THE GIRL WHO WOULDN'T MAKE FRIENDS

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The Gwyneths were sitting beside the low doorway.

The Girl Who Wouldn't Make Friends

BY

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TO
HUGO

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CHAPTER I.
THE FATEFUL LETTER.

Robinette was alone when the fateful letter arrived. If the whole truth be told, she was feeling just a trifle injured and indignant; for her mother had gone off to town for a day's shopping, and Robinette enjoyed lunch in a tea-shop above all things. As she happened to be kept from school by one of the heavy colds which had troubled her all winter, it had seemed to her a matter of course that she, the only daughter, should go with her mother to carry her parcels and make herself good company. But Mrs. Brent had not looked at matters in quite the same light.

"No loitering about draughty stations and looking in at shop windows for a girl who catches a cold if it comes within half a mile of her," she had said, and had laughed away Robin's protests and pleadings.

The boys went to school in town every day, and did not come home till evening; so Robinette had found the hours pass heavily, and had come to feel more and more ill-used as time went on. Dinner all alone was a dismal business; and she could not even invite the cat to sit on the table and share her meal, for a recent domestic tragedy, in which a neighbour's dish of "Rough on Rats" had figured prominently, had left her catless. Dogless she had been since old Jack had died, the week after father started for India; for Jack had been father's dog, and his place must not be filled till father came home and chose a successor himself. So she was feeling distinctly lonely, very dull, and rather inclined to make herself miserable.

For once she could not quite live up to her name. The boys had long ago discarded "Robertina," to which the big Bible attested her right, and had christened her Robin, because, as Cuthbert said, she was always chirpy and sometimes cheeky. She, casting about for something sufficiently retaliatory, had been content for a time to refer to the pair as the Hare and the Tortoise, since Cuthbert's deliberate methods were as proverbial in the household as were Dicky's rashness and impulsive haste. But when the "Just-so Stories" came her way, she, with a whoop of triumph, had nicknamed her elder brother "Slow-Solid," and the younger "Stickly-Prickly," and insisted, in spite of protests, that these were accurate descriptions of their characters. But this bickering was taken in good part on both sides, and from Cuthbert, who was fifteen, to Dicky, who was nine, while Robin came between, they were all the best of friends.

"A letter for you, Miss Robin."

Robinette was curled up into a ball in the corner of the sofa, bent double over a book, and all that could be seen was a tumbled blue frock and a long brown pigtail. But at this announcement she flew up, dropping her book.

"For me? From father? But it's not mail-day. Whatever's up now? And it's Dicky's turn—oh, it's not from father!" and she took the long blue envelope and examined it curiously.

" 'Miss Robertina Brent'! Dear me! It looks very—very official. Very important and business-like. I do wonder—but it's certainly for me, so perhaps I'd better open it and see."

She poked up the fire and knelt on the hearthrug to read the letter.

It was very long, and rather hard to understand. She knit her brows and puzzled over it. And when she did begin to understand, the news it brought was so very surprising as to be

almost past belief.

It began "Dear Madam"—at which she laughed; it came from Manchester, and was signed "James Martin, Solicitor;" and it began as follows:—

> "Dear Madam,—We have the pleasure to inform you that you benefit considerably under the will of our late client, Robert Quellyn, Esq., of Plas Quellyn, Carnarvonshire, North Wales. By his will, executed by us some twelve years ago and neither revoked nor cancelled by any later will, all his property, including his house of Plas Quellyn and its contents—among which, I may add, are a number of valuable pictures by Mr. Quellyn, similar to those on exhibition in London—also the revenues of the farm Bryn Ceidio, and the cottage, Moranedd, Porthdinlleyn, which form part of the estate, and an independent income of some £500 a year, are left to you on your reaching the age of twenty-one; in the meantime to be held in trust for you by Margery Brent, your mother."

There was much more, descriptive of the estate, the investment of the money, and the contents of the house. But Robin only read it all through once. The first paragraph she read very many times, and then sat gazing into the fire with startled face and thoughtful eyes.

"There's some mistake—there must be!" she was saying over and over again. "Why, I never heard of him before! Who can he be, I wonder? And how did he hear of me—*me*, Robin Brent? It's simply impossible! And why should he—but that's supposing it's true, and it can't be, you know. If he was a rich uncle, now—but he wasn't. We don't keep them in our family. I've heard father say so often. Of course there's some mistake. But they've got my name and address all right. I feel rather like Alice in Wonderland. Perhaps I'd better write and say I think there must be some mistake. It's for somebody else, some other girl, and she ought to know at once. But what a queer thing! I wonder how it's happened? I think, after all, I'll not write till mother comes home, at any rate. She'll tell me what to say. I've had no dealings with lawyers yet. But just suppose there was no mistake, and it really was for me?"

The room grew darker and the shadows filled the corners, then played across walls and ceiling as the flames danced on the hearth. Outside in the street the electric lamps went up with a jerk. In the room there was no sound but the occasional fall of embers in the grate.

And Robinette sat on the rug, dreaming in the firelight.

Rat-tat! rat-tat! But it was no telegram—only Dicky the Hare arriving home from school. The brothers came together—if Cuthbert managed to catch the train; but Dicky always covered the distance from the station with a rush, and generally reached home quite five minutes before Cuthbert, who, if he was not having last words with a schoolfellow, would be loitering along with a book or working out next day's problem as he walked. So to-night, as usual, Dicky arrived first, and launched himself into the quiet dining-room—cap, overcoat, satchel, boots, and all.

"Why isn't tea ready? Isn't mother home yet? Is that you, Robinette? Why isn't the gas lit? Why isn't the table set? Can't we have tea? I'm starving."

Robin rose, and put the letter carefully away on the mantelpiece.

"It's no use making a row, Dicky. You won't get your tea a minute sooner. We must wait for Cuthbert, and I'm going to wait and have mine with mother."

She lit the gas and pulled down the blinds, and began to make up the fire. But Dicky felt hungry, fancied himself starving, and was decidedly impatient.

"Well, I'm not going to wait for anybody. Can't I ask Ellen to get it in? Look here, Robinette, I didn't have half enough dinner to-day—"

"You had as much as usual, I suppose? But Ellen certainly ought to have had the table set by now. I'll speak to her. Servants are a bother; you have to be looking after them all the time."

"Was that a letter you had? Was it from father? O Robinette, how mean of you to grab it! I'm sure it was for me! You know you had the last one, and father always keeps to turns! You are mean—"

"It wasn't from father," said Robin calmly, when she could get in a word. "You shouldn't be in such a hurry. You always are, and you're generally wrong."

"Who was it from, then? Come on, Robin, tell us! Let's see it. Don't be a—"

"It's private—a purely business letter," said Robin, with a distinct feeling of importance which was new to her.

"Go on! Who'd send business letters to you? I believe it was only an Artificial Teeth or Old Clothes Wanted."

"Well, it wasn't, then, and it wasn't an advertisement of a new laundry or coal company either. It was a—a—communication—from my solicitor—my lawyer, you know," and Robin hid a smile behind the daffodils as she lifted them to make way for the tea.

"What *are* you talkin' about?" demanded Dicky, pausing in a wrestle with a bootlace to stare at her.—"Cuthbert, just come an' listen to her! She's talkin' 'bout lawyers and 'munications and s'lic'tors and things. *I* don't know what's wrong with her."

Robinette laughed and went to hurry up the tea. But by the time she came back Cuthbert had caught some of Dicky's curiosity.

"What's all this he's saying, Robin? Is there anything in it, or is it just his imagination—"

" 'Magination yourself!" cried Dicky indignantly.

"Well, you do get things into your head at such a rate, and you know you don't always wait to find out if there's anything at the bottom of them.—He's talking about lawyers, and letters, and artificial teeth, and old clothes all at once, Robin. What's up? Have you had toothache? Are you going to have false teeth? And what do you want a lawyer for? I should have thought a dentist—"

"I only told you what I said, an' what she said, an' what—"

"Oh, all right, old Stickly-Prickly! Don't get the hump so quickly! Let Robin tell us herself."

Robinette thoughtfully picked up the letter.

"I meant to wait till mother comes home, for I really think there must be some mistake, you know. But I don't think I can. I've had to wait a whole hour already since it came, with nobody to speak to, and I'm just dying to hear what some one else says about it. It's so impossible, you see. I never heard of him before."

"Of who? What? What's it all about? Robinette, you're just about as slow as Cuthbert to-day," cried Dicky in exasperation.

"Suppose you tell us about it first, Robin, and keep what you think till afterwards," suggested Cuthbert.

"It's from a lawyer," said Robin, staring at them with round, thoughtful eyes, "and it says that a man in Wales has died and has left his house and all his money to me—*me*! Now, you

know, it can't be true. Why should he?"

Dicky gave a shout of surprise and unbelief, then burst into a torrent of questions. Cuthbert seized the letter, and Dicky, crying to him to read it aloud, calmed himself to listen.

" 'Dear Madam'—"

"Then it's not for you, Robinette; it's for mother. How silly—"

"Wait a bit, you goose," and Cuthbert read on.

At the end of the first few lines Robin stopped him.

"The rest's all business, and rather hard to understand. The beginning is the important part. What do you think about it, Cuthbert?"

"It's for you right enough. There's no mistake. Here's mother's name all right too."

"But why? How—how can it be? I've never heard of him before."

"Neither have I. If you'd ever been to any of the places with the names, I'd say he was some old boy who'd taken a violent fancy to you, for some reason or other, like they sometimes do to handsome young ladies—"

"Go on! How could he? Why should he? And she's not—" began Dicky incredulously.

"But you haven't been there. I've never heard any of the names before. I say, Robin, you'll have to learn Welsh."

"Why should I?" she asked, her eyes widening.

"If you're going to be a landed proprietor and look after estates in Wales, you'll have to be able to talk to the people. Roberts—you know him, Lloyd Roberts, in my form—says if you aren't born to it it takes you fifty years to learn, and then you can never pronounce it."

"Then I shan't trouble to try," said Robin decisively; "I shall talk to them on my fingers."

"But, you goose, that would be all the same," laughed Cuthbert; and Dicky chuckled derisively,—

"O—o—oh! You'll have a nice job, Robinette. I'm glad I'm not you."

"Don't any of them speak English? Cuthbert, I believe you're only teasing."

"The small children may speak English. You'll have to catch one and use it for an interpreter."

"What nonsense! Then you really think it's for me? But isn't it a funny thing?"

"Of course it's for you. It'll be awfully jolly, Robin," he said thoughtfully. "I wonder what father and mother will say? You'll be as rich as rich."

"And is Robinette to have it *all*?" cried Dicky. "It doesn't seem to me quite fair, you know. —Say, Robin, you will have to give jolly birthday presents now! Remember mine's coming soon—"

"I wonder whereabouts it is; and what the house is like; and if it's near the sea—"

"I'll get the map," and Dicky rushed off for the big atlas.

The rugged outline of Carnarvonshire fascinated them all, and Dicky expressed a fervent hope that the house, Plas Quellyn, stood on the extreme point of the Land's End of Wales—on the very tip of the finger pointing across to Ireland. Failing that, the peak of Snowdon seemed to him the most desirable site for a dwelling-place; but Robinette objected, on the ground that it would be so awkward for shopping.

Cuthbert studied the map intently.

"It must be very wild and lonely. You see, it's so cut off from the rest of the world. Here's the railway crawling along the bottom edge, and here's another coming across to meet it. Then they stop. What do you do after that?—walk?"

"Have a pony-trap, perhaps," said Robin, her eyes glowing, "or a motor—"

"O—o—oh! Robinette, do you really think you'll have a motor?" gasped Dicky.

"No, certainly not. I hate them," and she ruthlessly nipped his wild hopes in the bud. "Besides, I shan't be able to afford it. I'm not going to be a millionaire."

"I wonder if the house is somewhere beyond the railway?" Cuthbert said, thoughtfully studying the map.

Then as he followed the line of the northern coast he came suddenly upon Porthdinlleyn Point and recognized the name.

"That's one of them! that's one of the names in your letter! I've found it, Robin. Come and look." And they crowded together over the map, and all tried to see at once.

"Then it is on the sea! Isn't that just splendid, boys!"

"And it's not on the railway, so you'll have to have a motor or something, Robinette, whether you like them or not—"

"It'll be awfully jolly to live out in the wilds, where there are no doctors or shops or anything—"

"H'm! I'm not so sure—"

"If any of you are ill I shall try my hand on you. It will be fine practice," said Cuthbert eagerly, for he had very definite ideas as to his own future. "There's sure to be no doctor in a lonely place like that. Perhaps Dicky'll break his leg—"

"Well, I just won't, then! And if I did, d'you s'pose I'd let you look at it? Break your own leg, if you like—"

"Or Robin might get chicken-pox or mumps—just to give me a chance. It wouldn't hurt much—"

"You dreadful boy! Do stop! Do you suppose mother will know anything about the place? Oh, don't you wish she'd come home? She must be buying up the whole of Whiteley's."

