it all right, anyhow. Snap out of it—do, Francie!" Primrose retorted, forgetting to speak in French.

Clare Kennedy and Gwen Parry were standing near enough the pair to overhear, but as Miss Ferrars was in charge of the two Fifths and took no apparent notice of it, neither felt it her business to call Primrose to order. But Clare's thoughtful grey eyes moved from that light-hearted young woman to rest curiously on Francie's face. So far, her only impression of the girl had been that she was a perpetual nuisance, always going about with a chip on her shoulder and being a complete pest. Something in the younger girl's expression roused Clare's curiosity, now. What was wrong with her? Why did she look so—Clare fought for the word and got it—so "*hungry*?"

"What is wrong with Francie Wilford?" she asked when the grandees of the school had left the inn and were proceeding by way of the rough log bridge across the mountain streams to their objective.

Gwen raised her eyebrows. “*Is* anything special wrong with her? I noticed that she was glowering as usual, but that seems to be her general condition. She’s always either frowning like a thunderstorm or else in such tearing spirits that she does the maddest things. By the way, did you hear that demon, Primrose Trevoase, talking in English?”

“I heard her, but I don’t see that we could do anything about it. Anyhow, Primrose isn’t nearly so bad as she was in St. Briavel days. She’s turning into quite a respectable member of society, if you ask me.” And Clare, whose gentle, unlike appearance had belied her badly in her own demon days, laughed gaily. “Primrose was very rarely able to get away with anything, anyhow. She always has looked a born imp, with those twinkly blue eyes of hers and her cheeky nose. Anyhow, it was no concern of ours. But I’d like to get to the bottom of Francie’s attitude, I must confess. Ah well! We can do nothing at the moment. You go on with what you were saying about lacrosse just before we reached the Auberge. I think I’d like to start it again. Do you think there’s any chance of Burnie’s agreeing. She’s pretty busy at any time, isn’t she?”

“Is that the lacrosse you’re talking about?” Josette asked, as her quick ears caught the fag-end of Clare’s speech.

“Yes; do you think Burnie will agree? Sure, I’d be delighted if we began again. When I was a kid I always looked forward to playing. Why did we ever let it drop? Anyone know?”

“I think it was when Mary-Lou had to fall out of all games until her back was properly healed. I know Kat Gordon said she couldn’t possibly make up her teams. Most people were mad about hockey that year or two, so I suppose they just let it slide and it’s never been taken up again.”

“What do you think about it, Josette?” Gwen demanded. “My own game is hockey, of course; but some of us did just begin lacrosse that last term, didn’t we?”

Josette shook her head. “I don’t think so. I imagine none of us were old enough. You know the rule always was that you had to be fifteen before you took it up.”

“Well, shall I bring it up at the Meeting tonight?” Gwen asked.

“Yes; I should. There isn’t much, apart from special duties and supervision. I’m letting the Staff party alone and calling a special meeting about it some time next week. It has to come before half-term, you know, and I’d like some decent ideas. I’d like,” said Josette echoing, if she had but known it, a good many of her predecessors, “to make it something quite original and out of the common.”

“Oh, so should I,” Gwen agreed. “The only thing is that this school has been going for quite a time—twenty-two years—and that means that most things *must* have been done at least once if not oftener. However, we’ll have to get down to it. I think you’re wise to give us a few days to get some ideas. Don’t you, Clare?”

“I do so. I believe I’ve got the glimmer of an idea for one thing, but it’s only a glimmer so far.”

The other two were on to her at once, but she merely smiled sweetly and refused to say any more, though the rest, joining up with them, demanded vociferously to be told, once they heard what Josette and Gwen had to say. Indeed, they made so much noise, that Josette pulled them up in the end.

“Careful, you folk! They’ll be hearing us at the Auberge and, apart from the awful example to the Fifts, we don’t want Ferry to have to report that the prefects raised the whole place, once they were away from her. She won’t tell us if she says she won’t. You ought to know Clare by this time! Change the subject! I wonder what we shall have in the way of a Christmas play this year? I don’t think Mummy is doing it. She’s up to the eyes in sales of work and the W.I. and things like that; and Daddy is going to America some time before Christmas and I expect she’ll go with him. Our twins are coming out to the new Kinder, you

know, when their term begins next week. That means it'll be left to Auntie Joey and you never know what *she* may produce."

"Isn't Mrs. Maynard very busy herself with *her* new twins?" Jessica asked. "We may just repeat one of the very old ones. We've done that before, haven't we?"

"Well, we have; but not often," Josette agreed.

Thereafter, they discussed the play with vim until they reached the end of their walk and turned to come back. They paused at the Auberge to try the echoes and, to everyone's ecstatic delight, Catriona gravely produced a toy accordion from which she extracted some excruciating noises which the magical echoes sent back, transmuted to fairy music, much to the amazement of a couple of tourists who had come while the girls were away and who were as thrilled as anyone could wish.

The last part of the prefects' ramble deteriorated into a *scramble*, once they reached the outer boundary of the school grounds and they had to run for it, or they would have been late for Kaffee und Kuchen which, in Switzerland, took the place of tea in England. However, they managed it without being seen by anyone but Mdlle de Lachennais who duly reported it at Staffroom coffee that evening for her colleagues to laugh over, and when the rest of the school marched in to take their places, it was the usual trim set of prefects that were busy at the big urns.

When Kaffee und Kuchen ended, they all had to hurry upstairs to change into the velveteen or light woollen frocks that were regulation wear during the evenings in the school week. Then various people allocated to the job pro tem. went off, armed with their own work, to take preparation in the lower form-rooms. Both Sixths and the two Fifths proper worked by themselves, but from Intermediate Fifth downwards, the girls were supervised. Preparation was a time for hard work, for it was carefully limited and once it had ended, all lessons must be put away. If you had not finished, you might not take your free time for them. Health was the first consideration at the Chalet School and always had been. Too many of the girls had connections with the big Sanatorium at the other end of the Görnetz Platz or had relatives living in the mountains for health reasons for anyone to permit overwork.

Ruey had pulled a long face when she discovered this. She had been accustomed at home to regulate her preparation hours to suit herself. Now she found that she must go at things steadily and not play. Margot had warned her that if you showed up bad work or confessed to undone prep, you had to have a very good excuse for it to be accepted by any mistress. So during the two hours allowed the Fifths, she concentrated for all she was worth on French, history, algebra and Latin. She was only average, though she was very artistic, and it took her all her time to get through what she had to do.

Abendessen followed immediately on prep and Prayers came after when the Juniors went up to bed. They had only an hour's prep and the last hour was their free time. The rest had their free period after Prayers. Ruey found that they might either go to their common-room if they wanted to amuse themselves quietly, or, if they preferred it, there was generally country dancing in Hall for the active folk. Neither Ruey nor the Maynards and their closest friends cared to settle down to jigsaws, round games, or other ploys, so they went off to Hall in a body and had a thoroughly good time at country dancing. Mdlle Lenoir, the youngest of the music staff, had volunteered to play for them, and half-a-dozen or more of the mistresses generally came to enjoy themselves, so the prefects were released from duty and all fled upstairs to the prefects' room where they disposed themselves round the long table, ready for their meeting. Josette sat at the Head with Clare on one side of her and Gwen on the other. The rest sat very much as they chose.

"Special duties first." Josette said when they were all settled. "You know what they are—Library—Stationery—Hobbies—Art—Music—Staff—Lost Property and Bank. We're having

a special pree for Lost Property this year. The Head told me so when I went for interview before prep. The others are second prefects for the bigger things like Games and Library. Maeve is editress, anyhow, so we don't have to worry about the magazine. Here are the slips with each job heading them. Fill in your choice for each and before I forget, remember that Gwen, Clare, Maeve and I aren't available for anything else. We'll have our hands full enough as it is."

While the others set to work on their slips, she and her two great friends sat back, having prepared their own beforehand. No one was very long in making up her mind. As Mary-Lou Trelawney, the previous Head Girl, had once said, most of the jobs settled themselves automatically. When Marie Zetterling, always slower than anyone else, had finally handed over her slips, Clare and Gwen went to the window-seat with the whole lot and acted as tellers.

The girls seemed to have made up their minds with fair ease. Barbara Chester was elected Librarian with Dorothea le Martin a girl from Jersey, as her second. Giulia di Ricci, niece of one of the earliest of the Old Girls, was elected to take Bank. "Your father is a banker, so it was certainly the obvious choice," Gwen told the stunned Giulia who wailed that sums of any kind were her abomination. Catriona was chosen for Staff prefect and accepted the post with resignation. Christine Vincent, her other self, was to take charge of Stationery, a job that no one liked very much, but which Christine, as everyone pointed out to her, would be able to do very well, seeing that she was always on the spot and not likely to be cheated into issuing anything that a mistress had not ordered.

"Jessica, you're First Hobbies," Josette read out.

"Well, at least it's something I know something about," Jessica said thankfully. "Who have I got for Second?"

"Marie; so she can see to the needlework and you can keep your eye on the handcrafts. I call those two jolly good elections," the Head Girl remarked. "Aimée, you take over Art." She grinned before she added, "And be thankful that it isn't Herr Laubach. Miss Yolland was a pet when she was a pree in my very young days, and I don't think she's altered much in that line."

Aimée Robinet, a French girl, threw up her hands. "But indeed, Josette, I am thankful it is *not* Herr Laubach!" she said emphatically. "Me, I should have begged to be excused if it had been. He was *always* angry with me—but *always*!"

The prefects shouted, Gwen remarking when she was serious again, "Yes; and I'll bet that's about what every girl appointed to that job has said every time!"

"True enough," Josette put in. "Sybs told me that last year, when it was Vi Lucy, she nearly went scatty at the bare idea. And yet, if ever the poor old pet could be said to have had a blue-eyed boy, it was Vi Lucy. Well, you're lucky, Aimée. You've got Miss Yolland to look after. Now calm down, everyone and let's get on. We haven't all the time in the world, remember, and there's a good deal to get through yet. Lizette, you're Music prefect. Don't forget that includes Plato as well as the people who teach instruments."

Lizette Falence, a Swiss girl from the Valais, nodded amiably. "I do not mind that at all. Miss Lawrence is easy to work with and I know the duties for when Janet Youll was in san last year with that dreadful throat, I was—how do you say—deputy for her. Thank you all for electing me."

"Well, it's nice to know that *one* person is pleased with her job!" Clare remarked.

"I'm quite pleased with mine—and I said so," Jessica interpolated; but was ordered not to side-track as there was no time for it.

"Lost Property—Jocelyn Fawcett," Josette read out.

"But why me?" Jocelyn demanded.

“Ask me another. You’ve got the votes, anyhow.” Then she laughed. “Don’t look so stunned, Jocelyn. It only means confiscating anything left lying about and having a school assembly once a fortnight to have the things claimed and the fines paid. Deney’s got the key of the cupboard, by the way. You’d better ask her for it tomorrow. It’s early days, but you know what Juniors are like, never to speak of Junior Middles. The most careless little monkeys under the sun! If you tied their belongings round the necks of some of them, I believe they’d still manage to lose at least half. So be prepared.”

Gwen suddenly chuckled. [4]“There’s one thing, Jocelyn. You’ll never have to face the kind of situation last year’s prees did when Ailie Russell and Co went round snatching things from everyone, whether they were left lying about or not, and stuffing the cupboard chock-a-block with things. What a dressing-down Mary-Lou did give those kids to be sure! Even Ailie and Janice were howling before she had finished.”

[4] *Trials for the Chalet School.*

Josette, who was Ailie’s elder sister, grinned. “And it didn’t end there, either. When I got young Ailie to myself, I told her exactly what I thought of her and none of my thoughts were in the least kind or sisterly. And Sybs had plenty to say on her own account later on. Ailie got it on all sides. And so, I imagine, did your young Janice,” she added with a glance at Barbara Chester.

Barbara chuckled. “I didn’t say a word to her. I simply ignored her for a week on end. Janice loathes that more than anything. When I finally recognized her a more hangdog kid you never saw.”

“Oh all that crowd were sorry for themselves then,” Josette agreed. “Monica, you’re second Games.”

Monica Caird, a big jolly girl in VIb, nodded. “Can do. I suppose we’ll have to go into a huddle about who takes what later, Gwen?”

“Yes; but it can wait for the moment,” Gwen said with a peculiar inflection in her voice that made Monica sit up and stare at her. However, Josette was already going to say that she had drawn up a provisional list for the supervision duties.

“I’ll pin it up in here and you can all take a dekkio at it and if anything clashes with special coaching or music or remedials or anything like that, let me know and we’ll do a bit of revision. Clare and Gwen helped me, so I hope it’s pretty well all right, but you never know.”

A murmur of assent ran round the table, followed by a little stir. All the routine business was over now and they could turn their attention to other things. Josette resettled herself in her chair and picked up a slip of paper lying beside her.

“Well, now we come to other business,” she said. “There are two ideas to consider. Catriona, I believe you are responsible for the first. Will you put your proposition before the meeting?”

The meeting sat up as Catriona rose to her feet to propose that they should have a debating society. She pointed out that during this term and the next, at any rate, it would be possible to devote one evening a fortnight to such a thing. They would all enjoy it and it was just as well for them to have a little training in the art of debating.

“You never know when you may suddenly be called on to propose a motion at a meeting or a vote of thanks or something like that,” she pointed out. “And apart from that, I think it might be a help to us in essay-writing—help us to learn how to put our points clearly and so on.”

“And to think quickly!” Barbara—very improperly—put in. She turned to Monica. “Remember that awful ‘Spot’ debate we had with Mdlle de Lachennais and Ferry when we were with them at St. Moritz, Monny?”

The pair promptly giggled and Josette, rapping for order on the table, told them severely that the motion was not yet thrown open and in any case, they ought to address their remarks to the Chair.

“I think that’s all I have to say,” Catriona told her. “I do think we ought to have a debating society. I know I’ve stressed the—the *educational* side of it, but I’d like to point out that you can have a good deal of enjoyment from it as well.”

“I’ll second it.” Jocelyn rose to her feet. “I think it would be a very good idea—for the Seniors, at any rate. I don’t know if it would appeal to Middles and Juniors, or if you would leave them out for the present. But I agree that we ought to have a debating society. You never know!” She suddenly looked owlish. “Some of us might end up as members of parliament and it would all be good practice.”

She sat down amid derisive hootings from the more frivolous of the others, who demanded to be told if she had ambitions that way herself.

“Oh, yes; why not?” Jocelyn said serenely. “I’m to read Economics for my degree when I go to Cambridge. When I’ve had a few years of experience and know more about life and things in general, I should certainly like to enter parliament. However, I wasn’t thinking about it just then.”

“The meeting is open for discussion,” Josette said as she ended. “I’d just like to point out that tempus is fugiting madly, so if you’ve anything to say, be brief, I implore you—brief and concise.”

“And hurry up about it and don’t sit waiting for someone else to begin,” Gwen added. “In fact, I’ll begin myself. I should like to say that I fully agree with the idea. I don’t believe it’s new in the school. I rather think there *was* a flourishing debating society here once, but it went with the wind before we came. If we can start one now, I’m all for it.” Then she sat down.

“Do we *have* to speak?” Aimée asked in her own language.

“Only if you’re proposing or seconding something,” Josette said.

“Ah! Then pray accept me as a member of it,” the Swiss girl said. “I shall enjoy listening to others, but I have little talent for arguments.”

It was quite clear that the suggestion was a popular one and when Josette put it to the vote, it was agreed unanimously that, subject to the Head’s assent, they should do their best to revive the old debating society.

“Really, the Head ought to be overjoyed,” Clare stated. “Isn’t she always telling us to try to argue our points in essays logically? She is, the creature! Sure, she’ll agree with a heart and half. We can settle details after we’ve talked it over with her.”

“The last motion comes from Gwen Parry,” Josette said, frowning down Clare, mainly because they had very little time for anything.

Gwen bounded to her feet while Monica sat up with deep interest. “I propose we revive the lacrosse,” she said. “I know we let the game drop after Mary-Lou’s accident. That, I believe, was mainly because she was the prop and mainstay of the whole thing and she was out of games for a full term. But it’s a pity we did. It’s a good game and we had it for years before that. I’m sure we could find enough people keen to play to make it worth while. Of course, whatever we decide, it must go to Miss Burnett, but I’ve an idea that she used to be a very keen player herself when she was here at school and would be quite pleased. Some of the other mistresses may be able to help out, too. Hockey, as you all know, is my own game; but I’d go for it good and hearty if we began again.” She sat down and Josette nodded at Jessica Wayne who had agreed to second the idea. Jessica had the added advantage of having played a little during the Christmas and Easter holidays with a team run by the daughter of the Vicar of her home village and by the time the vote was taken, it was clear that it was unanimous. The

Lights Out bell rang as Josette declared the meeting closed and the prefects put their room in order and departed bedwards feeling that they had done a good evening's work.

"What did set you off on the lax business?" Josette asked Gwen as they hurried along the corridors.

"Con Maynard in the first place," Gwen returned. "But I was talking to Con after Prayers and she told me that the first suggestion came from that new girl in Vb, Ruey Richardson. It seems she's played a little at home with a private club. I'm quite glad about it, you know. After all, it'll come into my training course when I start in on that and it'll be all to the good if I know what I'm doing."

"Oh, I agree," Josette said cordially. "Well, here we are at Hyacinth and it's getting late. Night, Gwen! See you in the morning!" And she went off to the little room she owned by virtue of being Head Girl, leaving Gwen to slip silently into Hyacinth. But as she went, she chuckled to herself. They *were* branching out in their ideas this term!

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW CHAPELS

“Do you really think you can find enough people to make it worth while?” Miss Annersley looked thoughtfully at Gwen Parry as she spoke.

“I’m almost certain we can,” Gwen replied. “Quite a number from Va and Vb seem to be very keen; and there are one or two of the Sixths who would like it. I haven’t inquired further down the school than Vb, because I remembered when we played laxe before, the rule was that you didn’t play till you were fifteen; but I think there will be some from Inter V as well. You see,” she went on, half-apologetically, “I didn’t like to make too much fuss about it until we’d consulted you. Josette and I really only talked quite casually to anyone we could and I don’t think the majority thought any more about it.”

“Except those young cousins of mine and their special crowd,” Josette put in. “*They* saw through it all right. Well, it was Ruey Richardson who first mentioned it, so Len tells me, even though it was Con—as usual!—who sprang it on Gwen.”

Miss Annersley broke into a laugh. “I can imagine it! All the same, Josette, Con is greatly improved in that line. She really does try to think before she speaks nowadays.”

“Not before time!” Josette said severely. “Really, the things that kid used to say were the outside of enough at times! But you’re right, I know.” She glanced at the Head with a question in her eyes. ^[5]“Something happened to those three last term. I never knew what it was, except that Mary-Lou was up to the ears in it and it had something to do with Emmy Hope and Ted Grantley. Whatever it was, it seems to have changed all three of them enormously. They’re not the same girls in quite a good many ways. Mummy noticed it at once when she was staying with Auntie Jo at the beginning of the hols. She didn’t say anything to any of *them*, of course, but when she came home, she got hold of me and asked me about it. I could only say I didn’t really know a thing.”

[5] *Theodora and the Chalet School.*

She stopped there and eyed the Head hopefully. Miss Annersley shook her head. “It’s no business of yours, Josette. Your Uncle Jack knew all about it at the time and so did Miss Wilson and I and one or two more of the Staff. But that is all. I’m not sure if your Aunt Joey has heard more than the barest outline, even now. I doubt it myself. But all this has nothing to do with restarting the lacrosse which is what you and Gwen came to see me about. I’m not sure what to say. Miss Burnett’s time is very full as it is. I don’t know if she will want to take on anything extra.”

“She seemed quite keen when we asked her about it,” Gwen said eagerly. “And Miss Ferrars told Len and Co that she used to play and would help with the coaching if we liked. And I’m getting rather keen myself, now I think of it. I would help, too, once I knew what I was doing. And it isn’t as if we had to consider even the Senior Middles—at least, *are* there any who are fifteen now?”

“That’s another question I can’t answer offhand. I think not, though I believe some of IVa reach that great age this term. However, that’s a very minor detail. If Miss Ferrars would really be willing to give up some of her free time to help with the coaching, it would certainly make things easier. On the whole, I think the best thing for me to do is to put it to the entire Staff and see what they think.” The Head spoke with decision. “We are having a Staff meeting on Monday night, as it happens. I could bring it up then. By the way, you prefects must arrange to take charge of the girls until Abendessen, but I know that will be all right.”

“Oh, of course!” both prefects put in as she paused.

“Thank you. I knew I could rely on you. Well, I’ll do that and in the meantime, go on finding out quietly, if you can, what the Seniors all think. If you find you can make up at least two teams, we’ll think of it seriously. I was very sorry myself when we had to drop it for lack of players; but that year Seniors were all hockey-mad and after Mary-Lou was hors-de-combat, Katharine Gordon found it impossible to keep it going. Very well, girls. We’ll leave it at that, then. Now is there anything else you want to speak to me about? The bell for Break will be ringing very shortly and you ought to be ready to go and take charge in the Speisesaal.”

They looked at each other, but they seemed to have said all they could, so Josette said, “I think that’s all, thank you.”

“Then — —” She stood up and they rose at once. “Thank you for coming to me, girls. I’ll do my best for you at Staff meeting.”

They took the hint, put their chairs back against the wall and went to the door where they turned to make the curtsy that remained as a reminder that the School had started its life in Tirol. Then they went out. Rules were in full force now, so neither spoke until they were safe in the prefects’ room where an eager chorus demanded to be told what the Head had said.

“She’s going to consult the rest of the Staff about it,” Josette explained as she sat down. “They’re having a Staff meeting on Monday night—which means, by the way, that we are in charge for the whole of prep—and she’ll bring it up then and see what they think. Meanwhile, she wants us to find out quietly how many Seniors would like to start again. She shot us out after that with a gentle reminder that it was nearly time for Break.”

“Yes!” Gwen had perched herself on the nearby windowsill. “Why was she so mad keen to be rid of us? There’s at least another ten minutes if not more before Break and I wanted to hint very delicately at the dedication of our Chapels. All we know is that it’s to take place some time this term, but no one has given us even a sniff at any fixed date.”

“Your watch must be slow,” Barbara said. “There goes the bell for Break.”

“In that case, so is mine,” Jessica remarked, turning her wrist to look. “According to me, there are still nine and a half minutes to go before half-past ten.”

“Me, too!” Maeve Bettany cried, following suit. “All our watches can’t be wrong!”

“Perhaps it’s the school clock that’s fast,” Jocelyn Fawcett suggested. “I’m at not quite ten-twenty-two. Oh, well, we’ll have all the more time for games!”

“And in the interim, everyone will be pouring into the Speisesaal for Elevenses and there won’t be a soul there to keep any sort of order. Come on and stop nattering about your watches!” And Josette made a beeline for the door.

“Funny thing if the school clock is fast,” Catriona murmured to her usual partner, Christine, as they left the room side by side. “It’s an electric clock.”

They found the long Speisesaal thronged with younger girls and there was some reason for Josette’s remark about keeping order. Va had not yet arrived and the buzz of chatter that greeted them when they went in was little short of deafening. Josette acted at once. She dashed to the high table where the Staff sat and pealed the little bell that stood at the Head’s place long and loud. The suddenness with which the noise ceased was stunning. Everyone stopped talking and turned guiltily to see who was there.

“Yes,” the Head Girl said severely. “It was *time* you made less noise! Have you all taken leave of your senses, or do you *want* us to have daily supervision for Elevenses?”

Rightly regarding this as a rhetorical question, no one said anything, so she went on. “Line up there, in your forms and get your lemonade—quickly, please. Heather Unwin, stop pushing! Judy Willoughby, get into line—and you, too, Renata. And don’t forget to replait your hair before the end of Break.”

Renata van Buren, a leggy twelve-year-old from Leyden whose long flaxen plaits were the bane of her life, shuffled into line, muttering under her breath that it was all very well, but what were you to do when ribbons just *wouldn't* stay put on the ends of your pigtails?

"Roll up the ends in the ribbons before you tie the bow," Josette informed her. She had the ears of a wolf and had heard Renata's mutterings.

That young woman went darkly purple. She had never meant the Head Girl to hear her remarks. She stayed dumb and the girls began to pass by the table where Barbara Chester and Clare Kennedy were handing out the glasses of lemonade. They were very busy when the door opened to admit Va. Jo Scott, the form prefect, went up to Josette at once to apologize for their lateness.

"I'm sorry we're late, Josette, but Mdlle came in to set our subject for French essay and she stayed talking. We came the moment she left."

"That's all right," Josette said. "Join on to the tail and get your lemonade. In any case, Break seems to be ten minutes early for some reason—"

She broke off there, for once more the door swung open and Miss Dene, the Head's secretary and another Old Girl of the school, came in and up to the high table where, with a word to the Head Girl, she pealed the bell again.

"Attention, please, girls!" she said. "Break is ten minutes early to give you as much time for your games practice before Mittagessen as possible. There will be no time for games this afternoon."

Everyone was on the *qui vive* at this. What was going to happen if they were not to have games this afternoon? Miss Dene smiled at them before she went on placidly: "Tomorrow, our chapels are to be dedicated and the Head knew you would want to prepare them today. There is a certain amount of polishing to do and they will need sweeping and dusting. Several friends have joined together to supply us with flowers for the altars and any other decorations you way wish to have. I am putting up lists in Hall after Break to tell you what your particular job is. Besides this, Mr. Denny is coming at fifteen hours to take the two choirs through their hymns and anthems so anyone in the choir, please remember to be in the song room by five minutes to the hour, clean and tidy and with your music."

A murmur of, "Yes, Miss Dene" came from the listening girls, but she had not yet finished. She held up her hand for silence and continued.

"This means a full afternoon's work. Mittagessen is at twelve-thirty prompt. You will have your rest period and then all get your domestic science overalls, gloves and caps and be ready to go to the chapels at thirteen-thirty. Now that really is all. Thank you!" She smiled at them again and departed, leaving them all agog with excitement.

The prefects, wise in their generation, hurried up with the lemonade and turned out anyone who had finished as soon as she had taken her biscuits. Once they were outside, they might talk to their hearts' content and no one loitered on this occasion. There was too much to discuss and too little time for all they wanted to say.

Ruey, with the Maynards and the rest of their gang as usual, asked eagerly, "Who's going to do the dedicating? Anyone know?"

"It's the Bishop of Minchampton for St. Mary's, I know," Len replied. "That was arranged ages ago. His three eldest girls were all here. Bess Herbert was one of the prefects when my cousin Bride Bettany—Maeve's sister—was Head Girl."

"So were Madge and Nan," Con put in. "Not Ruth, of course, poor sweet."

"Who was Ruth?" Ricki Fry demanded.

"Their youngest sister. She was at the school when it was on St. Briavel's and later she went on to Glendower House. She was never out here," Margot told her.

"Why didn't she come?" Ruey asked curiously.

“Because the Easter before she was due to come, she was killed in a motor smash. One of their uncles had taken her out for a run and a lorry came crashing out of a side road and knocked the car clean across the road into a high wall. Both Ruth and her uncle were killed outright and the lorry overturned and the driver was so badly hurt he died, too.” This was Con, her eyes darkening as she remembered that tragedy.

“How simply ghastly!” Ricki exclaimed. “How long ago was it?”

“Five years or so. She would have been nineteen if she’d been alive now. She was just fourteen when it happened.” Len looked very grave, and Margot hurried to change the topic.

“The Herberts have always been keen on the school and as he’s the only Protestant bishop to have any connection with us, the Head said he ought to be asked. We knew he’d agreed to do it—the Head said so last term.”

“And who is consecrating *our* chapel?” asked Odette Mercier, a shy French girl who had come the same term as Ricki and with whom Con had struck up a friendship that was largely protective on her side, since even after a whole year at the school, Odette was still inclined to keep in the background and have violent fits of homesickness.

No one knew, and it was not until the evening that they learned that it was yet another bishop with connections with the school. Bishop Mensch of Austria was the uncle of one of Joey Maynard’s closest friends, now Frieda von Ahlen, and therefore great-uncle of her small daughter, Gretchen, who was an ornament of Form IIIa this term.^[6] Long, long ago in what Joey herself was wont to call “the Dark Ages”, he had opened their first bazaar. Now they had called on him to dedicate their chapel of Our Lady of the Snows. It had not been certain if he could, for he was an old man and frail; but, as Miss Annersley informed the girls after Prayers that night, Frieda had rung up the school to tell them that he had come to spend a few days at her pretty home in Basle and, as he was very well for him, he was coming up with her and her husband that day and would stay at Freudesheim for the week-end. This meant that he could consecrate the chapel and all the Catholic girls were delighted to hear it.

[6] *The C.S. and the Lintons.*

The bell rang for the end of Break and Gwen and the rest of the prefects hurried them all off to change into games shoes and find their hockey-sticks and the balls for netball. From then on, the rest of the morning was spent in games practice and when they came in to get ready for Mittagessen, most of them were flushed and breathless. However, they cooled down during the meal and their rest period and then they all fled to the Splasheries to seize their domestic science uniforms before marching across the grounds to the side where the two little chapels had been erected.

They were not very large, naturally, each having been built to hold about two hundred and fifty people. They were of wood, as was to be expected in Switzerland, and they stood side by side in a railed-off plot with a narrow path bordered by strips of grass between the two. At the end of the path was a slender wooden tower which housed their one bell—a thank-offering from Sir Guy and Lady Rutherford for the restored health of their eldest daughter. Alixe had not been at the school, but her twin sisters, Anthea and Alison had, and so had her cousin, Nina. None of the Rutherfords would be present on the morrow, for Nina was in Vienna, working hard at her music, whereby the school hoped for a laurel leaf or two from her, for those who knew said that Nina was touched with the fire of genius. The others were far away on a long sea-voyage which was to round off Alixe’s cure. The east window in Our Lady of the Snows had been given by Miss Wilson, co-Head with Miss Annersley of the school, and especially, Head of St. Mildred’s, the finishing branch. Miss Annersley herself had offered the east window in St. Mary’s in commemoration of those Old Girls who had been, as she said,

called to Higher Service. Other people had contributed one or two more of the windows which were at the sides and the rest were filled in with clear glass until other people could fill them.

The altar at St. Mary's was a gift from Lady Russell and her husband and the Maynards had offered the one in Our Lady of the Snows. Other friends had added candlesticks, vases, a sanctuary bell and vestments. Two very Old Girls, both only children of millionaires, had provided the seating. The school had contributed the carpets and St. Mildred's had been responsible for the collection bags. Margot's great friend, Emerence Hope, and her parents had offered the altar in the tiny Lady Chapel in Our Lady of the Snows. All in all, the chapels were very complete.

"But what we really need now," Con observed to her own crowd as they scurried along, "is an organ for each of them and goodness knows when we'll get those! I believe a really decent pipe organ costs the earth."

"They do!" Rosamund spoke with decision. "Before Canon Gay left our church he started an organ fund for a new organ and they still haven't got more than a third of what it will cost." She suddenly looked wistful. "I wish they hadn't gone. Oh, the new Rector is awfully kind, but there was *something* about the Gays."

"If Tom is anything to go by, there is," Len said with a chuckle. "Where did her father go to? I didn't know they'd left Meadowfield. But then Tom hasn't written to Mamma lately. Too busy, I suppose."

"He's gone to be Archdeacon at the cathedral," Rosamund explained.

The three Maynards giggled.

"Imagine Tom the daughter of an Archdeacon!" Con said. "I'll bet she'll give all the other folk in the cathedral close some shocks!"

"Daughter?" Ruey exclaimed. "But why is she Tom? Is her name Thomasina?"

"No, though I don't know what it really is," Len returned. ^[7]"Tom always kept it awfully dark while she was at school. Anyhow, we have Ted here!"

[7] *Tom Tackles the Chalet School.*

"Yes; but that is really a short for Theodora," Ruey said argumentatively.

Ricki decided to bring them back to the organ question. "We've got quite decent harmoniums—or should you say *harmonia*?" she observed; and the rest went off into peals of laughter.

"What a ghastly idea!" Con bubbled. "No; I'm sure 'harmoniums' is all right. Well, here we are, so I suppose we must part company. We'll be seeing you."

They had reached the chapels by this time and Rosamund at once assumed command.

"Ricki, Sue, Ruey, you come with me. Oh, here's Barbara! We're ready, Barbara."

"Then come along and be quick about it," Barbara said. "What are you all scheduled to do? You help with the flowers, I know, Rosamund. What about the rest of you?"

She ushered them in, found out what they were supposed to be doing and set them all to work in short order. Rosamund went off to the tiny vestry, to find to her delight that someone had provided a great sheaf of arum lilies for the altar vases and there were plenty of other flowers for minor decorations. She, at least, was perfectly happy for the rest of the afternoon. Ruey and Ricki were set to polishing the brass altar rails and Sue Mason was provided with a floor-mop and polish and told to start on the uncarpeted floor on which the chairs stood. Thereafter, they were hard at it until, five minutes before fifteen hours, Josette summoned those who were in the choir—which included Ricki—to go along to the songroom at school.

Meanwhile, in the Catholic chapel, much the same work was proceeding. Margot and Con became hot and filthy as they rubbed at the six great brass candlesticks that stood three on each side of the Tabernacle, with Clare Kennedy to keep them at it and put in the tall white

candles when the sticks were ready. Len had charge of the huge candlestick that held the Eucharistic candle and was only half-done when the summons to choir came.

"I'll finish when we get back," she said as she stripped off her gloves and overall and laid them aside in the little sacristy. "Don't anyone else touch it, please." Then she went off with her sisters and the other members of the choir.