"Of course, if there was a motor, there'd be a good chance of accidents," said Cuthbert thoughtfully, the full possibilities of the case opening out before him. "Not bad ones, of course"—as Robinette cried out indignantly—"but nice little interesting cases—concussions and fractures and that kind of thing. Good practice in first aid to the wounded. I say, Robin, a fellow fractured his collar-bone at footer yesterday, and I wasn't there to lend a hand. Wasn't that hard lines?"

"Good thing for the fellow, I should say," grumbled Dicky.

"And if it's near the sea," Cuthbert went on eagerly, "Dicky's sure to get drowned and need to be resuscitated. I'll read up artificial respiration at once."

"Cuthbert, you're a perfect ghoul! I just hope if any of these dreadful things happen to anybody it'll be to you yourself. What do you suppose is keeping mother all this time?"

"Well, I'm going to have my tea," said Dicky, who in his excitement had forgotten he was starving.

The elders, however, chose to wait a little longer, so when Robin had supplied the wants of the impatient one, she joined Cuthbert by the fire, and they sat discussing the strange news till a well-known knock took them all racing to the door.

"Mother! mother! Robinette's goin' to be a millionaire, an' it's in Wales, and the lawyer's letter tells all about it, and it's a man she never heard of before and a place with a long name; and do you think it's fair she should have it all and none for the rest of us?" This was Dicky's way of breaking the news.

Cuthbert relieved Mrs. Brent of her parcels, and Robinette pulled her gently into the room and made her sit down, then thrust the letter into her hand.

“Don’t listen to Dicky; he’s a donkey. Read it, mummy! We can’t make it out. I’ve been longing for you to come home all afternoon. Perhaps you’ll be able to explain a little.”

Mrs. Brent was reading the letter, and her face, as she opened her eyes wide in startled surprise, was very like Robin’s.

“Robert Quellyn!” she said slowly at last. “How very, very strange! And after all these years!” and she read on in deep amazement.

“Then you do know something about him, mother, and you can tell us what it means?” asked Cuthbert.

“You really think it’s meant for me, mother? At first I was sure there must be some mistake.”

“It’s very extraordinary, but it’s certainly meant for you, Robin. As for what it means, that’s a long story. I’ll tell you what I can, but I’m not sure that you’ll understand it all. Still, you had better hear all there is to tell. It’s a most extraordinary thing, to hear of him again, and after such a long time! And in such an extraordinary way!—Have you had your tea, boys?”

“I’ve begun, but I’ll have another with the rest of you,” said Dicky, and the others laughed. Only Dicky could manage two teas in such quick succession.

“And the story? When will you tell us, mummy?”

“After tea,” said mother quietly.

CHAPTER II.
THE STORY OF QUELLYN.

Cuthbert was a big boy of fifteen, sturdily built, wearing Norfolks and a good-tempered, round face, which broke into smiles at the slightest provocation.

Dicky was so very like him that their mother would smile as she looked from one to the other. Dicky was fair also and had been fat, but was now growing thinner. He wore a football jersey with broad stripes going round and round, which made him look like a little zebra, short knickerbockers, and terrible boots.

Robin was nearly thirteen, tall for her age, and thin, with soft brown hair parted on her forehead and drawn loosely back into a thick plait falling to her waist. She wore a long blue pinafore hanging loosely from her shoulders to cover her school dress, for, as her mother said, she had spent so much of these last two terms in the house that she had been in some danger of wearing out her frock before she really had a chance of wearing it for school. Since last year's summer holiday, which had been spent in the usual way at Westgate-on-Sea, Robin had shown sufficient signs of delicacy to cause her parents much anxiety. She had been subject to constant colds and coughs, and had been troubled by nasty headaches which surprised and distressed her, and had been kept much at home. She hinted at the advisability of a change of air in the spring, and Mrs. Brent agreed that it would do her good, but doubted if it could be managed. For father was in India on business, and might not be home for nearly a year; and some things were difficult to arrange, and others were out of the question.

Tea was soon over that night. So as soon as Mrs. Brent was settled in the big chair they gathered round her, Cuthbert at her side, Robin and Dicky on the rug at her feet.

"I want you to think of a time long ago, when I was not much older than Robin," she said thoughtfully, "and you, Robin, are very like what I was then, I think. About that time my parents died, and I went to live with my aunts, whom you don't remember, in Porthdinlleyn."

"That's the long name in Robin's letter!" cried Dicky sharply, as all three looked up with sudden deepening interest.

"One of them. Porthdinlleyn is on the seashore, a little way from Plas Quellyn. I lived there for four years, and found it very lonely, as there were not many English people in the place. The one person I did make friends with was Robert Quellyn from Ceidio," and they looked up again. "He was only a couple of years older than I; and he was lonely too, for his mother was dead, and his father was a sailor and away from home most of each year. Plas Quellyn is two or three miles inland, away among the trees not far from a big bare hill—a very beautiful place. It seems almost incredible to think that it is to belong to you, Robin—"

"I'm not half good enough," said Robinette very soberly. "Why did he do it, do you think, mother?"

"I can only guess. You must hear the rest of the story. We were very great friends. We walked and rowed and fished together, climbed the hills, and drove about the country, and in fact grew up together. Then when I was nearly eighteen my aunts sold their house and came to London to live, and I of course came with them. Rob wrote to me that he was going for a long voyage with his father—I suppose he felt a bit lonely. After a time I met your father, and we were married. We loved one another, and were very happy, and we have been happy ever since." And they glanced up at her and nodded.

"I only say that because it has something to do with what follows, children. The year after I was married, Robert Quellyn came home, and very soon came up to London to see me. He wanted to ask me to be his wife. Do you understand?"

Robin's round eyes grew rounder in sudden sympathy.

"And you couldn't, of course. And he didn't know. Oh, but that was hard on him!"

"I had liked him very much, but I had never loved him," said Mrs. Brent decisively. "Even if I had not met your father I do not think I would ever have married Rob. But he didn't know, and he came up to find me. Of course my aunts told him all about it, and he went away home without coming to see me, and from Quellyn wrote wishing me every happiness. For a time I heard no more of him. Then, when Cuthbert was about two years old, he came up to town again, and came to see us. Now, just then we were having rather a hard time. Father's business was doing very badly, and he was terribly worried over it. He had begun to fear that it would be a failure and all his hopes would be disappointed, and then what was to become of us all we did not know. And all for the want of a little money! If he could have borrowed some money for a little while, he was certain it would all come right; but he had tried to get the money, and couldn't. When Rob Quellyn came up to town he found out all about this, and of his own accord offered to lend the money that was needed. After that all went on well; the business prospered, and the money was repaid."

"It was awfully decent of him," said Cuthbert thoughtfully.

"It was—awfully decent," Mrs. Brent agreed, smiling slightly. "We felt that we owed a great deal more than money to him."

"Yes, because he might have felt kind of bad towards father, for—"

"He was too generous.—About that time, you, Robin, were born, and we called you after him."

"I've often wondered. You used to say you'd tell me some day, mother."

"This is 'some day,' you see."

"Then is that why Robinette's got such a cracked kind of name? I always thought it was silly," Dicky observed, "but I s'pose after all it isn't."

"He was very much interested in Robin, and I think he was pleased she should have his name. That was the last time we saw him. He went back to Wales and gave himself up to his work. Did I tell you he was a painter?"

"No, but the letter says something about pictures."

"Thought he was a sailor—"

"I never said so, Dicky. He used to paint well as a boy, when he had had hardly any teaching, and he learned a great deal during his two years of travelling with his father. But when he came home he studied in earnest, and the teaching he had then, with the great gifts which were born in him, made him a very fine artist. We used to see his pictures when they were exhibited in London, and he was soon famous for his paintings of sea and waves and hills. Wonderful colouring he put into them, but not a bit too wonderful for the Nevin coast he painted. I had lived there, and I knew how true the pictures were."

"Nevin?" said Dicky. "Where's that?"

"Porthdinlleyn—all the coast near his home. Sometimes he sent portraits, figure studies, or what you would call 'story pictures'—romantic subjects out of history or legend—and they were all very fine. He used to get big prices for them; if there are many left in Plas Quellyn, Robin, they'll be worth a small fortune."

But Robinette was not thinking of money matters.

"And did he live all alone in Wales, mother? Hadn't he any one else to leave his house to but me? It seems very sad. Did he never get married?"

"About five years ago we heard of his marriage, but only through the newspapers. You see, when Dicky was a baby we all went out to India with father for some years, and when we came home very many things seemed changed and we had lost sight of many old friends. The papers spoke of his wife as a young Welsh girl, and had much to say about her beauty. I think they were probably right, for about that time he sent up to town the first of a great series of wonderful paintings, in which many people thought he gave us portraits of his wife. In Wales there is an old collection of stories, partly legend, I suppose, and partly history, but very interesting, and his paintings gave scenes from these stories. Geraint and Enid, for instance—"

"But that's out of our reading book at school!"

The others laughed.

"But I thought it was Tennyson, mother," said Robinette.

"Tennyson didn't make up the story, Robin; it is very, very old. There were a great many pictures in the series, all very fine, and some, at least, of the beautiful heroines were probably portraits of Mrs. Quellyn. The pictures were so much thought of and talked about that they were finally all bought for the nation and hung in a public gallery here in London, where any one can see them at any time—"

"Oh! You'll take us, mother?"

"You had better read the stories first, so that you will understand them. I must get you the book—"

"In Welsh?" asked Robin, pulling a long face.

"Oh no; you can get it in English."

"And what became of Mrs. Quellyn, mother? Isn't she—?"

"She died; and they had no children."

"And he was left alone?" Robinette asked pitifully.

"It was very sad. I believe he was very ill after her death, and I do not think he painted any more pictures. But I had not heard of his death. So far as I know, he had no one at all to leave his property to, but it's a very strange thing that he should think of you, Robin. I must write at once and ask to hear more about it."

"We must write to father too. What will we do with the house, mother? Go and live in it?"

"I hardly think so. It's so far away from everything—right out in the country, six or seven miles beyond the railway."

"Jolly!" said Cuthbert.

"How d'you get there? By motor-car, mother?" cried Dicky excitedly.

"By coach; but of course there is a carriage at Plas Quellyn. It's too far out in the country to live with children. We must think of school, you know. It would mean boarding-school, and none of you would like that."

"I wouldn't go," said Dicky promptly, and Cuthbert and Robin looked up with long faces.

"But in the holidays, mother! We could go for a while, just to see what it's like."

Mrs. Brent laughed.

"Oh yes, we could do that! I'll think about it. But there may be a good many business matters to see to before we can go and take possession. Now I'm going to write to this Mr. Martin and ask for fuller particulars, and then to-morrow I'll write to father."

She brought a book from the bookcase.

“Robin, suppose you look at this. And when the boys have finished their lessons, perhaps they’d like to see it too. Then if you go to see the pictures you’ll know what they’re about.”

“What is it?” asked Dicky curiously.

“The ‘Mabinogion’—the old Welsh tales.”

“What a name! What dreadful long words they do have in Wales!” sighed Dicky.

“Oh, you’ll have to get used to that!” laughed his mother.

CHAPTER III.
OVER THE SEA FROM CHINA.

Three heads close together bent over the book, and silence filled the room. Mrs. Brent, writing at the table, glanced at them at times, and smiled. The boys had finished their work in record time, and had joined Robinette, who had already made a good beginning at the story of Pwyll, without troubling in the least over the pronunciation.

Robin was reading aloud in an undertone. Cuthbert listened thoughtfully, knitting his brows at times as he puzzled over what she read. Dicky listened open-mouthed at certain portions, and chuckled at others.

Mrs. Brent threw out a suggestion now and then, when a word was more than usually murdered, and Robin sighed and did her best to cope with the struggle. For the sake of the story she accepted the difficulties, and at the description of Rhiannon in her garment of shining gold, riding on the "pure white horse of large size," she looked up eagerly.

"That would make a pretty picture, mother!"

"Yes. The stories are full of little bits like that, and Mr. Quellyn's paintings of them are very fine. His colouring was wonderful, and with such interesting subjects he turned out marvellous pictures."

The stories of trickery at the end of the tale appealed strongly to Dicky, who chuckled and laughed outright at times. Cuthbert listened intently to the descriptions of the various combats, and once or twice tried to suggest what treatment he would have advised for the hero's wounds.

"Now if they'd only had the sense to—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Dicky impatiently.—"Go on, Robinette! What happened next?"

They were all interested, and when the story was finished begged for more. So, at their mother's suggestion, Robinette turned to the latter half of the book and read the story of Peredur. At the description of the "black curly-headed maiden of rough and hideous aspect," with the ensuing vivid picture of her extreme ugliness, the boys fairly shouted; but more to Robin's taste was the story of the hero's meeting with the maiden of the castle, in her old tattered garment of satin, with the real fairy-tale description of her loveliness—"blacker than jet, redder than whatever is reddest, and whiter than the bloom of crystal."

It would seem as if the day had held sufficient excitement. But there was more to come, for, just as Mrs. Brent was mildly suggesting bed to Dicky for the first time—the idea always had to be put before him several times before he consented to depart—there came a ring at the bell, and the maid entered, and announced—"Lieutenant Carradale."

"Lieutenant—Carradale! Whoever's that?" cried Dicky, always the first to speak.

"H'sh! he'll hear you.—Who is it, mother?" whispered Robinette.

"Carradale! Mother, it can't be—Jim?" cried Cuthbert, with sudden understanding.

"I expect it is," smiled Mrs. Brent, and rose as the visitor entered—a tall young naval officer, bronzed and handsome, and wearing uniform; and the children stood and gazed in mingled admiration and surprise. But Mrs. Brent went forward quickly.

"Jim, my dear boy, really home again!"

"Just home," he laughed, "and trying to see all the old friends. Is it possible they've forgotten me?—Robin?—Dicky?—You'll remember me, Cuthbert, old man?"

"Not really and truly Jim from next door?" gasped Robinette.

"No, Jim from China," he laughed. "Just fancy you forgetting an old friend like that!"

"But you've grown up, you know," Robin laughed, a trifle shyly; while Dicky looked and listened, and pulled at his mother's arm and whispered questions.

Orders were hastily given for early supper, no more was said about bedtime, and Carradale was thrust into a big chair and bidden to give an account of his travels.

"Do you still belong to H.M.S. *Ardentinny*?" Cuthbert asked.

"Oh yes! I've stuck to the old *Ardentinny*. We're just home from China, you know; but they say were off to Dublin next, so that will be nearer home.—You'll let me run up to see you when I have leave?" he asked, looking up at Mrs. Brent. "It seems natural to come along here."

"Of course. Come here just as you would have gone home, my boy. It's a sad home-coming for you."

For during his five years' absence on service in the East, his mother, who had lived next door to the Brents for many years, had died, and the house was closed up.

"When we have to say good-bye for so long, we always know any time may be the last," he said quietly. "I know you were very good to my mother during her illness. I came along to-night to have a look at the old house, so I thought I'd drop in and see if you were still here."

"We're very glad you did. You must come often. We'll be delighted to see you at any time."

"That's very good of you. And Mr. Brent?"

"He's in Calcutta. He went out last autumn, and may be away for some months yet. Where are you stopping?"

"I left my things at a hotel in town. You see, I have no one in London except the few old friends here, so I thought I'd look them up—"

"And to-morrow you'll come again, and bring your bag and stay just as long as you can spare," said Mrs. Brent with decision.

"Now that is altogether too good of you," he exclaimed, his face brightening. "I'd like it above all things, but I really couldn't think of—"

"Of course you will come! Then you can pay your calls all round the neighbourhood comfortably, and renew old memories and be a little boy again," she laughed. "The children will be delighted. You can see it in their faces."

"Oh yes—rather! But it ought to be the holidays!" sighed Robinette.—"Jim, do you remember the good times we had with the sledge that snowy Christmas?"

"Don't I just? We tipped you off into a drift, and Dicky ran into Jack and knocked the breath out of them both.—Where is Jack, by the way?"

"Dead, six months ago."

"He had fits, and I had a mixture I knew would cure him, and mother wouldn't let me give it him. I'd read up dogs' fits, and it was the very thing. He might have been alive now if they'd let me see to him."

"Mother said Jack was dying, and she wouldn't have him tormented," said Robinette. —"Cuthbert, if you don't mind you'll grow up into a horrid vivisector, and you know how father would hate that. And we'd none of us ever speak to you again if we thought you'd been cutting up rabbits and puppies."

"You have to find out about the insides of things somehow. You wouldn't like a doctor to operate on you who'd never touched a knife before."

"Oh!" she shuddered. "Don't!"

Jim Carradale looked from them to Mrs. Brent.

"This is surely a new development," he said, and she laughed.

"Cuthbert says he is going to be a doctor, and would like to practise on us if we would let him. But somehow we don't see it in quite the same light."

"Do you ever have accidents at sea? What kind of a doctor have you on board? Tell me all about it, won't you, Jim? It always comes in useful—"

Then Robinette broke in, to change the subject,—

"Jim, do you remember that time when we all went to Westgate together, and you taught Cuthbert and me to swim?"

"Jolly! Yes, we used to have fine times; must try and have some more."

"We must tell you to-day's great news," said Mrs. Brent, and he looked up quickly.

So she showed him Robin's letter, and told him the story of Robert Quellyn, and he listened with deep interest.

"And will you all go off to see the house and take possession? It's splendid!—I congratulate you, Miss Robertina!"

Robin laughed and looked shy. "I can't imagine why he did it."

"Carnarvonshire! Then if we're stationed at Dublin we'll be quite near you. I shall run across and call on you when you're settled."

"Come and stay with us. Then we *would* have some fun," suggested Robin.

"Come before we've got to know all about the place. Then we can explore together," said Cuthbert.

"Come and drive us in Robin's motor-car," cried Dicky.

He had been very quiet for a time, fearing to attract attention to himself and so draw down sentence of bed. But the thought of the possible motor-car had become firmly rooted in his brain, and in his eagerness he forgot to be cautious.

"Dicky, it's long past your bedtime," said his mother promptly.

"And anyway there isn't going to be any motor-car," remarked Robinette.

"And I'm not sure that I would care to drive you if there was," laughed Carradale. "I'm more used to boats than motors."

"Pr'aps there'll be a boat. Then you could take us out fishing."

"Not till you've learnt to swim, young man! Only swimmers go fishing with me."

Mrs. Brent's hearty invitation to make their house his home during his stay in London was repeated when Carradale rose to say good-night, and was very gratefully accepted. So during the next fortnight they saw much of him, and the children renewed the interrupted friendship, and in a couple of days felt almost as if he had never been away.

So when, on the following Saturday afternoon, the promised visit was paid to the gallery in town to see the Quellyn paintings, Jim Carradale was naturally of the party.

As a rule, the children did not greatly care for pictures, though Robin was always attracted by anything which seemed to tell a story. But in these pictures they all felt a keen personal interest, though even to-day Dicky soon tired of them, and devoted himself to sliding upon the polished floors.

None of them would even cast a glance at the rows of pictures they passed before reaching the great room set apart for the paintings of Robert Quellyn. Their mother pointed out one and another, but they were all impatient to get on.

"We'll come back another day to see those old things, if you like," Dicky assured her condescendingly. "Don't let's waste time on them now."

During the last few days they had read the "Mabinogion" through from cover to cover, with somewhat embarrassing attention to detail at times. Carradale had been introduced to the stories, and the necessity for close study of them had been impressed upon him. He had been handed the book, and begged to read aloud to the three while they sat listening on the rug at his feet, and had done his best to satisfy them. But he had stumbled now and then, and omitted certain passages in spite of the repeated requests that he would read every word, and had even come to a dead stop at times. For occasionally the translation seemed quite unnecessarily faithful to the old original, and the very outspoken language of the chronicler was altogether too much for him while a young lady sat gazing up at him with clear, innocent brown eyes, not at all understanding his desire to edit the curious old literature he was set to read.

So he was as well instructed in the stories of the pictures as they, and if not as wildly curious, was at least deeply interested in the series of paintings, even before he had seen them. Once he had seen them, he, like a great many other people, could not forget them.

Blodeuwedd faced them as they entered the great door—Blodeuwedd, the maiden formed from flowers, "from the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, the fairest and most graceful maiden that man ever saw." There were the flowers in the wonderful background, rich, creamy blossoms deepening into the golden petals of the gorse, and all fading into the greens and olives of the oak leaves—flowers everywhere. And stepping out from among the flowers came Blodeuwedd, full grown but newly born, with streaming golden hair crowned with leaves, flowing white gown girdled with golden flowers, and wide blue eyes, which held just a hint of startled surprise and expectation.

Mrs. Brent watched the effect on them all with interest. She saw Dicky, after a glance, look round eagerly for something more exciting—something with horses and knights, and perhaps broken spears and swords—saw Cuthbert's eyes brighten, while Robin drew a long breath of delight; and she saw Jim Carradale start and stand gazing, with eager, fascinated eyes. He felt her look, and turning from the picture with an effort, he said, "That is the most beautiful face I have ever seen."

"A great many people have thought so," she said quietly.

"Do you know who—?"

"I think perhaps it was his wife, who died before him. But I really do not know."

"Surely she would be too young?"

"He married a young girl, they said. But no one knows very much about her."

The children wandered off to look round the room, and Carradale followed, but turned continually for another look at the Flower-Maiden.

Here was the Maiden of the Castle welcoming Peredur, and though her beauty was very different from that of the Flower-Maiden, it was almost equally striking. Her hair, "blacker than jet," hung like a cloud about her; her old tattered garment of satin, "which had once been handsome," fell to her feet, and through its rents and ragged holes, true to the description, could be seen her skin, "whiter than crystal."

And here was Olwen, the Giant's daughter, in her robe of flame-coloured silk, with "hair more yellow than the flower of the broom, skin more white than the foam of the wave, cheeks redder than the reddest roses, and hands and fingers fairer than the blossoms of the wood anemone," and there in the path behind her were the four white trefoils which sprang up

wherever she trod; but surely she was only the Flower-Maiden again in a different dress! The children all cried out at once that they were the same, and Carradale, who had found the dark beauty of the Maiden of the Castle somewhat unconvincing, was satisfied once more.

Here were Enid, Branwen, Luned, Helen of Britain, and Rhiannon on her great white horse; and many nameless heroines—the Lady of the Fountain, with flowing yellow hair and gowned in yellow satin—"There was plenty of satin going then," said Dicky incredulously—the Lady of the Glade; the Maid of the Mound; and many stalwart knights and handsome gentlemen, and great war chargers which delighted Dicky; and in the backgrounds mysterious old ruined castles and towers, or wide views of forest and mountain. Here were some of the weird monsters which Owain and Peredur slew, and then came some of the tyrants they met and vanquished—the One-eyed Man, the Grey Man, the Savage Black Man, the Man-eating Giant. Dicky revelled in these; then, with a shout of delight, called them from the contemplation of infant Taliesin just rescued from the weir, to see the Black Curly-headed Maiden, riding upon her yellow mule. After all, she was not so hideous in the picture as in the story. It seemed as if the painter, with his love of beauty, had recoiled from the full portrayal of her deformities. She was represented as a child, with clustering black curls and a mischievous little face, whose merrily twinkling eyes compelled a smile in return. She had the crooked back and huge feet of the story, but to Dicky's disappointment lacked the embellishments of long yellow teeth and uneven eyes with which the chronicler had endowed her.

The whole collection of pictures made a deep impression upon all the children, and it was long before they would consent to tear themselves away.

"But," said Robin, as she stood for a final look round the big room and a last long gaze at the sweet face of the Flower-Maiden, "there are really only two ladies among them all, you know. Whether he calls her Olwen, or Luned, or Blodeuwedd, and whether her dress is yellow satin, or flame-coloured satin, or amber satin—as Dicky says, it's always some kind of satin!—she's always the same girl with golden hair. And all the dark-haired ones are just as much alike, whatever their name happens to be. He must have known two very lovely ladies, and every picture is a portrait of one or the other."

"Not quite, Robin! You make it sound very monotonous. There is more difference than you think. Here is a brown-haired girl, for instance—"

"Yes, but look at her eyes! She's really only Olwen over again."

Mrs. Brent laughed. "The likenesses are certainly very strong. I'm not sure you're not right, Robin."

"And you don't know who the two ladies could be, mother? They must be portraits of real people surely."

"One was probably his wife, but which I couldn't say. Perhaps we shall meet the other in Wales," laughed Mrs. Brent.

CHAPTER IV.
THE SECOND LETTER.

The second letter, like the first, was addressed to Robin herself.

Very many letters had passed between Mrs. Brent and the lawyers, and the children were disposed to grumble because matters moved so slowly. They would have liked to set out for Plas Quellyn immediately on receiving the news; but their mother was waiting to hear what Mr. Brent would advise, and there was also much to arrange. Jim Carradale had rejoined his ship, on the understanding that if they all went north to Quellyn they would send him word, so that if he could get leave he could visit them there. The children were wondering if father would cable any message when he received the news, or if they must wait nearly six weeks for an answer, when Robinette's second letter arrived.