After a somewhat hectic practice, they returned thankfully to their tasks, and by the time someone had mentioned that it was nearly time for Kaffee und Kuchen, the chapel was a place of beauty. Madonna lilies stood on the altar and on the altar in the Lady Chapel. Vases of them had been placed before the statues of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and St. Clare—this last being given to the chapel in memory of one of the first of the Chalet School girls who had been a Poor Clare and died in a concentration camp during the war. Giulia di Ricci who placed the flowers, was a niece of hers and her eyes grew misty as she thought of the aunt she had never known except by hearsay.

"I wish Zia Luigia had lived to know of this," she said to Miss Wilson who had been filling the Sanctuary Lamp with the sweet-scented oil and came to stand beside her for a moment. "Mamma told me she thought so much of the school and she was so happy to be a member of it."

"And don't you think, Giulia, that she does know about it?" Miss Wilson said quietly. "I do. I think that besides those who will fill our two chapels tomorrow when they are consecrated, there will be a crowd of unseen worshippers, rejoicing to know that we have them at last."

The tears that had filled Giulia's eyes never fell. She turned to the Head her face glowing. "Ah! But that will be wonderful!" she said. Then she went to bring the other vases with which the Sanctuary was to be adorned, and no more was said about it just then.

All in all, it was a busy afternoon and when, at last, everything was done and the girls returned to school, it was with the proud knowledge that the two chapels had been as fitly adorned for the morrow's ceremonies as they could contrive.

But that was as nothing to the joy they all felt the next morning when the two bishops, in full canonicals, dedicated the two and consecrated them to the glory and the service of God for ever, as it was hoped.

There were not many, apart from the girls and Staff, present. Lady Russell had come and Dr. and Mrs. Maynard were there and so were Herr and Frau von Ahlen and Mr. and Mrs. Embury, as well as most of the doctors and their wives from the Sanatorium. Lady Russell's niece, once Daisy Venables and a beloved Head Girl, had come with her aunt, bringing with her her two little sons. Maeve Bettany's father and mother had also come with their eldest girl, Peggy, whose wedding in October would be the next excitement for the Russell-Bettany-Maynard families. But apart from these, there were very few outsiders, to quote Maeve Bettany herself. The school, talking it over later on, decided that it was better that way. As Len very practically pointed out, there would have been no room for them if many more had turned up.

"They'll all come along sooner or later," she said. "When we have Old Girls' Day in the summer term, quite a lot will come. And now, I'm going to visit ours again as the Head said we might if we liked. Anyone else coming?"

All her clan were. They went quietly, for though they were all rejoicing, it was a quiet joy and even the Juniors were sufficiently impressed to behave with a gravity that would have worried their elders if they had not known what had caused it.

And so ended one of the greatest of days in the history of the Chalet School.

CHAPTER VII

REACTIONS

If no one else had thought of it, the Staff, at least, had realized that there was bound to be a reaction among the younger girls, anyhow, from the rarefied atmosphere which had brooded over the school on the Sunday. They came to their work fully prepared for it and resolved, in their various ways, to keep it from being too severe.

“Poor you!” said Miss Wilmot to Miss Ferrars as that young lady picked up her books in the Staff room when Prayers were over, and headed for IVa to take them through a test on simultaneous equations, to see how much they remembered of last term’s work before she embarked on a new rule. “Those young demons will keep you on your toes throughout the lesson or I miss my guess!”

“Don’t worry!” Miss Ferrars retorted. “I’m keeping *them* on their toes. They’re doing a Spot test which won’t leave them a moment for playing up, and will show me how much they retain of last term’s work after the holidays.”

Miss Wilmot chuckled and prepared to depart to Vb, which was the lowest form she normally took in maths.

She proposed to start them off on the Third Book in geometry and, of course, she must also see how the new girls managed the work. “At least Vb should be old enough to have a little sense,” she thought complacently as she swung down the corridor to their room, her gown flying with the breeze of her own movements.

She was complacent too soon. She was still a little way away from the form-room when she heard such a buzz of conversation going on as made her quicken her steps. When she shot into the room, it was rather with the effect of a flying missile. It certainly came with a stunning surprise to most of the members of that form.

Vb might have been supposed to be old enough to have some sense—the average age of the form was fifteen and a half—but she had forgotten to allow for the fact that it contained such stormy petrels as Primrose Trevoase, Francie Wilford and Margot Maynard. To do her justice, on this occasion Margot was sitting at her desk arranging her belongings, and had no part in the turmoil. Francie and Primrose seemed to be having a violent argument, however, and more than half of the rest appeared to be taking sides.

Miss Wilmot shot up to the mistress’s table, put down her books with a slam that rose above even the noisy squabble taking place, and glared round at them. The bang recalled some of them instantly to where they were, and the rest, seeing them slinking as fast as they could to their seats, glanced round, saw a Miss Wilmot whose eyes were gleaming unpleasantly, and slid to their own places, trying to look as if butter wouldn’t melt in their mouths. Miss Wilmot simply stood there for the five minutes it took for this to happen. She extended the five minutes to seven. Then she spoke and the effect was of small pieces of ice dropping from her lips.

“I was under the impression,” she said in the German which was the appointed language for the day, “that this was a *senior* form. I seem to have made a bad mistake.”

Naturally, no one attempted to reply to this; but the form prefect, a Swiss girl from Geneva, named Maria Zinkel, glared indignantly at all who could see her. She had done her best to hush them, but it had been in vain. Francie put on her blackest scowl and the rest turned very red and looked sheepish.

Miss Wilmot said no more on that head. She merely set to and drilled them mercilessly through the opening theorem of Book Three which they were supposed to have prepared for her. Between their own emotions and the mistress's unwonted severity, most of them fell down badly over it. The only girls to come through with any credit were Mary Allen, who was head and shoulders above the rest when it came to maths; Margot Maynard, who could do brilliant work when she liked and had prepared this thoroughly for once in her life; and a new girl, Lisa Grünbaum, who should have been in Va, but whose French was elementary and English practically nil, so that she had been put in the lower form with the hope of going up next term if she could pull her languages up to standard. The rest might never have heard of the work, let alone *looked* at it!

Ruey, who was *not* mathematically inclined, had tied herself into such knots that she despaired of ever understanding what she was supposed to be doing. At least half-a-dozen were no better and the rest had only the vaguest idea of it.

Miss Wilmot looked at them grimly. "I see," she said. "Evidently, you all stand in much need of extra work in maths. That being so, you may expect me at fifteen-thirty this afternoon when I will take you through this theorem again and see that you know it. Understand, please, that no one leaves the room this afternoon until she can prove to my satisfaction that she really knows what she is doing." She caught Margot's eye and condescended to add, "I except from that Margot Maynard, Mary Allen and Lisa Grünbaum who seem to be the only girls who have troubled to prepare my lesson."

She ended there; but it was enough and more than enough. Fifteen-thirty to sixteen-thirty was a free period for them that afternoon, when they might get on with their prep or, if they chose and could get permission, have an extra games practice. That was all knocked on the head now. Most of them looked very blue and Charlotte Müller, a new girl from Hanover, only just succeeded in not bursting into tears at finding herself in disgrace so soon. As they were to find out during the next few weeks, she was an emotional creature and suffering badly from homesickness into the bargain.

It was at this point that Prudence Dawbarn, who was completely misnamed, if ever a girl was, had the sauce to say, "But what about our prep, Miss Wilmot?"

The look she got nearly froze her where she sat. It lasted a full sixty seconds, by which time Prudence was wishing she could crawl into a nice deep hole and pull it in after her. The rest felt like kicking her. Miss Wilmot was furious enough without Prudence making matters worse. And Miss Wilmot had the reputation of being one of the most easy-going mistresses imaginable, as a rule, though she could always pull in the reins when she felt like it. She was feeling like it now!

Before the mistress could follow up the look with a few well-chosen words which would add the finishing touch to Prudence's confusion, Ruey created a minor sensation. She had been slumping in her chair. Now she elected to sit upright and did it energetically. As a result, she knocked up her ruler which was lying at one side. One corner of the ruler had somehow got wedged under the rim of the inkwell. The ruler leapt up and so did the inkwell, to descend upside down to the floor; Ruey made a wild dive to save it, missed it, and caught the middle finger of her right hand in the slot at the back of the desk, bending the finger back till she felt it must break and wrenching it badly. Her "*Ow!*" as she released it just in time rang through the dead silence of the room and tears of pain filled her eyes.

Miss Wilmot might be angry as she had every right to be, but she had only to see Ruey's face to know that the girl had hurt herself. She was at Ruey's side in about two strides, demanding, "What have you done to yourself?"

"My finger," faltered Ruey, struggling for the German. "I have bent him—no, her—I mean *it*—right back!" She blinked the tears of pain away, but she was white for the moment, for the

pain had been severe.

“Sit down!” Miss Wilmot ordered sharply, helping her to do so. “Now let me see. Can you bend it—carefully, Ruey!”

“Ye-es!” But bending it hurt badly and Ruey’s eyes filled again, despite herself. “*Blub-baby!*” she muttered fiercely under her breath, and Miss Wilmot’s face stiffened, for she was dying to laugh at this unexpected epithet.

“You must come to Matron,” she said kindly. “That must have been a nasty wrench.”

“It—it’s getting better,” Ruey pleaded.

But Miss Wilmot was inexorable. She was an Old Girl herself and she had no idea of risking Matron’s wrath if Ruey had damaged the finger. She turned to the rest of the form. “Maria, go and get cloths and clear up that mess on the floor. Mary, take charge while Maria and I are gone. The rest of you, begin to revise your work. No talking, if you please! I shall question you when I return.” Then she whisked Ruey out of the room and upstairs to Matron’s quarters.

Matron examined the finger thoroughly, announced that nothing was broken though Ruey had given her finger a nasty wrench and would feel the effects for the next two or three days, but there was no serious damage.

“Do you take music?” she demanded.

“Oh, no, Matron!” Ruey hastened to assure her.

“That’s as well! You certainly wouldn’t be able to practise under a week. Very well, Miss Wilmot. I’ll attend to this and she’d better have a short nap before she comes back into school. She looks all in.”

Ruey, catching a glimpse of herself in Matron’s mirror, was not surprised to hear this. She was very white, which made the freckles which plentifully besprinkled the bridge of her nose look unnaturally dark. Her eyes were shadowed and, if she had told the truth, she would have had to own that, at the moment, she felt as if she had been to the wash and returned unstarched and badly mangled!

Miss Wilmot went back to find a subdued Vb working for dear life and Ruey, left to Matron’s tender mercies, first had to endure a thorough bathing and bandaging of her finger and then retire to her bed with a beaker of hot milk and half a Disprin to soothe her nerves.

“I’ll see what you’re like at Break,” Matron said as she drew the curtains across the latticed window. “You’ve an hour for a nap now and if you seem all right then, you may go back into school.” Then she left the dormitory and went back to her job of sorting linen for mending.

Left alone, Ruey shut her eyes. Already the pain was subsiding to a dull ache and she had felt much more like herself after she had drunk the milk. However, she had imbibed from the entire Maynard family a wholesome awe of Matron, so she meekly shut her eyes and fell asleep before she had realized she was drowsy. The bell for Break woke her, but she dared not get up until Matron arrived with her lemonade and biscuits. The little lady—Matron was a bare five foot tall—looked at her keenly but after two or three questions, she told Ruey that when she had finished, she might get up, tidy her bed and go back to her form-room.

“You must rest that hand as much as possible,” she said, “and be careful not to knock it against anything. If you have to write, you may try, but if the aching gets worse, you must stop. I’ll report to the Staff so that they understand.”

She fully intended doing so, but ten minutes after Ruey had thankfully departed, Miss Andrews brought to her Gretchen von Ahlen, who had just been very sick. Gretchen had been very delicate during the first years of her life and, though the doctors all said that she was much stronger and likely to go on improving, the authorities at the Chalet School were much too wary to ignore anything where she was concerned. Matron took charge of her and had her

hands full for the next hour or two, for Gretchen was really almost frighteningly sick. However, just as the bell rang for the end of Junior school, the sickness ceased and she fell into a quiet sleep. Matron left her in Nurse's care—they had taken her to the school san—and descended on Form IIIa to demand if anyone knew what the child had been eating lately.

IIIa were no match for her. She soon ferreted out the mystery and by the time she had got to the bottom of it, two or three people were feeling very sorry for themselves.

Renata van Buren had smuggled into school a box of rich Dutch chocolates—the kind of which two or three satisfy most folk at one time. Early that morning, naughty Renata had wakened a good hour before the rising bell. She had hunted out her chocolates from under her best Sunday hat where she had hidden them snugly. Then she had made the round of her dormitory in search of accomplices. Only Gretchen and a fellow country-woman, one Arda Peik, were awake. They might not “visit” and even Renata was not prepared to break rules to that extent, so they betook themselves to one of the bathrooms where they emptied the box at one fell swoop. As Renata pointed out, they might just as well, for Matey would be safe to find it sooner or later if they took it back with the Sunday hat.

Having extracted this from Renata and Arda, who had been badly scared by the effect on Gretchen, Matron proceeded to award them their deserts. Gretchen was quite sufficiently punished, though she would have to interview the Head later on. Renata and Arda, who seemed to possess tough Dutch stomachs, had not been affected so far. Matron, however, never believed in taking risks. She marched the pair off to her sanctum where she dosed them with gregory powder, and gregory powder without any help of strong mints to take away the taste. By the time the two had choked down the horrid draught and finished spluttering over it, they were quite sure that never again would they try to smuggle sweets into the school and feast riotously on them. And then they had to face an irate Miss Annersley, who told them in plain language just what she thought of them and their deceit and greediness! By the time she had finished with them, neither had enough spirit left to say “Boo!” to a goose and not even the awfulness of being condemned to stay indoors for the rest of the day since they had been dosed, worried them much. In fact Renata, who was shooter for her form's First netball team, only remembered it after they had left the Head. She wept copiously enough then and Arda joined in, for she had hopes of goal defence in the IIIa Second and now they would have to miss their games practice. Nor did anyone show them any sympathy, most people telling them it served them right!

As a finishing touch, Matron ordered all Juniors to turn out their possessions and confiscated everything in the way of tuck that she could find. The Juniors, who regarded smuggling part of their tuck as a legitimate activity if they could get away with it, raged at Renata and Arda and sent the unlucky pair to Coventry for the rest of the day.

Meanwhile Ruey, having rejoined her form and assured all kind inquirers that her finger wasn't too bad, went off with them to the geography room. This was one of a group of buildings set a little apart from the main buildings and consisting of the art room, the science laboratories, the domestic science kitchens and the aforesaid geography room. Forms which had lessons in one department usually remained for lessons in another to cut down the running backwards and forwards as much as possible. This morning, Vb had geography first lesson after Break and then an hour and quarter's chemistry with Miss Wilson who came over two days a week to take that subject and science generally with the Seniors.

This morning, they were a little late in arriving, and found Miss Moore, the senior geography mistress, waiting for them. For some reason, she was in an irritable mood today, which was almost as surprising as Miss Wilmot's outburst. These two had the reputation among the girls of being placid creatures on the whole. However, something had upset them today. That their own behaviour was mainly the cause of Miss Wilmot's lapse never struck Vb

and if it had, they would have pointed out that that had nothing to do with Miss Moore. Yet from the moment they marched in looking as apologetic as they knew how, it was all too clear that trouble was brewing. Miss Moore's eyes were stormy and her pretty mouth set in a thin, straight line. When Primrose, not looking where she was going, walked plump into a map-rack, she received a sharp rebuke that stung the red to her cheeks.

"Sit down, all of you!" Miss Moore snapped, paying little or no heed to the apology for lateness that Maria Zinkel produced. "Now remember, please, that you are here to work and not play. Take your mapping-books and draw a map of the northern counties of England, inserting and naming all the principal rivers. When you have done that, I will tell you what to do next. Begin, please!" Then she turned to her table and the work on which she had been busy when they arrived and left them to it.

Artistic Ruey had no objection to the drawing part. She knew the map of England almost by heart when it was a question of the outlines. Margot, who was *not* artistic, gave a despairing look at her. She could not see how she was to avoid trouble with Miss Moore in her present mood. There was no help for it, of course. She must do the best she could and hope to manage well enough to escape the worst. She picked up her ruler and drew her oblong before she fell to work to put in something that would be recognisable as the coasts of northern England. The rest fell between these two extremes.

Ruey might know her outlines, but she was none too sure when it came to naming the rivers. She muddled up the Wear with the Tees, setting the latter north of the former instead of vice versa, and when it came to naming the tributaries of the Ouse she was all at sea. To make matters worse, her hand was aching badly by this time and the pain was no help to her memory. Finally, remembering Matron's injunction, she gave it up, laid down her mapping-pen and sat back, nursing the bad hand and feeling, if the truth were told, slightly sick. She had hurt her finger more than she had realized. So it was unfortunate that Miss Moore, glancing up, saw her sitting idle and promptly called her to order.

"Ruey Richardson! Have you finished?" she demanded. "Bring your work here and let me see it."

Ruey got to her feet and her head began to whirl. She set her teeth, willed herself to keep going, and brought out her book. The drawing was beautifully done, but the names were more conspicuous by their absence than their presence. Miss Moore looked at the map and frowned heavily.

"Why were you sitting doing nothing when you have put in only"—she paused to count—"six names? And two of those are wrong. Surely at your age you know the rivers of your own country? Take this back and don't waste any more time, if you please!"

Because she had a boyish hatred of fuss, Ruey had carefully kept the bandaged hand out of sight. She stretched out her left hand for her book and nearly sent Miss Moore's pile of outline maps flying. The mistress, who had slept badly and was all on edge, rebuked her sharply.

"Do try not to be so clumsy. If you can't aim straight with your left hand, use your right and don't upset my work!"

This was more than Margot could bear. She jumped to her feet, exclaiming in her fluent German, "It isn't Ruey's fault, Miss Moore! She—"

"Thank you, Margot, but I am quite capable of attending to Ruey without any assistance from you!" Miss Moore interrupted her. "Be so good as to sit down at once and attend to your own business!"

Margot flushed and her blue eyes sparkled angrily, but she could say no more. Unfortunately, Miss Moore had taken her words to refer to Ruey's knowledge—or lack of it—of the rivers whereas the girl was referring to Ruey's use of her left hand. Miss Moore paid no more heed to her, but gave the book to Ruey and sent her to her seat. She had no idea of the

accident, for Matron had been too much occupied with Gretchen to go to the Staffroom for her coffee as usual and Miss Wilmot, who would probably have mentioned it, was summoned to the telephone two minutes after she entered the room and was absent for the rest of Break, turning up with just time to choke down her lukewarm drink before she went off to a soothing lesson with those members of VIa who still took maths. Miss Moore might, therefore, be pardoned for considering that the girl was stupidly clumsy.

Vb, knowing nothing of these wheels within wheels, resented her attitude on behalf of one of their members. Even Francie muttered to her next-door neighbour that Miss Moore was being a bit *much* today—and got away with it, the mistress having decided to go the rounds and see what the girls *were* doing with their time.

As for Ruey, she was seething inwardly. It was very absurd of her, but she felt at this point as if she would rather die than explain Matron's order to Miss Moore. If her hand ached, it ached and that was all there was to it! She set to work to rack her memory for the names of more rivers, and she did see her silly mistake over the Wear and the Tees and corrected it. But though she contrived to name two of the Lancashire rivers, nothing more came and only the fact that Miss Moore, who had begun at the back of the room, was nearing her now, kept her at it.

It must be owned that those maps were, in the main, enough to annoy the sweetest-tempered of geography mistresses. A good many of Vb were not gifted in drawing, though Margot Maynard had outdone the lot when Miss Moore bent over her work. The thing she had produced had left out Spurn Head on the east; as for the west, she had omitted the Wirral altogether and her attempt on the Furness district was a wide bulge, rather like a gumboil. She had topped up her sins by remembering that the Tyne had two branches and drawing them in—diametrically opposite to each other! By the time Miss Moore had told her what she thought of her, even Margot was feeling completely subdued, and the others were keeping their eyes on their work and trying to pretend they weren't there at all.

And then the climax came. Ruey, finding it impossible to think of the name of a single other river, was leaning over her desk, holding her pen and tapping it lightly on the desk. The step of the mistress as she moved on to Tina Harms, startled her so that she nearly dropped the pen. Involuntarily, she tried to clutch it and the pain that shot through the injured finger was just too much for her. She gave a gasping cry and fell with a thud to the floor.

Miss Moore whirled round to see what had happened and, at the same time, the other girls sprang to their feet with exclamations. Charlotte burst into noisy tears and Margot, flinging herself down beside Ruey to try and lift her, turned on the mistress to cry: "This is your fault! You might have *seen* that Ruey's hurt her hand and can't do much!" adding to her crimes by speaking in English.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STAFF IN CONFERENCE

“Thank heaven today is over—or practically so!” Miss Ferrars dropped down on the chair next to her great friend, Nancy Wilmot, pulled it up to the long table created by putting together half-a-dozen of the mistresses’ tables, and heaved a deep sigh of relief.

“Thank heaven, indeed!” her friend agreed cordially. “Has it been a bad day?”

“*Bad!*” Kathy Ferrars echoed. “That doesn’t even begin to describe it! There have been moments when I wished I could find a good, healthy King Herod with a band of efficient soldiers! Failing that, I yearned for a chopping-axe on my own account and the right to use it!”

“Tut-tut! Such violent emotions in one so young and fair!” Miss Wilmot recovered all her usual poise by this time, even though she fully agreed with her friend’s dictum. “Who’s done what to our little Kathy?”

“The whole lot—everything!” was the comprehensive answer. “Upper IVa kept on asking questions about their test; IVb might never have heard the word ‘decimal’, let alone been told what it means; as for geography, when I had a definitions test with Lower IVb, you’d have thought they’d never been taught the first thing about them!” Suddenly she began to giggle. “Believe it or not, Cecilie Auber informed me that a moraine was a *godmother!*”

Nancy Wilmot doubled up at this and Miss Moore, who had just come into the room in time to catch the word “geography”, though she failed to hear the end as Mdlle de Lachennais stopped her for a moment, came to sit down on the opposite side of the table and say vehemently, “Don’t mention the word ‘geography’ again before me tonight. I still haven’t got over Ruey Richardson’s performance this morning. And I shall never, in all my days, understand why the silly young ape couldn’t tell me she’d damaged her finger and Matey had warned her to rest it instead of sitting there, messing about and winding up by fainting. Anyone know how she is now, by the way?”

“She’s better. I interviewed Matey just after Kaffee und Kuchen,” Miss Wilmot replied. “If I hadn’t been so rushed at Break, you’d have known all about it, my dear Rosalind. But what with having to dash to the phone and being kept there practically the whole time, I never had a chance. Well, Ruey’s landed herself in san for the next two or three days, so let’s hope that’ll *larn* her as well as giving you time to get over your shock.”

Another group of mistresses arrived then, so the subject dropped and they occupied themselves with wondering just why the Head had demanded a special Staff meeting thus early in the term.

“We had the usual before term began and I thought we’d discussed everything of importance then,” Miss Charlesworth, the history mistress, observed.

“It can’t be just to discuss this lacrosse idea,” Kathy Ferrars said. “By the way, Nancy, didn’t *you* play it in your day?”

“I did, indeed. I was quite keen, too. I’d like the school to take it up again. It’s a jolly good game, in my opinion.”

“Then if Peggy needs help with the coaching we can call on you, I suppose? *I’ve* offered to give a hand and she’ll need all she can get with everything she has to do.”

“Delighted! I’ll come and coach with a heart and a half—always provided they have practices in my free time,” she added prudently. “But I think you’re right and this present

assembly isn't on that account. If that were all, it would be a case of a pow-wow between Peggy and the Head with the games prees thrown in, perhaps."

Miss Dene arrived at this moment, armed with a large portfolio which she deposited on the table before her usual seat at the Head's right hand. She was instantly besieged with questions, especially by the younger mistresses.

"Rosalie, why are we having a Staff meeting at this early date?" Nancy Wilmot demanded. "It isn't a week since the last one. What's behind it?"

Rosalie Dene sat down and smiled sweetly at her. "This is the Head's business."

"Oh, go on, Rosalie!" someone said coaxingly. "We'll know all about it when she and Bill come, anyhow. You might as well give us the gen now."

"Joan, have you ever heard how Marshall and Snelgrove built up such a successful concern?"

Miss Bertram's jaw dropped at this unexpected query.

"No; I have not. And what's that got to do with present events, anyhow?"

Rosalie Dene indulged herself in a long, deep chuckle.

"*That's* no answer! You go on and tell me. *How* did they do it?"

"By minding their own business!" With which Rosalie sat back in her seat and bestowed another sweet smile on those present.

The rest exploded for Joan Bertram's face was a study. Before she could retaliate, however, the door opened again to admit Miss Annersley, Miss Wilson and—Joey Maynard, at sight of whom there came a vociferous welcome.

"How have you managed to come here?" demanded Miss Derwent, head of the English Staff. "Have you smothered your babies, by any chance?"

"I have not. Phil and Geoff are sleeping sweetly and won't need any attention for the next two or three hours. The Coadjutor is baby-sitting in the nursery and will fly to the rescue if either of them yells. But it's unlikely. They're still only three months old and they'll sleep till twenty-two hours or thereabouts." She looked round the party of mistresses and a wide, slow grin spread over her face. "I've a message for you all from my sister. She couldn't stay as she has an important meeting on Wednesday, but she knew I wouldn't keep out of anything so important to the school—repetition there, by the way!—so she hopped off for home on the first plane this morning. She sent her love to everyone," wicked Joey went on, choosing her words with care while the two Heads listened with twitching lips, "and she hopes you'll give deep thought to the question under consideration and choose something really pretty as well as practical."

A blank silence greeted this speech. Then Nancy Wilmot sailed in.

"That's all very well and when we know what all this is in aid of, we'll do our best to fulfil her requirements. But so far, no one has given us the slightest hint and Rosalie merely grins at us and tells us to mind our own business!"

"Oh, I didn't!" Rosalie exclaimed in shocked tones. "I wouldn't be so rude!"

"Well, not in so many words, perhaps; but that's what it amounted to," Nancy retorted.

Joey turned to the two Heads. "Poor pets!" she said sadly. "You *have* been unkind to them! It shocks me—it does, indeed!"

Before the aggravated mistresses could institute reprisals, Miss Wilson took charge. "No one has given the show away, I think. In any case, seeing that Madge sprang this on us only on Saturday, there hasn't been much time wasted." She turned to the Staff. "That is true. Only we three and Rosalie, of course, know anything about it and, as I said, we since Saturday only."

"Then mayn't we know at once?" Miss Derwent asked plaintively. "The only reason we've heard of for this—this assembly is whether the school should go back to lacrosse or not, and *that* we got from Peggy Burnett during Kaffee und Kuchen."

"In that case," said Joey, appropriating a seat between Kathy Ferrars and little Miss Andrews who taught the lowest forms, "the sooner we set to work the better. Nell, do sit down both of you, and let's begin. I can see this taking hours to settle!"

"I hope not," Miss Wilson said as she moved to take one of the two chairs at the head of the improvised table. "I have to get back to St. Mildred's in time for Prayers, remember. Come along, Hilda! Sit down and let's begin."

Miss Annersley laughed as she took the chair beside her partner. "By all means," she said, her deep, beautiful voice hushing the murmurs that had been rising. "It's quite simple although, as Joey says, it will take a little time to decide. It's just this. We've decided to make a change in the school uniform."

"Not, I trust, in choice of colours," Mdlle de Lachennais murmured. "I like our present colours very well and for me, I should not wish to change them."

"No; not colours, Jeanne, so don't worry," the Head said, flashing a smile at little Mdlle, the doyenne of the Staff and therefore fully entitled to voice her ideas. "We are quite satisfied about that. It's the style we propose to alter."

"What's wrong with gymmers?" Nancy Wilmot demanded. "They were good enough for our generation. Why won't they do the present girls?"

"I imagine because the tendency is to try to train the girls in some sort of dress sense," Miss Wilson replied. "We insist that ours learn how to use make-up properly when they come to the age that demands make-up—out of school hours, anyhow. There's no reason why they shouldn't also be trained in the art of dressing themselves properly before they go out into the world?"

"But I don't see what they have to complain about in our gymmers," Nancy insisted. "After all, they are very smartly cut—none of your awful pleats, but fitting tops and flared skirts with shirt blouses which always look trim."

"I know that; but the present generation seems to be revolting against gym tunics and shirts and after all, it isn't even as if they wore them for gym, these days," Miss Annersley pointed out.

Peggy Burnett, who had been sitting ruminating, looked up. "I can see the point. They wear shirts and shorts for their gym and games, so there really *is* no point in hanging on to gymmers for lessons—except that for so long those have been the accepted uniform in schools. But if we're giving those up, what are we having in exchange?"

Miss Annersley stretched out and possessed herself of Rosalie's portfolio. "That is what we are here to decide. Lady Russell—Madame"—she smiled as she repeated the title by which Madge Russell was always known in the school—"has brought us about a dozen sketches of various styles which would be pretty and appropriate. You are to examine them and vote on them. They are all smart and practical and I think most of them would appeal to the girls. Here you are!" She handed a bunch of water-colour drawings to Miss Wilson who passed them out one by one. "I may say that Madame has passed all of them, so you can choose as you like."

The Staff took them eagerly. Each sheet bore a drawing of a schoolgirl's dress, showing, as Kathy Ferrars remarked, the front and the rear elevations. They were reproduced as on girls and in the school's colours and everyone agreed with the Head's statement that they looked both smart and practical. One or two were still of the pinafore type, but pinafore with a difference. For example, in one, the top was buttoned on to the skirt at the waist and could be removed, leaving a well-cut skirt for ordinary use. In another, the pinafore was cut to a deep V back and front with no sides. Yet a third had only shoulder-straps crossing at the back and buttoning on under the arms. There were full dresses, not unlike the velveteens the girls wore for the evenings in winter, with plain white collars and cuffs. Yet another had a round neck

with yoke to match. The long sleeves ended in rounded cuffs and neck, yoke and cuffs were piped with crimson on the deep gentian-blue of the frock. There was one with honeycombing at the shoulders and waistline, and the V neck was finished off with small revers of white. All were shown to have pockets, either let into the seams or, as in the case of the last, patch-pockets cut to a V-shape on the front of the skirt. Every skirt was cut with a good flare to leave active legs free and avoid bunchiness.

“I like this one best, I think,” Miss Derwent said after a prolonged study of the lot. “It’s very smart with that honeycombing and yet it’s quite a useful kind of frock. I see the pockets fasten with buttons, so we shouldn’t have people perpetually dropping things out of them and also, they are more likely to remain flat.”

“Don’t you believe it!” Nancy Wilmot said sceptically, as she craned over to examine the sketch. “Half the young monkeys will cram their pockets full of all sorts of oddments. Look at their blazer pockets!”

“I think we can rely on Matron to deal with that,” Miss Annersley said drily.

“Yes; where *is* Matey?” Joey demanded. “I’ve just missed her.”

So the story of Gretchen, Arda and Renata came out and Joey, for once, did not laugh. Instead, she looked anxious.

“Is Gretchen all right now?” she asked.

“Very sorry for herself,” Joan Bertram told her; “but the sickness has stopped and she had an hour’s quiet sleep this afternoon, so Matey was hoping that that the worst was over. But I looked in on her as I was there and she looked very washed-out.”

“Don’t worry, Joey,” Miss Annersley said. “Gretchen really is stronger than she used to be and mercifully, she didn’t eat nearly as many of those chocolates as Renata and Arda seem to have done. How they’ve escaped bad bilious attacks, is more than I can say. Now forget it for the time being and turn your attention to the dresses, all of you. We want to come to *some* decision as soon as possible.”

“Are we keeping our usual material?” Rosalind Moore asked.

“We certainly are,” Miss Wilson said with decision. “It washes well and it’s warm and light and hard-wearing—which last, it has need to be!”

“Me, I prefer this one with the round neck and yoke,” Mdlle announced. “It is truly chic in design and yet it is simple and *jeune fille* and therefore what we need.”

“But what about the folk who can’t stand the blue unrelieved?” Miss Yolland asked. “I know it’s a lovely blue and it does suit most folk; but there are certain people who would look awful if there weren’t a touch of white to relieve it. I think I’ll vote for this one with the deep Vs.”

It was at this point that Kathy Ferrars raised a laugh by saying pensively, “At least there isn’t one that our one and only Yseult could call picturesque!”

The Staff simply shouted at this. ^[8]Yseult Pertwee had been at the school for only a short time, but in that time she had impressed herself on all and sundry by objecting strenuously to tunics, tidy hair—she wore her own lengthy locks floating about her until Matron finally took her in hand—and the lack of beauty and picturesqueness generally in school uniform. She and her two younger sisters had, however, been summoned to America where their mother had been taken seriously ill while lecturing on the Arthurian legends. Mrs. Pertwee had had to undergo a major operation from which she recovered very slowly and latterly, she seemed to be making little or no progress. As she was the only relative the girls had everyone was anxious, but a query addressed to Joey, who was the one to keep in touch, brought the reply that no one could say which way her illness might turn. The girls were living with an Old Girl of the school, one Cornelia van Alten who, in the days when she was Cornelia Flower, had made school history on her own account. ^[9] Everyone knew that Corney, as they all called her,

would be kind to the girls and look after them; but everyone hoped that Mrs. Pertwee might still rally for the sake of her family.

[8] *The New Mistress at the Chalet School.*

[9] *The Head Girl at the Chalet School.*

Miss Wilson recalled them to the business in hand almost at once. "We're here to decide on the new uniform," she said brusquely. "We can't do anything about the Pertwees at the moment, but we *can* make up our minds about the uniform. You folk have been hanging over those sketches long enough to have come to some sort of decision. We'll take a vote on it now. Pass them along here and I'll number them. Then we'll lay them out along the table and you can go round for a final look and choose which you prefer. All got writing materials?"

They obeyed her and when she had numbered the sheets and they had been spread out round the table, the Staff rose and promenaded round, inspecting them for the last time. As each made her choice, she wrote her number on a slip of paper which she handed to Rosalie Dene and when the last had come in, the two Heads and Joey inspected them. The one with the revers was chosen by a narrow margin of two and the question was settled.

"When are you telling the girls?" Miss Derwent asked.

"Not until just before the end of term," Miss Annersley said firmly. "So don't let them get the smallest hint of all this, any of you."

"And when do we begin with it?" little Sharlie Andrews wanted to know.

"If anyone needs a new tunic for the Easter term, she must get this. Otherwise, it must wait till next Christmas term. They rarely wear their winter uniform for more than a week or two of the summer term, so there's no point in their getting the new one then. They must finish with their gym tunics first. Parents won't love us if we demand completely new uniforms for the Easter term, especially parents of girls who had just come this term."

"Well, I'm glad to know that," Joey remarked. "It doesn't affect my three—no; four, with Ruey—for though she's new, her tunic isn't. That one Len grew out of last Easter term fitted her well enough and I gave it to her to wear out. I had an idea this was coming, you know. Madge was hinting at it in August when she was here. In any case, all four will be fifteen before Christmas and will be in blouses and skirts, though if they want to have the new uniform, they may have it. I like it and it would suit the lot, even our freckled Ruey."

"The freckles are going, now the great heats are over," Kathy Ferrars pointed out. "She's not a pretty girl, I admit, but she has a lovely skin."

"Pink and white—well, you expect that with red hair," Joey said. "Well, now that the great question is settled, what about the other one—the lacrosse? We didn't play it in my time, but I've often watched it both here, in England and in Canada, and I loved the look of it. If I have a vote in the matter, I shall give it to starting again."

The two Heads turned simultaneously to Peggy Burnett.

"What about it, Peggy?" Miss Wilson demanded. "Can you fit it in with all your other jobs? I know you have a good deal on your plate these days."

"And do you think you can find enough girls to make up at least two teams," Miss Annersley added. "For I warn you, I won't consider it unless you can get that. It would be impossible to give them practices otherwise."

Peggy laughed. "So far as I can gather from Josette and Gwen, quite two-thirds of the Seniors like the idea. Some are keener than others, of course; but I think if we ask them straight out, we shall find that we can make up three if not four teams. As for fitting it in, Kathie and Nancy both play and have both offered to give up some of their free time to help with the coaching. I'm very grateful to them. And what about the Millies?" she turned to Miss Wilson. "Couldn't some of *them* give us a hand? Mary-Lou, for instance, and Hilary and Vi.

They were all keen players when we had it and so was Lesley Bethune. Don't you think they would enjoy taking it up again? Those four are all capable creatures and can teach quite well."

Miss Wilson nodded. "I'm sure they'd be delighted. You'll have to keep your eye on Mary-Lou, of course."^[10] I know she made a marvellous recovery from that accident of hers, but she owned to me a term or two ago that when she got badly tired, her back began to ache. I'm afraid she'll feel the effects of that knock for some years yet." She smiled whimsically before she added, "I still feel that bone I broke in my foot all those years ago when we were up at Fulpmes, if I'm too much on my feet."^[11]

[10] *Mary-Lou of the Chalet School.*

[11] *Eustacia Goes to the Chalet School.*

"Yes; but that *was* a broken bone and if I remember rightly, it was some time before you could have it seen to. And then there was all that ghastly tramp you had a few years later when you and Joey and the rest had to fly before the Nazis."^[12] That didn't do your foot any good, I know!"

[12] *The Chalet School in Exile.*

Joey chuckled. "What a business that was! And what sights we all looked when it was all over! Whenever I get nightmare, I'm always back in it. Luckily —"

"Now that's enough," Miss Wilson said firmly. "I know you and your gift for side-tracking, Jo, and we're having none of it at the moment. Peggy, do you think that if some of my girls came to help with what Kathy and Nancy offer, you can manage?"

Before Peggy Burnett could reply, Miss Derwent spoke up. "If you come to that, I could help with the coaching myself. We played it at my school and I was in the first team as Second Home my last year there. I don't think I've forgotten much."

"So could I." Miss Armitage, who took science under Miss Wilson, suddenly spoke up. "Anyone else ever play? Speak up, if so."

"I did," Rosalind Yolland owned. "I loved it, and when I first left school I belonged to a private club. I'd love to give a hand with it."

Miss Wilson sprang to her feet, her eyes dancing. "Hands up, all of you who have ever played!" she commanded.

Quite a number of hands went up. She counted rapidly. "Nine of you! Can't we scratch up three more and run a Staff team? I *am* right in thinking it takes twelve players to make a team, Peggy? Yes," as Peggy nodded, "I thought so! Jeanne, what about you? You can't plead that you're too old. You play fine tennis and a woman who spends most of her holidays prancing about in the Alps ought to be able to play a game like lacrosse. It can't be anything like so strenuous!"

Mdlle laughed and assented, and "Bill", as she was to most of the school, looked round the others. "Who else? Céline," she looked down the table at Mdlle Lenoir who took Junior piano, "what about you?"

"But yes; if you wish it," Céline Lenoir agreed. "But I do not know it at all."

"No matter! You'll soon pick it up. And Gill Culver, my own secretary, used to be mad on it. I'll speak to her when I see her. There you are, then! There's your Staff team for you! I don't think you'll have any trouble over the coaching, Peggy."

So it was decided and next morning, those members of the school interested enough to scan the notice-board in Hall before Prayers, had a fine piece of news to announce to the rest, for a notice on it told them that lacrosse was to begin again and those girls who wished to join were invited to put their names down on the big sheet of foolscap Rosalie Dene had pinned up alongside for the purpose.

CHAPTER IX

THE LACROSSE EXCITEMENT BEGINS

The excitement engendered by the new notice was terrific. The two Sixths were calm enough. For one thing, most of them knew already about the proposal. For another, seven of them were in the First hockey eleven and had no intention of giving it up. Finally, they had their dignity to consider. But below them, the school literally *bubbled!*

Ruey, one of those who read the notice, went flying to find the members of her own gang and tell them all about it. The Maynards were all thrilled at the news and so, in her quiet way, was Rosamund Lilley who had stuck to netball so far, preferring it to hockey. On the other hand, Betty Landon and her own particular "twin", Alicia Leonard, were hockey fiends and Betty's only reaction to the notice was a hope, loudly voiced, that this did not mean they were giving up her pet game. Joan Baker, who had taken to hockey like a duck to water, also hoped this and so, at the moment, did the Dawbarn twins. The members of Inter V, the lowest form in Senior School, were equally divided. As for the two Upper Fourths, they were dying to know if the old rule—which someone mentioned to them—still held good and they might not begin until they were fifteen. As only Jeanne Dubois and Sarah Ridley in Upper IVa had reached this mature age, and every girl in Upper IVb was well below it, they sat in their places in Hall, waiting for the silence bell and chattering vociferously about it.

They made so much noise that Josette finally stalked up on to the dais, clapped her hands for silence and, when she got it, scorched them with a few words which brought dead silence over the whole of Hall, only broken by the silence bell and the hurried arrival of Miss Lawrence who, for once in her life, had been late. She scurried to the piano, sat down and drifted into Macdowell's *To a Water Lily* and, between that and Prayers, they had a chance to cool down. By the time the Catholics, who had their own devotions in the gymnasium with Mlle de Lachennais, marched in, they were all sitting looking as demure as in them lay. The Head waited until the last girl was seated and then spoke. Her lovely voice reached easily to the farthest end of Hall, but she had no need to raise it, for the girls sat like a set of deaf-mutes.

"I expect all of you know about the notice on the notice-board, if you have not read it for yourselves," she began. "As you know, we used to be very keen on lacrosse. Owing to various causes into which I need not go at the moment, it had to be dropped two years ago. Now, the idea that you should play it again has come from some of yourselves. Miss Burnett is willing to give you what time she can spare and I know you will be pleased to hear that not only are several of the mistresses willing to lend a hand in starting you off again, but a number of people from St. Mildred's are also anxious to come and renew their fun in it. In fact, they are hoping to make up a team of their own, so you will have *one* challenge, at any rate, when you are able to accept it." She paused there and went on in a rather different note. "I hope you will be grateful to all these people. Mistresses are giving up a part of their very precious free time to help you; and St. Mildred's girls will lose at least one afternoon if not more for the same purpose. Further, Miss Dene is spending every spare moment she has on re-arranging the time-table in order to fit in your practices."

Again she paused and this time, the girls were ready. Led by Josette and Gwen, they broke into furious clapping. The Head gave them a minute and then held up her hand for silence.

"Now that is all I can tell you at the moment. Are there any questions?" She looked round at them with a smile.

Betty Landon stood up. “*Must* we play or may we choose between laxe—lacrosse, I mean—and hockey?”

“You may choose. No girl may take both. Both are strenuous games. Lacrosse in particular is a very fast game which takes every scrap of energy, both mental and physical, that you can put into it. You people are still growing and we cannot allow you to overstrain yourselves. Netball will remain, as before, our second game. Yes, Heather?” as no less a person than Heather Unwin, prefect of Upper IVb, got to her feet while Betty sat down with a satisfied air.

“Please,” Heather began in rather stumbling German which was the language for the day, “how old must we be before we can begin? Someone says we must be fifteen. Is that correct?”

“That used to be our rule, certainly,” Miss Annersley said, “and so far, we have not discussed that question. I can’t tell you yet, Heather. You shall know as soon as possible.”

Lois Kynaston from IVb jumped up. In her excitement, she spoke in English. “Oh, *please*, Miss Annersley, couldn’t it be lowered to fourteen?” she implored. “If it’s kept to fifteen, not one of *us* will be able to play this term.”

Miss Annersley laughed before she said, “I see. But please put that speech into German, Lois. You must not forget rules, even if you *are* wildly excited.”

Blushing furiously, Lois did her best while the rest of her form glared at her. Really, Lois was the outside of enough! It was sufficient to make everyone concerned say that the age limit must remain at fifteen! But the understanding Head said no more, not even to tell Lois to pay the usual fine.

“I can only say that we must discuss it before we give you our final decision,” she said, smiling. “Now! Any more questions?”

Rosamund Lilley rose. “What are we to do about crosses?” she inquired.

“We have a number of school crosses put away, I think. Miss Burnett is going to look through the games stores and make certain. Some of you may wish to have your own, but I will see what we can do first. Say nothing about it in your home letters until we tell you, girls. Now is that all?”

Maeve Bettany rose with dignity from her seat among the prefects. “I should like to say that I know we have two crosses at home which belonged to my sisters when they were at school and I’m sure they would be pleased to give them to the school.”

“What about one for yourself?” Miss Annersley said smiling.

“Bride’s would be too long and Peggy’s much too short for me,” Maeve explained. “I’ll have to have one of my own. But I could bring the others when we come back after Peggy’s wedding.”

There was a distinct sensation in the school, or such part of it as had known Peggy Bettany, at this. She had been a very popular person with everyone and though Maeve’s own kind knew about the wedding which was to be at half-term so that her sister and cousins might be there, it had not seeped further down till now.

“That’s a good idea,” the Head returned. “I don’t suppose Peggy will want it again—or at any rate, not for the next few years. Thank you, Maeve.”

Barbara Chester instantly followed her. “We have *my* sisters’ crosses, and both my cousins, Julie and Betsy Lucy, used to play. I could use Beth’s myself and Nancy’s and the others’ could come to the school.”

“What about Vi Lucy?” Miss Annersley queried.

“She has her own. She used to play and she is taller than either Julie or Betsy,” Barbara explained.

“Well, if the girls are willing to let us have them, we shall be delighted to accept them,” the Head replied. “Now is *that* all? Time is flying and we mustn’t lose the whole of our first lessons.”

There were no more girls present who owned former members of the school for sisters, but Ruey informed the Head that her own crosse was in their house at Croydon and might she ask Mrs. Maynard to include it in the things she brought back when she and the doctor went to warehouse the furniture and give up the keys?

The Head nodded assent and followed it up by saying, "You had better run across to Freudesheim immediately after the rest period this afternoon, Ruey. Mrs. Maynard said last night that she was leaving for England early tomorrow."

Con opened her lips to exclaim at this, but Len, sitting next to her, dug her with a sharp elbow and she subsided. The triplets had known that their parents were going some time that week, but it was news to them that it was to be so soon. Miss Annersley glanced down to where they were sitting.

"Len, I have notes for you three and Ruey which your mother left when she was here last night. Come to me at the end of morning school for them, dear. And now," her voice became authoritative, "this must end. School—stand! Turn! Forward—*march!*"

She had caught Miss Lawrence's eyes just before and that lady at once struck up a gay tostep and the school marched out smartly. No one might speak until the form-room was reached, but the moment Vb were safely in theirs, Margot caught Ruey's arm and hissed at her, "Wait for me at Break! There's heaps I want to ask you!"

More was impossible, even if she had not tempted Providence by speaking in English. They heard the tap-tap-tap of high heels on the parquet outside and knew that Mdlle would be with them in another second or two. They scattered to their seats and when she flitted in, they were all sitting with their Livys in front of them and looking at if their minds were on nothing but Latin. Well aware that they were all excited, she set them to work at once and by the time the bell rang for the end of the lesson, they had calmed down considerably. The Head came to them next and not a girl was prepared to merit one of her rebukes for bad behaviour. Besides, this was general literature and as the only preparation they ever did for it was an odd essay now and then, they never knew what she had in store for them.

It turned out to be nineteenth century novelists and she soon had them all thrilled, choosing great novelists of their various countries. She scribbled up the names on the blackboard and then ticked the ones she intended to take that term before launching forth into an account of the growth of the novel. She was an excellent lecturer and knew how to hold the girls' interest. No one gave a thought to anything else until the bell rang for Break. Then she gave them a shock. Gathering her books together, she went to the door which Francie Wilmot was holding open.

"Oh, by the way," she said, turning before she went out, "I should like you to write me an essay on what I have just been saying. Not more than four hundred words and to be handed in this day fortnight. Thank you, girls!"

She went out and left them all gasping.

"Carramba!" exclaimed Prudence Dawbarn who had picked up this unladylike expression from somewhere and was making constant use of it at the moment.

"Not so much talk!" said a stern voice from the doorway. "Put your books away and line up—quickly, please!"

With Josette looking at them like that, they could only obey. In two minutes they were all marching meekly along to the Speisesaal to get their lemonade and biscuits and when these had been disposed of, they departed to the garden where Ruey was at once surrounded by a crowd of people, all demanding to be told what she knew about lacrosse.

"How many to a team?" Heather Clayton demanded when they were standing at the top of the steps that led down to the sunk garden.

“Twelve.” Ruey paused and then began to name them to the excited crowd. “Point—Cover Point—Third Man—Centre—two Wing Defences, left and right—the same in Wing Attack—First, Second and Third Home—Goal.”

“Twelve; that’s one more than in hockey,” Margot said thoughtfully. “I suppose the Wing Attack and Wing Defence are the same as Outside and Inside Right, for instance. What are the Homes and Third Man? Are they the same as Backs?”

“Somebody give me some paper and I’ll draw you a diagram,” Ruey said obligingly as she fished for her Biro.

Len produced a small notebook and Ruey dropped down on the top step while the others squatted or stood round her, watching as she proceeded to draw the diagram, talking all the time.

“This oblong is the field. Goal here at each end and this square round it is the Goal Crease. I’ll print it in. Now Point stands here at the right and Cover Point at the Left. Third Man is in the middle. Centre stands in front of her, but right up, of course. Wing Defences are in front of Point and Cover Point, more or less, midway between Third Man and Centre. *This* is the Centre line and the two Wing Attacks are on the far side of it. Third Home is here in the middle, and nearer the opposite goal. First and Second Home are here, marking the other team’s Point and Cover Point. That’s roughly the way you stand before the game begins. Got it?”

“Looks as if it might be exciting,” Priscilla Dawbarn commented. “Can’t you put in the other team so that we get an idea of the whole show?”

Ruey had put initials for the first team. She marked in the others in the same way and then handed back the book to Len who was nearly overwhelmed by people standing round her, poking their heads round trying to peer at the sketch and get an idea of how the teams stood.

“It’s frightfully small!” Primrose Trevoase objected, trying to get a glimpse of it over Len’s shoulder.

Len had made a discovery. “But every man in the field is marked except the Goalkeeper!” she exclaimed.

“No? Not really?” Ted Grantley said. “No,” as she tried to tuck her head under Len’s arm and nearly sent that young person tumbling headlong down the steps. “It’s no good! Tell you what, Ruey!” She swung round, addressing the gifted artist in English. “You go to Deney and get a big sheet of drawing-paper from her and do another diagram—one that we can all see. She’ll let you have it if you tell her what it’s for. Sorry, by the way, Len! I didn’t mean to jiggle you like that!” For again, she had nearly sent Len flying.

“I’m not standing here any longer,” Len said with decision. “You’ll be making me sprain an ankle or a wrist or something.” And she moved back firmly. “You do as Ted says, Ruey, and get the paper. Ask Deney after morning school.”

“Sorry, but I can’t. I’ve got to go to Miss Burnett for remedials,” Ruey replied with a grimace. “She says I’m round-shouldered.”

“Well, never mind that,” Tina Harms interjected. “Tell us instead, Ruey, how long is this field on which one plays?”

But here, Ruey could give no help, never having bothered about it. “I have no idea. I should think it might be a hundred yards—what’s that in metres, someone?—about that, anyhow, or perhaps a hundred and fifty. The goal posts must be six feet apart—I know that, and the crease has to be three feet on either side and six feet back and front. The goalposts are exactly in the middle of the crease, you see. The centre line is the exact centre of the field, of course. Oh, and you have two umpires, one at each goal. That’s about all I can tell you.”

“How long does a game last?” someone else wanted to know.

“Two thirty-fives, I think, but I’m not sure.”

“Anything else you can tell us?” demanded Maeve Bettany who had come along to see what the huddle was about and now coolly plucked the notebook from Len’s hands and examined the diagram with interest. “By the way, keep to German, you folk. I don’t *want* to fine you, but you all know the rules—or if you don’t, you ought.”

“What do we wear?” Odette Mercier asked shyly.

“Just what you wear for other games—shorts and woolly jumpers as you get very hot and it keeps you from catching chills. In my club, we always wore special lacrosse boots—rubber soles and sides up to the ankles—but I believe one can wear any shoes so long as they have rubber soles. The Goalkeeper wears leg and body pads and padded gloves as well. You see, she is the only player who may use her hands to stop the ball and it’s jolly hard—made of black rubber, I think, though I don’t really know. By the way, she can only stop the ball with her hands when she’s in the crease. Otherwise, she must use her crosse.”

The bell ringing for the end of Break put a stop to any more questioning just then, but Ruey had said quite enough to convince many of her hearers that lacrosse was *the* game for them. By the time Miss Dene could spare a moment to go and look at the lists, she found that about half the Seniors had put down their names, not to mention the whole of Upper IVa and all those people in Lower IVb who had had their fourteenth birthday. They hoped that the Head and Staff would stretch a point and make fourteen the age at which they might begin.

“This settles it,” Peggy Burnett said when she discussed it in the Staff-room that evening. “We go back to lacrosse. We should have enough for twelve teams of sorts—that is if we make fourteen the age-limit.” She looked questioningly at the two Heads who were there with them.

They looked at each other and then they laughed. “We’ve decided to split the difference,” Miss Wilson said. “In future, all girls who are fourteen years and six months old may begin. The rest must wait.”

“Well, I suppose I’m not sorry,” Peggy replied. “After all, it would be rather a business fitting in all that lot for practices. Right! It’s fixed! I hope everyone present is prepared to help wherever possible, if it’s only coming to watch and cheering the little dears on. If they begin, I want them to be keen and it’s amazing what a kind audience can do for you in that line!”

CHAPTER X

A SPOT OF COOKERY

Ruey was feeling very disgruntled. It is true that after all the trouble with her hand when she had topped up everything by fainting, Matron had ordained a few days in san; but she was a healthy young thing, and when she woke up next morning was so obviously her normal self that the school's beloved tyrant had reversed her edict and allowed her to go into school.

"On condition that if you feel in the least poorly or overdone, you ask leave at once to come and report to me," she added.

"Very well, Matron," Ruey said meekly. She was determined to keep out of Matey's clutches if it was possible. Besides, to quote herself, she had no use for folk who whined for a little hurt.

She had to go each evening and morning to have the finger bathed and rebandaged and that was quite enough. So her disgust on the Wednesday was enormous when, having happened to say something about the school's latest craze while Matey was busy, she was promptly told that she, at any rate, need not hope to join in anything of the kind for the next week or ten days.

"And not then, if your finger isn't better," Matron added.

Ruey knew better than to argue the point. She had heard plenty about Matey from the Maynards—including Joey herself who, even now, when she was a proud mother of eleven, could become startlingly meek under a certain look. She said no more and the bandaging being finished, she was sent off with the usual admonition to be careful and not do any more damage to herself.

"What's wrong with you?" Margot demanded ten minutes later when she had been well and truly snapped at five times—and all without any reason that she could see.

"Nothing's wrong!" Ruey growled.

"Is your finger hurting you?" Ricki Fry asked—they were all together as usual and waiting for the end of Break.

"No—or nothing to write home about." Ruey, even as irritable as she was at the moment, could never be anything but truthful.

Len looked at her. "Then what's wrong, Ruey? For something certainly is. You haven't had any bad news from Roger or Roddy?" she added with a little anxiety in her voice. "I saw you had a letter this morning."

"No, nothing. Roger's got his Rugger cap," she added with a little pride in her voice. "And neither of them has heard a thing from Dad if that's what you're thinking about."

"Then what's up?" Rosamund asked.

Ruey paused a moment. Then she said, "Matey says I'm not to play lacrosse for at least a week or ten days and not then if my hand isn't quite all right."

"Oh, rotten luck!" came a chorus.

"All the same," Con added, "Matey's quite right, you know. If you bashed your finger again you might really injure it. Anyhow, none of us can begin right away. For one thing, they've found only six crosses in the store."

"How d'you know?" queried Francie who was tagging along with them as usual.

"I saw Gwen Parry just now and she told me. Mamma said in her note to Len that she was meeting Auntie Mollie and Auntie Madge in London and she'd wired to Auntie Mollie to fetch

Peggy's and Bride's crosses with her. She'll find yours and she's buying ours, but even that will only give us a dozen for the moment and it won't be enough."

"And," put in Sue Mason, "they'll have to pick out a place for a field and get it marked and the goal posts up and everything."

"Oh, that isn't going to hold us up," Len informed her. "Burnie said that we could use the field we always had when we used to play before. But she's insisting that we all have proper lacrosse boots to save any bangs on our ankles. So we shan't begin this week, anyhow, and not till halfway through next and *then* only if we're lucky. I don't suppose, Ruey, when it comes to the point, that you'll miss a thing."

This put a different complexion on matters. Ruey lost the sulky, mulish look she had worn perseveringly since she had left Matey's room and cheered up.

"Well, at any rate, Ruey can hoe in and tell us some of the rules and things like that," Ted pointed out. "It'll all be a help when we really do begin."

"Oh, good idea!" Margot cried. "You will, won't you, Rue?"

"Why not start in right away?" Sue suggested; however, nothing came of *that* for the bell rang for the end of Break and they had to go back into school—or rather, since this was Wednesday and their day for domestic science, Va went off to a lesson in logarithms with Miss Wilmot while Vb trooped back to the kitchens where Frau Mieders was waiting for them.

Everyone liked Frau Mieders who had been with the school for many years. She had joined the Staff when it was in Tirol and as soon as she and her mother and sister could escape from Hitler's domination, they had come to England where she had rejoined the school. She was a stout, kindly Austrian, famed for her placidity, though that was to be broken for once this morning. At the same time, she was capable of keeping the naughtiest Middles in their proper place. The girls enjoyed their lessons with her, even the polishing, dusting and sweeping; and as for cookery, it was regarded as more or less play though they had to work hard, for only the best would do for Frau Mieders.

On this morning, Vb had been learning how to make sundry polishes and creams and how to apply them during the first part. The second half was devoted to cookery. The girls hurried in, changed from the black overalls they wore for cleaning into the white ones they wore for cookery and then went to the big kitchen. Frau Mieders was standing at her own little table and, before Break, they had put out their boards, rolling-pins, bowls, knives, spoons and measures on the long trestle tables which ran down the room and which each held fifteen places for pupils. Big baskets of enormous green apples stood at each end and on a broad shelf at the side were seven spring balances for weighing quantities.

The girls took their places quickly and then sent expectant looks at Frau Mieders. What were they to learn to make today?

"Nun, meine Kinder," Frau Mieders said, beaming on them, "today, we make the puddings for Mittagessen. And for the puddings, they are Apfel-strudel."

The girls beamed back at her on hearing this. Apfel-strudel was a favourite pudding with everyone at school.

"First," the mistress said, lifting a bundle of white cloths, "we will these distribute. Margot and Odile, pass them quickly."

Margot and Odile, each standing at the side of her table nearest the mistress, took the cloths and handed them out, one by one, until everyone had one. When that was done, Frau Mieders took the spare ones and then turned to her instructions.

"First, two hectogrammes of flour—in English measure, a little more than seven ounces. Maria to Madeleine at this table, you may weigh first, please."

More quickly than might have been expected, the girls weighed out their flour, turning it into basins and returning to their boards where they waited for the next ingredient.

“Now one egg each. Francie, please pass the eggs along for your table and Tina for yours. Put him into the bowl of the spoon safely.”

Everyone did so but Prudence. She handled her egg so carelessly that it missed the spoon and began rolling away to the edge of the table. Prudence squeaked and dived for it just in time. Another instant and it would have been on the floor. Very red, she laid it gingerly into the spoon while Frau Mieders exclaimed, “But, Prudence! You must more careful be! We cannot have waste!” She turned to the others with her next instruction.

“In the cup at your side, place one tablespoonful of oil and in the measure, a little water. With the oil, please be careful, or you must scrub the tables.”

The big bottles of olive oil—four to each table—were passed from girl to girl and as each one finished with it, she took her measure and went to the sinks to get the water. That done, they had to take the apples, three each, which they were told to set beside them and then pass along the tins of currants and raisins from which they took a small handful of each, setting them on the big sheet of white glazed paper at their left. Sugar and fried breadcrumbs followed and a little salt and then they had everything. Now came the mixing.

“Put your flour on the board,” the mistress said, “heaping it up and then making a little hollow in the middle and into the hollow, pour your oil—carefully, please! Break your egg into it and add a pinch of salt. Now flour your hands and we are ready for mixing.”

“On the board?” Ruey asked, dismayed.

“But yes, Liebchen. You mix with your hands on the board. First powder your hands with flour and then begin. You must knead until no crumb of dough clings to your fingers and as lightly as you can. So we shall have our pastry light as a feather and so-delicious when we come to eat him. Begin, please!”

“Gosh!” Ruey muttered in an aside to Margot who was her next-door neighbour. “I’ll never do this without spilling oil and egg all over the shop!”

“Oh, yes, you can,” Margot returned—they were allowed to talk a little so long as it was about their work and they did not raise their voices enough to make nuisances of themselves to other people—“Look, Ruey! Flake off the flour round the well into the egg and mix with the tips of your fingers and go on until you have it all worked in.”

With a grimace, Ruey did as she said and contrived to avoid making a mess on the spotless table. Frau Mieders, going the rounds and watching them, commended her lightness of touch, not realising that the girl was saving her right hand as much as possible. Before she came in for cookery, wicked Ruey had removed Matey’s neat bandage and there was nothing to remind the mistress of what had happened.

By degrees, they added water to their dough, a very little at a time, until it was of the proper consistency. It took some time to finish the kneading, for Frau Mieders insisted that it must be free from the least stickiness.

“How much longer must we knead it?” Margot asked plaintively at last.

“Until it shows bubbles and no longer to the fingers adheres. Continue! That is not yet ready, Margot!” was all the satisfaction she got.

“Why must we knead so much?” inquired Thérèse Rambeau.

“That your pastry may be light. Did you not hear me say so, Thérèse?”

“But,” protested Prudence who was never subdued for long, “wouldn’t it be easier if we just added baking powder to bring it up? It wouldn’t need nearly so much work then.”

“But it would not be pastry for Apfel-strudel,” Frau Mieders pointed out, unanswerably, so far as Prudence was concerned. “Cookery is not for idle girls, Prudence. To bring nice food to

the table to eat is an art and art, as we are told, is only accomplished by taking infinity of pains. Come, all! Work away! Soon, we shall with this finish and turn to our filling.”

With a sigh, Prudence turned back to her kneading; but at last even she could announce that the dough no longer clung to her fingers and as she was the last, they had their next instruction. They had to flour the boards, leaving the pastry on them, cover the lump with their basins, and turn to mixing their filling in the second bowl with which each was provided.

“Peel, core and slice the apples,” the mistress said. “Peel thinly, please and also slice thinly.”

Ruey got over this by quartering her apples and removing the cores before she began to peel and several of the others followed her example. The rest peeled first and cored after. And then Frau Mieders caused dismay among them by announcing that she was coming round to see how thinly they were peeling and slicing!

Prudence, whose idea of “peeling” was to remove skins at least a tenth of an inch thick, with great presence of mind pushed her own heap hurriedly on top of Tina Harms’s model shavings and had mixed them well together before Frau Mieders could come to their table. Tina looked her consternation, but said and did nothing to give naughty Prudence away, though Frau Mieders rebuked both sharply when she arrived and bade them never to do such a thing again. Tina went pink, but Prudence merely looked as meek as she could and apologised prettily.

“I thought it would be a saving of time when we had to clear up. I’m so sorry.”

Frau Mieders eyed her thoughtfully, but said no more and passed on to Eloise Dafflon who deserved the praise she received for her work.

“You are one pig, Prudence!” Tina said in an undertone when the mistress was at the other end of the table. “Now Frau Mieders will think I peel badly.”

“Oh, I hadn’t thought of that. I’ll go and tell her, shall I?” Prudence offered at once. “I’m awfully sorry, Tina.”

Tina was a good-natured creature, so she shook her head, quite disarmed by this penitence. “But no; it would be no good. You will not do it again, I think.”

“Oh, rather not! I really am sorry, Tina.”

By this time, the work of the last girl had been inspected and Frau Mieders had returned to her own table and was sending them to rinse their hands before starting on what proved to be the hardest task of all.

“First,” she said, “open out your cloths. Now sprinkle them lightly with flour that the pastry may not stick while it is baking.”

Even this was not without its difficulties. Some of the girls were so anxious not to overdo the flour that they shook on scarcely any at all and had to do it all over again. Others put too much and were sent outside to shake some of it off. But it was Margot who created the real sensation. Her flour sifter had a loose lid unless it was firmly screwed on. When she put the flour in, she merely gave the lid a couple of turns. She picked up the sifter and gave it a good shake. Away went the lid and away with it went the flour in every direction! Ruey got a liberal dose of it and as for Margot herself, the front of her red-gold hair became whitish in a second. Some of the others got the edges of the cloud and began to cough and sneeze while the mixture of exclamations in French, German and English turned the kitchen into a minor Tower of Babel. They made so much noise that Miss Moore from the geography room and Miss Yolland from the art room both sent messages to ask what was wrong and could *they* do anything to help!

For once, Frau Mieders lost her serenity and snapped out orders and answers with a vim that hushed the noise at once and sent them all scuttling. Those who had been floured were sent to the splasheries at the far end of the building to get rid of it. Frau Mieders herself found

hairbrushes and treated both Margot and Ruey to a hair-brushing that left their scalps tingling before she sent them out to shake their overalls free from flour. By the time it was all over and they were at work again in the kitchen, a good quarter of an hour had gone and the Apfel-strudel were still to finish.

Everyone was very quiet and careful. Their kindly mistress looked uncommonly grim for her and no one wanted to get into trouble. The flour-sifter was set aside and Margot told to find another. Then they began on what was the worst job of all.

The dough had to be uncovered, placed on the cloth and first rolled out and then stretched on the backs of their hands until it was almost wafer-thin and transparent and fitted the cloth exactly. There must be no breaks in it and this made it worse. Ruey, whose hand was aching badly again, found it quite beyond her. She caught Margot's eye, held up the hand and grimaced.

Margot was upset by the accident with the sifter. She forgot where she was and exclaimed loudly, "Oh, Ruey! You *haven't* taken off your bandage!" There she stopped short and bit her lip, for Frau Mieders had overheard and came at once.

"What is this, then? Ruey, what have you done? Ach! I remember. Your hand is hurt. But where is your bandage?"

"Er—in my pocket," Ruey said with a glare at Margot who was crimson.

"But why? Why did you not remind me? You are a bad girl—very bad! Come with me at once and I will bandage him again for you and never do so again!"