She examined it curiously, knitting her brows over the postmark, which began with "Pwll —." Then she read it through, her puzzled face growing still more puzzled, while all the others watched and waited expectantly.

She looked up at last, her face full of excitement.

"Of course she must stay, mother! It'll be rather jolly on the whole, won't it? I wonder if she's Welsh? But of course she must be, with a name like that."

Cuthbert coughed expressively, Mrs. Brent began to laugh, and Dicky cried indignantly,—

"Well, I do think you might tell us what you're talking about, anyway, Robinette!"

"Didn't I?—Here, mother! I forgot you hadn't read it. Tell them all about it. It's from somebody called Gwyneth Parry," she explained, and the boys listened intently while Mrs. Brent read the letter.

"Moranedd, Porthdinlleyn.

"Dear Miss Brent,—I learn from the late Mr. Quellyn's solicitor that you are the new mistress of Plas Quellyn. Perhaps if I introduce myself you will forgive my troubling you. My sister Margaret became Mr. Quellyn's wife five years ago. We lived with our father in Morfa Nevin, but shortly after my sister's marriage we were left orphans, and from that time until my sister's death my home was with her at Plas Quellyn. Soon after her death I took up some work in the north of England, but returned to Quellyn on the death of my brother-in-law, to see what arrangements had been made for the future and to render any assistance I could. I am anxious now to return to my employment, but feel unable to do so while certain matters here remain unsettled.

"I therefore write to you now on behalf of Gwyneth Quellyn—'Gwyneth fach,' as she is called, or 'little Gwyneth.' She was adopted by Mr. Quellyn seven years ago, and is now twelve years old. Her father, an old friend of Mr. Quellyn's, was obliged to go abroad, and left the child by invitation at Plas Quellyn, intending to return within a year. He died suddenly soon afterwards, leaving Gwyneth quite unprovided for, and Mr. Quellyn characteristically took her to his heart, and would not hear of sending her elsewhere. So far as we know she has no relations, and no other home in the world. I am confident that Mr. Quellyn fully intended to provide for her, but since Margaret's death he was never like himself, and the matter must

have been forgotten. His will, as no doubt you are aware, was worded, 'If I die without wife or children'—and Gwyneth has, of course, no legal right to a penny. But I think morally her claim to consideration is a strong one.

"You will, I am sure, wish to carry out what would so evidently be Mr. Quellyn's wish. So I ask that, in making your plans for the future, you will take Gwyneth fach into account. Plas Quellyn is the only home she remembers, and she could remain here very happily with the women now in charge if you do not intend to occupy the house yourself. If you are coming to Quellyn, or if you think of selling or letting the house, I hope you will make other arrangements for her. I would take her back with me to Newcastle, but that is impossible, as I am not my own mistress there.

"I may add that Gwyneth does not know I have written thus to you, and I do not propose to mention the matter to her, as I am not sure how she would take it. She is a proud, high-spirited child, and apt to take strong prejudices, but most affectionate, and very faithful in her friendships. She looked on my sister and Mr. Quellyn as parents, and the death of one after the other in so short a time has been a great grief to her. To Mr. Quellyn, especially, she was passionately devoted, and I know it would be a great trouble to her to leave Plas Quellyn.

"I should explain also that Gwyneth fach is at present not living at Quellyn itself, but at Moranedd, the cottage on the shore which Mr. Quellyn bought and furnished as a summer dwelling-place. He always spent the whole summer here in Porthdinlleyn, close to the sea, only going up to Quellyn to work in his studio at times. He was taken ill last September while living here, and was never able to be taken home. So Plas Quellyn is still shut up, in charge of the gardener and his wife, but will of course be prepared for you if you wish. This cottage is in the care of Mrs. Roberts, who has acted as cook and housekeeper for many years. She speaks no English, but her niece, Jenny, who helps her in the house, talks English well, or Gwyneth fach will of course be glad to act as interpreter for you.

"I shall be leaving here in a few days, but if you should think of visiting Quellyn, I would be pleased to make any arrangements which would add to the comfort of your arrival.—Sincerely yours,

"Gwyneth Parry."

"Now! What do you think of that? Of course she must stay there, mother—and whether we go or not. Oh, couldn't we go soon, and make friends with her, and see what it's like? It will be jolly to have another girl in the house all the time. Boys get so—so tiring, now and then."

"Yes, I think she must certainly be considered," Mrs. Brent said thoughtfully. "Yes, she has every right to expect it. How very like Robert Quellyn! I wonder how many other secret kindnesses stand to his account? Well, Robin, what will you write to this Miss Parry?"

"I? Oh, you'll write for me, mother dear! I wouldn't know what to say. Say—say we're coming to stay at Plas Quellyn almost at once! And we'll be delighted if this girl will stay there so that we can get to know her. What's her funny name? Gwyneth *what*?"

"It means 'Gwyneth little' or 'Gwyneth dear.' If I write that, it means that we will take her into the family and make her like one of ourselves. I suppose you are all prepared to do your share? It will depend more on you than on me whether the plan is a success or not."

"Fancy two girls in the house! They'll fight," said Cuthbert.

“Two Robinettes! Oh, my goodness!” cried Dicky, in pretended dismay at the prospect. “As if one wasn’t—”

“It’s just a blessing she’s not another boy,” was Robin’s very natural response.—“Yes, mother, of course we’ll be very pleased. It will be downright jolly.”

“Wonder what she’ll say about it!”

“Of course she’ll like it too. We’ll make her. Then we are going to Wales soon, mother?”

“I think we might take a run down there in April, just to see what it’s like. Shall we make them open up Plas Quellyn for us, or shall we go to the cottage by the sea?” Mrs. Brent asked, smiling.

“Oh, the cottage! Mother, do let it be the cottage!” There was a perfect chorus of agreement.

“You may have to do without some things you have been used to, you know.”

“Jolly fun!”

“Very well. If you knew, as I do, what Porthdinlleyn means, you would be even more eager for it.”

“But I’d like to see Plas Quellyn,” said Robinette.

“Of course you shall see it. But it’s three miles from the sea, and the shore will be much more bracing for you all, and especially for you, Robin. It will do you all the good in the world. We shall have to come back for school, you know,” she added.

“We won’t think about that. Perhaps this house will be burned down while we’re away, and we couldn’t sleep in the street. Or perhaps the school will be blown up. Or perhaps—”

“Perhaps London will be invaded by the French or swept away by a whirlwind,” suggested Cuthbert, kindly helping her out. “Or perhaps another Great Plague or Black Death will break out, and then you simply couldn’t come back. Of course I should come to help, but you’d be just as well out of the way.”

“Don’t let’s think about horrid old London at all! Hip, hip, hip! We’re off to the place with the long name to have a real good time! Mother, don’t you think perhaps there *might* be a motor-car?”

“And we’re going to make friends with Gwyneth fach,” said Robinette.

CHAPTER V.
THE LITTLE BROWN CAR—AN ACCIDENT.

A stretch of deep-blue sea, unbroken by sail or steam, save where on the horizon a liner crept lazily past; miles of golden sand and windy dunes; then green hills, and behind them great bare mountains; and away to north and south blue wavy arms of circling coast-line—the fair land of Wales embracing her azure mirror, Cardigan Bay.

Robinette lay back in the corner of the railway carriage, positively weary with the weight of new impressions. She had never, within her memory at least, seen a mountain until to-day; but standing with the boys in the corridor had held her breath and watched as the weird gray head of Cader rose before them—drew down his clouds and vanished—came slowly into view again, grander, more majestic than ever. She had dreamed of lakes, and had leaned against the window-pane as the train crept along by the long shining strip called Bala, lying asleep between the hills. Woods, glens, cascades, rivers, the wide estuary, and Dolgelly in its fairy valley; black cows and piebald cows and great white pigs, gazing sleepily up from the fields, herons standing in the shallows; and everywhere, at every station, the strange noisy confusion of an unknown tongue, unreadable advertisements and newspapers, unpronounceable names full of *w*'s and *y*'s, *dd*'s and *ll*'s—everything was new and fascinating. She felt full of excitement and eagerness for more, and at the same time almost worn out with the wealth of new delights on every side. What a letter she would write to father to-morrow!

Cuthbert was beside her, comparing notes and opinions. But Dicky—oh, Dicky, of course, was out in the corridor!

He had hardly consented to sit still for ten minutes all day, save when luncheon and tea baskets were to the fore. He had a little notebook—and how grateful they all were to that notebook! In it he wrote down the name of every station they passed, and the exact time, to the second, at which they reached and left it. On another page was a record of the number of people, not only in their own reserved carriage, but in the whole compartment, at the start from London, and this was corrected at every stop if any one entered or left the carriage. And on still another page were the names of any engines they passed, and various other statistics, supposed to be of interest to father, to whom, of course, the record would be sent. The spelling and correcting of his notes kept him busy most of the time, and Mrs. Brent, who had dreaded the long day's travelling with so restless a companion, heaved more than one fervent sigh of relief at sight of the youngster prone upon the seat intently making notes in his little book. He sighed laboriously over the names once the border was crossed, but refused to be turned from his self-appointed task or to descend to abbreviations, though "Glyndyfrdwy" and "Llanuwchllyn" were sore trials to an Englishman of nine years.

"Do Welsh names mean anything, mother?" he sighed. "Seems to me they're just letters put together. There's no sense in 'em."

"Oh yes, there is. They nearly all mean something, but you'd have to learn Welsh to understand them all."

"What does Moranedd mean?" asked Robinette across the carriage.

"You don't say it properly, Robin. The people there won't know what you mean, and Gwyneth will laugh at you if you don't mind. Pronounce the two *d*'s at the end like *th*, and put the accent on the *a*—Mor*a*neth. It means 'a dwelling by the sea.' "

"If they mean *th*, why do they put two *d*'s?" grumbled Dicky, struggling with "Penrhyndeudraeth."

Mrs. Brent called them to her window for a glimpse of Snowdon, and they lost the blue bay for a time. But passing through a cutting between great cliffs they found it again, and looked up with delight at a towered castle on a rock.

The day's sunshine slipped away, leaving a golden western sky, and the great hills of the Land's End of Wales stood out darkly against the light. The train drew up in a little station under rocky cliffs, and they knew that it could take them no farther.

"Now we go out into the wilds!" said Cuthbert joyously.

"I hope it's not too wild. I want some supper—"

"Are we going in the motor-bus?" cried Dicky. "O mother, do!"

A great green and white motor invited them to enter, and Dicky the Hare was inside before they could hold him back. But his mother called him out again.

"There must be a carriage of some kind waiting for us," she said. "They are expecting us at Quellyn. Wait a little, Dicky, till we see."

Then over the bridge and into the station yard came a little brown car, with brown-liveried chauffeur in charge, and drew up by the steps. As the platform cleared the man jumped down from his seat and stood watching the people, then came up to Mrs. Brent.

"For Quellyn, madam?" he asked, and Dicky gave vent to an exultant shout.

"There, Robinette! Didn't I say there'd be a motor? Isn't it a beauty? Oh, come on, come on, do!" and he fairly danced with delight.

Robin climbed in rather gingerly, and took her place on the back seat with some trepidation. The boys both made for the driver's seat, and wedged themselves in tightly where there was only room for one, so that they could watch the chauffeur as he touched levers and handles and sent the dainty little machine gliding smoothly through the crowd of vehicles on the station bridge.

Their luggage was piled in behind. Robin drew close to her mother at first, for this was a new experience. They were only creeping along at present, the engine throbbing impatiently, as if eager to be off at speed, but in the throng of carts and buses leaving the station a collision seemed to her unaccustomed eyes inevitable. Certainly their driver seemed to choose his way with marvellous skill, and steered his course through the slow-moving stream with perfect safety. But Robin was not yet used to motoring, and her distinct touch of nervousness was not allayed when Cuthbert turned to her and shouted cheerily,—

"Like it, Robin? Don't be scared, old girl! If anything goes wrong I know just what to do. I'll patch you up in a second if you get smashed. And if we have a collision you'll only come on top of Dicky, you know, and he's nice and soft."

A keen salt wind was blowing up from the bay, sharp with the smell of sand and seaweed. The car swerved round a corner, and left the crowd behind. Away down the narrow street of an old gray town, across a wide market-place, gathering speed with every second, passing in a flash rows of new villas, and off they went down quiet country lanes, leaving clouds of dust behind, but looking forward to a fair white road, with green hedges and hanging trees.

Robin gripped the side, breathless, with scarlet, wind-whipped cheeks and bright, excited eyes. So this was motoring!