With another glare at Margot who was nearly in tears—after all, she had grown fond of Ruey and she had never *meant* to give her away like this—Ruey stalked after the irate mistress who took her into the other kitchen and bound up the finger neatly before telling her that she was to do no more work that day. She might stay with the rest and take down the remainder of the instructions; but Frau Meiders herself would finish the pastry. And so she did, managing the stretching with a skill that caused some of the girls to gasp. Margot standing working at her board with red cheeks and shamed eyes fixed on what she was doing, never lifted her head, and, glancing at her now and then Ruey gradually cooled down. She guessed that it had been a mistake and when Frau Mieders relented sufficiently to allow her to attend to the filling herself, she contrived to nudge her chum with an elbow and whisper, "O.K. You didn't mean it. It's all right."

"And now," said the mistress when the apples, sugar, currants and raisins had all been placed on the pastry. "We roll him into a long, thin sausage—this way!" And she took two corners of the cloth in each hand, Ruey standing aside while the rest crowded round to watch, and deftly rolled it up. "Now you try him."

The less said about the shape of some of those "sausages", the better! Some were twice the size and more of Ruey's. Some were thin at one end and thick at the other. Primrose Trevoase cleverly rolled her cloth in with the filling and had to undo it, find a fresh cloth for herself and then stand to one side, looking silly, while Frau Mieders carefully transferred the remarkable result to the fresh cloth. But at last they were all done and the cloths removed. The final touch was to brush them over with melted butter and this, too, Ruey was allowed to do. After that, each "sausage" must be carefully bent in the middle and put on the well-greased baking-sheets before being slipped into the big ovens to bake till they were golden-brown when they must be sprinkled with fine sugar before they were served, piping hot and, as everyone in the school agreed, very delicious, despite the odd shapes.

Clearing away followed and Ruey was ordered to go and sit down and rest her hand. Some of the girls washed up, while others wiped and put away. Some scrubbed down the long tables which looked anything but beautiful, so bespattered had they become. Others swept and dusted. Not until the kitchen had been restored to its pristine neatness might they go. It was

done at last and they removed the black overalls they had donned again for this part of the work, folded them up and then streamed away to the school with only just enough time to tidy before the gong sounded for Mittagessen. But before she, too, returned to the school, Frau Mieders sat down with her order-book and carefully noted down a new flour-sifter as highly necessary. She was not going to have another sensation of that kind in her lesson if she could help it!

Further, she did *not* report Ruey's sins to Matey as both that young woman and Margot had feared she might do. She was a kindly soul and she judged that the extra aching Ruey had to endure as a result of her silliness was probably quite enough punishment. Ruey, with a "toothache" in her hand for the rest of the day that made her feel very woeful, quite agreed with her on that point. Until Matey herself told her to leave it off, she kept that finger bandaged.

CHAPTER XI

LACROSSE

As it turned out, Joey Maynard was away until Friday of the following week though the doctor came back on the Sunday. As he was escorting a patient to the Sanatorium, and a very sick patient at that, neither he nor Joey thought of the eagerly-awaited crosses when he set off and they remained in England until Joey herself returned home. *But*—and it was a big “but”—Peggy Bettany, up to the eyes as she was in preparations for her wedding, spared time to write round to some of the girls who had been her own contemporaries at school and rang up others near at hand to beg their crosses if they were not using them. So when Joey did turn up again, it was with a whole pile; and that was not counting the new ones for her triplets nor Ruey’s own.

“So that’s twenty-seven for the school. I had a letter from my sister Nancy this morning,” Barbara Chester proclaimed triumphantly, “and she says Dad’s coming out to see Naomi Elton—she’s having the big operation on Sunday, you may remember—and he’s bringing hers and Beth’s and Julie and Betsy Lucy’s and he’s got the ones my cousins Nella and Vanna Ozanne had when they were here. Auntie Janie has the keys of their house in Peterport and she went and rootled till she found them. So that’s six more. We can begin playing properly any time now!”

Joey, who had been invited to tea with the prefects to describe to them the preparations for Peggy Bettany’s wedding, laughed. “I’m glad to hear it! Unless winter comes late this term, you won’t be able to dodge in many practices, I’m afraid. This is the last week of September and the last week-end of October is half-term which always cuts into things. Once November arrives, *anything* may happen in the way of weather! How many practices a week are you having?”

“Two for each team—we’ve got six teams, we hope, and a lot of practice teams and we’re putting in as much work as we can in our free time,” Clare Kennedy told her. “The worst of it is that the days are getting steadily shorter and no one will hear of us practising in the gym—bad luck to them!”

“I should think not! What do you imagine would happen to the windows if you started practising shooting, for instance?” Joey demanded.

“Sure, haven’t we had that dinned into us ever since Josette went to ask Burnie if we might?” Clare said. “We have, so! But the Head has given permission for extra practices on Saturday morning instead of walks, so we must be doing the best we can with that and be thankful.”

“*And* hope that winter stays its hand till the end of November, at any rate,” Maeve put in. “How are things going at home, Auntie Jo? Is Mummy all right? Is Peg off her head with excitement or is she taking things calmly? Have you seen any of our frocks? Tell us all, for that’s why we asked you to tea.”

Joey regarded her niece in silence for a moment. “Well, upon my word! That’s a nice thing to say to a visitor! I’ve a good mind to go straight home at once!”

“Oh, no, you won’t!” her other prefect niece, Josette, retorted. “You’ll have to forgive Maeve. The poor thing’s nearly crackers with excitement. She needn’t talk about Peg. It’s the result of never being bridesmaid before, I suppose—Maeve, if you heave that cushion we’ll put you out, so I warn you!”

Maeve laughed and put down the cushion she had swung up to throw at her cousin and Joey condescended to pour oil on the waters by answering her questions.

“Your mother is positively jittery with excitement. Anyone would think *she* was the bride and not Peggy, who’s as calm and collected as ever she was. It’s a mercy your Aunt Bridgie is still with them! I’ve seen the frocks and they’re all lovely. It’ll make a picture of a procession—Peggy all in white and you girls following her in gold. Peggy is going to have a beautiful wedding. As for presents, unless they propose to charter a cargo-boat to take them to Canada, they’ll have to leave half of them behind. Uncle Jack and I took one look at the positive *bazaar* that’s spread out in your glory-hole, and presented the happy pair with a cheque on the spot. Much the most sensible thing to do when they’re going abroad!”

“Well, Peggy *ought* to have a decent show,” Maeve replied. “After all, hers is the first wedding in the family.”

The talk drifted off to something else after that, but Barbara had been seized with a great idea and next day convened a meeting of those girls who could remember Peggy Bettany at school. There were not many of them, for Peggy had left before ever the school reached the Görnetz Platz. But she also passed on her idea to “the Millies” who agreed to join in, with acclamations, and the result was that the following Saturday morning a deputation of three, composed of Mary-Lou Trelawney of St. Mildred’s, Barbara herself and Catriona Watson, arrived at the study bearing bags of money which they requested the Head to have put into a cheque for Peggy’s wedding-gift from them. As the elder members of the Staff—which included three of the St. Mildred’s Staff—had been to her previously with a similar request, Miss Annersley laughed, complimented the girls on the idea, and promised to see to it. However, that came later. In the meantime, with crosses enough for two teams and a few over, a good part of the school went lacrosse mad.

Ruey had not wasted the time, especially since her hand was better. She had begged leave to borrow a blackboard from one of the formrooms and with the aid of this set up in the senior commonroom, she explained to them with diagrams the make-up of a crosse and its different parts.

“This,” she said, pointing to what the others had been calling “the handle”, “is the butt. Here, where the netting and the butt join is the collar. The netting is a foot wide at the widest part and it narrows to the collar. By the way, nowadays, people call the whole thing a stick more often than ‘a crosse’.”

“What’s it made of?” Ted Grantley asked her.

Ruey gaped at her for a moment. She had not bothered about this at all. Then she remembered something she had heard at her club. “The butt and frame are wood. There is no metal at all in a stick. The netting is strung with either rawhide or catgut. It’s got to be absolutely flat when there isn’t a ball in it. It isn’t so tightly strung that it won’t hold the ball, you know; not like a tennis racket, f’rinstance.”

“How do you use it?” Carmela Walther queried.

“Well, it’s a bit difficult to show you without a proper one, but you have one hand at the collar—whichever hand you can use most easily—and the other at the end of the butt. You grip that firmly, but the hold at the collar is looser.”

“So that you can shift it quickly if you have to: *I* see,” Francie said, nodding.

“No; that’s one thing you mustn’t do. You mayn’t slide your hand down as you feel disposed, any more than you may slide the hand on the butt up.”

“Can’t you ever move a hand at all?” Heather Clayton cried.

“Well, all I can say is that it was rammed well into me that you can’t,” Ruey returned.

“My one and only Aunt Sophonisba!” Len exclaimed, using an exclamation of her mother’s. “It sounds somewhat of a trial to me.”

“How do you *hold* the stick?” Francie demanded. “Is it across you, or up and down?”

“Straight up and down—sort of perpendicular. Look here!” And Ruey jumped up on to one of the low window-seats so that they could all see her. “I put my right hand on the collar—so. My left hand holds the butt. *Now!* My left elbow is bent at a right angle—like this—and the stick is held away from me by the length of my forearm. My hand is level with my waist and the stick is parallel with my body. My right hand holds the collar and my forearm lies more or less level with the stick—Oh, someone fetch me something—a stick or a hockey-stick or something—and I can show you properly! You’ll never understand this way!”

Two or three people went flying to find what they could and Carmela arrived with a hockey-stick in one hand and a badminton racket in the other. “Either of these do?” she demanded, holding them out.

“I might manage with the hockey-stick. The racket isn’t long enough.” Ruey took the hockey-stick. She found it much heavier to raise to the correct position than the light crosse. However, it did well enough to show the others what she meant and she demonstrated, pointing out that the open face of the netting should be just higher than her head and directly facing the player.

“That’s it,” she said, dropping the stick after a moment or two.

“But do let me try!” Carmela implored—and nearly started a riot. Every girl present wanted to have a shot at it. In the end, nearly all the hockey players went off to fetch their sticks. Then they stood, trying which hand at the collar would suit them best. Those who did not play, begged to borrow so that they might try, too.

Ruey went round, showing them as well as she could. She even offered Francie some advice and it is on record that that young woman contrived to get over her dislike of the new girl sufficiently to accept the advice meekly and without a single snarl out of her.

They made so much noise that Josette, coming away from the Junior commonroom where she had been showing the Juniors how to play “Impertinent Questions” marched in to ask them what they thought they were doing. She made the pleasing discovery that amongst them they had broken an electric light bulb, the glass of a picture and a vase. Eloïse Dafflon had had a near shave of putting the end of her hockey-stick through a window as a finishing touch.

“You idiots!” the Head Girl commented. “Do you *want* any of the Staff to think you need watching like a pack of kids?”

There was no reply to this, not even from Prudence. They rightly judged it to be a rhetorical question.

“Clear up that mess,” she said. “You folk who have smashes to your credit, don’t forget to report to Matron. And do, all of you, use your wits! A hockey-stick must be pounds heavier than a crosse and a lot more difficult to balance in that position. If you want to practise, why don’t you get leave to go to the gym? That’s the place for this sort of thing. You couldn’t hit the lights there if you tried—not as long as you aren’t using a ball.”

This was true, for during the summer holidays there had been alterations, and both Hall and the gym were now lighted by strip lighting, whereas the other rooms still had the old flex-and-bulb type.

Having thoroughly flattened them out, she departed on her own lawful occasions. They were left to clear up the mess of broken glass and the people responsible went to find Matron and confess their misdeeds to her. The lecture she administered was brief but sharp and they returned to their own kind feeling as if they had been put several times through a mangle and come out as flat as pancakes. However, the fever had begun and it raged violently. They never experimented in the form-rooms or common-rooms again, but whenever they had a chance, the girls were to be found practising their holds.

This did not satisfy them for long and the next thing was a demand to know what they did after that. Ruey felt a good many inward doubts as to whether she could explain, but she did her best, once they were given the school crosses to practise with, to initiate them into the mysteries of “cradling”.

“You have your left hand at the butt and the right hand on the collar,” she began. “You keep your stick vertical, taking the left hand out to the left—like this—” she grabbed the nearest crosse and demonstrated. “You use your shoulder and your left wrist to do it.”

“How?” several voices interrupted at this point.

“Well, it’s what they call ‘rotating the shoulders and extending the wrist’. I mean you keep your elbow bent still.”

Ottile Paulet, a shining light of Inter V, promptly produced some astonishing gyrations as she tried to do this and Ruey ran to help her.

“No, no! You let your body go to the left with your arm—this way!”

“Ah! Now I comprehend. Yes, my Ruey; that is *much* easier!” And Ottile proceeded to work at the action with vim.

“But it doesn’t *stop* there does it?” Con demanded.

“Of course not! You swing your left hand in a semi-circle to your right hip, letting the left wrist extend and turning your body to the right. Don’t forget that your right hand does the guiding and your left the controlling.”

“What happens if you use your hands the other way about?” Francie asked.

“The same thing, but the other way on. It’s easy, Francie. All you have to do is to go right where I say left and left where I say right. Understand?”

“I find it completely muddling,” Primrose Trevoase put in. “Oh, well! I suppose it’ll come in time.”

Ruey grinned at her. “Our coach, Miss Curtis, used to say that it’s frightfully important never to forget that your stick is a part of your body and that your body movements help as much as your hand ones and—er—vice versa.”

Miss Ferrars, who had come out on an errand to Gwen Parry and paused to watch this unofficial coaching, now took a hand. “One moment, girls! Ruey is right in what she says, but she hasn’t gone far enough. You have to practise these movements while moving forward. Try them at a walking pace at first and quicken up until you can do them running. Oh, don’t look so aghast, all of you! Lacrosse is a *running* game. Of course you must learn to do them running! All right, Ruey! Carry on!” She left them with a smile and a nod and Ruey, who had gone red, took heart from the smile and went on.

“I’d forgotten that. Ferry’s right, of course. Here, Odette! You try with this and when you’ve had three minutes or so, hand it on to someone else.”

Thereafter, the onlookers were entertained by a series of mid contortions as those lucky enough to have crosses did their best to follow out their instructions.

One or two seemed to drop into it at once. Others gave promise of better things in the future. Most of them, as Gwen Parry murmured to those of her compeers who were with her, would have been a gift to any circus proprietor on the look-out for promising young contortionists!

Ruey danced madly round the performers, giving instructions and criticism with a free hand until some of the girls watching, began to wonder if lacrosse was quite the game for them. Such antics were not to be found in hockey. Joan Baker was quite certain about it.

“No thanks; hockey’s good enough for me,” she said when Rosamund Lilley offered her the crosse she herself had been using.

“I almost think it’s good enough for me,” Jo Scott who was standing near chimed in. “I’m keen on hockey and Gwen says I’ve a chance of First XI colours this term. Anyhow, I don’t

see me making a circus freak of myself for any game on earth!”

Ruey overheard this. “But it isn’t like that at all!” she cried indignantly. “This is the very beginning. It’s the same with every game—tennis—hockey—I’ll bet you got yelled at enough about ‘Sticks’ when you first began, both of you!—swimming—rowing—ever caught a crab at the oars? Everyone makes a mess at first unless they’re a born genius at a game.”

Jo chuckled. “I knew about ‘sticks’ before ever I began hockey and I was so scared of being yelled at as you say that I scarcely lifted my stick from the ground. *I* was yelled at for spooning at the ball. I’m sorry, Ruey, but I’m sticking to hockey, thank you!”

“Well, you just wait until people get into the way of it and then you’ll see,” Ruey prophesied. “When you can really play, all this sort of thing doesn’t happen. Lacrosse is one of the prettiest games to watch that I know.”

“I’ll wait till the time comes—if it ever does!” the sceptic rejoined with a grin.

“You won’t have long to wait, Jo.” Miss Ferrars had given Gwen her message and was on her way back to the house. “This afternoon, we—the Staff, I mean—are playing a team from St. Mildred’s to let you see how it ought to be. We’re both scratch teams, I’ll admit, but we all know how to play, so you come and watch us, you two, and *then* see if you don’t change your minds!”

This was news to everyone and the lacrosse fans cheered her to the echo as she hurried on, laughing as she went.

The school turned out in full strength that afternoon to watch the friendly match between St. Mildred’s and a team made up of all those Staff members who played and four from the “Millies” who had been kindly lent by the finishing branch. Despite lack of practice, they played quite a pretty game which resulted in a draw for they were, on the whole, very evenly matched.

Even the sceptics had to acknowledge that it had something in it. Those who were keen to start with, were made even keener.

“I do hope we can start properly soon,” Rosamund Lilley remarked as she and the rest of the gang went back to school to make themselves fit to be seen for Kaffee und Kuchen. “It’s a marvellous game to watch. I simply love it!”

“Ye-es,” Jo said thoughtfully. “As Ruey says, it’s a pretty game all right. And ‘swift’ isn’t the word for it! It’s a real thrill. I just yelled when Ferry tackled Mary-Lou the way she did and made her drop the ball by tapping her stick so quickly. And then Burnie nipped in and picked it up and passed—I suppose you do call it passing, Ruey?—to Miss Derwent like lightning! All the same, though I wouldn’t mind knowing how to play and doing it occasionally, hockey is really my game and I’m sticking to it—like glue!”

Joan Baker refused to change her opinion. “Oh, I dare say it’s pretty enough *and* fast enough,” she said. “But it’s too much like work, getting to know all that business with the sticks and the twists and turns and so on,” she said. “I’m sticking to hockey, too. It’s a lot more straightforward and easy to understand.”

Ruey just did *not* sniff!

CHAPTER XII

GROWING INTO A CHALETIAN

By the time the middle of October came and half-term was in sight, Ruey had more or less settled down at school. She still grumbled at intervals about various rules and regulations, but on the whole she seemed quite happy, as Joey Maynard remarked to the Head during a flying visit one evening.

"I rather wondered how she would fit in," Joey said as she sipped the delicious French coffee *Mdlle de Lachennais* had produced when she appeared.

"But why should she not?" *Mdlle* demanded.

"Oh, well, since Mrs. Richardson died, those kids seem to have done very much as they pleased at home. The Professor *had* a housekeeper—Miss Wotherspoon, of all names!—but from what they've all said at different times, I don't think she had much hold of them, not even Roddy. They went to bed when they liked; did their prep when and as they liked; in fact, generally ran their own lives. So I did just wonder how she would like having to obey rules about that sort of thing."

"She seems to be taking everything in her stride," Miss Annersley said. "I've heard no complaints, anyhow."

"Thank goodness for that! And now I must be off. I hope I'm not being previous, but Geoff has started dribbling at a great rate and he's been fretty this last day or so. I don't like them starting teeth so young and I hope it's not that; but I'm very much afraid it is." Joey shook her head sadly as she got up.

"What about the little Phil?" *Mdlle* asked.

"Nothing, so far. She's as placid as ever she was and she's not dribbling in the least. No teeth starting there, so far as I'm any judge."

Joey went off to see to her new twins and the mistresses—the two Heads, *Mdlle* and Rosalie Dene—looked at each other and laughed.

"How little Joey knows," Rosalie Dene said.

"She'll have to put up with regular bedtimes—Ruey, I mean," Miss Annersley remarked. Then she changed the subject.

It was true enough, however. Ruey did resent being sent off to bed at a set time each night. Since her mother's death when she was only twelve, she had gone to bed when it suited her and more often than not it had been nearer eleven than ten before she and her brothers had trailed off bedwards. To have to go up promptly at nine each night struck her as rather too much of a good thing. Again, at home, the three had done their preparation as and when it suited them. Here, after *Kaffee* and *Kuchen* and changing for the evening, the girls went to work at once and worked more or less steadily for the next two hours if they were Seniors or Senior Middles; less, according to their age in the lower forms. But it was done at once, and you had to go on working and not stop to play or pick up a storybook for a refreshing chapter or two before continuing with Latin or geography or algebra. It is true that she found after the first two or three weeks that her work was improving by leaps and bounds, but the lack of freedom of choice still irritated her at times. She had got into lax ways during the past three years or so and that sort of thing is not cured in a few weeks.

"I don't see why you're growling so," Len said one Saturday night when they were resting between country dances and Ruey, with an eye on the clock which had just proclaimed bedtime for the Juniors, had begun to grumble. "You *knew* that we had bedtime rules before

ever you came here. We three told you so. It's only common sense!" This last with some severity. "If everyone just went off when they felt like it, you'd have people going at all hours and a nice old muddle there'd be in the dormies. You can't have that sort of thing in a—a community."

"Oh, I *knew* it, but I didn't *realise* it," Ruey said discontentedly. "It's an awful bind! I often lie awake for hours after I'm in bed because I'm not accustomed to going so early."

"You'll get over that by the end of term," Len told her heartlessly. Her violet-grey eyes scanned Ruey's face so keenly that that young woman blushed and demanded, "Why are you staring at me like that?"

"I was just thinking," Len replied. "You may lie awake for hours as you say, but even so, earlier bed is doing something for you. You look lots better for it, Rue. You always have a colour now and when we first knew you, if you hadn't been so sunburnt, you'd have been pasty!"

Margot, sitting next to them with Francie, leaned across the latter to say with a giggle, "If it's giving you a decent complexion, it's all to the good."

"Oh, talk sense! As if I cared two hoots for that sort of tosh!"

"Well, you ought to. Mother says it's one of our jobs to make and keep ourselves looking as decent as we can. Other people have to look at us and it's going to be a sickener for them if they have to keep on looking at haggish faces or people who are untidy and don't wash properly," Margot told her with a grin.

"She never said a word about it to *me*!" Ruey retorted sceptically.

"Give her a chance! She hasn't been your guardian more than a minute or two and she hasn't had much time yet. But I'll tell you what it is," Len added, still looking at her. "If you go on improving like this, Roger and Roddy won't know you when they come home at Christmas. Honestly, Ruey, I mean it."

Ruey looked disgusted. Then two imps suddenly danced in her hazel eyes which had turned bright green and a queer smile tilted her mouth.

"What are you thinking?" Margot asked instantly.

"Oh, nothing!" And Margot and the rest might tease as much as they liked, they got no more from her just then.

Not that they had long to tease. Jessica Wayne who was doing M.C. with another prefect, Lizette Falence, rang the bell and announced, "Take your partners for 'Oranges and Lemons'!" and everyone rushed to seek a fresh partner. There was an unwritten rule that you did not dance more than twice in one evening with anyone, not even with your dearest friend. This ensured everyone having a chance of dancing, for both Staff and prefects were apt to make remarks if any girl was left out for one of the elders to take pity on her. So Margot left Francie, who was looking her pleasantest, since she had had two dances with her idol, and called on Wanda Roth to be her partner. Ruey and Len went off to draw in Enid Matthews and —this was Len—a very shy new girl called Julie Pierre-Bonnet, who protested in a terrified voice that she didn't know the dance and would spoil it for the rest.

"Of course you won't!" Len said, speaking in Julie's native French, since all languages were permissible at the week-end after Saturday's Mittagessen. "I'll tell you what to do and you'll soon learn it. Come along, Julie! It's a lovely dance!"

Julie, if she had been left to herself, would have retired to a corner and watched, but she had to go, perforce, and found herself in a set composed of Francie Wilford and Connie Winter, a member of Inter V who had a reputation for being as wicked an imp as had ever entered the doors of a decent school; Margot and Wanda; Ted Grantley and Odette Mercier; Ruey Richardson and another member of Inter V, one Isabel Drew whose main ambition was to get through life as easily as she could. At one time, she and Len and Con had been in the

same form, but Len and Con were workers and had gone ahead and Isabel had lagged behind with complete contentment.

Other dances followed, varied by a turn at "Subject and Object". Then the Senior Middles went off to bed in their turn and the Seniors were left behind to make the most of the extra half-hour allotted to them on Saturdays. They were all hot and breathless, for the last dance had been a wild "Goddesses", so they sat about Hall, fanning themselves with their handkerchiefs and gossiping amiably among themselves.

Len and Co. found themselves next door to a group of prefects, among them, Barbara Chester.

"Does anyone know what the latest news of Naomi is?" Barbara was asking.

"Not since this morning's report," Clare Kennedy said gravely.

"It wasn't awfully good, was it?" Len said, the laughter leaving her face. "Poor Naomi! She's having a bad time of it! But if only all this puts her right, she'll say it was worth it, I know. Mary-Lou told me that she said to her she'd give almost anything to be more like other people—straight, you know, and able to do things. But—I don't know—" She stopped there.

"But Len, did not the doctor say that it would be a long time of convalescence for her?" asked Giulia di Ricci, her eyes going to Len's face. "You saw him this morning, I know. Did he tell you anything?"

"Nothing; but we saw Mamma later," Con chimed in, "and she said Papa was worried about this set-back."

The Head had left the room in response to a sign from Miss Dene who had gone out just before. Now she came back and went to the daïs and those girls who noticed, saw that she was looking very grave. She touched the bell on the reading-desk lightly, and the laughter and chatter died away as everyone turned to the daïs.

"I have a fresh report on Naomi, girls," Miss Annersley said quietly.

Everyone looked at her anxiously, for it was clear that the report was not a good one. No one spoke, however, and she went on,

"Dr. Maynard wishes me to tell you that she has had a bad relapse and is very ill again. He hopes that when you girls say your prayers this week-end, you will all remember her and pray for her. It is almost half-past nine now, so there will be no more dancing. Instead, I am sending you all upstairs as soon as you have cleared up to give you a little extra time to do as he asks. We all hope that this may be only temporary and the doctors and nurses are doing all they can for her. Mrs. Maynard has gone to her and so has Mary-Lou Trelawney. She asked for them. We must do our part. Will you set Hall in order and then go quietly upstairs. Don't forget that the Juniors are supposed to be asleep by this time."

She left the daïs and went out again, followed by all the mistresses while the girls turned to and began to return Hall to its usual state, ready for next morning's school Prayers.

"Naomi must be awfully ill if they've sent for Mamma and Mary-Lou," Con said to Ruey as they dragged a form from the wall to its proper place.

"Why do you all think so much of Mary-Lou?" Ruey asked. "I can understand anyone wanting Auntie Joey; but why Mary-Lou?"

Con considered. "I think it's because she's awfully so all *there* always. And she's so decent and so—so kind and understanding and looking out for other people. It's a pity you don't know her, Ruey—really *know* her, I mean. You'd like her!"

"But why should Naomi ask for her out of everyone?" Ruey persisted.

Barbara who was behind them, answered this. "Because Mary-Lou helped her to straighten out the one term she was here—straighten out in her mind, I mean." She turned to Clare. "Do you remember what she was like when she first came, Clare?"

“I do so!” Clare assented. “It wasn’t so much that she was sneering as that she kept us all at arms’ length and wouldn’t let anyone even try to get near her.”

Barbara nodded. “Exactly! And then somehow Mary-Lou got hold of her.^[13] I know something happened that week-end our crowd spent at St. Moritz, though none of us ever knew what. But Naomi was different after that.”

[13] *Trials for the Chalet School.*

Clare nodded. “You’re quite right. The second half of the term, she joined in with us. Do you remember,” there was a sudden flash of laughter in her eyes, “that appalling punishment she proposed for those young imps from Lower IVa over the Lost Property business?”

“What was that?” Ruey demanded. This was something she had not heard yet.

“I’ll tell you tomorrow if you remind me,” Con said instantly. “There isn’t time now. The Head will be waiting at the foot of the stairs to say goodnight to us. Come on, Ruey! We’ll tell you tomorrow, but just now, we’ve got to get these forms into place. Give that one a shove to the right, will you? Hi, Francie and Margot! Join yours up to this one and then we’ve nearly finished.”

Ruey might be persistent, but when Con chose to be obstinate, there was no moving her. The younger girl gave it up for the time being and they finished tidying Hall, left it while Josette and Gwen saw to putting out the lights, and all trooped off upstairs.

The Head’s plea had not been in vain. Almost to a girl, they spent a few extra moments on their knees that night, praying that all might still go well with Naomi. Even the new girls who knew her only from what the others had told them, added their petitions. They had their reward. One of the nurses from the Sanatorium cycled over for the eight o’clock service. Seeing Josette who was watching for Mrs. Graves, once Hilary Burn and an Old Girl of the school, as well as its former games mistress, she jumped off her bicycle and came up to her.

“I know you belong to the Chalet School,” Nurse Potter said. “I just thought you would like to know that that poor kid Naomi was a shade stronger when I left. I thought I might be able to get hold of one of you, so I asked before I came off duty. She’s responding to the treatment and Sister said she had had two short periods of natural sleep.”

Josette’s face lit up. “Oh, good! Thank you from all of us, more than I can say! I’ll let the rest know before they go into St. Mary’s. I’m early because I wanted to grab Mrs. Graves and ask if she knew anything later than last night’s bulletin. But I doubt if she’ll know this. It really is good of you!”

The little nurse laughed. “I guessed you’d all be on tiptoe about her.” She nodded at the Head Girl and went on into the little chapel which was open to such of the Staff of the Sanatorium as cared to attend. The Catholic chapel of Our Lady of the Snows was also open to them and quite often one or two of them turned up.

Josette turned again and saw the groups of girls in twos and threes making their way to one or other of the chapels. She gave up her vigil and ran to give them the news. There were subdued rejoicings on every side, but the elder girls, at least, knew that this did not mean that all danger was over and a good many more prayers ascended that morning that the improvement might be continued.

No more was heard until just before the end of Mittagessen, the top door of the Speisesaal opened and Joey Maynard walked in. She looked very tired and “all eyes”, as her observant eldest remarked later; but there was triumph in the smile she bestowed on them.

“I mustn’t stay,” she said as they all turned to her anxiously. “I just wanted to tell you that Naomi is improving. Her heart is steadying and she has a firmer grip on life. She isn’t out of danger—won’t be for the next few days; but she really has a chance now. Last night, the doctors were all afraid she was going to slip through their fingers. No one can say definitely

yet whether she will or not; but she's putting up a fight again. Don't forget her, any of you. She needs all the help your prayers can give her. And now I'm going. I'm so tired, I can scarcely keep my eyes open!" She looked round the room for her own three and Ruey. "Len, I know you three and Ruey were coming this afternoon, but I'm afraid it'll have to be off for this week. Sorry; but I know you'll understand. When Naomi is safe, you really shall come and I'll provide the most indigestible cakes I can find and sweets as well, by way of celebration."

Matron was on her feet and round the table. "You come with me," she said grimly. "You must be talking in your sleep to talk such rubbish as that! Indigestible cakes, indeed! You're coming to bed at once and you're staying there until the morning. Come along!"

She led the unresisting Joey out and Margot vowed ever after that just before the door closed on them, she distinctly heard Matey say, "Don't be tiresome, Jo! You're going straight to bed and that's all about it!"

After their rest, the girls were told that Seniors and Senior Middles might go for a ramble about the Platz so long as they went in no less than four in a group. Everyone below Upper IVb was taken for a good brisk walk with the duty mistresses. Len resisted all attempts of the others to make up a party of their entire gang and called her sisters and Ruey to come with her and they strolled off in the direction of what used to be the only path up to the Platz before the motor-road was built. She and Con had had a brief, serious talk that morning and she felt that somehow they must help Ruey to understand about things at the school.

At first, they only discussed school affairs. Then Ruey said suddenly, "You know, you three, I just don't understand."

"What don't you understand?" Margot demanded.

"Well, this girl, Naomi What's-her-name. From what you all say she wasn't at school for more than one term and she was awfully queer and didn't fit in, except just at the end. Yet you all think so fearfully much about her pulling through this illness—well, I do rather, myself!—and I can't see *why*?"

The triplets looked at each other. They knew what they thought, but it would not be easy for any of them to put it into words. Len made an effort, for this was why they had come off by themselves.

"For one thing, she's one of us—a Chalet girl," she said thoughtfully.

"I still don't see what that has to do with it," Ruey persisted. "Girls at the High used to be ill sometimes. I remember one was awfully crocked up in a motor smash, but no one made any fuss about it except her own particular pals. But here, you all seem to act as if she was—well—your special chum. Why?"

Margot tried. "Perhaps it's because we're a smaller school than your High. Didn't you say there were more than six hundred girls there? Well, we're only about half that number."

"Even so, it's a lot, isn't it? When Dilys Jones—she was the girl that was smashed up—was so frightfully ill in hospital, I don't remember anyone saying much about it, not after the first shock of the news. And certainly no one, not even the Head, asked us to *pray* for her."

Con spoke dreamily. "Perhaps, though, you never felt as if you were all one. We do, here."

"What's that about feeling we're all one?" queried a fresh voice behind them and the triplets turned round with cries of joy.

"Oh, Mary-Lou! the very person we wanted!" Len exclaimed fervently.

"Thank goodness you've come along!" Margot cried. "*You* can explain to Ruey far better than us. This is Ruey, by the way!" And she caught Ruey's hand and dragged her forward.

Con explained. "Ruey wants to know why we all think so much about Naomi getting better, Mary-Lou. I know in my own mind, of course, but it's rather hard to put it clearly for someone else. *You* can tell her, though."

Mary-Lou smiled at them and turned to Ruey, who was looking at her, partly in alarm, partly with deep admiration. She was tall and slim and very graceful. Her sunny hair, bare to the sun and the October wind, was light brown, but it was full of golden lights and it curled riotously all over her head. Beneath her long curling lashes, her eyes were vividly blue and she had a complexion of peaches and cream. But it was not just her colouring, lovely though that was. There was an air of authority about her and a subtle dignity. Ruey thought to herself that no one would care to cheek her, and yet she was completely friendly and natural in manner.

"If ever I was in a hole, I'd go to her if she was anywhere around," the girl thought. "I believe she's the kind that would stand by you whatever happened."

Mary-Lou gave her a friendly grin. "Puzzled, Ruey?" she asked.

"Yes; *awfully!*" Ruey replied instantly. "And what gets me most is that though I never saw Naomi in my life and don't know her, somehow I felt last night and again this morning that it really mattered to me that she pulled through. I don't understand it. *Why* should we all feel like that—for we do, you know." Then she added shyly, "I'm not much on praying, but I did pray and it felt as if *my* prayers mattered like everyone else's. I want to know why."

"Because they do, of course." Mary-Lou spoke in matter-of-fact tones. She looked round. "Come on! Let's go and sit down on that log and sun ourselves and I'll explain to you as far as in me lies. Only most of it, you'll have to think out for yourself. Any ants or bandersnatches about?" She examined the log. "O.K. It seems to be clear. Squat, all of you!"

They sat down, Mary-Lou at one end and the other four in a cluster in the middle. She turned to face them before she spoke. "Now then! Try to get this, all of you. Though I think Len knows it and probably Con and Margot as well. Though lessons—school lessons, I mean—matter as much here as they do in any decent school, there are two things that matter more. One is that we all grow up with healthy bodies. That's why they make such a fuss about regular bedtime and not trying to work out of hours and so on." Here, she paused to grin to herself. Before anyone could ask the meaning of that grin, she went on: "The other thing is healthy characters."

"But they make a fuss about that sort of thing at any school," Ruey persisted. "They talk about the 'tone' of the school and how awful it is to cheat or tell lies and things like that, and how unsporting not to be able to lose decently and so on. Isn't all that part of your character?"

"It is; but here, we go even deeper. After all, that sort of thing can all be very much on the surface. Here, we learn to help other people and to understand them as far as possible—learn what makes them tick over, in fact."

Ruey stared. "But how? How *can* you hope to understand everybody? You can't!"

"Not altogether, I know," Mary-Lou agreed, "and it's easier for some folk than for others. But you can try. Take Naomi, for example. I don't know if you've heard that when she first came here, she kept us all off with a broomstick, more or less. She wouldn't be friends and she wouldn't have anything to do with us that she could help. I know you've heard that when she was younger than you crowd she had a ghastly accident which twisted her body badly. That was bad enough but she let everything twist her—her *soul* as well. She'd been looking forward to being a ballet dancer and of course that was completely knocked on the head. She could only walk with a bad limp and she was all bowed together. Worse than everything, her parents were killed in the same accident, so she didn't have them to help her. There was only an aunt who had a family of her own to worry about and anyhow, wasn't as understanding as she might have been. And *the* worst thing of the lot was that Naomi had nothing to fall back on. Her people were agnostics and her aunt seems to have flighted about to any sort of church service that took her fancy—or else didn't go at all. I shall never, as long as I live, forget the shock I got when she calmly told me that she had no religion," she added reminiscently. "I

simply didn't know what to do about it. However! All that being so, the result was that she said either there was no God; or if there was, then He just didn't care. All poppycock, of course, but can you wonder that when she thought like that her mind was in as bad a mess as her body?"

"And then," Con said absently, "when you saw how things were, you just pitched in and helped her to think differently. Oh, I know you, Mary-Lou! It's the sort of thing you've always done."

For no reason that Ruey could see, Margot suddenly went darkly red and Len looked sheepish. She was not to know that only the previous term when Mary-Lou had been Head Girl, she had done that very thing for the Maynards and Margot, at any rate, had profited largely by it. Mary-Lou herself flushed to the roots of her hair.

"A nice busybody you make me out to be!" she complained.

"I didn't mean it that way. Anyhow, everyone's always told us that Mamma is exactly the same and Len is a bit that way, too. We're all ready to help if it's pointed out to us, but you three see where help's needed and just sail in."

It was impossible for Mary-Lou to go redder, but she said, "I thought you'd decided to give up saying the first thing that comes into your head, Con?"

"So I have." Con was not in the least discomfited. "But I'm not hurting anyone by saying that. Anyhow, Ruey, what I think Mary-Lou is getting at is that that's what she means by trying to understand people. Mamma calls it 'getting into someone else's skin'."

Len broke in. "Now I know! The more you learn how to do that, the more your character goes on growing, because you learn about *people* and it's people who matter most."

Mary-Lou had recovered herself again and she nodded. "You've got it, Len. We learn at the Chalet School to look out for other people as well as ourselves. We can't go through life living alone and if we try to, we end by making ourselves thoroughly miserable unless we're so bone-selfish that we just don't see them at all. We've got to learn to live *with* other folk and *for* other folk—our own folk first when we're tinies. Later, the folk at school and then we carry that idea out into the world and apply it to the folk we meet there. But all the time we ourselves are growing in understanding and, let's hope, kindness and helpfulness. It's not much use understanding people if you don't go all out to help them."

"No," Ruey said slowly. "But how are you to know?"

Mary-Lou's face grew suddenly grave. "By believing in God and trying to help as He wants us to. That is part of our training here. Now you know—or all I'm going to tell you at the moment. You think it over for yourself. By the way, you four, I've just come back from a visit to Naomi and you'll be glad to hear that she's still on the upgrade. She's had a really good sleep and some milk and other stuff and I saw Uncle Jack and he says he feels happier about her now. Take that to the Head, Len, and she can tell the others. It's best from her. Now I must fly. Vi and Hilary and the others are waiting with their tongues hanging out of their mouths for my report. Goodbye! We meet at lacrosse tomorrow!"

She got up, gave herself a shake and went swinging off across the turf, leaving Ruey deeply impressed and with a good deal to consider.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LATEST DOING

The news about Naomi continued to be good. Very slowly, but very surely, she began to pull up the steep pathway to health again. By the next Sunday, the doctors sent word to the Head that she was out of danger. The school cheered up immediately. It is on record, indeed, that the Junior Middles, seeking a good way to celebrate, though most of them scarcely knew her at all, hit on the idea of having a special “midnight”. They were to pool all they could manage in the way of “eats” and, by way of an extra, certain of them would act a play written by those sinful inseparables, Ailie Russell, Janice Chester and Judy Willoughby. That, however, came later on. It was also to add yet another legend to the many which the Chalet School had accumulated during the years.

Their elders were rather less exuberant. The prefects, at any rate, remained anxious. They realised as they had not done before, that what had happened earlier might happen again and that Naomi would remain frail for a very long time to come.

The Head, who generally knew the temperature of the school, sensed what they were feeling and decided to take measures against it at once. As she said to “Bill”, Mdlle de Lachennais and Mdlle Berné who were drinking coffee in her pretty salon, while no one wanted the school to produce a bevy of featherheads, neither did they want the girls to be burdened too seriously at their ages.

“How are you going to deal with it?” Bill demanded with interest.

“Give them something entirely fresh to think of.”

“How can you do that? The MS. for the Christmas play hasn’t come to hand yet, has it? So you can’t use that. What’s your great idea?”

“You’ll know when tomorrow night comes”—this was Sunday—“if you and Mary-Lou and Vi and Hilary and—let me see—yes; Blossom Willoughby will all turn up at twenty hours. I’ll treat you to coffee and pâtisseries from Interlaken.”

“Can do. And I know I can answer for the girls. What do you want with those four?”

But Miss Annersley was not to be drawn. She merely smiled sweetly at them and Mdlle de Lachennais finally changed the subject by demanding, “And what of us, chérie? Do Julie and I come, also?”

“With pleasure, though I don’t know if it will interest you as much as some folk!”

“Oh, let her be!” Bill cried disgustedly. “She’s set on being mysterious. But I warn you, Hilda, if there’s nothing much after all this palaver, I’ll have my revenge!”

“By all means!” The Head remained unmoved by even this threat.

The result was that when twenty o’clock came next night, an inviting table was waiting in her salon and besides those present the night before and the “Millies”, there were also Miss Burnett, Miss Ferrars and Miss Wilmot, together with Gwen Parry, Josette Russell and Monica Caird.

“What’s it all in aid of? Do you know?” Blossom asked Gwen in an undertone as the games prefect presented her with a cup of coffee.

Gwen shook her head. “Not an idea! All I know is the Head invited us three to have coffee with her tonight and we accepted *con amore*, as you might expect!”

Mary-Lou arrived with a plate of luscious pâtisseries for which Miss Dene had gone down to Interlaken by an early train that morning, but Blossom said no more. She knew that none of themselves knew the reason for this meeting.

Miss Annersley was a charming hostess. She dispensed her coffee and sat chatting pleasantly about various school happenings until everyone refused anything more. Then she signed to her own girls to take the crockery away and when that was done, she blandly requested to be told if there were any reason why a lacrosse match should not be played on the coming Saturday afternoon?

"I know it's early days yet," she wound up, "but everyone has been practising at every possible moment. What about it, Miss Burnett?"

Peggy Burnett, who had been looking startled, pulled herself together. "It all depends upon what sort of a match you have in mind," she said. "If you mean the School versus the Millies, definitely not! The school would be wiped off the face of the earth and you don't want to take the heart out of them at this stage. But if you mean to *mix* the lot and pick two teams of the best the school has *and* the Millies, that might work. Blues versus Reds, for instance. Have six of each lot in each team. They'd be equal then and it would do the school a lot of good."

"That was my idea. Girls, what do you think about it?"

"I think it's a good notion," Gwen said. "We've quite enough people who are getting a very good idea of the game and it would do them all the good in the world to try out with a backing of Millies and against themselves and Millies—if you see what I mean," she added, growing very pink as she considered her rather muddled statement.

Blossom spoke up. "I think it would be the very best thing. It would help them to know what they're getting after. Don't you think so, you two?" She appealed to Mary-Lou and Vi who both agreed with enthusiasm that it was a splendid idea.

"Quite a number of the girls know something about the game now," Mary-Lou added. "I've been amazed at the way some of them have come on. A match would do them good—help them to learn their weak points and so on. And if we're evenly divided as you say, it would be fair enough and whichever side was beaten wouldn't feel crushed to the earth. Oh, I'm all for it!"

"And it has my vote all right," put in Vi Lucy, an enchantingly pretty girl who contrived to combine brains and, in particular, artistic gifts of no mean order with her beauty. "Also, it ought to make everyone even keener than they are."

"Then would you talk it over with Hilary?" Miss Annersley asked. "By the way, please tell her that I'm sorry she couldn't come along this evening; but if she's been having a bilious turn, she certainly wouldn't have enjoyed my coffee and cakes."

"And *such* cakes!" Mary-Lou murmured reminiscently.

"What on earth made Hilary, of all people, bilious?" Gwen demanded. "I never knew her to suffer from anything like that even when we were all Middles."

"No one knows," Blossom said cheerfully. "She's had nothing that the rest of us haven't had—after all, we *are* all rather beyond the stage when you gorge for gorging's sake!—and, as you say, she was never given that way before. It's a mystery!"

"Perhaps she's missing Matey's care," suggested Vi with a chuckle.

Bill, who had been sitting back with Miss Annersley, listening to the discussion, interfered at this stage. "Oh, no, Vi! I can't allow you girls to malign our own matron like that. Matron Rider is as good as can be. But this is the second turn Hilary has had and if it goes on, she's seeing the doctor. We don't want a second edition of your sister Julie's peritonitis! Once of that was more than enough!"

"It was!" Miss Annersley spoke with fervour. "I should have the doctor to Hilary without any more waiting, if I were you, Miss Wilson. It may be a grumbling appendix."

"I rather think I will," Miss Wilson replied. "However, we can't do anything more about it at the moment."

The talk left Hilary Bennet then and they went on to discuss which of the beginners might be chosen to represent the school in the two teams. Ruey was a foregone conclusion. She had played before and was very promising. So was Rosamund Lilley who had taken very kindly to the game. She was quick, neat in her movements and observant.

"Those two are certainties," Miss Burnett agreed. "You might include Len Maynard as well, I think. She's not as good as Ruey and Rosamund, but she's coming on."

"And Margot," Gwen put in. "She really is amazingly fast, once she gets going."

"Margot could be as good as Ruey if she was more careful," Monica said abruptly. "Excitement is her trouble. She just shies the ball anywhere when she's passing and never takes time to think. Now Maeve Bettany mayn't be as fast, but she's steady and keeps her head and she plays a most unselfish game."

"I'll tell you who's going to be jolly good when she's played a little longer, and that's Marie Zetterling," Mary-Lou remarked. "I should think she might be a player later on. Put her down for the team, please."

"Yes, do," Josette added her mite. "She'll be about the only member of either Sixth to play, for the rest of us all play hockey or netball and it's too late in the day for us to change round. We can't let down the school's teams like that."

"Wait till you join *us*," Vi said, "and then you can do as you like. You'll be coming in a year's time, won't you, Josette?"

Josette nodded. "I expect so."

"Then you expect wrong," Miss Annersley said. "However, you must tackle your mother on that point. But as a matter of fact, both you and Sybil will be saying goodbye to us at the end of the Easter term and when you come back, you two will be grown up. By the way, all of you, this is off the record and is *not* to be broadcast to all and sundry. Is that understood?"

They all agreed that it was and Josette remained silent for the rest of the meeting, too stunned by this shock to have anything to say. Not that it went on much longer. Time was passing and Miss Wilson and the Millies had half-a-mile to walk home. Before they broke up, however, they had succeeded in choosing twelve girls who might be said to be the school's best players. It was decided that Mary-Lou should captain the Blues and Hilary, if she was well enough, the Reds. Blossom, who preferred hockey, refused to take on the job if Hilary's indisposition continued so it was given to Vi who had always been a keen player.

"Now is that all?" Peggy Burnett asked after Miss Wilson had observed that time was flying and they really ought to go.

"No; we haven't named any reserves," Miss Wilmot exclaimed. "I'm going to propose Tina Harms."

"And I'll propose Francie Wilford," Miss Ferrars chimed in. "What about two from St. Mildred's?"

Miss Wilson instantly proposed Meg Whyte, a former Chaletian, and Mary-Lou named a girl who had come from a big school on the south coast, one Deborah Mitchel. On that, the meeting really ended. The St. Mildred's people bundled up, for the nights were very chilly now, though the days remained warm for October, and set off on their walk and Miss Annersley bade the prefects of the school goodnight. They went off, all but Josette who came up to her.

"Auntie Hilda," she said, since no one else was near, "do tell me what you meant just now. I'm *not* going to be a Millie? But why?"

"You must ask your mother when you go home for half-term," the Head replied. "Oh, I don't say that if you begged off hard enough she wouldn't let you stay on, though she's adamant about Sybil. You must thrash it out with her, though."

Seeing that she meant what she said, Josette sighed deeply before she said goodnight and followed the others upstairs. She hurried to bed and lay awake for some time pondering on the surprising news she had just had. Finally, being a level-headed girl, she decided that this was getting her nowhere and she had better go to sleep. She turned on her side, snuggled down under the blankets and fell asleep peacefully until the rising-bell woke her next morning.

Gwen, meanwhile, had determined to be up early and the result was that when Va arrived in Hall—such of them as attended Prayers there—Rosamund Lilley, who always conscientiously looked at the board before she took her seat, gave a smothered cry of surprise, much to the amazement of her own clan.

“Qu’avez-vous?” Jo Scott demanded as the other girl bit her lip and came to take her place with cheeks flushed and eyes shining with excitement. “Why are you so revved up?”

Rosamund laughed. “There is a new notice there,” she said pointing to the notice written in Gwen’s dashing hand.

“A new notice?” Jo was out of her seat in an instant; but the silence bell ringing sent her back again and they all had to wait for the moment. Miss Lawrence came in and took her seat at the piano where she began to play softly until the second bell brought the Head and the rest of the Staff and Prayers began. But when the Catholics had all arrived and were in their places, Miss Annersley told them that there was to be a lacrosse practice match on the coming Saturday afternoon. Two teams had been chosen from among them and St. Mildred’s and they would be evenly distributed between the teams. Miss Burnett would be putting up the names of those chosen to represent the school some time that day—Gwen’s had been merely an announcement of the prospective match—and she hoped that when that was settled, they would all work hard during their practices that week. Then she dismissed them to lessons and they had to let it alone.

Busy Miss Burnett had no time to attend to the matter until late in the afternoon; but after Kaffee und Kuchen, Margot Maynard deliberately disobeyed rules and slipped into Hall on her way upstairs to her dormitory to change for the evening. She dared not stay more than a moment, but in that time she got the main things she wanted to know. Then she fled and, for once in her life, escaped being caught.

“I’ve seen the list,” she told the others breathlessly as she wriggled out of her gym tunic and blouse, hung them up and pulled on her dressing-gown to go and wash. “Tell you the rest when I get back.” And she dashed off, banging the door behind her. She was gone a bare three minutes and there was some point in Maria Zinkel’s severe remark that she must have just *looked* at the soap and water.

“Oh, never mind that!” exclaimed Francie, contriving to remember to speak in French. “Who is on the list, Margot?”

“Ruey for one, of course; and Len and Ros. You are a reserve, Francie, and Tina’s another.”

“What about yourself?” someone asked.

“Yes; I’m down, too. The only one out of the Sixths is Marie Zetterling.”

“What about Con?” Enid Matthews asked.

Con herself, in the far corner of the dormitory, waited for the answer. She was not anxious to play in the match. She enjoyed the game, but apart from swimming which she loved and in which she promised to be very good, she was not specially fond of sports. She was the only one of Joey’s children so far to prefer books to games. Even Felix and Felicity, known as First Twins to distinguish them from the latest additions to the family, were keen on outdoor sports. But from her earliest days, Con had been happiest when she was either reading or inventing stories on her own account.

Margot’s reply came reluctantly. “She isn’t down.”

Con spoke up for herself. “That’s a good thing! I did hope they wouldn’t choose me. I’m not nearly good enough and there are plenty of people who could beat me.”

There was a flurry and a scampering and Margot appeared between the curtains of her sister’s cubicle, brush in hand, to exclaim, “Con! Do you really *mean* that?”

Con was pulling her frock over her head. She waited until she was into it before she replied, “Of course I do!”

“But I thought you really liked lacrosse?”

“So I do. I think it’s a much better game than either netball or hockey. That doesn’t make me want to play in matches—*any* kind of matches—though.”

The pair had been speaking in English and now Odette Mercier’s soft, shy voice recalled them. “Please, Margot and Con, do not think I am interfering, but this is French day, n’est-ce-pas? And you are both speaking in English.”

Hasty Margot’s lips opened to tell Odette to mind her own business; but for once, Con was before her. “Thank you, Odette,” she said in French. “We had both forgotten. We do not want to pay any fines if we can help it, do we, Margot?”

She nudged her sister and Margot, recalled to her senses, answered, “No; that is true. Thank you for reminding us, Odette.” She turned to her sister, dropping her voice so that no one else could hear. “And thank *you*, Con. I don’t want to set Odette off on the weeps. But oh dear! it is so hard to remember!”

“But you do try,” Con said in the same low tones.

“Yes; I do. And, by the way, I’m breaking rules by visiting. I’ll go!”

“Poor old Margot!” Con mused as she put the finishing touches to her attire. “Mamma says she has the hardest row to hoe of any of us in most ways and we ought to help her if we can. Goodness knows she’s trying harder than ever before! Anyhow, we don’t want Odette upset. She’s such a watering-pot sort of creature!”

Then she was ready and she raced off downstairs to get out her work and begin on it at once. It included algebra and arithmetic that evening and Con had inherited all her mother’s dislike of mathematics and found them hard going. By the time the rest arrived, she was well away on her algebra and not even Len could have roused her from it. When Con worked, she *worked*.

For that matter, so did everyone else. Josette, coming in with a bunch of essays the Head had asked her to give to Va, found them all hard at it. She laid the essays on the mistress’s table and departed thinking thankfully that at least no one need ever bother about Va during prep.

Once the bell sounded for the end of all schoolwork, however, their tongues wagged hard enough while they waited for the summons to Abendessen. Some of the so-called French they employed was enough to have made any true son of Gaul tear his hair out. When they ran short of vocabulary, they frenchified their English and one or two were not above employing Latin or German if they were badly stuck.

“Were the team places given on the list?” Rosamund asked anxiously when they were safely in their commonroom.

Margot nodded. “They were; but I can’t tell you them now except my own. I’m playing Right Attack for the Reds, but what with Latin and a simply ghastly *précis*, besides everything else, I’ve forgotten the other places—oh, bother! There I go! English again! Thank goodness tomorrow *is* English day!” She changed over suddenly to French. “The umpires are Burnie, Ferry and Willy. I stayed just long enough to see that. I can’t tell you any more, for I knew I ought not to be there and I did not dare to linger. You never know where Matey may be!”

“I wish we might go into Hall before Abendessen,” Carmela Walther sighed. “I do think that is a—*a needless* rule. Now we must wait until Prayers.”

"I should like to go myself," Len admitted. "Oh, well, it will come soon now. You must just wait, Carmela."

Jo Scott, overhearing this, chuckled. "Patience is a virtue, you know."

"It is one I have always thought very dull, me," Carmela said frankly. "Dieu merci! There is the gong at last! Let us hope that no one will ask for a second helping tonight!"

As it happened, no one did; but Carmela was not the only girl to bolt her meal in a most unbecoming way and then sit glaring round at her more well-mannered sisters. Still, all things have an end sooner or later; and, as Betty Landon pointed out to her when they were clearing their table, the meal had taken no longer than usual. Carmela merely bestowed a scornful glance on Betty and then, her chore being done, left the room. But it really was a relief when, Prayers being ended and the Staff departed to their own quarters, they were able to crowd round the notice-board and examine the list in Miss Burnett's neat script.

Gwen kindly read it out so that everyone should know whether she were playing or not and if she was, in what place. There were disappointed faces everywhere and Len, who was not only playing under Mary-Lou in the Blues, but had the one place she liked best as Third Man, looked as upset as anyone when she found that Con had been left out. Con herself merely repeated her remarks to Margot and refused to see that it was hard luck that they weren't all three playing. Len had to give it up in the end. She "linked", as they called it, with Ruey and Ted who happened to be nearest and went off with them to the common-rooms where they all settled down to Hobbies and the making of articles intended for the big Sale they held every summer in aid of the Sanatorium at the other end of the Görnetz Platz.

The general opinion was that, all things considered, it ought to be a close thing, for they had been very evenly distributed. That should make a good match of it. However, they had to wait until Saturday afternoon to find out whether they were right or not.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MATCH

“Now then, everyone, pull up your socks and get down to it the moment we’ve drawn. Remember that in lacrosse, of all games, there simply is *no* time ‘to stand and stare’, as the poet so beautifully puts it. You’ve got to get cracking on the instant.” Thus, Mary-Lou, as she surveyed her team before leading them out.

They certainly *looked* very workmanlike. All wore the loose gentian-blue shorts and cream woollen pullovers which were the school’s uniform for games. People with short hair had it snooded smoothly back; the long-haired folk wore theirs twisted round their heads and secured with a strong silk net. Over the left shoulder, each wore the narrow gentian blue braid which showed her team.

Mary-Lou’s eyes roved over them thoughtfully. “Carmela, mind you keep your head. Don’t forget to mark First Home closely and whatever you do, *don’t* block the Goal’s view.”

“No, Mary-Lou,” Carmela said meekly.

“Len, don’t forget to mark your opponent on her *goal* side. You have a bad habit of getting dead in front of her or else skittering round just anyhow. And don’t forget to use body-checking. And that goes for the lot of you. You all seemed scared green of using it and it’s quite regular so long as you don’t *charge* your opponent. That is definitely out and counts as a foul. Ruey, keep your eye on your Attack and be ready to receive the ball from Defence unless you’re being marked. The rest of you, keep your heads and remember that lacrosse is a *running* game, so don’t let me see any *sauntering*! One last warning. Don’t try to do everything yourself. There are eleven other players in the team and the prettiest play and the best game is when the ball passes quickly. It’s also the most sensible—less chance of your being heavily marked. Any questions before we go? No? Then come on and put your backs into it and see if we can’t win. We’ve as much chance as the Reds have, remember!”

She ended there and marshalled them into some sort of order before she walked them off to the field. Carrying their crosses, and most of the novices, at any rate, feeling more than a little self-conscious, they marched along, all set to meet the Red team under Vi, alas! Two days before, Hilary had been taken off to the Sanatorium for observation and was there at this very moment, very sorry for herself and fuming because she was missing the match. Mary-Lou and Co. had sent word that morning that they would stroll along in the evening to tell her all about it, but that was a poor substitute in Hilary’s estimation—especially when the sickness had ceased for the time being and she was being kept on a strict diet which excluded most of the dishes she liked best.

The three umpires were already on the field when they got there and Red arrived two minutes later. Miss Burnett, who had been talking earnestly to her fellow-umpires, left them at once and came swiftly to join the teams.

“We’re giving you two twenty-fives,” she said. “Get to your places quickly and we’ll begin. I’ll toss for side. Call, please, Vi.”

Vi called and won the toss. She looked round. There was no wind to speak of and the pale sunshine was moving to the west. She chose school end which would give her team the light at their left side and everyone moved to places at once. At the same moment, a volley of cheers came from the onlookers who thronged the boundaries. Not only were all non-playing members of the school and St. Mildred’s there, as well as all the resident Staff, but all the non-residents had turned up too. In addition, a number of the nurses from the Sanatorium had

come along in their free time and Hilary had told Mary-Lou and Vi that there was talk among the younger nurses of getting up a team among themselves. Several doctors' wives also added to the audience. Joey Maynard had come complete with big double pram in which Phil and Geoff were slumbering sweetly at the moment, and Frau Doktor Courvoisier, still much better known to the school as Bidy O'Ryan, was also there with *her* twins. Little Mrs. Peters had been wheeled along in her invalid chair by her husband Dr. Peters. She was able to walk short distances, but the school was a good mile and a half away from their chalet and it was a cool day. With her were the two adopted Peters children, foregathered with Joey's elder twins and the three eldest of Dr. Morris's family. Making up the group was Mrs. Graves, otherwise Hilary Burn, an Old Girl and one time games mistress at the school and a great favourite with everyone. Her two little girls were in the nursery at home with running colds and Hilary knew better than to bring them and let them loose among the Juniors. "Matey" *would* have had something to say in that event!

"Not that they're really bad," she explained to Joey and the rest. "In fact, Marjorie is practically all right now. But—I know Matey!"

"It's a blessing," Phoebe Peters remarked, "that all the children in our families grow up accustomed to noise. Neither your babies, Joey, nor Bidy's have batted an eyelid for all the cheers."

Joey chuckled. "Mine get broken in very early as a rule. The only exceptions were Felix and Felicity. I had them in early September and the girls and Stephen were all at school for the whole term, so those two were four months old by the time the whole family were at home. Ah!" with a sudden change of subject. "They're ready to start. Centres look very formidable, don't they, with their crosses held at the ready like that! Whoops! There they go!"

Mary-Lou and Vi, who had been toeing the centre line with crosses held at hip level, wood to wood and angle to collar and parallel to the centre line, had drawn them up and away from each other and the game was off to a good start for Red. Vi had been just a shade more on the spot than her opponent. She scooped up the ball, passing it instantly to Janet Youll, her Right Attack and Janet, racing as she went, passed to Third Home with a sure aim.

Third Home caught it smartly, but Len at Third Man, was ready. Dodging neatly, she turned swiftly to tap her opponent's crosse. Susan Branning had not been expecting it from such a tyro and Len got the ball. Racing back, she passed to Mary-Lou who, seeing that she was well-marked, lost no time in passing to her Third Home. Ruey had been on the watch and she made no mistake. She caught the ball deftly and was off down the field in the direction of Red's goal before she saw Ted Grantley, at Third Man, tearing down to catch her, and passed to Lesley Malcolm out on the left.

Lesley was an old hand. She caught the ball but was attacked by Vi Lucy, moving at top speed, who checked her stick just as she tried to shoot to Mary-Lou. The pass was deflected and the ball fell between Anne Purdey of the Blues and Rosamund Lilley of the Reds. Anne caught up the ball with a beautiful cradling movement, but Rosamund was after her and she passed to Marie-Thérèse Georges, who fumbled it and nearly let it drop. She managed to save it, however, but in vain. Janet Youll from St. Mildred's was on to her and the ball fell, Janet catching it and passing with a beautiful long shot to Margot Maynard. Margot got it and set off for Blue's goal with a burst of speed that carried her well away from most of her opponents. Seeing that she was being marked by Third Home, she passed quickly to Hilda Jukes, her own First Home, and Hilda caught it, passed to Vi who came flying and Vi shot to goal in the same movement while Hilda fell back at once, for Blue's goal, Lesley Bethune, was ready and saved brilliantly, passing out to Carmela Walther at Point.

Carmela, on her mettle and aware that she was now marked by Margot, passed straight to Amandine Robinet from St. Mildred's. Amandine passed to Len who was well on to it and

tore down the field before, seeing Geneviève Rosier coming up at a run, she passed to her Centre. Mary-Lou was there and she passed to another “Millie”, Antoinette Duval, who returned the ball to her with a quick movement. Mary-Lou, marked by at least three people, made no mistake. She passed swiftly to Anne, who shot out to Ruey and Ruey sent it on to Len who passed to Mary-Lou again. By this time, they were close to Red’s goal crease and Marie Zetterling was on guard. Mary-Lou did not hesitate. She shot out to Sue Mason at First Home and before Marie, who had expected Mary-Lou to take the shot herself, had time to recover, Sue had shot straight into goal. First blood to the Blues!

There was frantic cheering from the audience as Mary-Lou sent her team back to their places for the second draw. Vi paused a moment before she took up her position on her own side of the line to say, “Jolly good play, Mary-Lou! That was a very neat move!”

Mary-Lou grinned at her, but there was no time for more, for Miss Burnett was eyeing them severely, and they hurriedly took up their places and then the ball was off again. This time, it was all the Reds. Vi herself shot the goal just before the whistle blew for half-time, for Janet Youll was too far back and Rosamund too inexperienced to manage with anyone as good as Lesley Bethune in goal.

The very hot players had their blazers brought to them by friends who rushed up to congratulate everyone on her play, and Miss Ferrars produced a basket with quarters of oranges which she handed round as a slight refreshment. But half-time lasted only five minutes. Miss Ferrars brought her basket round again for the well-sucked peels and when Tina had caught it from her and carried it off the field, the players wiped their hands on their handkerchiefs and took up their places once more.

The play in the second half was not quite so good as in the first half. Some of the younger girls were tiring and passing and dodging were both slower than before. Margot, by this time wild with excitement, excelled herself by catching a pass from Vi neatly and then, instead of passing on to Doris Hill whom she saw to be marked by both Thérèse Rambeau and Sue Mason, tried a terrific shot right across the field to Marie Lemprière. She put her back into it and the result was that the ball flew across the boundary—nearly braining Miss Andrews who had all the Juniors with her at that side—and was finally picked up a good ten yards away.

The whistle went at once and everyone “stood” instantly. Geneviève, the nearest player to where the ball had gone out, picked it up in her crosse and on the word, “Play!” given by Miss Ferrars, the nearest umpire, she shot it quite neatly into the field and play went on.

Lesley Malcolm got it and passed almost at once to Anne Purdey who passed on to Mary-Lou. Mary-Lou shot out to her Right Wing Defence, Marie-Thérèse, but Janet Youll was on the spot. She dodged with a swift body-turn and Marie-Thérèse, still very much of a novice, lost her head *and* the ball. Janet caught it up, ran some yards with it and then passed to Vi who shot out to Rosamund. Rosamund got her crosse to it only just in time, but Len was there to check her crosse. It fell and Len picked it up, passed immediately to Mary-Lou, who went baldheaded for the centre line where she passed to Antoinette Duval from St. Mildred’s. Antoinette took it beautifully. She was almost unmarked for the moment and she went at her best pace towards the Red’s goal. But both Susan Branning at Third Home and Maeve Bettany at Point marked her so she shot out to Anne on the left. The pass fell short and Ted Grantley was there and back the ball went towards the Blue goal. Ted was tackled by Len and Mary-Lou caught the ball, passing out to Lesley Malcolm at Left Defence Wing and Lesley was a seasoned player. She raced back to Red Goal at top speed, only passing when she saw Vi coming up. Len got it, and made a valiant effort to pass to Anne Purdey, but shot too far to the right and it fell to Rosamund. Rosamund was tackled by Ruey and once more the Blues got possession. However, fight as hard as they might, no more goals fell to anyone and when the whistle blew for Time, the match was a draw of one-all and everyone was short of breath and

tired, except, perhaps, the Goalkeepers and they, if they had been playing properly, ought to have been more tired, mentally, than anyone else.

Mary-Lou, calling her team together, started the cheers for the Reds, which cheers were returned in good earnest by the Reds for the Blues. The match was over.

The two Heads came on to the field to congratulate everyone on her play and the umpires, their duties ended, fraternised with their own kind.

“Our girls haven’t done too badly,” Peggy Burnett said with carefully restrained pride to Miss Nalder who had been games mistress at the school in its very early days and was now at St. Mildred’s where she not only saw to all physical culture, but also took musical appreciation and dramatics.

“Very well indeed, considering what a short time they have been playing,” Miss Nalder said generously. “You’ll have to keep an eye on some of them—Margot Maynard, for instance. She has the makings of a player, but ‘wild’ doesn’t describe some of her play. And Len and the Grantley child and that French girl—what’s her name? Amandine Robinet? Thanks!—and Maeve Bettany all need to work up their speed. By the way, that new child Ruey What’s-her-name, has a lovely cradling movement. She’s been well-taught. But she must learn to watch for attacks from other players. And Marie Zetterling ought to have work in the field. Her stickwork needs a lot of practice. When she’s better there, she ought to make a very decent Goalkeeper. She keeps her wits about her and her eyes on everyone. I congratulate you, Peggy. You do credit to my teaching in the early days!”