In their rush across Carnarvonshire, from the sunny southern shore to the wilder coast of the north, they had no time to take much note of what they passed, and were left with only vague ideas as to what lay between the two seas. The boys on the front seat were chattering

and plying the man with questions. Robin was breathless with the excitement of their speed, and forgot to look about her. She had an impression of white lanes and dusty hedges, long, sweeping stretches of meadow-land, primroses, streams, great trees, and an evening chorus of birds. Then came great hills in the distance, sharply defined against a cloudless, darkening sky, their road grew hilly, they flashed past gray cottages and rushed hooting through a village. The trees lined the road and grew more closely together, and her mother touched her arm and said quietly,—

"These are the woods I told you of, where I used to come for picnics. And this great round hill with the splendid trees is Bodvean."

The motor crept panting up a long slope, and Robinette had time to look beyond the hedges into shadowy depths of woodland, past tall stems clothed in luxuriant ivy, to silent, secret nooks starred with primroses and carpeted with the rich brown growth of last year's bracken. Here under the trees it was almost dark; but when they had passed the little post-office in the woods and the gray hamlet close by, they were out in the open again, and could still see the fields and distant hills. The great round crest of Bodvean fell behind, and the bare, rugged slopes of Madryn, on the other side, grew close and took on a wild and desolate look.

Some handsome red cows watched their swift passage from a safe position behind the hedge, and tossed their heads indignantly at such noise and tumult, and the bells on their necks clanged tunefully.

"Church bells! They're glad to see us," laughed Robin. "I wonder if Gwyneth fach will be glad too? But of course she will."

Down and up the long slopes of the switchback road they raced, and here at the top were cross roads and milestones.

"Nevin!" said the chauffeur, with a jerk to the right. "Ceidio—Quellyn"—to the left, and they looked eagerly, but could see only fields and trees and a long white road running towards the lonely peak of Madryn.

"Then we must be nearly there!" said Robin excitedly. "But where is the sea, mother? there's no sign of it anywhere."

Mrs. Brent laughed. "You haven't long to wait now. This is Morfa, where we come for shopping and to fetch our letters," as the motor sped with warning hoots up the long, straggling street of a gray and white village, each of the neat little houses with its garden and flowers and low stone wall. The houses were spread among the fields in all directions, so that the village seemed of considerable size.

"We shan't be out in the wilds, after all, Cuthbert," Robin remarked.

"Wait!" laughed her mother, "a minute or two more. This isn't Porthdinlleyn yet."

"I shall never learn to say it!" Robin sighed. "We'll have to be careful we don't get lost and have to ask our way home, for we could never say that name. But of course Gwyneth fach will be with us and she'll know the way."

"I'm beginning to wonder how we're to get there."

"But why, mother? Can't the motor take us?"

"Not all the way, I think. This is Penrhos"—as they took a sharp turn to the right, round a corner with a row of low stone cottages. "Now, Robin, right ahead! Do you see the sea?"

"Seems as if we're going right into it!" cried Dicky.

It was nearly dark. The white road dipped suddenly in a sharp descent between high green banks. In the gap between the banks was a faint dark line against the gray sky.

The motor took the slope carefully, with the assistance of the brakes. Mrs. Brent grasped the side with a touch of nervousness, because the drop was so very steep and sudden. The children were too deeply interested in their surroundings to have any fear. But the chauffeur turned to reassure those behind.

"There's no danger whatever, ma'am. We often take the car down to the beach. Miss Gwyneth—"

Then the car struck something in the roadway, swerved, and made a frantic attempt to climb the twenty-foot bank—failed—and fell over on its side, snorting and gasping.

Robin screamed, then struggled to her feet. But Cuthbert was up before her, eagerly assisting his mother and asking anxiously where she was hurt. Then, as she assured him breathlessly that she was all right and looked round nervously for Robin and Dicky, he helped her to sit down on the bank and turned to see to the others—cool and collected, though a trifle excited by this unexpected opportunity.

"Robin, are you all right?—Dicky?—Can't I do anything for anybody?"

It would be unjust to say that he was disappointed to find even the chauffeur unhurt and his services uncalled for. But he assured them that if any damage had been done he would have known just what to do, as he had before leaving home read up how to repair all kinds of breakages in case anything of the kind should occur. He offered to fetch his mother a glass of water from the nearest cottage, but she declared herself only a bit shaken and quite all right again now, so they gathered round the car to ask the cause of the disaster.

The man had been searching about the dark roadway, and now wrathfully held up a great lump of flint.

"That's what did it, and no wonder! Now how did it get here? Never came up from the beach by itself, that didn't."

"You don't suppose any one put it there on purpose, do you?" Cuthbert asked incredulously.

"Don't see why they should want to wreck the car."

"Is it much hurt?" cried Dicky. "Oh, I do hope it isn't smashed! I've been looking forward to riding in it every day."

The man had stopped the throbbing engine, and the car lay helpless on its side, a melancholy silent object.

"I'll see to her. If you wouldn't mind walking on to the foot of the Bwlch, ma'am, you'll find the trap waiting there. I'll bring down the boxes. Tide's out."

"Then come along, boys. The sooner we get home the better. We've had enough excitement for one day."

The shock of the accident had upset them all, and every one felt suddenly conscious of great weariness unnoticed before. They left the car without protest or question, though all wondered much what was to come now. Mrs. Brent led the way down the steep road, the banks, covered with brambles, towering on each side and shutting out the last of the twilight.

Then Dicky the Hare, who of course was in front, gave a shout of surprise, for he stood on a wide wind-swept beach, with great cliffs behind and a gray, heaving sea away beyond a shining stretch of wet sand. There were cottages here close at hand, but otherwise it was all very lonely and a trifle cold, with keen salt wind blowing up from the water. Across the bay, from the darkness under the cliffs, a cluster of tiny lights winked at them in friendly, hospitable fashion.

Robin sniffed the sweet, sharp air.

“It smells very good! But are we going to live on the sand, mother? I hope they’ll give us something to eat soon, and plenty of it! I’m absolutely starving—”

“So’m I! I didn’t have half enough tea,” cried Dicky. “You should have got more buns, mother! I told you there wouldn’t be half enough.”

Then the chauffeur came down, carrying a trunk, and whistled impatiently, and round the corner from the cottages came a trap and a sturdy pony, and following them a cart for the boxes.

Some words in Welsh passed between the chauffeur and the man in charge of the pony, and the children turned eagerly to their mother.

“Are we to get in? Well, this is a journey! What a joke! What a place to get to! What would father say to it, d’you suppose?”

The drive along the sands to the far corner of the bay did not take many minutes. The tide was far out, and the trap ran easily over the flat wet sand. The children drew close together for warmth, and wrapped themselves in the rugs they found on the seats.

“Does the tide ever come right up to the cliffs?” asked Cuthbert.

“Oh yes! In winter I’ve seen it tearing at the cliffs as if it would wash them away.”

“Then how do you get here at high tide?”

“Across the cliffs and through the fields. It is certainly more sheltered than the shore.”

“But it is a trouble to open all the gates, indeed!” said their driver, turning in his seat. “And Miss Gwyneth she thought you would like the shore.”

“Oh, we do!—”

“Gwyneth fach?” asked Dicky, proudly introducing his one word of Welsh.

“No! Gwyneth fawr—Miss Gwyneth.”

“What does that mean? Who’s she?”

His mother laughed. “It means Gwyneth Big as the child is Gwyneth Little—Miss Parry, who wrote to us, I expect.”

“Ay!” said the man.

“Gwyneth Big! How rummy!”

It was very dark. The lights ahead still twinkled in friendly fashion, inviting them on to warmth and welcome. Out to sea there was a blank darkness, darker, they thought, than anything they had ever seen. Suddenly out on the inky curtain a bright point of light appeared for a moment, then vanished.

“Is that a lighthouse, mother?” cried Dicky.

“The Holyhead light—the South Stack Lighthouse. You’ll see it again presently. And this”—as they turned a sharp corner of the cliff and found the friendly lights blazing just ahead—“this is Porthdinlleyn.”

CHAPTER VI.
GWYNETH BIG AND GWYNETH LITTLE.

A passing impression of houses, cliffs, and wet sand, of a long low white cottage with lighted windows, of a wide-flung door shedding streams of welcoming light upon the cold blackness without—and that was all they saw of Porthdinlleyn that night.

Without giving another thought to the pony and trap, which might spend the night there on the shore for all they cared at the moment, the children made for the friendly warmth of the big doorway, and found themselves in a narrow whitewashed passage.

The sound of their arrival had not been heard, for wheels on soft sand made little noise. But a shout from their driver brought an old woman to the end of the passage, and she, with a Welsh exclamation, which was probably hearty welcome but might equally well have been anything else, rushed excitedly forward and opened a door at the side.

The sound of voices in heated discussion, and of course in Welsh, came from within, then ceased suddenly, and there was a meaning silence. Mrs. Brent took Robin's hand and led her into the room, and the boys followed at their heels.

Then Dicky gave an excited cry of surprise and delight.

"Mother! mother! The prettiest girl out of the pictures! You know—the girl they made out of flowers! You said perhaps we'd meet her in Wales! 'Tis her, isn't it? The girl Jim said was the prettiest he'd ever seen, and he'd seen a good many, he said.—Be quiet, Robinette! That's my toe you're jumping on, you clumsy thing!"

"Hush, hush, Dicky!" and Mrs. Brent turned apologetically to the girl, who had flushed up to her golden hair at this unexpected recognition.

But there was no mistaking or denying the fact. She was certainly the fair-haired heroine of so many of Robert Quellyn's paintings—Blodeuwedd, Olwen, Rhiannon, and many others.

She was standing by the great fireplace, her bright hair and fair face framed by the dark wood behind. She was tall and graceful, not much over twenty years of age. She wore a loose white cooking pinafore covering her dress, and held in one hand a toasting-fork and in the other a plate of scones, but put these down hastily and came forward, embarrassed and annoyed at being caught unprepared.

"Please forgive my little boy! He does not mean to be rude, but he is very thoughtless," began Mrs. Brent.

"Indeed, I am sorry we do not seem ready to welcome you properly," and Gwyneth fawr put aside Dicky's unfortunate speech without comment. "It must be our clocks again! You see, it is so hard to know the right time here. Every one tells a different thing, and it is hard to know which is right. The only man who is sure to be right is the conductor of the motor-bus, and I did not go up to the post to-day to ask him. I do hope the car was in time to meet you at the station.—Please forgive my being just a bit untidy! I thought you would like hot cakes to your supper, perhaps, after driving in the cold.—Gwyneth fach!"

She turned, with a troubled look, to the small girl who stood in the middle of the floor. Robin had been gazing at her already, eager to make friends.

But "Gwyneth fach" did not look friendly. Surely her determined little face, as she eyed the strangers defiantly, told rather of aversion, distrust, resentment.

She was small for her age, but strong and sturdy. Her short clustering curls were black and her eyes were very dark, but her skin was clear and white, unfreckled, but with a touch of warm colour from the sun. She wore a short dress of rich, deep blue, hanging loose to her knees, with lace at the neck and elbows, and she held a small white puppy clasped wriggling to her breast, while a very stout fox terrier, evidently the mother, sat watching anxiously to see what would befall her offspring.

And as she faced them without a word, but with defiance expressed in her whole attitude, Dicky once more gave a sharp exclamation.

"Why, Robinette! She's the black curly-headed girl out of the story—the hideous ugly one, you know—but she hasn't got a black face, or a hump on her back, or yellow teeth, or—"

"Dicky! Dicky! How can you?" groaned Mrs. Brent. "What can be the matter with you to-day?—Gwyneth, my dear—"

But Gwyneth fach had turned, flung a sharp word in Welsh to the elder girl, and disappeared through a doorway beside the fireplace, leaving them looking at one another—and at Dicky.

"Oh, you silly little boy! How could you be so rude? And I was just longing to speak to her!" cried Robin.

" 'Twasn't rude, then! She is the same as the black girl in the picture, 'cept that she's not black, and how was I to know she wasn't all Welsh? Cuthbert told me they wouldn't know what we were saying."

Then Gwyneth Parry said quietly,—

"I think we must leave Gwyneth fach to herself for a while. Perhaps she will come back presently. Shall I take you upstairs? You would like to see your bedrooms, and then Jenny will be bringing in the supper."

Before leaving the room they all cast wondering glances about, for until now they had not had time to take much note of anything but the two Gwyneths themselves.

Such a pretty room! Such an astonishing room to find in a low whitewashed cottage! But when Mr. Quellyn bought the house he had altered it to suit his own ideas, and the artist's touch was everywhere.

Pale green-washed walls, long low windows with lattices and shutters, black oak woodwork, creamy hangings, a wide inviting window-seat, and cosy settees on each side of the deep fireplace, which, as Dicky said, "went right into the wall," sea-pictures in dark frames, a big table spread with snowy cloth and primroses and cheerful signs of supper, and, best of all, a great fire burning on the open hearth—these made the sitting-room of Moranedd, "the dwelling by the sea," the delightful room it was.

"We have only this one room to sit in here," Gwyneth explained, seeing the pleasure in their faces. "At Plas Quellyn, of course, there are several. But I really like this little house better myself. And it is so delightful to be so near the sea. I hope it will not wake you in the night."

"Why, we can hardly hear it; it's ever so far away!" said Dicky, not one whit abashed by the trouble he had helped to make already.

The passages between the rooms were low and narrow, with whitewashed walls, and, downstairs, floors of red and blue tiles, and the stairs were high and twisting, and had awkward corners which apparently were on the lookout for unwary heads. Gwyneth apologized for their inconvenience, but Robin assured her eagerly that everything was just delightful.

The bedrooms they found as pretty as the sitting-room. Here again were long, low windows with wide seats below—a big room for the boys, a little one for Robin, and another large one which at present the two Gwyneths shared, while Mrs. Brent had a pretty room below, opposite the dining-room.

"What a dear little house it is!" Robin said in delight; "all so neat and close together, and every bit of it so pretty!"

When she had washed away the feeling of the long train journey and the race across country in the motor, and replaited her tumbled hair, she went carefully down the winding stairs, and found Gwyneth Parry once more toasting scones, but this time without her big apron and wearing a pretty gray pinafore dress, with short, useful pleated skirt and soft white sleeves and yoke. Robinette looked round eagerly for Gwyneth fach; but she was not there, so she turned to the other girl.

"I want to make friends with Gwyneth. We have all been looking forward so much to seeing her! May I go and find her?"

Gwyneth fawr's face took on a troubled look again.

"Now I don't know what you will say, Miss Brent, and I am really very sorry, but I must tell you—"

"Oh, please don't! Nobody ever calls me anything but Robin!"

Gwyneth smiled. "Then you must be friendly too, and call me Gwyneth also. I am sorry there are two of us, but you see it happened so. People here get over the difficulty by calling me 'Big,' as if I were a giantess; and Gwyneth fach 'Little,' as if she were a dwarf! But you will see why we always call her Gwyneth fach."

"I shall call her that too. Please tell me, do you or she feel bad towards me because of what's happened? I couldn't help it, you know. I hadn't even heard of Mr. Quellyn till I got the letter telling all about it."

"It has nothing whatever to do with me, Robin," Gwyneth Parry said gravely. "As for Gwyneth fach, she is a silly child, and I am not pleased with her. I will tell you—but here is your mother. Then I will call to Jenny."

"Isn't it pretty, mother?" Robin said softly, while a smiling round-faced country girl brought in supper—chickens and eggs and bacon from Plas Quellyn, and fish from the bay. "Couldn't we make this little house our home always—at any rate, all through the holidays?"

Then Dicky the Hare came clattering down the wooden stairs and passage and hurled himself into the room, but did not see Gwyneth Parry standing by the fire.

"Say, mother, aren't they going to give us something to eat? It's hours since we had tea, and I'm starving—"

"O Dicky! You had a huge tea at Barmouth, and the buns that were left before we got out of the train, and you had biscuits in the motor, and chocolate when we were driving—"

"You shut up, Robinette! That doesn't count.—Aren't we going to have supper soon, mother? Do ask them—"

"Supper's on the table, Dicky," said Mrs. Brent quietly, and Robin chuckled.

"So 'tis! Then do sit in, mother! Come on quick!—I'm going to begin if you're not, Robinette. I'm not going to wait all night—"

"I shall have to buy you a muzzle, Dicky," said his mother.—"I wonder if they sell muzzles in Morfa, Miss Parry?"

"You might get one at the post-office," said Gwyneth fawr, with her quiet smile again. "They keep most things there."

"At the post-office?" cried Dicky, open-mouthed. "Thought they only sold stamps at post-offices!"

"Where's Cuthbert?" and Robin was going to the door to call him when he came leisurely in, with the white puppy wriggling indignantly in his hands.

"Look here, mother! This is fine! Just what I've been wanting ever since I read that book on bones. See his ribs?—Be quiet, you silly little beggar! I'm not going to hurt you.—Come and feel them, Robin, and I'll tell you all their names. He's better than any book, for he's got 'em all in the right places."

"Well, of course! Where did you expect him to have them?—outside? You're tickling him, Cuthbert, you big bully! Leave him alone."

"Put him down, Cuthbert, an' come on to tea. I'm not goin' to wait for him, mother. If he's started on bones he'll be at it all night."

"I'm not hurting the little beast," Cuthbert protested, feeling every point in the squirming little body with careful, eager fingers; "I'm only studying anatomy.—There, run away, stupid!" as the indignant pup wriggled itself out of his hands and fell to the floor with a yelp of surprise at the consequent bump, then scuttled away to the kitchen. "I'll examine him thoroughly another time," he said with gusto, coming to the table. "It's just what I've been wanting. I try to get hold of Dicky's ribs in bed, but he's a bad subject—wriggles worse than the pup."

Gwyneth Parry had been listening quietly. She was very sober as she poured out tea for the thirsty four, and had nothing to say at first. Mrs. Brent was wondering at her silence, when she looked up, evidently prepared to speak out what was on her mind. At the same moment Dicky, having satisfied himself that in time his hunger might be appeased, burst out,—

"Where's the other girl—the black curly-headed one?"

"Won't Gwyneth fach come and be friends, Miss Parry?" asked Robinette wistfully.

"I hardly know how to tell you about Gwyneth fach," and the girl's fair face was clouded with distress and embarrassment, "and yet you will have to know. I am so very, very sorry, and I will do anything I can to help. I have said everything I can think of to her, and so far it's all no use. This is what has happened. Of course she was terribly upset over Mr. Quellyn's death, but that was three months ago, and she is getting over it. She had never thought of what would become of his house and property till we told her they were to belong to some English people. Even then she only thought it would seem funny and horrid, as she put it, to have strangers at Plas Quellyn. I know her very well, and I know she had never thought of the possibility that he might leave the house to her. She had simply not thought of it at all, and her only feeling, as I have said, was that it would be strange to see other people living there. Indeed, her only comment was that she wished he had found somebody Welsh to leave it to. She has the race feeling very strongly, and is very Welsh—"

"But don't Welsh people like English people?" asked Robinette, with round eyes.

Gwyneth fawr glanced at her, and said slowly, "They look on them always as strangers and foreigners, and they will never forget—you have learnt history, I suppose?—well, never mind! I am Welsh, and I might say too much," she said with a laugh. "I am certain you will find all the folk friendly enough to you. But there it is. There is a little feeling of strangeness between the two races even now, and Gwyneth fach has learned it. But, of course, we all look on English people as necessary evils nowadays, and even quite like them sometimes! Well, you understand, Gwyneth does not object to your owning Plas Quellyn, though she would

have liked you to be Welsh. But the house would have had to belong to somebody. That is not where the trouble comes in."

"Then there is trouble?" said Mrs. Brent, and Gwyneth nodded.

"I do not know what Gwyneth fach thought was to become of her when you came to Quellyn. I do not suppose she ever thought of the matter at all, but just took it for granted she would continue to live here. But I felt it necessary to explain the circumstances to you, and so I wrote, as you know. Somehow—I believe through Mrs. Roberts, the housekeeper here, whom I was foolish enough to consult, and who ought to have had the sense to keep all I said to herself—Gwyneth fach heard of my letter to you. She discovered for the first time that she was practically homeless, with no right here or anywhere else, and moreover discovered that I had asked you to take her in. Perhaps you will not understand how great the shock of this was to her, but you will believe me when I tell you of it, and you will see its results in her, I am afraid. I am more sorry than I can say. I had meant her not to understand how matters stood. I thought she would accept the situation without question, and I believe she would have done so, but for auntie's—that is, Mrs. Roberts's—interference. Auntie, as we call her, is a good old soul, but not very discreet. She chatters away to Gwyneth fach, and has done so for years, more or less, but most of all during the last few months of Mr. Quellyn's illness and since, when Gwyneth has been left very much to her and Jenny for company."

"And Gwyneth is not willing to be friends?"

Gwyneth fawr sat staring down at her cold cup of tea.

"She says she will not stop in the house while you are here. Of course it is very wrong—disgraceful, and very foolish—and I have told her so, but I fear I have lost much of my influence over her in the months I have been away from home. She says—she has a certain gift of expression, as you will find, I fear!" she laughed ruefully—"she says you are only taking her in out of charity and because you cannot help it, since I asked you to; and she refuses to be thrust upon you in this way, thrown on your hands as an encumbrance which you must take along with the house and estate—"

"Oh, how can you! how dare you! As if we felt like that!" cried Robin indignantly, and Mrs. Brent gave an exclamation of dismay.

"I am only repeating what Gwyneth fach says herself, so that you may know the worst at once. I believe that you are perhaps pleased to have her with you, and that in any case you recognize her right to be here, as Mr. Quellyn would so obviously have wished it. But to make Gwyneth fach believe this is more than I can do. Perhaps you will succeed better. I have done my best. I have talked, and argued, and scolded, and pleaded, and explained, all over and over again, but it is all no use. She won't forgive me, she won't forgive you, she won't be friendly, and she says she won't stay in the house. Mrs. Brent, I am terribly sorry about it all. I feel very guilty and ashamed that you should have this trouble, and I will do anything I can to help. But Gwyneth fach is—well, beyond me. I thought possibly strangers might manage her better. I feel as if I could do no more with her. I am so sorry it has happened. I feel as if it was my fault, but I thought I acted for the best. I thought you ought to know," and she looked up, her face full of distress.

"Oh, it's not your fault," said Robinette, looking ready to cry with vexation and disappointment. "But it's so—so downright silly, when we're just longing to be friends."

"You must try and make Gwyneth see that," said Mrs. Brent thoughtfully, and turned to Gwyneth Parry.

"I am very sorry to hear all this, but please do not blame yourself, Miss Parry. I can understand how it has come about. We must all do what we can to set matters right. Surely Gwyneth will soon see that we really wish to welcome her, if she will let us! But what does she mean by saying she will not stay in the house? Where does she think she will go? Where is she now, for instance?"

Gwyneth fawr looked up. "I don't know," she said frankly. "She has run off somewhere. I am pretty sure she is not in the house. Mrs. Brent, if I might suggest, I would say leave Gwyneth fach to herself for a day or two. Perhaps when she calms down a little— You see, we had a—a discussion over my sending the car to meet you."

"The motor?" cried Dicky.

He had been listening intently, but not allowing his interest to interfere with his supper. The others, their eyes fixed on Gwyneth Parry, had forgotten that they were hungry; but Dicky had been working steadily away, and only looked up now at the reference to the car which had so fascinated him in spite of its bad behaviour.

"Yes. She says it is hers—it was given to herself by Mr. Quellyn last summer, she says, and she strongly objected to my taking the use of it for you."

"And is that so? Is it her own by gift?"

"I believe that after my sister's death, Mr. Quellyn, who had bought the car for her and rarely used it himself, remarked to Gwyneth fach that it must be hers now, as he would not care to use it again. But of course she has no right—"

"Then we will not use it without her consent," Mrs. Brent said promptly. "She will surely soon come to understand that we do not wish to take her things or to make trouble for her," and Robin nodded thoughtfully.

But Dicky was not amenable.

"O mother! Don't be mean! I thought we were going to ride in it every day!"

"You'll find plenty to do here without motoring at that rate, Dicky, and I'm not so very fond of motors anyway. Besides, it has broken down—"

"How was that?" asked Gwyneth Parry quickly, and listened with puzzled face to their account of the accident.

"I am so sorry you had such an unfortunate arrival," she said in distress, "and how it happened I cannot think. The man is very careful. He drove Margaret and Gwyneth fach and me all last summer without any mishap. There ought not to be stones like that in the Bwlch," and she sat puzzling over it with troubled face.

"Perhaps Gwyneth fach put it there on purpose," said Master Dicky, blurting out the thought to which Robin would not have given utterance for worlds.

"Gwyneth fach was here with me. She could not possibly know anything about it. You will make trouble if you suspect her of wrong on every possible occasion," said Gwyneth sharply, with such heat that the children looked at her in surprise, and Mrs. Brent wondered if Dicky's thoughtless words had fitted too well into some suspicion with which she was struggling.

"It was just an accident, of course, but it was very unfortunate," she said quietly. "Miss Parry, will you tell Gwyneth fach from me that if the motor is hers we will not use it unless she is willing that we should? Do you think she is in the house? for I would like to speak to her."