Peggy grinned. “That’s a good many years ago! But thanks, all the same.”

“Don’t mention it!” Miss Nalder said with a chuckle. “And now, lead me somewhere where I can wash and tidy. My hair feels *wild!*”

They went off, chatting amicably together. The school, led by the prefects, trailed along to the Splasheries, the grandees of the school taking St. Mildred’s with them and Mary-Lou and Vi calmly resuming oldtime occupations and acting as whippers-in at the end of the lengthy procession. Married ladies and mothers departed for Freudesheim where Joey was offering “an English tea” and where all the babies and small fry were whisked off to the playroom by Joey’s two right-hands, to quote herself, Anna and Rösli. Joey’s party broke up early, however, for bedtime came early for the tinies up at the Görnetz Platz. Hilary Graves, in particular, remarked that she had been away from her pair quite long enough.

“Marjorie is a young demon,” she remarked as she pulled on her coat. “I’ll be thankful when she’s old enough to go to school. The only time I feel really safe where she’s concerned is when she’s asleep in bed.”

“I can imagine it,” Joey said emphatically. “I haven’t forgotten what happened to Bruno’s nice new chain!”

Whereat, both ladies went off into peals of laughter before Joey advised trying what spanking would do. “The only thing that has ever held Mike and Felix, and it did Margot good, too, when she was Marjorie’s age. You try it, Hilary.”

“Oh, go and teach your grandmother to suck eggs!” Hilary retorted. “I spanked her good and hearty the day I found her slapping Lois and she’s never done it since. But she finds other things to do,” she added cheerfully. “Now I’m going. Congrats by the way, on the play of both Len and Margot. They ought to make players. What about Con? Doesn’t *she* play?”

“Oh, yes, but she wasn’t good enough for the team—or so she told me,” Joey said serenely. “She’s a cat of another colour. Odd how different those three are and in so many ways! Going? Goodbye, then. I’ll be seeing you!”

Over at the school, the great topic was the match, of course. The Millies had been invited to Kaffee und Kuchen, and Karen, the cook and head of the kitchen staff, had bestirred herself to some purpose and the tables were laden with plates of pastries, sandwiches with varied and

delicious fillings and, as a finishing touch, ices, made in the new deep freeze which had been installed that summer. Everyone ate with exclamations of surprise and delight. Not that that kept them from talking over the event of the afternoon. Indeed, they made so much noise that Miss Annersley, who was entertaining all the Staff of both branches of the school to a similar luscious meal in her pretty drawing-room, had to send Rosalie Dene along to the Speisesaal with a request that the girls would lower their voices. They could be heard right into her own annexe and, she imagined, as far as Freudesheim. They were quieter after that, and as soon as the meal was ended, Miss Wilson appeared to request her own girls to return to St. Mildred's, especially if Mary-Lou and Co. wanted to go to the Sanatorium to see Hilary. The school proper cleared the tables and then dispersed to their dormitories to change for the evening.

"I hope," Len said as she brushed out her chestnut locks before plaiting them into a loose pigtail which she secured with an enormous bow halfway down, "that we don't have dancing and games tonight. I'm tired and I'm stiff and all I want to do is to sit down somewhere and keep quiet until bedtime."

Most of the teams felt the same way, so it was a relief when they streamed downstairs to Hall to find that the Staff, foreseeing this state of affairs, had arranged for progressive games with tiny prizes at the end. They all settled down thankfully to making up lists of various articles, all beginning with the same letter; seeing how many shorter words they could manage from one long one; building card-houses; fishing for boot buttons off a plate with bent pins tied to a length of sewing cotton, and all the other competitions they knew on such occasions.

This went on till Abendessen and Prayers, after which they had a short singsong before they were dismissed to early bed. It is on record that no one grumbled for once. Everyone was too tired, for the lookers-on had wearied themselves with their excitement.

"Well, what do you think of lacrosse *now*?" Francie Wilford demanded of Joan Baker as they finished setting the forms back in their proper rows before leaving Hall.

"Oh, it's a good game," Joan owned. "I don't say I wouldn't like to be able to play sometimes. But hockey for mine. It's not nearly the hard work lacrosse is."

"Oh, you're hopeless!" said Len who had overheard both question and answer. "It's no use, Francie. Even if she did ever come to prefer it to hockey, she'd stick to it that she really liked hockey best. It's the way she's made," she added sadly.

"No sauce, young Len!" Joan retorted vigorously. "There; that's the last and I'm for bed. Come on, Francie! What are you waiting for? The Head said we were to go up as soon as we'd finished and we've finished."

Con, who had been helping to tidy up oddments of thread and pins, came up and slipped an arm through Francie's. "She's waiting for me, seeing we're in the same dormy," she said. "Come on, Francie! Here are Margot and the rest. Don't forget to go quietly. The babies ought to be asleep by this time and Matey will have a lot to say if we wake them up."

Francie went off with Con and Joan was left to follow. She slept in Cornflower which was on an upper floor. But she made a face to herself as she went. Apart from Rosamund Lilley whom she had known before they both came to the Chalet School, she had no real friends. It had struck her that Francie was in very much the same condition and they might as well "pal up" as she called it to herself. She had begun making slight overtures to the other girl this term and now and then, Francie had responded. Joan was not to know that the younger girl's jealousy of Margot Maynard's friendships was at the bottom of it. Neither could she guess that Mary-Lou with the quick eyes had seen her this afternoon and, catching hold of Con just before she left, since Len and Margot were elsewhere, had said quickly, "Keep an eye on Francie Wilford, Con. I think she needs it."

Con was doing just that. She and Francie talked vigorously all the time they were undressing and Margot was drawn into their chatter. Meanwhile, in Gentian, Len, in the

intervals of undressing, washing, doing her hair and saying her prayers, was also talking of the lacrosse.

“You’ve done something for the school, Ruey,” she said. “If it hadn’t been for you, we might never have thought of reviving the lacrosse and it would have been a tremendous pity, for I do like it so much and so does nearly everyone else.”

Ruey grinned. “I daresay someone else would have dreamed it up if I hadn’t. Now I’m going to say my prayers. I’m half-dead and so ought you to be after this afternoon. All I want is to get to bed and just stay there. Shush!” With which she dropped to her knees and, most of them having reached the same stage, there was silence in the dormitory for the next five minutes. Then the first bell, the warning for Lights Out rang and they all clambered into bed and settled themselves down.

“Goo’night, everyone!” Ruey said, smothering a yawn. “I shall sleep without rocking tonight. Hi-yooh!” She wound up with another yawn which was echoed on all sides. Con, the nearest to the door, switched off the lights and when the prefect on duty peered in, everyone was well away. The practice match had certainly been a success from every point of view.

CHAPTER XV

HALF-TERM HAPPENINGS

The next excitement for the school was the news which somehow leaked over from St. Mildred's that Hilary Bennet had "twisted something inside", as Josette put it, and must undergo an operation.

"Oh, *poor* Hilary!" the prefects exclaimed with one voice when they heard.

"I say! She's always been mad to do P.T. This won't stop her, will it?" Clare Kennedy added anxiously.

None of them knew, but Barbara Chester got up from her seat in the prefects' room and left it, quite unheeding the cries of, "Where are you going, Barbara? What's bitten you?" which rose from the rest. She was back ten minutes later, accompanied—and this was a shock—by Matey.

"I don't know who's been letting cats out of bags to you people," the latter said abruptly, "but for your comfort, the operation is not serious and it will not affect Hilary's chances of taking up physical training later on. She will have to take care and avoid any specially strenuous exercise for the next few months, but by the summer, she ought to be as strong as ever again."

"Oh, Matron, thanks more than we can say for coming and telling us!" Josette exclaimed. "We didn't know just what it might mean and we all *do* know that Hilary's one aim and object in life is to take her training and then teach. It would have messed up her whole career if it—well, if it had been really serious."

"No more serious than it was for your Aunt a year ago," Matron told her.

"The same thing you mean?" Josette asked, startled.

"Not quite; but very much the same thing. Now stop worrying, all of you, and think of something else! I never knew such people for hunting up trouble!" With which she marched off, leaving them all greatly relieved.

It wasn't quite as easy as that, though. For one thing, Hilary was a motherless girl and her father, one of Reuter's correspondents, was in Pakistan at the time. Cables flew between the Görnetz Platz and Karachi, for Hilary was under age and his permission to administer deep anaesthesia—"What's that?" Christine Vincent demanded, to be told that roughly, it meant chloroform—had to be obtained. In the end, all was well and she was operated on on the Saturday following the match. The operation was a complete success and by Monday, the patient was feeling well enough to be decidedly cross because she was missing so much.

"And *that's* a jolly good job!" Josette remarked to Gwen when they heard. "Oh, not that's she's cross, you ape! But that she's evidently coming along nicely. Now we can think of other things. Do you realise that we start half term on Thursday?"

"Gosh! So we do! Well, all your crowd can be sure of a thrilling time."

"We can! Peggy is to be married on Saturday morning, so we're all going straight to the Quadrant. Our family leave there as soon as the bride and bridegroom depart for their honeymoon—which lasts only four days. They sail for Quebec the following Thursday. Auntie Joey and Uncle Jack and the kids are staying on at the Quadrant until Monday but they're crossing to France on the Monday morning—flying, I may say, as far as Paris—and coming on from there by train. My Uncle Dick, Peggy's dad, has a pal who is a charter pilot and he's agreed to take the whole lot over as he has a job that day. We three and Maevie are joining them and coming on by the first train we can catch to Basle. If you ask me," Josette finished

pensively, “we look like spending the best part of the hol going and coming. But we couldn’t miss Peggy’s wedding—the first in the family!”

“Still, you’ll have all the fun of the wedding,” Gwen pointed out. “Mind you bring back some of Peggy’s cake for us! By the way,” she went on, “what’s happening to young Ruey? *She* isn’t going with you, is she?”

“Of course she is! Auntie Joey counts her as one of the family. You know, if ever that loopy dad of hers *does* have a shot at space travel, he’s hardly likely to get back safely. It’s just as well he had the sense to ask Auntie and Uncle to be guardians to her and the two boys.”

When Thursday arrived, everyone was going off as early as possible and by half-past nine, all who went that way were in Basle where the Maynards’ party said goodbye to the rest. They were flying as far as Paris, Joey having flatly refused to do the whole journey by train.

“With young Ailie and my own elder twins given to train-sickness on occasion, though they never seem to turn a hair in a plane?” she had said firmly. “Not on your Nelly! We fly to Paris, anyhow. Mercifully, I had that gorgeous cheque last week from my publishers, bless them, so I’ll go shags with you over the fare for our own crowd, Jack, and Madge and Jem can just stand the damage for their own three. Dick agreed to the flying at once for Maeve. It’ll shorten the journey enormously and with three babies as well as the twins to see to, that’ll be a boon!”

It was a glorious day when they started from Basle, but as they neared Le Bourget and began to descend, they found that it was anything *but* over Paris. They landed in a drizzle and a wind was moaning over the long runways giving promise of an uneasy crossing from Calais, to say the least of it. Joey took one look at the weather when they had left the plane and then issued her orders.

“Jack! You go off and see if it’s possible to fly to England. I’m not taking all this crowd by sea if I know it! I don’t want to arrive with at least half the party green and limp! We’ll have to economise when we get home again, but we’re going for a wedding, let me remind you! Hilda,” she turned to the two Heads who, with Rosalie Dene and Mdlle de Lachennais as representatives of the school staff were also invited, “what will you folk do?”

“Go by train and boat as we arranged previously,” Miss Annersley returned. “And there’s no need for you to take the triplets and Ruey and Josette with you, either. They can come on with us, so you’ll be saved that much extra expense. They’re all good sailors. Give me their tickets, Jack, before we all forget.”

“Haven’t got them,” he said laconically. “I intended to book to London from Paris. Here!” he fished out his wallet. “You’ll have to see to ’em yourself. That ought to cover it, I fancy. You go over to the restaurant, Jo, while I see about our seats in the afternoon plane if possible. It’s short notice, though.”

“Yes; but it’s not the tourist season,” she told him as she and Sybil between them picked up the big Moses Ark in which the babies were sleeping.

He went off with a chuckle and Miss Wilson, picking up small Cecil, said firmly, “Now, come along, Joey. I’ll wire the Quadrant to expect you crowd earlier than we said, so you needn’t bother about that. Rosalie will see to the rest of the business with me and then we must all get off. You don’t want to miss the aero-bus into Paris, I suppose and nor do—Good gracious! Evadne Lannis!” as a slim, chic woman came whirling up to them with outstretched hands and exclamations bursting out of her lips.

“Evvv!” Joey cried. “What on earth are you doing here? I thought you were at home.”

Evadne Lannis, as she once was, but now Lady Watson, laughed. “It’s a case of history repeating itself, I guess. Do you remember how Poppa and I met you at Calais on the quay when you first went out to the Oberland?^[14] We were expecting someone by the boat and she didn’t turn up and then I saw you and your family. We were expecting an aunt of my

husband's to join us in Paris for a few days, but I guess the weather set her thinking again. Anyhow, she hasn't come and I was just making for the car when I saw you and Dr. Jack. My, Joey! How your girls have grown! And are these the latest? Let me have a peep!"

[14] *Joey Goes to the Oberland.*

"Not likely in this weather! We're going to the restaurant to wait for Jack and have coffee. Join us, and we'll give you all the hanes," Joey coaxed, using the Welsh word for gossip as she had often done when they were living near the Welsh border.

"You can count our crowd out," Miss Annersley said. "Here come Rosalie and Nell and if you folk don't mean to catch that bus, we do. Come along, girls! There isn't any time for loitering."

With this, the party divided, the Staff with the triplets, Ruey and Josette making for the aero-bus into Paris, and Joey and Evadne with the others turning away to seek the big restaurant where they had coffee and cakes while they waited for Jack.

Evadne was able to see the new twins, once they were safely under cover, and exclaim over them with such delight, that Joey shot a quering glance at her. Then the doctor arrived to announce that he had succeeded in booking the seats for the afternoon plane and had also rung up a favourite hotel in London to book rooms for the night since he refused to consider a night journey for the small fry.

He declined an invitation from Evadne to drive into Paris in the car, saying that he meant to go and look up an old friend while he had the chance.

"I'll meet you here half-an-hour before the plane goes," he said. "No, Evvy! Sorry, but I really do want to see Legros. I'll meet your husband another time. Now where's this car of yours? Come along and I'll see you safely into it. Give me those youngsters and you hang on to Cecil, Maeve and Sybs."

He led the way to the car-park where the big touring car belonging to the Watsons was waiting in charge of a chauffeur.

"Edgar won't let me drive in Paris," the hostess explained as she climbed in and held out her arms for little Cecil. "Come along to Aunt Evvy, sugar-pie! Sybs, there's room for you beside me. Joey, can you manage with Maeve and the others?"

"Easily! We're quite accustomed to packing in," Joey laughed as she took the Ark on her lap with an elder twin on each side of her while Maeve squatted on one of the folding seats. The chauffeur finished securing their cases to the luggage carrier and then scrambled into his seat and they were off to the accompaniment of shrieks from two indignant babies who had been rudely aroused by all this hustle. The shrieks continued until they reached the Watsons' private apartments in the big hotel in the centre of Paris where, at long last, Joey was able to administer bottles and gag them properly, to quote herself.

"Sorry for the yells," she said when at last the pair were settled comfortably in the bedroom while Sybil and Maeve were amusing themselves with magazines in the salon. "Towel, please, Evvy, and you'd better have one yourself if you want to give Phil her bottle."

Evvy produced the towels and then took little Phil and the bottle and proceeded with the business of feeding her.

"You do have such lovely babies, Joey," she said. "Little beauts, this pair!"

"They're not too bad," the complacent mother agreed. Then suddenly, "For mercy's sake, girl, bubble that baby or she'll regurgitate! Don't you know *anything* about babies?"

As she spoke, she threw the towel over her shoulder, laid Geoff over it and patted him briskly on the back. Evadne looked at her open-mouthed, but meekly did her best to copy her. When both babies were feeding again, she looked shyly at her friend.

"I guess I don't know anything much about babies yet, but — —"

“Evvy! Do you mean—Oh!, I’m so glad for you!” Joey cried, her back eyes glowing warmly. “What wonderful news! When, by the way?”

“Oh, not until the end of April. I guessed you’d be pleased. Don’t tell anyone yet, will you? No one knows but Edgar and me—and now you.” Evadne paused before she went on, “I guess I’m more than glad. I was afraid I might be too old.”

“Rubbish! I’ve heard of someone who had her first baby when she was well over forty and she’s had two more since. You’re younger than I am, let me remind you. *I*,” quoth Joey, “was a prefect when *you* were a mere Middle—and a very wicked one at that!”

Evadne laughed. “We did keep you all on your toes, I guess,” she owned. “Say, Joey, what did you mean by ‘regurgitate’?”

“Bring the milk back. Babies always do that if you let them feed too quickly. Their tummies can’t take it in a hurry.” At which point Geoff illustrated and Evadne hastily withdrew the bottle from Phil in case of accidents and “bubbled” her again.

“There’s an awful lot to learn,” she sighed when at last the pair had been put back into their basket, warm and satisfied and already asleep.

“Oh, heaps,” Joey agreed. “But it’ll come. You’ve had *one* lesson today, anyhow. Now let’s go back to the girls and First Twins and catch up on the news.”

They were still busy gossiping when Sir Edgar himself came in and Evadne introduced him with great pride. He was a tall, grey-headed man, very straight-backed and with a well-drilled look. But he had a humorous mouth and very kind eyes and it was clear to Joey, at least, that he thought the world of his wife. He expressed himself deeply disappointed to hear that Jack was not joining them, but insisted on driving the whole party to Le Bourget when it was time to go and the two men met for a few minutes and quite obviously liked each other.

There was no standing about, for the weather had worsened and the rain was coming down in torrents. The two men attended to everything needful while Joey and the girls got the tinies into the plane and took their seats. Then Jack arrived and a few minutes later they were off, headed for England and rising well above the storm.

“Quite an exciting beginning, wasn’t it?” Joey asked her sister-in-law next day when they were awaiting the arrival of the other half of the party.

It went on being exciting. Ruey had been all set to feel shy and out of things, but no one had much chance of that sort of thing at The Quadrant. And then, to her wild surprise and delight, Roger and Roddy turned up with the Heads’ party. Dick Bettany had written to the High Master to send them along so that they might see their sister for a day or two and as the two half-terms coincided, all was well. Ruey’s cup was brimful after that.

The wedding on Saturday was a delightful affair and Peggy made a picture of a bride in her ivory-white dress with the point d’Alençon of her mother’s wedding-veil framing her lovely, serious face. The autumn tints of flowers and dresses suited every one of the bridesmaids and even Mollie Bettany did *not* cry during the service though she looked sad for a minute or two. But Joey, seated next to her, was on the watch and she joggled her sister-in-law smartly at the right moment.

“It’s a pity, though, that she had to have Bride and Polly Winterton for the leading pair,” Joey observed when the Russells had set off for their home in the Welsh mountains, taking with them the Staff as Madge wanted a talk on school matters with them, and the rest of the party were seated in the dining-room, having a nondescript meal composed of the remnants of the wedding feast—all but the nursery folk who had been put to bed an hour earlier. “Peg’s such a tiny creature and those two are such lamp-posts!”

“Lamp-post yourself!” cried her outraged niece. “I’m no taller than you are and Polly is a good inch shorter. Lamp-posts, indeed!”

Jack, who was sitting next to her, did not improve matters by patting the irate Bride on the head.

“Calm yourself—calm yourself, my child!” he said soothingly. “In comparison with Peggy you two *are* lamp-posts and there’s no getting away from it! Not,” he added reflectively, “that Joey herself is anything but a lamp-post—by comparison! In fact, the only people shorter than the bride were her train-bearers. Still, they all looked very well and the first wedding among the younger generation has been a howling success. I suppose yours will be the next, Bride?”

“Then you suppose wrong!” Bride retorted. “We aren’t going to get married for at least four or five years to come. How do you imagine we could live? We’re both at the beginning of things. There’s plenty of time for Sybs or even Rix or David to give us the second wedding before then.”

“Not me!” said dark, silent Rix, Peggy’s twin brother, who was at St. Thomas Hospital in training for a doctor. “Not David, either. I can hear Uncle Jem on the subject if David produced a blushing bride at his stage. Doctors don’t marry early as a rule—can’t!”

“It’s been a gorgeous half-term, hasn’t it?” Len remarked when they said goodbye to Joey at Freudesheim where they had wound up the holiday with a magnificent tea provided by Anna and Rösl. “I’m glad we were able to be at Peggy’s wedding *and* to be bridesmaids!”

“It’s been a wonderful time, altogether,” Ruey declared warmly. “It *was* decent of Mr. Bettany to think of sending for the boys like that. I—I’ve missed them.”

Joey cast her a worried look. During a short period in private, Evadne had asked her about Ruey and when he heard about the professor, Sir Edgar Watson had looked very grave. He had heard something about this mad attempt on space and, as he told Joey, it was an almost suicidal project. However, Ruey knew nothing about that and was to know nothing. Everyone had decided on that.

“If you four don’t get off, you’re going to be late,” she said. “Goodbye, all of you. I must fly! I can hear Geoff!” And she turned and ran.

The four schoolgirls looked after her doubtfully, but she slammed the door in their faces, so they walked demurely down the drive and round by the road. In England, it had been fine weather all the week-end, but to judge by appearances, it had never ceased raining since they left the Görnetz Platz and water was standing about the garden in pools which meant no taking their usual short cut by the gate in the side hedge.

“We’ve got the whole of the second tier of Peggy’s cake for the school,” Margot gloated as they went. “It was a huge affair altogether, so there’ll be enough for everyone to have a sliver.”

“And Maeve promised to bring all the photos,” Con added. “She isn’t coming back before Friday, is she? That should give her plenty of time to get them developed and printed. I hope they’ve come out well.”

“With all the snaps that everyone insisted on taking?” Ruey chuckled. “There ought to be at least a dozen decent ones. What was that about the Records, Margot? Something Sybil said. Something about the best of the happy pair must come for the Records. I meant to ask at the time, but there was so much going on, I forgot. What did she mean?”

“Do you mean to say that you’ve been here a whole half-term and don’t know about the Records?” Len exclaimed. “It’s time you did! We keep records of every Old Girl we can find—details of what they’ve done since they left school, you know, and photos and snaps to illustrate. You must get hold of them some wet Sunday when we can’t go out and have a look through them. Mamma is the first as she was the first pupil and there are hundreds of others, of course. It was one of the ideas we had for celebrating the school’s coming of age.”

“What a smashing one!” Ruey exclaimed, using strictly forbidden slang.

“Better be careful,” Con warned her. “That’s verboten.”

“I forgot. Well, what a decent one, then. Why did Maeve stay behind?”

“Because Auntie Mollie was feeling on the lonesome side,” Margot said. “Bride and the boys couldn’t stay and Daph’s still not much more than a baby. Peggy’s been at home for ages now and Auntie’s going to miss her horribly. Having Maeve for the first few days will help to take the edge off it.”

“Oh, I see. Yes; I can understand that.” Ruey cast a fleeting thought to her brothers.

Len guessed it, and changed the subject. “It’s getting frightfully late and Matey will want to know why we haven’t turned up sooner. In any case, I want to have everything cleared away before the rest turn up. There’ll be no peace for us when they do, for they’ll all be dying to hear about Peggy’s wedding. Scram!”

They scrambled!

CHAPTER XVI

A WALK THAT WENT WRONG

Needless to state the people who had been at the Winterton-Bettany wedding were nearly mobbed for accounts of it. When Maeve finally arrived back at school, so many people wanted to see the copies of the snaps and photos she had brought, that she finally went to the study to seek permission to pin them up on the notice board in Hall so that everyone could study them at leisure. The Head laughed and demanded to see them on her own account. But when she and Rosalie Dene had finished exclaiming and commenting, she reminded Maeve that Hall notice board was meant for notices only. However, she asked Rosalie to hunt in the stock-room and the result was a large and very elderly board, long since discarded, which was handed to Maeve. That young woman carried it off to the prefects' room and she and her compeers spent a joyful hour arranging the snaps before it was borne downstairs and hung in Hall. An equally joyful time was spent by most people on the Saturday evening in studying the various groups and what Betty Landon called "the singletons". The bridesmaids came in for any amount of criticism and admiration as well and, to quote Nancy Wilmot in the staff-room later on, a good time was had by all.

The following Wednesday night, all preparation was excused, for the Christmas Play had arrived and Miss Annersley proposed to read it to the school at large before giving out the parts. This move met with approval from everyone from Josette down to little Andrée de Chaumont, who was the youngest girl in the school. When the bell rang for them to go to Hall, everyone was beaming—except Francie who had gone about ever since half-term like a sulky bear. Miss Annersley read the play which had been written by Joey Maynard. On this occasion, she had left the beaten track of pageant scenes, and produced a straight play. All the same, she had kept the Christmas message of love and peace running through the plot like a golden thread.

Everyone was very quiet while the play was being read. Thereafter, the Head gave out the parts. Ruey, to her great delight, had a small speaking one, though she had expected only a walking-on one as befitted a new girl. But she had proved during the literature lessons that she could read well. She had an excellent memory and a gift for dramatics and no one was going to overlook that sort of thing.

Of the rest of the clan, all three Maynards had speaking parts, Len and Margot with long ones and Con with a short, but very important one. Ted Grantley and Sue Mason were thrilled to be cast as boys; five of the prefects were men; Ricki Fry who had to wear large glasses, the result of an accident to her eyes during her first term at school, was an old schoolmaster. Francie was to be an old woman.

It was a good character part and Francie, like Ruey, had a gift for acting. Unfortunately, she took a dislike to it from the first. What she wanted was Ruey's much smaller but far more sympathetic part. She grumbled and growled and broadcast her discontent to all and sundry until Margot, hearing her, came down on her.

"What on earth are you grumbling about now? You've got a jolly decent part—one of the important ones, too. Your Old Woman has a lot to say and she's a complete yell in places. Why can't you be content when everyone else is?"

"It's a disgusting part—a cranky, bad-tempered old woman, always growling and fussing," said Francie, not seeing how very apt the part was, though no one had thought of that when the dramatis personae were selected.

Margot saw it and, thoughtless as usual, was on the point of saying so when Ricki Fry, with a good guess at what was coming, hurriedly intervened. "It's no worse than mine. I'm a snuffy, cross old schoolmaster. What's worse, I've got to have a *beard* stuck all over the lower part of my face. However I'm going to be heard when I've got to speak through a mass of face-fungus like that is more than I can say."

"You'll have to practise yelling up," someone interposed. "And you pipe down, Francie! You're always growling about something or other. Give it a rest—do!"

Francie "piped down", but she was still in a highly ruffled state of mind. It did not improve when she asked Margot to be her partner for the next morning's walk and Margot said, "Sorry, but I can't! I'm booked to Ruey for the rest of the week. You'll have to wait till Monday. I'll fix up with you then, if you like." Then she ran off after Ruey to demand to be told what the prep was for English.

"I was having my sickening remedials with Burnie and I missed the end of the lesson," she reminded her friend. She was still not reconciled to the fact that she was growing so quickly that there seemed some risk of her outgrowing her strength and, which was as bad, developing a slight curvature of the spine. Dr. Graves had ordered remedial exercises for her and, knowing careless Margot, Peggy Burnett insisted that she come every day to do those exercises under proper supervision.

"I'll show you," Ruey said. "Come to the form-room and I'll give you my prep book. It's paraphrasing."

"It would be!" Margot groaned. She loathed both paraphrasing and *précis*, though she could write a good essay and enjoyed doing it.

They went off together and Francie stood staring after them, no very pleasant look on her face. The others saw it, of course, but set it down to her disgust with her part in the play and thought no more of it. As Priscilla Dawbarn had said, she was always growling about something.

This happened on the Friday after the reading of the play. Saturday proved to be a grey day, dry enough and with a fresh wind, but with no sunshine anywhere. The knowing ones cocked their eyes at the sky and prophesied rain sooner or later. As it had rained on and off most of the week, no one was surprised and only the "games-mad" folk bothered to complain because games were definitely off for that day. Even the *en-tout-cas* netball courts were sodden and the playing-fields were seas of mud. Hence, the walk for which Francie had tried to book Margot. In the end, she left the question of a partner so long that she had to be content with Geneviève Rosier from Inter V. Geneviève was a delightful girl, but she had come to the school that term speaking nothing but her native French and she still found it hard to express herself easily in anything else.

With the coming of November and wet weather, colds had begun to show themselves. Matey and the other matrons were always strict about infection and anyone who was at all "sniffley" was promptly isolated, so instead of the eighty-odd girls who made up the three Fifth forms, there were less than sixty of them. As three of the Staff had been caught using their handkerchiefs suspiciously often the day before, steps had been taken with them, too, and the upshot was that since Kathy Ferrars and Nancy Wilmot, whose "free" Saturday it was, had betaken themselves to Basle on the Friday night in order to attend some lectures at the University, Staff was very short. Mdlle de Lachennais had therefore offered to be responsible for all members of the Fifths for the afternoon walk. Miss Annersley had been grateful and agreed at once. If she had known what was going to happen on that walk, she would have declined the offer on the spot!

They set off along the motor-road, headed for Ste. Cecilie, a hamlet about four miles from the school. Mountain paths and scrambles were forbidden today, for everywhere was wringing

wet. It meant the highroad for everyone and that did not give much choice for walks.

Since they were all Seniors who might be expected to behave themselves, Mdlle. only waited until they were well away from the Platz itself before she gave the word to break ranks and allowed them to wander along in groups of three or four—never any more—with the usual provisos. They must be ready to get to the side of the road if they heard any traffic coming; they must keep well away from the outer side of the road for that fell almost sheer in places to the valley far below; they must not yell or laugh loudly; they must get neither too far ahead nor lag too far behind. All this was the general rule and everyone expected it. Mdlle. sent Len Maynard, Rosamund Lilley and Jo Scott, all girls to be trusted, to the head of the procession with orders to see that no one went past them. She herself fell to the rear with Jeanne Daudet and Gabrielle Meynolles as companions, ready to act as “sheepdog”.

“This is *not* a path,” Odette Mercier remarked as she carefully skirted round a big pool extending nearly right across the road. “It is many little lakes, all not far apart, n’est-ce-pas, Ricki?”

“You’ve said it,” Ricki agreed as she took a flying leap over a miniature sample of Odette’s “lakes”. “When it rains here, it rains and no mistake!”

Needless to say, at least half the girls following them copied her example. Mdlle. laughed and called them kangaroos, but there was no one else in sight, so she let it go so long as they refrained from splashing themselves and each other.

Margot, Con and Ruey had joined up and were chattering together. Francie, thankful to have got rid of Geneviève, who insisted on speaking French all the time to her and had gone off to make one of a quartette with other French girls, looked round. She was the only one alone at the moment and that was forbidden. She made a beeline for the Maynards and Ruey, determined to give the latter no possible chance to be more with Margot than she could help.

Margot was *not* welcoming. “I thought you were with Geneviève?” she said.

“So I was and I’ve had enough of her,” Francie returned. “Natter—natter—natter all the time and always in French! I’ve *had* her! What were you three talking about so keenly with your heads close together?”

There was a silence. As a matter of fact, the three had been discussing Professor Richardson’s plans. So far, Ruey had had one letter from him and one only. That had been so illegible that she had given up trying to decipher it in despair. She told herself that at any rate, he must still be on the earth or someone would have told either them or Dr. and Mrs. Maynard and contented herself with that. But that was five weeks ago. Since then, she had heard nothing and only that morning she had had a letter from her elder brother, Roger, asking if she or the Maynards had heard from their father as neither he nor Roddy had had any word since the first week of the term. Ruey had kept her private affairs very much to herself and the two Maynards knew that she did not want anyone else in the school to hear about them. So when Francie put her blunt question, they were in a quandary.

Francie noted the silence and reddened with anger. Her queer eyes flashed and her lips were primmed to a thin, straight line. “Oh, if it’s private affairs, please don’t let *me* interfere!” she said sharply. “I wouldn’t do that for the world! And I’m not anxious to know about Ruey Richardson’s family or anything like that.”

Ruey *still* did not like her and she had the temper that goes with red hair—so had Margot, for that matter. Ruey was slower to take fire, perhaps, but that was all. On this occasion, Margot did *not* see what business it was of Francie Wilford’s what they had been discussing and she said so and not so pleasantly as she might have done.

“You’re quite right: it *was* private business and has nothing to do with anyone else.” Then she added, “For heavens’ sake, Francie, don’t *you* turn into a poke-nose! *One* of that kind’s

quite enough for the Seniors! Betty Landon always wants to know the far end of everything. Don't *you* start!"

Now whatever else had been in Francie's mind, it had certainly not been curiosity. Con opened her lips to try to smooth matters over, but the furious Francie was before her. "Oh, indeed! Sorry if I seem to be inquisitive!"

"Then you shouldn't ask questions about things that have nothing to do with you!" Ruey retorted smartly. "The business is mine, if you must know. I'm not saying anything more and neither are Con and Margot."

"Oh, I wouldn't ask about any business of your High and Mightiness's for anything!" Francie struck back. "Well, if that's all it is, Margot, what about joining me for a while? Con and Ruey can be company enough for each other I should think."

"Would you, indeed!" Margot flung at her. "Then you can go on thinking! We three have a good deal to talk about so I'm afraid you must whistle for my company for the present."