Gwyneth fawr went out into the kitchen and spoke in Welsh to Jenny, then returned.

"I am very sorry, but she has run away out and says she is not coming back."

"But where will she go? What will she do? It is getting late. What are we to do about her?"

“Nothing,” said Gwyneth promptly. “I would not like to undertake to find her in the dark, but I know she will be safe enough. She will go up to Quellyn, most likely. Anyway, if she has gone we cannot bring her back, and if we could it would not be wise. Indeed, Mrs. Brent, she will be perfectly safe. Every one knows her, and nothing could possibly happen to her.”

“And are we to go to bed not knowing where she is?”

“I do not know what else we can do. We cannot find her in the dark, but I assure you she will be safe and in shelter somewhere. Indeed, I think you will have to leave her to herself.”

“I don’t like it at all.”

“Neither do I, and I am very angry with Gwyneth fach, but I can see nothing else to do.”

Then Dicky looked up from his tea again.

“The black curly-headed girl in the story—the ugly one—wasn’t she always in a bad temper, calling people names and saying spiteful things to them? Wasn’t she, Robin? Well, Gwyneth fach can’t help looking like her, I suppose, if he made the picture and put her into it, but she could help behaving like her. She’s just the black curly girl all through just now.”

“Dicky seems fairly well up in the old stories,” said Gwyneth fawr, with a faint smile.

“I am beginning to be afraid every time Dicky opens his mouth,” said Mrs. Brent.

Cuthbert looked up with dancing eyes. “Yes! He never opens his mouth without putting his foot in it.”

“Get away to bed, all of you,” said Mrs. Brent.

“But I would like to know what has become of Gwyneth fach,” sighed Robinette.

CHAPTER VII.
THE LITTLE BROWN BOAT—AN ADVENTURE.

Once during the night Robinette awoke. She had fallen asleep quickly, in spite of strange surroundings and regrets concerning Gwyneth fach. But in her sleep a new sound reached her, became part of her dream, and finally woke her. She sat up, listening.

It was the regular crashing fall of waves on sand—the long backwash, like the drawing in of a deep breath, and the thundering crash again. Last night they had heard only a distant ripple. She slipped out of bed and drew aside the dainty curtains, and found the shutters wide open.

It was a fine night, but a sharp sea breeze was blowing up the waves. Day was just breaking, a dim gray light over sea and sky, with faint streaks of pink, and the heaving stretch of waters looked cold and threatening. The smooth wet sand was swallowed up by the sea, which had crept to the very walls of some of the houses of Porthdinlleyn.

She laughed as she remembered Dicky's remark of the night before, that the sea was ever so far away, and they could hardly hear it. It was always a source of satisfaction to herself and Cuthbert when Dicky the Hare was proved wrong in one of his hasty assertions; for he always spoke without thought, and often had to alter his rashly-formed early opinions to agree with later knowledge.

The waves were dashing on the rocks at the foot of the cliff and on the white walls of some of the cottages. But Moranedd, "the dwelling by the sea," faced the water, and still had a protecting strip of sand in front.

She looked round with sleepy eyes at the gray hamlet crouching on the sand at the foot of the cliffs. On the left was a great dark point, rocks below and grass above, running out to sea and curving like a huge black arm as if to protect the village lying behind. In the harbour thus sheltered were fishing-boats and luggers riding at anchor, and a few small boats, which suggested possibilities of enjoyment. Out at sea was a curtain of gray mist, and the hills of which she had heard were hidden. She shivered and crept back to bed, wondering if this cold grayness meant rain later in the day.

The noise in the boys' room awoke her some hours later, and she called to Cuthbert to know what they were doing, for they had speedily discovered that the walls of Moranedd were so thin that they had only to raise their voices very slightly to be heard all over the house.

Dicky, it appeared, had been trying to put into practice Cuthbert's remark about opening his mouth to put his foot in it, and Cuthbert had seized the opportunity while he was thus engaged to feel his ribs and see how they compared with those of the white puppy. The result was a conflict, which only ended when Robin appeared half dressed to say that *she* was going for a walk before breakfast, but she supposed they wouldn't be ready in time. The idea had not occurred to Dicky. He was into his jersey and all dressed in five minutes, and Cuthbert was ready in ten; and they all set out to explore, with nearly an hour to spare till breakfast time.

It was a bright windy morning. The mist of the dawn had risen, and before them, away across the blue bay, was the great twin-peaked mountain, Yr Eifl, rising boldly right out of the sea for many hundred feet, heaving up two sharp peaks to a cloudless sky.

"Isn't it fine? isn't it grand? We couldn't see that last night," Robin said softly. "See the colours on those mountains! And the round hills reaching along this way like a wall behind us

—and the green cliffs—and the yellow sand—and the sea, isn't it blue?—and these black rocks and gray houses—doesn't it all make a picture? No wonder Mr. Quellyn was an artist."

"Oh, come on! Which way shall we go? Come on, Robinette; it'll be time for breakfast if you stand there much longer!" cried Dicky impatiently. "Shall we go up the road or along the rocks? I vote for the rocks.—Come on, Cuthbert!—Don't go to sleep, Robinette! Come on, do!" And Robin turned to follow him, drawing a deep breath of delight as she turned from her first full sight of Porthdinlleyn Bay.

Behind the cluster of gray cottages on the beach which made Porthdinlleyn, a rough road broke through the face of the cliff and offered an easy way to the top. On each side of the village was a point of black rocks, with a suggestion of a footpath along the base of the cliffs. The sand along which they had come the night before was still covered by the tide, and it was hard to believe they had really been driven over the place which was now a stretch of deep blue sea.

There were more fishing-boats in the bay now, and on these there was some bustle as sails came down and nets were stowed away. On the beach near the houses lay several small boats, while others, moored to buoys, floated with the tide.

Directly in front of Moranedd a dainty little brown boat lay on the shore. Sitting on her side was a boy in a blue jersey and white slouch hat—a brown-faced, dark-haired boy, with merry black eyes, which, as Robin realized suddenly, had been fixed on her ever since she came out of the cottage.

Dicky was eyeing the boat longingly.

"I'd like a row! D'you think that fellow would take us out if we asked him? If mother won't let us go in the motor, she'll surely let us have a row now and then."

"In fact, if we mustn't mote, we may surely boat,' said Cuthbert, and Dicky chuckled appreciatively.

"Like a row?" asked the boy, strolling up.

"Very much. But is it your boat?"

"No, it's yours."

"Mine?" asked Robinette, with round eyes.

"You're from Moranedd. It's one of the Quellyn boats."

"Oh! We didn't know. Isn't that jolly, boys?"

"Ripping!" said Cuthbert.

"Spiffing!" said Dicky. "First class!"

"I'll take you out, if you like," said the boy obligingly.

"It's very kind of you. But do you think we ought? We haven't asked—and have we time?"

"Heaps of time; your breakfast's at half-past eight."

"How do you know that?" asked Robin, with round eyes again.

"Oh, I know Gwyneth fawr—Miss Parry. Besides, every one here knows everything about every one else."

"I'm not sure that I shall like that," she said seriously. "And do you live here?"

"Over there," he said, with a vague nod in the direction of the white cottages which marked the Bwlch, where the breakdown of the night before had occurred.

"What's your name?"

"Ivor Lloyd."

"And do you really think you could take us for a row—just a little one, and not far?"

"I guess so," he laughed, and began to push down the boat.—"Come and help," he said to Cuthbert and Dicky.

Dicky was jumping with excitement, but calmed himself enough to push. Ivor brought the oars from an outhouse, and, being barefoot, gave the boat her final shove after the others were seated, then waded after them and scrambled in over the gunwale.

Robin gripped the side as the boat lurched for a moment. Dicky laughed.

"It's ripping!" he said.—"Goin' to be sea-sick, Robinette?"

"Don't be scared, old girl. If you get drowned I'll bring you round," cried Cuthbert reassuringly.

"My goodness! Cuthbert's going to be a poet! Just listen to him! That's the second time this morning."

"It's the combination of sea and mountain air," laughed Cuthbert. "Either is good for you, but both taken together are apt to be rather strong. I never felt—or smelt—anything like it before," and he sniffed appreciatively.

"If it's strong enough to make Cuthbert a poet, perhaps it may even manage to make Dicky sensible," laughed Robin, beginning to enjoy herself. "Really, the way he went on last night was too awful for anything. I wouldn't have believed even Dicky could make such a mess of things in so few minutes."

"Robinette, you're a horrid, mean—"

"Keep cool, Stickly-Prickly, keep cool! Don't get in a fit, man! Sit still, now, or you'll have us all overboard. There's nothing to be ratty about."

Ivor was watching them with merry eyes, and was listening to every word. He handled the oars skilfully and with ease, and Robin said enviously,—

"I suppose, if you live here, you have always been used to boats and the sea?"

"Oh yes! My dad's a sailor, but he's always away. There's only one thing nearly as good as a boat, and that's a motor."

"Our motor broke down last night. Somebody had put a huge stone in the road," said Dicky. "Who could it be, d'you think?"

"Nobody put it there. It had just dropped there somehow," Robin said sharply. "It was an accident."

She had an odd feeling that Ivor was watching her, and that he had introduced the subject of the motor on purpose to hear what was their view of the accident. Could he possibly know anything about it, she wondered; then dismissed the idea as ridiculous.

"I heard about it," said Ivor. "It was in the Bwlch, just near our house. I wonder how it happened."

Robin looked at him sharply, her suspicions returning; but he would not meet her eye, but gazed down over the side of the boat.

"Have you noticed how clear the water is out here? See these rocks we're passing over. You can look right to the bottom."

And Robinette was wondering again, and hesitating as to whether she should question him further, when Dicky cried eagerly,—

"What a jolly beach! What's that little house for? And is that thing for a boat? Is it a boathouse, then?"

Their boat had crept along past steep cliffs, grass above, black rock below, but giving the shore a wide berth because of the hidden rocks with which it bristled. Now they had reached a

sandy cove, with smooth inviting beach and a path up the cliff. On the beach stood a low stone house, with a long slip running down into the water.

"It's the lifeboat house. Like to get out and have a look?"

"Yes, rather!" So he steadied the boat beside the slip, and Dicky and Cuthbert scrambled out.

"I'm quite comfortable. I'll wait for you here," said Robin.

"Might as well have a look round while you're here. You can get jolly shells on the beach sometimes," said Ivor. "It's a good long walk over the cliffs, and maybe you won't have time to come back here again just at once," as she hesitated. "You've heaps of time."

So Robin climbed on to the slip also, and joined the boys by the lifeboat house.

The door was locked. They could see nothing from the front, so went round to the back in search of windows, and spent several minutes in vain attempts to see into the building. Then Dicky ran round to the front again, and a shout from him brought the others running out also.

He was dancing on the slip in wild excitement and indignation, almost speechless with wrath.

"Look! look! He's gone and left us! Oh, what a mean, shabby trick! And it's our boat! O Cuthbert, what'll you do when you get hold of him? Wish he'd tip over and get drowned! Wish he'd run on a rock—"

Then his foot slipped, and he went down with a thud into the channel cut for the keel of the lifeboat, and sat disconsolately rubbing his bruises and hurling fierce exclamations after the retreating boat and Ivor Lloyd.

"Wonder what made him play that trick?" said Cuthbert blankly. "I thought he was a good sort."

"And he was meaning to do it all along!" cried Robinette, "for he asked us to go with him, and when I was going to stay in the boat he talked me into getting out. D'you know, boys, I've an idea—I don't know why, but I can't help thinking he had something to do with the motor spill last night! D'you suppose he could have put that stone in the road?"

"But why should he?" asked Cuthbert slowly.

"Pr'aps he's a friend of that girl's," grumbled Dicky, still rubbing his bruises, "and she put him up to it."

"Wish we'd thought of asking him about her. It's quite possible. She evidently feels pretty ratty about it."

"I think we'd better get home," said Robin. "We can talk about it on the way. When we get there we'll ask Gwyneth—big Gwyneth—if she knows him. Where do you suppose we are?"

Their surroundings were still strange to them, and as they had come by boat, the finding of a way home presented some difficulty. The path up the cliff, however, offered an obvious way to somewhere; so they made for it, and, racing to the top, stood there panting, and looked round in amazement.

At first glance the sea seemed on every side. Certainly there was sea in front, sea behind, and the horizon line ran unbroken round one side.

It was a long green moorland, open, wind-swept, sunny, with ponies grazing near a flagstaff. Later observation explained the presence of the sea on three sides by proving this to be the end of the long headland which curved round to shelter Porthdinlleyn harbour. To the left the green neck of land stretched away to join the mainland, and in that direction therefore they turned, and hastened over the uplands, keeping cautiously back from the edge of the

cliffs, and revelling in the free sweep of the wind, the wide green stretch of moor, and the unbroken crescent of deep blue sea behind.