Con had been glancing back uneasily. Mdlle. was a fair distance away, but in their temper, both Margot and Francie had raised their voices. "Pipe down!" she said now. "If you yell like that, Mdlle. will hear and come bursting along to ask what it's all in aid of. And for the matter of that, I don't quite know myself. What's biting you, Francie? You're always going off the deep end for next to nothing. Why?" Her deep brown eyes grew suddenly soft. "Is anything wrong, and can we help?" she asked in a different tone.

Francie choked, but she was still too angry to do more than take the warning. She still had enough sense left for that. She lowered her voice, but her manner was as insolent as it could well be as she replied, "Nothing's biting me. There's *nothing* wrong. But Ruey Richardson seems to think that she's the only person who has any right to Margot's friendship. Other people would like a look-in sometimes." She swung round on the staring Margot to demand, "Well? What about it? Are you coming with me or not?"

Margot had had time to pull herself together. "*Not!*" she said emphatically. "Whatever you may think, I want to talk to Ruey and I *don't* want to talk to you. So put that on your needles and knit it!"

Con tried again. "There'll be heaps of time left for you to talk to Margot later, Francie. Why don't you join up with some of the others for the present. Then you and Margot might pair off going back and Ruey can stay with me, won't you, Rue?" She tucked her hand through Ruey's arm and gave it a warning squeeze.

Ruey knew it was a hint to keep her own temper, but she had to swallow hard before she replied as pleasantly as she could, "Yes, of course. You don't mind, do you, Margot? Especially as Francie seems to have something important to say to you."

Now though various past events had caused Margot to make far more strenuous efforts to control her temper than she had ever done before, she was still not very far from the days when she flared up over everything. She was not pleased, either, with the assumption that Ruey would let Francie have her for the chat she wanted just for the asking or without consulting her first. There was a good deal of pride in Margot's make-up and she strongly resented being "pushed about", as she called it, by anyone. So instead of helping to smooth things over as she might have done, she was up in arms at once.

"Don't mind, indeed! Of course I mind! You all seem to think I haven't any right of choice of my own! I'm quite capable of saying who I'll walk with, thank you! And Francie isn't that person now! So now you know—all of you!"

"Oh! So that's the way of it!" Francie cried. She threw all caution to the winds and her voice rose to perilously near a shout as she added furiously, "So that's how much you value my friendship is it, Margot Maynard?"

"Yes it is!" Margot was blaring in her turn. "It's no use your trying—"

Just *what* it was no use Francie's trying, was never known, for at that point, a motor ambulance which had been hooting deliriously as it approached the sharp bend in the road at this point, rounded it—mercifully, very slowly!—and rolled along, apparently bent on massacring the four who had forgotten rules and were straddled well across the road. With shrieks of horror, they scattered. Con, clutching at Margot, went into a thornbush. Ruey, grabbing Francie by the tail of her coat, hauled her off the road to the inner verge and straight into a deepish ditch which had been cut during the summer months to help carry off the water from the road surface. Naturally, after all the rain earlier in the week, it was brimming and the pair floundered into it, tripping and falling full length.

Mdlle., hearing all the noise, came flying round the lower bend to find out the cause for the screams and arrived just as a pair of drowned rats began to scramble out of the muddy water, while Con and Margot wrenched and tore themselves clear of the bush which seemed to cling to them lovingly. The ambulance had pulled up a little further along, for the driver had applied his brakes at once. As Mdlle. reached the scene, followed by Jeanne and Gabrielle, the door at the back was flung open and Dr. Graves sprang out, intent on seeing just how much damage had been done. The girls ahead had also heard the noise and came tearing back in time to see Dr. Graves set Ruey and Francie, dripping and shivering, for the water was icy cold, on the road; while Con, with a final tug, left the best part of one stocking among the thorns and Margot, who had lost her beret and whose short curls were in the wildest confusion, scrambled to her feet with tears of pain pouring down her cheeks and leaving a good-sized tuft of red-gold hair among the thorns.

CHAPTER XVII

A VERY PRETTY FEUD

“It really was ghastly!” Margot scribbled in the long letter she was writing to her departed *alter ego*, Emerence Hope, the next afternoon. The rain had begun again during the evening of that eventful Saturday and was now descending in cataracts. There was no going out for anyone and the Head had sent word that the girls might read or write letters and otherwise amuse themselves, so long as it was quietly.

Margot glanced round before she went further. Her triplet sisters were both reading comfortably and Ruey, having written to both her brothers that morning, was engaged on a lengthy epistle to her cousin Daisy Rosomon who had once been an ornament of the school in earlier days and was still known to the girls as “Daisy Venables”, despite the fact that she had been married nearly four years and was the proud mother of two small sons. Francie seemed to have vanished somewhere—and Margot felt that she honestly didn’t care what became of her! She had *had* Francie! She went on again.

“At the same time, Emmy, it was frightfully funny in parts. There were Ruey and Francie crawling out of that ditch looking a couple of drowned scarecrows, all streaked with mud and dripping in every direction. And Con and I were literally tearing ourselves away from that bush which clung to us as if it couldn’t bear to let us go! Mdlle. came haring round the bend, going off into exclamations exactly like a squib raining stars, with Jeanne and Gabrielle—she’s new: French, but quite nice—toiling after her. Dr. Graves was bounding out of the ambulance and the driver was hanging round the side of his cab, all one broad grin. Well, I suppose we did look a set of sights. Con lost a chunk of stocking—even Matey can’t make her mend it, for most of it just isn’t there to mend. I lost my beret and I *felt* as if half my hair had been torn out by the roots. My head is sore yet! Don’t worry about that. I got Con to look later on when we went upstairs to change and she said I seemed to have as much as usual and she couldn’t see the smallest bald patch. But it certainly *felt* as if I’d have to take to a wig for the rest of the term!

“Dr. Graves asked what on earth we thought we were doing in the middle of the road like that when we *must* have heard the horn? Con said she was sorry, but we’d all been talking and hadn’t noticed it until the thing came sliding round the bend. We noticed it then all right, I can tell you! He said well, we must have been discussing a jolly interesting subject if it made us as deaf as all that. Another time, he thought it would be as well if we left such things until we were safely in the school grounds and would we please try to remember that for the future?—all as sarky as could be. *Yo-ow!* He made *me* squirm all right! And then he asked Mdlle. how she proposed to get us back to the school, for we certainly couldn’t be let walk at *croc* pace. Ruey and Francie, at any rate, ought to be raced back as hard as possible before they caught cold. I forgot to say that by this time, everyone else was all round us and it was a blessing that nothing else came along the road or there would have been *slaughter!*

“Mdlle. asked if he could *possibly* take those two in the ambulance with him and drop them at the entrance, but he said he couldn’t. He had a very serious case in the

ambulance and he couldn't put a couple of drenching wet objects in with him—the case, I mean.

“Mdlle. said that in *that* case—sorry! No pun intended!—we must think again. He told her to wait a minute and he would see what could be done. He went back into the ambulance and presently came out again and said, ‘Nurse says she can manage the last five miles alone and Peters and Maynard will both be at the Sanatorium when they get there so *that* will be all right. It’s a pity to penalise the rest of the girls because these four chose to be heedless. Suppose you leave them to me and take the others on to wherever you were going.’ Then he turned to the ambulance and said, ‘Drive on, Schmidt, and remember what I said about going slowly and carefully.’ So the driver started up again and moved off, but I saw the nurse peeping out over the edge of the blind and grinning madly!

“After that, Mdlle. got the others croc-ing again and we four had to go back with him. He simply raced us along and you should have *heard* Ruey and Francie squelching at every step! By the time we reached school, we were boiling, he’d taken us at such a rate. He asked for Matey, but thank *goodness* she was out for the afternoon and Barbara Henschell—you remember her?—was in charge. She always was awfully decent even when she was a pree and she’s awfully decent still. She ticked us off, of course. I suppose she felt she *had* to do that. But she called one of the other matrons and they took Ruey and Francie to the bathrooms and *parboiled* them, to judge by their looks when they joined us for Kaffee und Kuchen! Ruey said Barbara scrubbed her down as if she had been a horse and she felt sure her skin was coming off. I don’t think Francie got off any more lightly, either. Anyhow, after that, she gave them each a hot drink and sent them to lie down for half-an-hour to get over the shock. She said she’d see after that. However, they were both all right, so she let them dress and come down and she hasn’t said a word to Matey. Or if she has, Matey thinks we’ve had enough, for she’s never said a word to us. Con and I didn’t have to be boiled, but we had to go to Nurse for we were all scratched and had to have iodine put on. *My* scratches weren’t so bad. *My* hair got the most of it. But *Con* looks as if she’d taken on her own weight in wild cats and been well and truly licked! Her face is scratches from here to yonder! You *should* have heard the rest yell when they saw her!

“Of course we had to go to the Abbess when she got back. She’d been over at home, having English tea with Mother and Daddy and the kids and Aunt Rosalie was with her. She told us *just* what she thought of us for being such careless idiots and her thoughts weren’t at all nice. One blessing, being her, she didn’t ask *too* many questions and you may be sure we didn’t tell her anything we didn’t have to! Naturally, none of us said anything about the scrap with Francie and Francie held her own tongue. One thing she—the Abbess, I mean—*did* say was that if we weren’t all careful, we might have our parts in the play taken from us! We’re all being frightfully careful, for we don’t want *that*!

“But here’s an odd thing, Emmy! Francie is dead cuts with all of us—Con and Ruey and me, I mean—and before that she was *always* hanging round me. In fact, she was a regular nuisance at times so that in one way, I’m *not* sorry she’s stopped it. I was never specially friendly with her and why she should have suddenly started this term when she never bothered before is beyond *me*! She really was getting to be a complete pest, always butting in and trying to hang on.

“Now here’s where the odd part comes in. Len and I were in the corridor this morning when Francie stalked past us with her head in the air and looking as if we

just weren't there! When she had gone, Len asked what had happened. I told her we'd had a scrap which, of course, she knew. Every blessed girl among the Seniors does, I think. Len said, 'Let's hope you two put things straight soon, then. Francie looks most *desperately* miserable.'

"I didn't say anything, of course. I don't think Len expected it. But later on, Josette got hold of me and asked me what we thought we'd been doing? She asked as a *cousin* and not as Head Girl, by the way, or she'd have got *nothing* out of me. I said I honestly couldn't tell her any more than she knew already and *that* was true! Cousin or not, I wasn't having her butting in on a *private* affair. But all she said was, 'Well, for goodness sake see if you can *do* something with Francie so that she stops going about looking as if she'd been asked and couldn't go!'

"I simply don't understand it, Emmy! It was *she* who started all the fuss, so why should she be upset because she's got what she *wanted*—at least I *suppose* so. For it's true, you know. I've been squinting at her when she wasn't looking and she does look down in the depths! What on earth is the *matter* with her? Anyhow, it was mad to drag Con into it, or Ruey, either. I don't see that they had anything to do with it. I *do* wish you hadn't left, Emmy! I like Ruey well enough. She's very decent, awfully straight and all that and good fun, too. But she isn't *you*! Oh, dear! What a *mix-up* everything is!"

At this point, Margot paused to cast her eye over the sheets she had written. She made a face as she realised that all her underlining and exclamation marks would have brought her a lecture from any one of the English mistresses if they could have seen them. All the same, she felt it was the only way to get home to Emmy just what her feelings were. She heaved a sigh so gusty that Con, sitting near, heard her and looked up from her book with some amazement. Margot caught her eye and made a fearful face at her. Con grimaced back with a will before she turned to her book again. She guessed that her sister wanted no interruptions.

Margot returned to her letter. It was several pages long already and, as she reflected, the postage would be double the usual and even then, she was not sure that Emmy would grasp everything. Well, she had done her best and saints couldn't do more. Time was flying and the gong would be sounding for Kaffee und Kuchen shortly. She had better finish the thing and hope for the best.

She ended it, succeeded in cramming it into the big envelope she had begged from her mother at half-term, sealed and addressed it and then got up.

"Any letters to take to the post-box?" she asked of the room in general.

There were at least half-a-dozen. She collected them and went out to seek the big box in the entrance hall where all letters had to be put. Letters were not read by the Chalet School Staff as a rule. Miss Dene glanced over the envelopes before she bundled them into the postbag to be sent down to Interlaken, but, for the most part no one had time to write to anyone but relations or guardians. The only restriction ever laid on their correspondence was that if anyone wanted to write to someone not belonging to the stated category, she had to bring a signed slip from the home authorities, giving permission. In passing, it may be said that this rule was very rarely abrogated, though the school still treasured the story of Felicity King being invited to explain why she was writing to a firm which manufactured cosmetics and other aids to beauty and having to tell Miss Dene that she was sending for samples of complexion lotion as she had discovered two or three freckles over the bridge of her nose. No one ever knew how the tale had leaked out, for Miss Dene kept her own counsel and Felicity would certainly never have reported the scathing remarks she had to endure before her letter was torn up and she was dismissed with a final injunction to leave her skin alone and be

grateful to God that she was pretty enough to have no need to trouble herself about complexion lotions. Not that she or anyone else could have fed vanity on Miss Dene's remarks in that line. The school's secretary had left her under no delusions that mere prettiness could make up for being empty-headed and conceited.

Margot dropped the letters into the box and then turned off for the library to choose a book with which to fill in the remaining hours before bedtime. Not only was the rain coming down in torrents, but there was a high wind blowing, so that even church was off for that day. When gales blew from the north-west, there were times when they could hardly keep their feet up there on the Platz. It was due north-west now, as they could tell by the way the rain battered on the front windows.

"Hope I can find something decent," she muttered to herself as she opened the door to find to her surprise that the light was on. Evidently someone else had had the same idea.

She strolled past the shelves where the Junior fiction was displayed and rounded the case standing opposite the door to come to a halt. Francie Wilford was there, looking along the shelves containing the novels. For a moment, Margot stood still in dismay. Then she tilted her chin and walked calmly to another set where she stood, scanning the titles, to all appearances. In reality, she was wondering what she should do.

On her part, Francie was equally nonplussed. By this time, she was sorry that she had lost her temper and flown out at Margot the day before. That was no way to make friends with the other girl. Unfortunately, Francie was as proud as Margot and had no idea of saying she was sorry. All the same, she, too, lost interest in the books. Like Margot, she stood staring at the shelf before her eyes and taking nothing in. Finally, she plunged at the first book she saw, tugged it out and went off to the desk to enter its title, the date and her own name in the librarian's register, which was the sole regulation under which the Sixth Forms and the two upper Fifths might help themselves to books out of library hours. It was one of their privileges of being, as Mary-Lou had said in her very early days, a really Senior Senior.

At the same moment, Margot also picked out a book at random and made for the same goal. Both reached the desk at the same time and neither was prepared to give way. It really was a ridiculous situation. Neither could be first, for the register was with its attached Biro in the desk and neither would let the other open it. So there they stood, glaring at each other defiantly and both getting chillier and chillier, since some economical person had turned off the heating there earlier on and the damp cold, brought by the wind, penetrated everywhere.

Just how long it would have gone on, no one can say, though Margot was beginning to see the silly side of it and sooner or later her bubbling sense of humour would have found vent in a peal of laughter. Nothing would have infuriated Francie more, for that young woman was sadly deficient in humour up to date. Mercifully, they were spared that, for there came the sound of quick, light steps and Clare Kennedy walked in.

"Hello!" she said with her friendly smile. "Novel-hunting? So am I. Sure, there's not much else one can do but read with the weather the way it is. I've finished *Wuthering Heights* and goodness knows it's the last thing to read with the wind wuthering all the time. Will you be letting me come at the desk? I want to mark it off." And she opened the desk, took out the register, and marked off the novel as returned by writing in the date and her initials. Then she looked at her silent companions. "Got your books? Then enter them, for goodness' sake! Here you are, Margot!" She pushed the register over to Margot who hurriedly scribbled in the details and scuttled, thankful to be out of the impasse so easily. When she got back to the common-room and settled down as near the stove as she could to try to get warm again, she looked at her book and her disgust on finding that she had taken one she had returned just before half-term was intense. However, she could hardly go back again and change it. She must just put up with it.

Meanwhile, Francie had also returned and was making the pleasing discovery that *she* had taken one of Charlotte Yonge's contemporary novels. She rather enjoyed that Victorian best-seller's historical stories, but the others left her cold. Equally with Margot she felt that *she* could not return it at once and must make the best of it. She settled down with one slim foot against the radiator near which she had pulled her chair and became lost, so far as anyone could see, in *Nutty's Father*.

Ruey, whose home letters had all been finished by this time, was buried deep in Jules Verne's *Voyage Autour de la Lune* which she had selected as perhaps giving her some idea of what might happen if her father really did go off on a space flight. She happened to be near the same radiator as Francie, something that young woman had not noticed before she settled down, and once or twice she glanced up from her reading. It was the original version, and though her French was vastly improved, the racy idioms were rather beyond her at times. She had to guess at their meaning from the context, and what she made of some of the paragraphs would have given the gifted author several shocks if he had known. During one of her pauses, her eyes fell on Francie and, like Len, she saw that the girl was very unhappy. Ruey had a hot temper, but it was quickly over and sulking was beyond her.

"There's something awfully *wrong* with Francie," she thought, giving up Jules Verne for the present. "Really, she looks as if someone had wired her to say that all her relations had been swallowed up by an earthquake and the cat had eaten her pet canary! Can't I *do* something about it? But what? She doesn't like me. In fact, she loathes me, though goodness knows why! I've never done anything to her that I know of. Still, I'd better try to do something about it. She looks absolutely *lost*! The thing is—what? I can't just butt in on her and ask her what's wrong and can I do anything. Oh, bother! Why am I fussing like this about her? I wouldn't have cared two hoots a few weeks back."

What Ruey did not understand was that the Chalet School unwritten rule of trying to help other people had got hold of her and she was well on the way to becoming a true Chaletian. But she did remember, quite suddenly, that Auntie Joey had told her during that talk in bed the last night of the summer holidays that she never had to stand alone and help would come if she asked for it. This was something she felt dimly she could hardly take to either the Head or Auntie Joey. She had better try God.

No sooner said than done. Ruey thought swiftly, "Please show me what to do!" The answer came at once and she felt she could have kicked herself for being so slow. She could quite well go and apologise to Francie for yanking her into the ditch. *That* wasn't butting in! And though she had done it without intending it and to save the other girl from being run over, still she had given her a soaking. She could say she was sorry and the next move would be up to Francie herself.

Being Ruey, she acted at once. She shut her book and stood up to drag her chair to the other end of the radiator where Francie was doggedly reading without taking in very much. She gave Ruey a startled glance, but she said nothing. Neither did she do more than glance. Ruey might soon get over her rage, but Francie had a sulky temper at the best of times and it had not been improved by that absurd encounter with Margot. She hunched her shoulders over her book and paid no heed to the other girl.

Some people would have taken instant offence and left Francie to stew in her own juice, but once Ruey had made up her mind to anything, she was difficult to put off. Francie might turn her back all she liked. Ruey was going to apologise or burst in the effort!

"I say, Francie," she began as she plumped down in her chair, "I want to tell you how awfully sorry I am that I shoved you into the ditch like that yesterday. It was an accident. I didn't mean to do it and I'd forgotten about the ditch if I ever knew it was there. But I truly am awfully sorry you got so wet."

“Please don’t bother. It doesn’t matter in the least,” Francie said icily, never lifting her eyes from the line she was reading over and over again. Deep down, she was longing to come out of her sulks and accept that apology for which there was really no need as she very well knew. Ruey’s action had saved her from the ambulance. But the devil of pride had a firm hold on poor Francie at that date and it was beyond her.

Ruey was gravelled. She had no idea what to do next. You couldn’t go *on* saying you were sorry if the other person did nothing about it. She looked at Francie in a troubled way, but Francie seemed much too interested in her book to heed her. In the end, Ruey got up and moved her chair over to the group which contained Len and Con. Everyone was reading, but Len looked up with a matey grin and moved her own chair to make room for the newcomer.

“What’s wrong with Francie?” she asked in an undertone.

“Search me!” Ruey was emphatic. “I know as much as you.”

“I’m beginning to wonder if I’ve got on to it. If I have—*goodnight!*”

“Why?”

“Because it’s something neither I nor anyone else but one girl can do anything about and I have an idea she won’t do anything.”

“Why not? Someone will have to do something! If Francie goes round looking as if she’d lost everything she valued in this world and hadn’t much hope of the next, some of the grown-ups will notice and make inquiries. I don’t know what would happen then, though.”

“There’s that about it. I wonder if I could use that? The point is, though, that Mary-Lou warned me off butting in last term and I’m certain—well, the other girl would think I *was* butting in if I said anything. Oh, dear!” Len heaved a sigh that nearly wafted Ruey across the room. “It’s frightfully difficult to know when you’re doing the right thing or not.” Her eyes wandered to where Francie had let her book fall into her lap and was staring unseeingly through the window.

“Well, I’ve done all the butting in I can do just now,” Ruey said, “and it got me nowhere. I think we’ll have to leave Francie to come out of her black mood herself.”

“Yes—if she does! But if she doesn’t, some of the Staff will notice—Matey, probably—and then questions will be asked.”

“Well, it’s no use me trying any more. Francie seems to have taken a hate at me, though why she should, is more than I can say.”

Len thought this over. She glanced across the room to where Margot was curled up in her chair enjoying *Magic for Marigold* despite the fact that she had read it so recently. Then she glanced back at Francie and saw that she, too, was looking at Margot. There was something in that look that made matters plain to the eldest Maynard. So *that* was the reason for it all! And what could she do about it? Exactly nothing!

“I wish,” Len said deliberately, “that Mamma was here or I could go to her. For it strikes me that she’s the only one who can unravel *this* mess!”

CHAPTER XVIII

“IT MAY BE GENIUS, BUT — —”

“No, Margot! *That* won’t do! Say it again and try to put a little expression into it. You might as well be repeating your multiplication table for all the feeling there was in your voice in that last speech! *Feel* it! Here are these poor children, shut up in that great, ugly building, made to wear ugly clothes and hard at work most of the day. You’ve had a sudden crashing sense of the difference between your life and theirs and it makes you wretched. *Feel* wretched! Don’t just say it! Feel a choking in your throat and let the tears come to your eyes. How would *you* like to live like that and have nothing to look forward to but going to domestic service—and domestic service as it was in *those* days? Now begin—‘But do you really mean — —’ Get on with it!”

Miss Ferrars, who had been given the job of producing the Christmas play, sat up in her seat in the first row of forms in Hall and waited. Margot pulled herself together and tried again. It was by no means what Miss Ferrars wanted, but she let it pass for the moment and the rehearsal went on.

All the same, Kathy Ferrars was moved to wonder what on earth was wrong with Margot Maynard. “Tame” wasn’t the word for her rendering of a good part, and Margot was a good little actress when she chose. For the first week or two of rehearsals, she had put her whole heart and soul into the part and done well; but this last week she had more or less *walked* through it, she had been so lackadaisical. It was not in the least like her. As a rule, what Margot did she did to the top of her bent. Then Francie Wilford entered in her character of the soured old matron of the children’s Home and Miss Ferrars sat up with a vengeance. If Margot was poor, Francie was outrageously bad. She knew her lines and that was all you could say. Her movements were wooden and the scolding she had to give Margot for “putting ideas” into the heads of “pauper children”, which should have been funny, was the dreariest thing imaginable. She added to her sins by mumbling half her words so that even the producer, sitting in the very front seat, had to pull her up over and over again and tell her to speak up.

The band of “foundling children”, mainly members of the Junior school, became infected and as for Betty Landon who was supposed to be their leader, Miss Ferrars’ pretty mouth became one grim straight line for it was all too plain that lazy Betty hadn’t bothered to learn her lines properly. She halted, fumbled for her words, had to be prompted three times in one speech and finally dried up completely.

Miss Ferrars put up with it as long as she could, then she shut up her prompt copy, tossed it down on the seat and sprang to her feet.

“This is disgraceful, girls! I will say that you all know your lines—except Betty, but when I’ve said it, I’ve said all! Betty, those lines are to be perfect by next time. If you insist on fluffing through your part like this, I shall consult Miss Annersley about giving the part to someone else and leaving you merely to walk on. I mean that, so please take warning!”

Betty went red and looked alarmed. She had been cheerfully saying that she would be all right on the night, but now she saw that this would not do. She had no wish to lose her part, the first important one she had had in any school play. She sighed and made up her mind that she had better get down to it over the week-end.

Miss Ferrars was going on. “I don’t know what’s the matter with you, Margot. You know your lines and your movements and last week you rehearsed well. *This* week, you seem to have lost all interest. It won’t do! Nor you either, Francie. You are supposed in this scene to be

telling Margot exactly what you think of her and all your thoughts are unpleasant. For goodness sake *speak* unpleasantly. You're supposed to *snap*! Instead, you moan. You aren't telling her that you have toothache and wailing for sympathy. You're telling 'a pert Miss' exactly where she gets off!" In her earnestness, Kathy fell back on slang and Margot, smarting as she was at the words addressed to her, smothered a grin. Francie, on her part, merely scowled more blackly than ever. Miss Ferrars gave her a severe look and then went on with her comments.

"Foundlings, you are *not* to keep on fidgetting and moving about. You're terrified of the Matron, remember, and you stand huddled together—all but Betty who stands up for the lot of you. Now remember that and try to do a little better next time, please. This is a lovely play, but if you go on as you're doing, you'll spoil it completely. This is a new idea, remember, and we want it to succeed. Very well. That will do now. You may all go and make yourselves tidy for Kaffee und Kuchen. I'll let you know when I want you for rehearsal again. Margot, switch off the stage-lights as you go out, please. Leave the other. I want to collect my things."

They departed as quietly as they could. Miss Ferrars was a sweet-tempered person as a rule and they had heard quite enough from her for once to want no more.

Kathy herself climbed up on to the dais to pick up the music left on the piano. She closed the lid and stood there a minute or two, drumming on the polished rosewood with her fingertips and thinking deeply. This was the first Chalet School play for which she had been made solely responsible and she was very anxious for it to go well. Most of the girls were getting into their parts, but this scene was shockingly poor.

"There's nothing wrong with Betty Landon but laziness," she thought. "The crowd will learn in time to keep still, I hope. It's Margot and Francie who are the real worry. What on earth is wrong with those two, I wonder?"

"Hey, Ferrars, my love! Don't you want any Kaffee und Kuchen?" asked an amused voice behind her, and she swung round to see her great friend, Nancy Wilmot, standing there.

"Nancy! How long have you been here staring at me?"

"Oh, about two minutes. Come on and stop looking as if you had the cares of the world on your back! What are you doing in Hall at this hour, anyhow?"

"I've been taking a rehearsal of that scene between Margot and Francie," Kathy said, as she followed her friend out of Hall, pausing to snap off the one light left. "You know—the one where *Madeleine* meets that bunch of children from the Home and stops to speak to them and is so horrified to learn how they are treated. It's frightfully important, for the whole play turns on it—at least, all that follows does."

"How's the thing going?" Nancy asked as they turned to make for the entrance hall and big staircase, on their way to the Staff sitting-room.

"Most of it not too badly. Oh, it's all in the rough at present, but the majority know what they're supposed to be doing. But that scene—Nancy, it's driving me silly! Betty Landon still doesn't know her lines. As for Margot and Francie, it's supposed to be a funny scene, what with *Madeleine* telling *The Matron* exactly what she thinks of her and *The Matron* starting in by being very haughty and ending up by spluttering incoherently. Those two could do it on their heads if they liked. They can both act—well, look at the Saturday night shows they've been in! But will they? No! Margot, who began by being good, has become indifferent and sounds it. Francie mumbles so that half the time you can't hear her and the rest she might be saying anything! I could knock their silly heads together!" she ended viciously.

"Tut-tut! These violent feelings in one so young and fair! So far as Betty is concerned, it's sheer bone laziness as you very well know. That young monkey never does a stroke she can help unless someone comes behind her with a big stick to prod her on."

"I've applied the big stick this afternoon. I told her if she didn't know her lines properly by next rehearsal, I was going to the Head to ask her to give the part to someone else and leave Betty merely to walk on."

"Good for you! That ought to settle her all right. Our Bettina is as lazy as she's long, but she would hate to have to give up her part—especially as you can bet your bottom dollar that the crowd will see that everyone else knows just why. What about the other two? What's gone wrong with them?"

"I haven't a clue! I rather think," Kathy said, stopping at the head of the stairs to lean against the banisters and look up at her big friend, "that there's some sort of private feud going on there—in that crowd, I mean. What it's all about, I don't know. But Francie is going round with a whole kennel of black dogs on her back; Ruey looks worried most of the time; the three Maynards are keeping their own counsel very stickily and the rest are likewise being mum. I'm certain it's something out of school, and I don't see how I can butt in on them in that case."

"You certainly can't. Oh, well, there's no time for another rehearsal this week. It's our evening for the Seniors tomorrow night, remember, and we'll have to get down to it if we want it to be a success. You give the whole thing a rest till next week and hope for the best. And now, if you feel you can bear to be parted from those banisters, come along and see what a cup of Jeanne's coffee will do for you!" And Nancy slung an arm round her friend's shoulders and ran her along the corridor to the Staff sitting-room where Kaffee und Kuchen was in full swing. She brought two cups of Mdlle.'s unsurpassable coffee and the plate of cakes over to the corner where Kathy Ferrars had subsided and then struck into the conversation with a demand to know how far they had got in their plans for tomorrow night. Thereafter, no one had any time to think of anything but that.

Once in each term, the Staff combined to entertain a part of the school. On occasion, the entertainment was extended to the whole school—if it were a play, or a concert party or Mrs. Jarley, for instance. On this occasion, it was for the Seniors only. The rest of the school would amuse themselves in their common-rooms on the evening in question. The younger mistresses had put their heads together and evolved a programme that would take some arranging as they all confessed.

"But then," little Miss Andrews—Sharley to her peers—remarked, "the girls will certainly have something to talk about!"

This began next morning when the entire school, even Francie, was agog to know what the Staff had in store for their guests. A large notice on the board in Hall requested all visitors to come in their dressing-gowns!

"*Dressing-gowns!*" Josette ejaculated as she stared at it. "But why dressing-gowns? What," with deep suspicion, "are they going to do with us?"

"Tuck us all up in bed and one member go to each dormy and tell us bedtime stories!" was Prudence Dawbarn's outrageous suggestion.

She was howled down with such vim that the ringing of the first bell passed unnoticed and Miss Lawrence, who had come to play her voluntary, chuckled to herself before she struck the opening chord of Beethoven's Sonata Pathétique, bringing them all to a sudden realisation of the time.

Later on in the morning, Len Maynard was sent by Miss Wilson with a message for Miss Dene who was going to Berne on Monday. She tapped demurely at the office door and then went in. Miss Dene and three or four of the mistresses were all on the floor, busy over a huge bundle they were unpacking and when Rosalie Dene glanced up, she let out what came near to being a howl as she sat firmly down on top of the bundle before demanding to know what Len wanted.

“Miss Wilson asked me to give you this list to order for her in Berne,” Len explained, laying the said list on the desk.

She withdrew in good order, but not before she had glimpsed a pile of rolls of crepe paper and her curiosity was roused to such a pitch that when she was supposed to be hemming the torn edge of a pyjama jacket sleeve, she hemmed both edges neatly together and never discovered what she had done until she came to put the jacket on!

She had no chance to tell the others what she had seen and, in fact, she forgot all about it for the time being, for Ruey, who had been detained by Matron to explain—if she could—exactly why her handkerchief drawer was in such a muddle, had been too late to read a letter from Roger which had arrived for her. She took it into prep to read when she had finished her homework and mending and having got through them in record time, eagerly opened the letter and read it. A stifled exclamation reached Margot who was sitting next her, and brought that young woman’s eyes to her face. Ruey was sheet-white, but when her chum hissed an anxious query at her, she shook her head and Margot had to hold her horses until the bell rang for Break.

Ruey was out of the room almost as soon as the bell sounded, but Margot was not to be cheated that way. She only paused to call her sisters and collect biscuits and milk for herself and Ruey and then the three went off in search of the fugitive. They found her where Len had guessed she would be—in the little summer-house down in the sunk garden. No one was likely to go there, most of the girls preferring to keep to the paths and move about. Now that November was half over, the weather was chilly, even on sunny days and this was grey on the whole.

Ruey looked up as the three marched in on her. She was still very white and her eyes were dark with a look of dread. The Maynards crowded round her and Margot gave her the milk.

“You drink that,” she ordered. “Go on! Every drop!”

Ruey did as she was told. Then Len took a hand.

“What is it, Rue? Tell us. Perhaps we can help.”

“Oh, you can’t!” Ruey gasped. “No one can!”

“Raspberries to that!” retorted Con, using a strictly forbidden remark. “Anyhow, you belong to us now and you’re not going to be miserable by yourself, is she, you two?” She appealed to her sisters and they both assented.

For reply, Ruey produced her letter and thrust it into Len’s hand. “Read it! Read it aloud!” she gasped, her sensitive lips quivering.

Len glanced down it before she began. Roger was not much of a correspondent and he had no idea of breaking bad news gently.

“Dear Rue,” Len read, “Get a hold on yourself. Pa’s off to explore space early next month. Had a long letter from him this morning—typewritten, mercifully, so I could read it, even though he’s no typist. He told me to let you know. The rest was business stuff in case they don’t get back again. He said I was to tell you that there always had to be someone to do a job for the first time and he and another chap are being it in this. Keep your chin up! If they succeed, he’ll be famous, I suppose. If they don’t, well we aren’t left alone. There are the Maynards and the Rosomons, so it might be worse. See you at Christmas. Roger.”

“Poor old Roger, I’ll bet he found *that* a sticky letter to write!” Con said.

Ruey looked at her. “I know. It was a *rotten* job to wish on to him. But—oh, I know he and us have never been as—as close as you lot are with your people, and I know Auntie Joey and Uncle Jack will look after us and there’s Daisy and Laurie, too. But it’s—well, it’s a bit of a knock when you’ve got to face the fact that your own father is so mad over a thing like space flight that he’ll risk never coming back, even though he has us three to think about.”

This was so true that the three were silent for a minute. Then Margot suddenly bounced to her feet and fled from them. Ruey looked after her, amazed.

Len tried to help. "Look, Ruey! It isn't *yet*. It mayn't happen after all. They'll have to do piles of tests on whatever they're going up in before they do take off and in the end, it mayn't work after all. This is only November and Roger says they don't go till December. Let's hope and—and *pray* that it doesn't come off after all. We three all will."

However, help was coming from another quarter. When Margot had torn off like that, she had headed straight for the gate between the school grounds and the Freudesheim garden. She had burst through, rushed to the house and yelled for her mother. Joey, coming posthaste in alarm to know what had happened, needed only two sentences.

"Ruey's heard from Roger that their dad is space flying next month. Do come and help her!" Margot gasped.

"I'm coming! Where is she?"

"In the summer-house. Len and Con are with her. Oh, thank *goodness* you weren't out!" And Margot, panting with the speed she had made, stopped short, for her mother was flying over the grass, leaving her well behind.

Thus it was that when the bell rang for the end of Break, Joey had reached the summer-house and, sending the others away, had taken the white-faced girl into her arms and was holding her closely. Ruey burst into tears when she felt that motherly clasp round her. She clung to Joey, sobbing and shaking, and Joey let her cry for a few minutes. Then she began to talk and after a while, she found out where the worst sting lay and she was able to ease the smart a little.

"You know, Ruey, your father is a genius in his own line. Everyone says so."

"But why need he forget all about us and go off like that?" Ruey sobbed.

"Because that's what genius all too often does. People like him are—lop-sided, so to speak. It's the thing that matters most in their lives and everything else has to go down before it. It's a kind of madness—an obsession is the best way to put it. Even human relationships don't mean to them what they mean to ordinary folk. Do you understand?"

"I—I think so," Ruey whispered. She was still shaking, for the storm had been sharp, but the sobs were ceasing and she had scrubbed her eyes dry.

"Then that will help you. Of course," Joey went on meditatively, "he ought never to have married, but I expect it hadn't such a hold on him when he was a young man. In fact, from all I can hear, it's only since your mother died that he's let it get this hold on him. Try to see it a little from his point of view. He was left with three children and he doesn't know the first thing about children. She had gone from him and he missed her horribly—more than you can understand. He sank himself more and more in his ruling passion till it's reached *this* pitch. He does love you three. He made all arrangements for you before he went off. Give him credit for that."

"Ye-es." Ruey gave her poor eyes a final scrub. "And—and you're *sure* it isn't because he doesn't care whether we're alive or dead that he's just leaving us like this, Auntie Joey?"

"Certain!" said Joey, complete conviction in her voice.

Ruey drew a long breath. "Then—then I'll do my best to try to see his angle. Thanks a million for coming. You—you've made things better."

Joey bent swiftly and kissed her. Ruey was almost a boy in her hatred of caresses but now she clung to Joey.

"You've been so *awfully* decent!" she whispered chokily.

Joey released her. "O.K. now? Then you'd better skip off. I'll go and see the Head and ask if you may come home with me for the week-end if you like. What about it?"

Ruey paused. Then she lifted her head. "I shan't *feel* much like fun tonight, but—Roger said, 'Keep your chin up' and I'm going to. It's just like you, Aunt Joey, but the others would wonder. No; I'll stick it."

"Good for you! Very well, you shall stay for the Staff evening. But I *am* going to ask the Head to send you four over for the whole day tomorrow. Then nobody can wonder and I think our girls will understand."

Ruey nodded. "They will—they do! Thanks more than I can say!" Then she fled.

Joey walked home to ring up Miss Annersley and get permission for the four to spend Sunday with her. When she had put down the receiver, she stood still for a moment.

"It may be genius," she said to herself, "but in my opinion, it's sheer insanity and my one regret is that that wretched man can't be locked up in the nearest luney-bin!"

CHAPTER XIX

STAFF EVENING

Ruey might say and think that she wasn't feeling much like fun that night. To a great extent, it was true. But when she refused Joey's invitation to go to Freudesheim for the weekend, she chose more wisely than she knew. For one thing, Gwen and Monica put their heads together and arranged pick-up matches in all three of their winter games when Miss Dene sent for Josette to tell her that the prefects must take charge that afternoon as the mistresses would all be too busy. The Juniors were sent to the drive to play rounders with Aimée Robinet and Monica herself in charge and everyone else not playing was expected to line the sides of the netball court and playing-fields and cheer the others on. Ruey was in one of the lacrosse teams and had not time for anything but the game. In fact, by the end of it, she had, to a great extent, managed to push her troubles to the back of her mind. They were still there, but they did not loom quite so large just at present.

When they went in to wash and brush up, they were met by Matron Henschell who informed them that Kaffee und Kuchen would be half-an-hour earlier than usual and the evening would start at seventeen hours. Every Senior was to bring needles, scissors, pins and thimble to Hall with her and they were to be properly dressed up to their dressing-gowns. Then she clapped her hands over her ears and ran before anyone could ask a single question. So the whole time of Kaffee und Kuchen was spent in wondering what the mistresses had in store for them.

"But what *can* they be going to do with us?" Francie demanded of Ricki Fry, completely shaken out of her black mood by all this.

Neither Ricki nor anyone else could tell her and the whole body departed to change for the evening in a state of pleasing uncertainty.

The Middles and Juniors bemoaned their own fate in having to spend an ordinary Saturday evening in their common-rooms with relays of mistresses to look after them since no one was taking any risks with such sets of imps.

The Seniors finally streamed downstairs, all robed in their dressing-gowns and were at once able to see why no mistress could be on duty that afternoon. The Staff had worked hard to transform Hall into what Sue Mason, who was given to using clichés, described as "a bower of beauty". Curtains had been hung before the daïs where the piano and mistresses' chair had been removed to the floor. Long wreaths of evergreens adorned the walls, caught up by bunches of paper flowers. The forms had all been pushed to the back and the deck chairs had been set out in little groups here and there, but widely spaced—why, no one could imagine. As Hall was strip-lighted they could do nothing about that, but more wreaths had been fastened to the walls and taken to the beams running across the ceiling, so that a tentlike effect was obtained.

"Isn't it fabulous!" Len Maynard observed to her own crowd as they looked round.

"Simply magnificent!" Con returned.

"Oh, mais c'est très, t-r-rès joli!" Odette exclaimed.

The others were all exclaiming to each other and the Staff who, it must be owned, literally smirked as they were heartily congratulated by all and sundry. Then Miss Annersley, in one of the pretty light woollen frocks she wore in the winter evenings, mounted a chair and clapped for silence.

"I have a piece of news for you Seniors," she said when everyone was at last sitting down somewhere and the chatter had ceased. "We have decided to give up our school tunics as a uniform and take to special dresses instead."

There was a murmur at once suppressed by the prefects as they took this in.

The Head smiled at them and went on: "You are now going to see the dress we have chosen. Miss Andrews—Miss Yolland—Miss Derwent! Come along and show yourselves!"

The three mistresses appeared from behind the curtains on the daïs and everyone gasped, for each was wearing an example of the new uniform and there was no mistake about it. Everyone liked it on sight! It looked so very trim and workmanlike and was so very smart into the bargain!

"It's so chic!" Josette said enthusiastically. "I do like the touches of white in the revers; and the crimson honeycombing on our lovely blue looks awfully well. Well, Head Girl or not, I'm going to root for one of those when I go home."

"Oh, so am I!" Barbara agreed. "Janice will have one, of course, and I'm jolly sure I shall. And think of the saving in blouses!"

This advantage had struck no one so far, but they all saw it as soon as she spoke.

Margot suddenly spoke up eagerly. "Miss Annersley, it isn't only for the under-fifteens, is it? I mean we Seniors can have it if we like, can't we?"

Miss Annersley laughed. "That must depend on your parents. In any case, no one will have it to wear till next term at soonest. A number of the under-fifteens have tunics they must wear out, so it will not come into general use until this term next year. Your parents would be very annoyed if we asked them to change the uniform so soon after they had bought new tunics for this winter. Quite right, too! Blouses and skirts don't matter so much. Tunics must be either worn out or outgrown."

"Well, I'm going to ask for one," Margot said to her own clan. "We didn't have new gymmers this term. Mother said it wasn't worth while as we were so nearly fifteen. We have skirts, of course, but I'm going to beg and pray for one of those frocks."

But the Head was clapping for silence again. When she got it, she requested them to go back to their seats—they had all jumped up in their excitement—as now the chief business of the evening was to begin. They all sat down hurriedly and some of the younger mistresses went round Hall, handing to everyone a large bundle, securely tied up. When the last had been given out, the Head spoke once more.

"In those bundles, you will all find some rolls of crepe paper and reels of cotton to match. You are to make yourselves fancy dresses out of them and when they are done, you put them on and wear them for the rest of the evening. The best in each form will be awarded one of the new uniforms as a prize. You have until eighteen-thirty to finish, so the sooner you begin the better!" She jumped down from her perch, went over to Miss Yolland and Miss Andrews who nodded and slipped away and then turned as Josette, prompted by at least a dozen people, asked anxiously, "Will the sewing be taken into account? I mean—does *neatness* matter?"

"On this occasion, no. So long as the dresses will more or less hold together for the evening, that's all we ask. We aren't having dancing or wild games later, by the way."

That was enough! Everyone hurriedly undid her bundle. Crepe paper of at least two colours was there as well as the sewing cotton and in less than five minutes, the floor of Hall was covered with girls, anxiously spreading out their paper and trying to decide what sort of dress they would make.

Ruey, with two shades of green, pitched on Robin Hood. Margot, finding white and pale pink, plumped for a daisy. Len's was orange and brown and she made up her mind for Minnehaha. Francie's bundle contained dark blue and white and she set to work to turn herself into a jack tar. Con, with scarlet and green, voted for a poppy. There was no end to the variety

of dresses they chose. The Staff, wandering about among them and chatting matily with them, were startled at the fertility of their minds.

"It's just as well," Francie remarked once as she wrestled with a white sailor collar that would *not* lie flat, "that this Evening is for Seniors only. The Juniors would have been having fits. Bother! I've cut this thing too wide to fit the neck of the jumper. I'll have to do another!"

Margot, cutting a length of white paper into daisy petals, grinned. "Mine's easy! I'm not having sleeves, either. Just a ring of petals round the armholes."

"You ought to have yellow paper for the centre. How are you going to manage?" Con asked as she cut out jagged green leaves to make her own bodice.

"If you wait you'll see!" her sister retorted, finishing her cutting and setting to work to stitch the white petal strip over the longer pink petal strip she had already done.

Con chuckled and turned back to her own work.

When Matey, who was acting as timekeeper, called "Finish off!" most of the dresses were finished and donned. Only two or three people cried out in dismay, among them Josette, who borrowed pins frantically to give the finishing touch to the somewhat elaborate costume she had evolved. Clare and Barbara helped her into it and more pins fastened the bodice.

"It's a dream!" Barbara said. "Pink certainly is your colour, Josette."

"When you've *quite* finished!" remarked Miss Wilmot's voice close to them. "Lead the line, please, Josette. You people are to walk slowly three times round the room to give us a chance to judge of you—er—confections! Miss Lawrence will play for you. Keep well apart, girls! We may ask you to turn a few times and some of you will need room for that."

They really made a delightful procession. Josette had turned herself into a Georgian court lady with lilac petticoat and pink bodice and panniers. She had stuffed out the panniers with all the scraps she could scavenge, tying them up in her own and Barbara's handkerchiefs and pinning them as firmly as she could under the panniers. Clare herself, in bright green and scarlet, was an Irish colleen. She had even slipped off her shoes and stockings in keeping and her sweet oval face looked charming under the scarlet "shawl" she had pinned over her smooth dark hair. Maeve in lilac and green was a crocus. Len's Red Indian dress, complete with head-dress with long strips of both colours waving wildly from it, met with acclaim. Ruey had been afraid of cutting her breeches too tight and had gone to the other extreme with the result that they bagged out behind; but her pointed cap with a feather made of a strip of the paper rolled to a point was much admired. Margot had finished off her pink and white daisy frock with a coronal of paper petals through which her red-gold curls rose to form a perfect daisy-heart. Francie's bell-bottoms were so wide that they flapped about her ankles in a way that would have driven any naval man crazy; but her collar fitted to a miracle and her lanyard, of white plaited paper was really ingenious.

"It's going to be a real puzzle to choose!" Miss Moore wailed when the procession had gone round Hall three times and its members had been told that they might sit down now. "I could award a prize to at least six in each form."

"I'd no idea the girls could produce so many bright ideas," Miss Annersley agreed. "I'm gravelled myself."

"Me, I am truly bewildered," Mdlle. put in. "How can one decide among so much? Voyons! Let us have our feast now and during the evening, we will vote as we can and you, ma chère Hilda, shall declare the winners at the end?"

Eventually, that was what they did. Matey and the other matrons who had been seeing to the younger members of the school, now drew back the curtains which had cut off the daïs to reveal a long trestle table loaded with good things. The girls were requested to sit down and the Staff waited on their guests most hospitably. Even Matey was pressing with ices, creams and jellies, though wicked Maeve vowed she saw "castor oil tomorrow" in the lady's eye!

The rest of the evening was devoted to quiet games, for the paper dresses would hardly stand up to anything else. They were divided up into groups of twenty each, counting the Staff who “sat in” with the girls. Then they played “Scandal” with startling results. [15] Barbara’s account of her first long walk at the Platz turned into “A man was missed and carried me to the house!” Len began with the hoary tale of Alfred and the cakes and it ended up as, “The neat wife shook.”

[15] *The Chalet School and Barbara.*

That was followed by some rounds of “Advertisements” and “My godmother died and left me a fan”. They wound up with “Subject and Object”, a great favourite with everyone.

This was to have one surprising result. The Maynards and Co. had formed one group to which had been added, among other people, Nancy Wilmot and Rosalind Moore. Nancy, taking the lead, sent out the couples in turn and, towards the end, she pitched on Ruey and Francie of all pairs and shot them out with an injunction not to be too long.

Ruey went reluctantly. Why on earth had Willie sent her out with Francie, of all people? However, she could hardly refuse. Francie was equally dismayed, but she was in the same boat. They marched out, each with her chin up and each determined to have as little to say to the other as possible. And then they found that they were the only pair outside. They eyed each other doubtfully. Then the same impulse took the pair of them and they exclaimed together, “I say — —”

Neither got any further, for Ruey was seized with the giggles. Francie stared at her haughtily for a moment. Then *she* caught the infection and the pair simply shook. Finally Ruey, mopping her eyes, gasped, “We’ve got to stop this! Willie will be sending for us in a sec. But one thing, Francie! *Why have you hated me so from the word ‘go’?*”

Francie was startled into telling the naked truth. “Because I always wanted to be chums with Margot Maynard, only she had Emmy from the start and wouldn’t look at me. Then Emmy left last term and I did think there was a chance for me, only then you turned up, living with the Maynards and all and I saw it was going to be the same thing all over again. Of course I hated you! You’d taken my chance away and it wasn’t likely I’d get another!”

“Oh, Francie, you goop! Margot is no more chummy with me—not really—than she is with half-a-dozen other people. I think she still hankers after Emerence. Haven’t you noticed how she won’t talk about her? But if that’s all, why didn’t you *do* something about it instead of assing about looking miserable?”

“I—I — —” Francie stammered.

“Are you two *never* coming?” demanded a voice from the door. “Hurry up and choose and come on! Willie’s getting impatient!” The door closed behind Barbara Chester with a bang and Ruey said hurriedly, “We can’t do a thing about it now. But be my partner for the walk tomorrow and we’ll talk it over. Now, for goodness sake, think of someone!”

“I—I can’t!” Francie protested. “Oh, well—Santa Claus and his—his — —”

“The chimneys he’s supposed to go down!” Ruey put in swiftly. “O.K. You be Santa and I’ll be the chimneys. Now come on before Willie eats us!”

They scuttled in and had the supreme satisfaction of baffling the rest completely. No one could guess Santa Claus, for Francie chose to ignore the Christmas story and thought of him in his capacity as the Bishop of Myra which is real history. As for the chimneys, they were even worse. Ruey’s prompt, “Oh no!” when asked if she was something belonging to the Subject put them all off and after that, she and Francie did little but look at each other and stifle their giggles. All very irritating to the guessers!

“But you said he was a *real* person!” Barbara protested when the group had given it up and been told the answers.

“So he was!” Francie retorted. “Who do you think Santa Claus really is? St. Nicholas, the boy-bishop of Myra, of course!”

“Gosh!” Len ejaculated. “I might have thought of that—but I never did!”

“Neither did I,” Nancy Wilmot owned. “That was a clever one, you two.”

There was no time for more. Miss Annersley’s bell rang through Hall and she herself stood by the lectern on the dais. Some of the mistresses had followed her and Nancy and Mdlle. both exclaimed and fled to take their places. When the last member of Staff was there, the Head spoke.

“It has been very difficult indeed to decide, for you have all shown such ingenuity and many so much originality, that we nearly had to draw lots on it. However, we didn’t have to descend to that. I can give you the names now. But first, I must tell you the prizes. We are giving each of the winners a voucher to take to our outfitters and each voucher will give you one of the new uniforms. We couldn’t have the dresses here, because of the difference in your sizes. But in any case, you couldn’t wear them this term, so you may wait till the holidays. In VIa, the prize goes to Josette Russell for a well-thought-out and elaborate dress. In VIb to Lisette Falence for an effective Breton Fishergirl.”

Everyone clapped loudly. Josette was very popular and though Lisette was a quiet creature, everyone liked her. Then they settled down to hear who had won in the three Fifth Forms. In Va, it went to Ricki Fry who had turned her green and yellow rolls into a Mandarin’s dress, with green petticoat and yellow overcoat. She had made herself a green hat which was not exactly correct, but she had been bright enough to use the black cord from her dressing-gown as a pigtail. Ricki was bright pink when she went up to receive the envelope containing her voucher and by the time she rustled back to her chair, she was crimson.

In Vb the prize went to Francie—mainly by grace of Mdlle. who had firmly pointed out to her colleagues that the cutting and fitting of the collar was very difficult without a pattern and it had been beautifully done. The last voucher was awarded to Connie Winter and Connie was one wide beam as she went up in her Nurse’s uniform to receive it. Her people were very poor and she herself was at the school on the Thérèse Lepâtre Scholarship. There was no money for extras in the Winter family and Connie had already resigned herself to wearing skirts and blouses when the rest were flaunting it in the new uniform. This was a joyful surprise.

“Mummy will be as thrilled as I am!” Connie thought as she sat down again, clutching the precious envelope to her. “I must take care of it and it will do for Lulu when she comes here—as she jolly well *will!* I’ll see to that!”

Then the evening was over except for one thing. Josette was about to stand up and call for three cheers for Miss Annersley and the Staff, but Francie was before her. Springing to her feet, she began, “For they are jolly good fellows!” and after the first stunned moment, every one of the girls joined in, singing at the tops of their voices.

“Thank you, girls!” Miss Annersley said as well as she could for laughing when Josette’s three cheers had followed. “And now—bed, everyone! Go quietly, please. It is nearly twenty-three hours and if the Middles and Juniors are not asleep, they ought to be! Don’t make a noise to wake them up, whatever you do. And don’t forget to say your Prayers as you missed School Prayers this evening. Goodnight, everyone!”

And that really was the end. The girls picked up their various belongings and went off while the younger members of the Staff only waited until the last girl had vanished, followed by the four Matrons, before they turned to, to set Hall to rights.

“We’ll see to all this,” Nancy Wilmot said, waving her hand at the litter of deck-chairs, scraps of paper and ends of sewing-cotton strewn everywhere. “We won’t say ‘no’ to a final hot drink, Jeanne, if you feel disposed to provide it by the time we’ve cleared up. Thank you so much!”

And Mdlle. went off, laughing, to see to it. The Head and Miss Dene followed her and when the weary but satisfied Staff sat down in the Staff sitting-room to cups of delicious coffee, it was to find that Miss Annersley had produced chocolate biscuits from her own store to add to the feast.

“It’s been a good evening,” Miss Derwent remarked as she finished her coffee. “Leave the crocks, everyone. Vida and I will wash them up tomorrow morning. Meanwhile— —”

“Meanwhile,” Miss Annersley said, “there goes midnight. Time *you* were all in bed. Goodnight, everyone! Coming, you two?” to Mdlle. and Rosalie Dene who had bedrooms in her private annexe.

They parted for the night and when the moon struggled through heavy clouds for a fraction of time, not a soul in the Chalet School but was sleeping the sleep of the just and weary.

CHAPTER XX

A REAL CHALETIAN!

The walk Ruey had planned so gaily with Francie did not come off. Those heavy clouds of the night before had come laden with snow and the school woke up next morning to find that it was a case of "visibility nil". It was impossible to see as far as a yard through the madly whirling snowflakes that came down so silently and so relentlessly.

"Well! Crown me with a pancake!" Margot ejaculated as she stared out of her cubicle window at the giddy dance outside. "This is a young blizzard!"

"It may be, but it won't last for long and the snow won't lie, so don't hope for ski-ing or lugin' yet," observed Marie Walther with a pessimism born of long experience. "You know yourself, Margot, that the first snows *never* lie. All it will do will be to prevent our walking out and then the whole Platz will be a sea of churned-up mud!"

Marie, who was the cousin of Carmela Walther, but most of whose life had been spent in England as her father had been the Swiss representative of his firm there, had, nevertheless, been born in Geneva, so the dormitory accepted her statement. Besides, those of them who had been at the Görnetz Platz two or three years, knew it to be correct on the whole. First snow never did come to stay.

Once more, there was no going out. The girls had prayers, hymns and readings in the gymnasium for the Catholics; in Hall for the Protestants. When that ended, they were told to go to their common-rooms and amuse themselves quietly.

"Walk's off," Ruey said to Francie when they met in the common-room. "What about our talk though? Where can we go to be private?"

"The gym?" Francie queried. "No one else is likely to go there and it's warm."

"O.K. Come on!" And Ruey led the way. She was determined to have this out properly with Francie.

Once they were safely ensconced in the gym with no one else to interrupt, Francie, having let down the barriers by even a little, let them go altogether. Long before she had finished, Ruey was realising that there were people who were much worse off than she was. Her father might have odd ideas about his duties as a parent, but at least she had Roger and Roddy. None of them were sentimental but each of the three knew that the other two would rally round in a case of need. Francie had *no one*—not even an absent father. And Ruey felt dimly that the kindest of stepmothers could never quite make up for your own mother.

Where the question of Margot was concerned, she did her best to get the other girl to realise that it was most unlikely that Margot would make another close friend as she had of Emerence. Certainly not for the next few years. In her anxiety to make Francie grasp this, Ruey forgot her own griefs and grievances and by the time she had persuaded that young person to try to see things rather more sanely, her own troubles had lost the worst of their sting. Besides, she had felt that it was not fair for all the telling to be on one side. She had let Francie into the secret of her father's proposed journey and found her not merely sympathetic, but wildly excited.

"Oh, Ruey! Not really? Honestly? But how—how fabulous! Why, they might even reach Mars—or—or Venus! By the time we leave school people may be taking trips there just as they do trans-continental flights now!"

Ruey suddenly grinned. "It'll take a bit longer than that, I'm afraid. Both Mars and Venus are millions of miles away from earth! Anyhow, it's the moon they're heading for and from all

I've heard, I can't imagine a more ghastly place for a trip!"

In discussing this, Francie finally forgot that she had ever hated Ruey Richardson. In fact, it was the beginning of a real friendship for her which had far more in it than the one-sided adoration she had felt for Margot Maynard. She accepted once for all that the latter was not likely to offer the close friendship she had given Emerence Hope to anyone else. Now that her thoughts had been turned outward and away from herself, there was a chance that the kinks in her make-up would be smoothed out in time. To look a little ahead, that was exactly what happened. The Francie Wilford who went home for the Christmas holidays went prepared to be as pleasant as she could and by the time she left school, she had lost her permanent black dog and was an attractive young person in every way.

As for Ruey, this term at the Chalet School had done much for her. Having fallen into the lines the school designed for its pupils, she kept to them. When she and Francie went out into the world to work, the Head always said and felt that these two were among the school's successes.

All this was to come later. Meantime, the worst had been smoothed over. This was just as well for the end of term was only a few weeks away and, apart from lessons and games—when the weather permitted!—everyone had as much as she could do with the play.

Having finally made friends with Ruey, Francie stopped coveting her part. She discovered that her own was a remarkably good one and threw herself into it. Incidentally, Va were so annoyed with Betty Landon, that they gave her no peace until she knew her lines so well that she could have repeated them in her sleep. As she once said with as much bitterness as easy-going Betty could produce, *everyone* who had a spare moment seemed determined to use it in hearing her through them!

Kathy Ferrars heaved a thankful sigh on the day that the scene over which she had had so much trouble went smoothly from beginning to end. That being so, she turned her attention to other scenes and a few more people who needed a firm jog or so and began to hope that her first Christmas play would be successful.

The Christmas play was always given on the last Saturday afternoon of term. The school broke up early in the following week—this time, on Tuesday—and Monday would be given to clearing up generally and packing. All plays were given in St. Luke's Hall at the gates of the Sanatorium. It had been given to the Platz by a grateful patient some years before. Other people had provided seating and lighting and the girls made their own scenery for everything so that by this time they had a good supply of back-drops, flats and even a certain amount of furniture.

Besides the main hall, which would seat six hundred, there were dressing-rooms behind the stage and siderooms which were useful for cloakrooms and refreshment rooms. For the School's plays, St. Mildred's provided usherettes, the orchestra, and people to take charge of refreshments. When the St. Mildred's pantomime came off, the school saw to these functions. Audiences were provided by people from the Sanatorium, the inhabitants of the Platz and other shelves near at hand, such Old Girls who lived within visiting distance and any visitors who happened to be there. Joey or her sister wrote the plays and the school's singing-master, Mr. Denny, saw to any music that was needed and acted as conductor.

On this occasion, Joey had written the play. The story was a simple one.

A spoiled girl, the only child of wealthy parents, fell in with some children from a nearby orphanage. She talked to them and discovered how different their lives and prospects were from hers. She had everything money could buy: they had bare necessities. She had pretty clothes, a kind governess who made lessons interesting and plenty of time for play: they wore a hideous uniform, went to school to a snuffy old schoolmaster who made free use of his cane and, when lessons were done, were set to chores of all kinds. The Matron was an ill-tempered

elderly woman who detested children and was there because the salary was good. When they reached the age of twelve, the boys were sent out to day-labouring and the girls to domestic service.

So horrified and shaken out of her normal selfishness and egotism by all this was the girl, that she begged her parents to spend the money they would have given for her usual lavish Christmas presents on giving these poor children a party with a magnificent tea, a Christmas tree laden with gifts for them and a supper as fine as the tea. Further, she coaxed them to do what they could to change the place. As her father was a trustee and Chairman of the committee, he got both Matron and Schoolmaster pensioned off; people in their places who loved children and would do their best to make them happy; and abolished the awful uniform. There were to be regular holidays and at least two hours for play and reading every day.

Joey had set her play in mid-Victorian times, since Homes for children are such very different places these days. She rammed home her lesson in the last scene. The girl, happy as she had never been before, was fast asleep in bed after that wonderful party and as she slept, a troupe of angels came in singing. The Madonna followed, bearing her Baby in her arms and with her, St. Joseph, the shepherds and the three kings because they had been the first to offer gifts to the Christ Child. They surrounded her bed and blessed her as she slept and the Madonna bent over to lay her Baby on the girl's arm for a moment, while the angels sang the beautiful carol, "Christmas Day is Come."

The curtain fell on dead silence which lasted for a minute. Then a voice spoke: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

No applause was ever permitted on these occasions and as actors and audience came from many different countries there could be no National Anthem. The end was marked by one of the priests coming before the curtains and saying a few words.

"Christmas time is close at hand," he said slowly. "It was then that God gave to man the greatest Christmas Gift of all time. The time when He showed His surpassing love for man. This is the time when we should show our love for our fellow-men as the little Christina did in the play you have just witnessed. Make it a happy day for all in your own homes; but also spare a word, a thought, a gift, a prayer for those to whom Christmas brings little or nothing. God bless you all and give you a holy and a happy Christmas."

He slipped back between the curtains. The footlights went out and the house lights came on. The doors were flung open and the audience streamed out into the dusk of the winter evening. Mercifully, that one snowstorm had been the only one, though there had been plenty of rain and high wind to make up for it. But the day had come grey, but dry, and it continued so all day.

Everyone went to church on Sunday and the tiny school chapels had been decorated for the occasion. They sang Christmas hymns and carols and the collections at all services were dedicated to the children of a poor parish in Innsbruck. When the school, then in Tirol, had given its first Christmas play, they had done this and, apart from the war years, they had done it every year since then.

Monday was a busy day, for not only had all books to be packed up and stored in desks and lockers, but they had to pack. Tickets and journey money were given out; library books called in and checked up. Finally, the school magazine, which was late this term, had to be distributed. As a wind-up, when everything was done, they had Spot Supper with speeches from new mistresses and girls after those from the two Heads and Joey Maynard who insisted on turning up on every occasion. Proceedings were wound up by a sing-song in Hall and everyone went early to bed for most of them had long journeys on the morrow.

The Maynards and Ruey stayed at school till the last motor coach had vanished through the gates. When only the Head, Rosalie Dene and the Matrons remained behind to finish off

various jobs, Matey called the four and told them to take their cases and be off to Freudesheim.

“I’ll be seeing you later—all the holidays, in fact,” she said. “Tell your mother, Len, that she needn’t expect me before eighteen hours. I’ve a lot to do.”

“All right,” Len said, picking up her case. “We’ll be expecting you, Matey, so don’t be late! Come on, you folk!”

They had already said goodbye to Miss Annersley, Miss Wilson, Rosalie Dene and the other matrons, so there was nothing to wait for. They took their cases and went off down the path, through the wicket gate in the hedge and across the wide lawn of Freudesheim. Joey had seen them coming from her bedroom window and she was at the top of the steps, waiting to welcome them home.

“How late you all are!” she said as she kissed and hugged them. “I expected you an hour ago. However, it gave me the chance to get Phil and Geoff off to sleep so don’t make a noise to waken them. Take your things up to your rooms and unpack. Then come straight down to the salon. I’ll have elevenses waiting for you.”

“Where’s Papa?” Con asked before she turned to the staircase.

“In Interlaken on business. He’ll be up in time for lunch. Did Matey say when she was coming, any of you?”

“Not till eighteen hours,” Len replied, hanging over the banisters halfway up. “She says she’s got heaps to do, but you can expect her then.”

“I see. Well, go on, you three. Ruey, I want you for a moment.”

She led Ruey into the study as the triplets raced upstairs with due care for the slumbers of the last new babies.

“Ruey, I have news for you,” she said quietly. “You know that the space flight was put off a fortnight ago for various technical reasons. Those have been overcome and early this morning, your father and his companion took off. And—and that’s all.” She looked anxiously at the girl.

Ruey stood still for a moment. Then she dropped her case which she had been clutching and flung herself into the arms ready to receive her.

“I’m not going to make a fuss or be miserable about it,” she said breathlessly as Joey held her close. “Or not if I can help it, anyhow. It’s Christmas time and I’m not going to spoil it for the kids by being a wet-blanket. And I’m going to trust to God to bring Father safely back. Or—or if he doesn’t come back, then I’ll know that he has Mother again, so he’ll be happy. And—and we three aren’t left alone. We have you and Uncle Jack and there’s Daisy and Laurie Rosomon. So—so it might be—be worse!”

Then, because she was only a human girl, she had a little weep. Joey held her and murmured comforting words to her and presently she was herself again.

“S-sorry!” she gulped as she scrubbed her eyes fiercely. “I didn’t—mean to howl like a kid! I wo-won’t do it again!”

Joey held her a minute longer. “I think,” she said with gentle gravity, “that this one term at the Chalet School has given you something you didn’t have before. I’m proud of you, Ruey. And don’t try to bottle things up too hard. That does no one any good and in the end, when the outburst comes, it’s worse than if you had given way just a little now and then. So come to me if things seem too hard. That’s what I’m here for. I can say that to you, because you aren’t the self-pitying kind and you’ve learned this term that we’ve got to think of other people as well. Yes; I’m *very* proud of you. You’ve become a real Chaletian—someone who can face the hard things of life as well as accepting the pleasant ones. Someone who’s going to be some good to the world and her fellow human-beings. Go ahead!”

She released the girl and Ruey stood looking up at her. “That’s what I wanted,” she said. “It’s awfully decent of you to tell me I’ve made a start. I mean to try to go on until I’m a real, true Chaletian—something like you and—and Mary-Lou!”

“Oh, but you’re that already,” Joey said quickly. Then, in a different tone: “The others are yelling for you! Fly, before they wake the babies from their mid-morning nap! Quickly, Ruey!”

Ruey snatched up her case and ran.

[End of *Ruey Richardson—Chaletian*, by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]