"If that girl really put him up to it, you know, and if she's going on like this, it's going to be pretty lively," said Cuthbert. "Seems to me we're in for some larks, but hardly the kind you expected, Robin."

"I wish she'd be sensible! I want so much to be friends, and it's so silly—"

"I'd give her something, if I could get hold of her!" grumbled Dicky. "And as for that boy—I call it a shabby, mean trick to pretend to be friends, and then serve us like this!"

"Wonder where she's hiding? She must have slept somewhere—"

"This doesn't seem to be taking us home. We don't seem to be getting any nearer to anywhere, anyway," said Robin, pausing on the brink of a cliff precipice. "And we must mind where we're going. The way you suddenly find yourself on the edge is most awkward."

"More awkward still to find yourself at the bottom, and me patching up the broken pieces! There's a man; ask him if we're right."

"He's coming after those ponies. What shall I ask? The way to—to—oh dear! I can't say it! It's just what I knew would happen! I can't say that dreadful name."

"Ask the way to the place with the long name," suggested Dicky brilliantly.

"They've all got long names—that's the trouble. I'll see if he knows Moranedd. I have learnt that, anyway."

She approached, and nervously put the question, "The way to Moranedd—the beach—where the harbour is, you know." But he looked at her stolidly and shook his head, then jerked his thumb over his shoulder and passed on.

"Well, I never! Doesn't speak English! What a nuisance!"

"We'd better go on. We must get somewhere if we do; and we can't go the other way, for there's only sea behind. But do be careful, boys! I haven't the least wish to know what Cuthbert would do if Dicky broke his neck or I was smashed to atoms."

The coast on each side of the headland was broken up into bays and crevices by the fierce play of the waves at the point, and as the children looked doubtfully over the edges of the yawning gaps they came upon with such startling suddenness, they saw the sea breaking far below on sharp black points of rock, with no beach at the foot of the cliffs, but deep water all around.

"I wouldn't like to come along here in the dark," said Robinette. "Isn't it a long way down? I wonder how we'll get back to the shore."

"There's that mean boy!" cried Dicky, pointing to a speck on the blue bay between the headland and the mountains. "Wouldn't I just like to give him something! What funny bumps in the ground, Robinette!"

Their way led them over two great mounds with a deep trench between, all covered with soft springy turf.

"They look like long green graves of giants, lying right across from the sea at one side to the other," said Robin.

"Wonder who made them, and what for?"

"Made them!" scoffed Dicky. "Nobody made them. It's only the way the hill happened to grow."

"I'm not so sure of that—"

"Oh, there's a road! Look! Is that the way down? I'm going to see where it goes to, anyway," and Dicky raced away down the cart track which cut through the sandy cliff and fell

steeply to the beach.

A yellow sandy roadway, yellow walls with patches of green heather and grass, deep blue sea in the gap between, and a cluster of old gray and white houses on the sand at the foot, close to the sheltering cliff, with a wonderful view of sea and mountain beyond—Porthdinlleyn by daylight. Dicky raced shouting down the path, with the others at his heels, and made for Moranedd and breakfast.

CHAPTER VIII.
PLAS QUELLYN.

"Late for breakfast! A bad beginning, Robin. We want to go off to Plas Quellyn as soon as breakfast is over; and for nearly half an hour Miss Parry and I have been waiting for you, and wondering what could have become of you all."

"It's that bad boy's fault. Most likely he told us the wrong time, as well as landing us in a place we'd never seen before;" and over breakfast they gave an excited account of their adventures.

"Ivor! Then Gwyneth fach was at the bottom of it," said Gwyneth Parry, frowning. "I must get hold of her somehow and talk to her. I never dreamt she would be up to tricks like this."

"Are they friends, then?"

"Oh, very great friends. Ivor's not a bad boy, but Gwyneth fach does pretty much what she likes with him. I fully believe she is chiefly to blame. I'll speak to him too—if I can find him. But he'll be ashamed and unwilling to face me for a while. He always is when he and she have been up to some tricks."

"D'you know, I believe, and Robin believes—"

"We came home such a jolly way, mother! You must come with us and see.—Cuthbert, tell her all about it," and Robin turned to Dicky, and spoke sharply in an undertone.

"Don't say another word about that. Now, Dicky, if you do, you shan't go out in the boat any more. It's my boat, and I won't let you. Can't you see, you goose, that you'll get Gwyneth fach into trouble if you go on about that? I won't have it. And anyway, you don't know anything; it's only guessing. So just you keep quiet."

"Want to make trouble for her; she deserves it."

"Well, I don't, then, and I won't; so just you be careful." And Dicky subsided with an unsatisfied growl, which meant that the discussion would probably be renewed later.

"I searched for the puppy before breakfast, but they say they don't know where he is," Cuthbert was saying to Gwyneth Parry. "I wanted to have another look at him. His bones are awfully interesting."

"Perhaps he has run off somewhere with his mother. They'll turn up again later on."

"The girl Jenny said she hadn't seen them all night, and she didn't believe they'd slept here at all."

"They can't be very far away."

"I believe Gwyneth fach has taken them."

"I have arranged that the trap will meet us at Penrhos," said Gwyneth fawr, turning to Mrs. Brent. "Perhaps you won't mind walking so far across the fields, as the tide is in."

"We'll all enjoy it. I used to be very fond of that path through the fields and over the hill."

So presently they climbed the cliff road again, with Gwyneth fawr as guide. She had come down dressed for the walk in a gray golf cape thrown over the short gray dress she had worn the night before, and a jaunty tam-o'-shanter, and as they stood waiting for Cuthbert, who was searching once more for the white pup, she had remarked to Mrs. Brent,—

"I wonder if you were surprised not to see us wearing black things for my brother-in-law. It occurred to me after I had said good-night that you might be wondering about it. The people here think it is very wrong of me not to have seen to it. But, you see, I know how he would

have hated it. He would not let Gwyneth fach wear mourning for Margaret, and he even said to me that if I must make any change in my clothes at all he hoped very much I would only put on gray and white. He did so hate to see black everywhere, and the people here think it so important. So we have tried to do what we thought he would wish. I had such trouble last night to make Gwyneth fach put on her blue frock because you were coming. She is a bad, silly child."

They strolled across the moor, and by the path through the middle of the cornfield, and so over stiles and walls, and along footpaths and cart tracks, by hedges and banks starred with primroses, till they reached the broad white road at Penrhos corner, and found a little brown pony-trap and a little brown pony awaiting them there.

Of course Dicky had found many excitements by the way. He had ventured, along with Cuthbert, as near the edge of the bottomless black hole as his mother would permit, had climbed the post on the moor, had frightened a flock of sheep, and fled himself before a herd of black cows; while Gwyneth fawr and Mrs. Brent were kept busy answering the stream of questions which flowed from Robin and Cuthbert as each turn of the path gave wider views and showed new beauties of the countryside.

The long range of hills, which forms a wall behind the quiet corners of Nevin and Porthdinlleyn, stood out clear against a bright sky—square, bare Madryn, the dense woods around his feet hiding Plas Quellyn; round, green Bodvean; Nevin Mountain; the craggy Echo Rock; the white-faced quarry, Gwylwyr; and last of all, Yr Eifl, falling sheer into the sea, monarch of the scene, king of the Nevin hills. Robin and Cuthbert must know the name of every point and every village, then turned to glance seaward, and discovered on the skyline a faint blue shadow—Holyhead, whose light they had seen the night before.

Dicky was more interested in the crooked stiles and footpaths over walls, and had no patience for such details. He did his best to break his neck by dancing on the top of every stile they had to cross, and then jumping down without using the bricks and stones left sticking out to serve as steps, and Mrs. Brent had to divide her attention between him and the elder ones.

But as they drove through Morfa and then by quiet lanes to Quellyn, Robin's curiosity as to all they passed was stilled, and she sat sobered by the thought of her inheritance; for she had been told just which parts of these fields and woods belonged to her, and their extent was rather appalling.

She was still more silent when Plas Quellyn came in sight, for she found it all somewhat overwhelming. A great gray house covered with ivy, with long, narrow windows, turrets, battlemented walls, and an imposing doorway, it was more her idea of a castle than of a dwelling, and she thought with sudden relief of the cosiness and dainty comfort of Moranedd, in its corner by the sea.

The house stood among smooth lawns, an avenue of beeches running from the great doorway to the big iron gates. And inside, when they had passed through the porch with its stone pillars, was a wide entrance hall, panelled in dark oak to the roof, with long, stained-glass windows, and a great oak staircase leading to a gallery which ran round the hall, and from which the upper rooms opened.

They looked round and up, up into the domed roof, and even Dicky was impressed for a moment. Then, while the others still stood silent, and Gwyneth fawr, understanding their feeling, waited also, he burst out suddenly,—

"I say, what jolly big banisters! Come and try them, Cuthbert. Oh, I say, the floor's slidy, like in that picture gallery. Do let's come and live here, mother, do! It's just ripping!"

“Come here, Dicky!” as he made for the staircase. “You must behave yourself.”

“I was—I wasn’t doing anything. Surely it doesn’t hurt the old floor to slide on it? I’m not going to do any harm to anything, but it’s no fun just to—”

“Don’t get so excited over nothing, Dicky.”

“Don’t get in such a fit, Stickly—”

“And has Gwyneth fach really lived in this beautiful house always?” Robin asked softly of Gwyneth fawr. “What a lucky girl! Just fancy living here! And it’s no wonder if she hates us for coming interfering. I feel just too mean for anything about it. You know, I can’t quite believe it’s real, I could understand the dear little house on the shore being mine, but this is all far too much—too important somehow. It rather frightens me.”

“It is a beautiful house,” Gwyneth said quietly. “Come and see the rooms. There are a great many of Mr. Quellyn’s pictures in some of them.”

“Do you think Gwyneth fach is here just now? I want so badly to speak to her.”

“I don’t know where she is, Robin. I think she probably came here last night; but she may be anywhere at present. Very likely she is out with Ivor.”

“I would like to see her again,” Robin murmured, and followed the others from room to room.

In the great dining-room were many pictures such as they had seen in London—some finished paintings of further scenes from the old stories, some small replicas of those exhibited in the gallery, and many framed sketches and studies for others.

“We’ll come here when we have a wet day, and examine them all thoroughly,” said Robinette. “O—o—oh! I do like that one.”

It was Queen Gwenhwyvar receiving Enid, the bride of Geraint. Gwenhwyvar, in rich garments of yellow satin, had masses of soft dark hair and great dark eyes, and she was certainly very beautiful. But Enid, in her white robe and veil, had sunny golden hair falling over her shoulders in two long plaits, and big blue eyes: and the children, after a first glance, looked with one accord at Gwyneth fawr, who flushed to the roots of her bright hair.

“The queen is my sister Margaret,” she said quietly. “It is a very good portrait.”

“Mr. Quellyn was fortunate to have such models,” said Mrs. Brent. “We wondered much when we saw the pictures in London.”

“He used to claim a little of our time now and then. I, of course, was hardly old enough at first. I was only fifteen when Margaret was married. Gwyneth fach was delighted when he put her into a picture too.”

“I’m very fond of this one already,” and Robin gave another glance at Enid’s sweet face before she turned away. “But, after all,” she added, “it’s very much nicer to have her alive than to have any number of pictures. Just fancy going home to dinner with her and looking at her whenever we like!” and Gwyneth heard her and began to laugh as she led them into the library.

Then she turned to give them a warning look, and held up her hand in caution. Mrs. Brent laid a restraining hand on Dicky’s shoulder, and they entered quietly.

It was a small room, hung with dark curtains, and with books on every wall. On a wide couch piled with cushions Gwyneth fach lay asleep, the white terrier and its pup curled cosily up beside her. The anger and defiance were gone from her face, and there was a sweetness in the soft curves of cheek and chin and little mouth they had not seen before. Her tumbled dark curls were spread over a yellow cushion. She wore a useful workaday dress of dark green

cloth, short and pleated, and belted at the waist, and a flat green cap with white feather lay on a chair close by.

The terrier raised its head and blinked sleepily at them. The pup stretched its little legs, yawned, and cuddled down to sleep again. Gwyneth's arm tightened about them, and she slept quietly.

Gwyneth Parry withdrew, and the others followed.

"I'll wake her and speak to her before we go. I would like to know what she has been up to in the night. Gwyneth fach asleep in broad daylight is a most unusual sight."

"So she had taken the dogs, after all. I guessed it," said Cuthbert.

"They are great pets of hers. Come and see the conservatories before we go upstairs, and we'll let her sleep till we are ready to go."

But Robin foresaw the possibility that Gwyneth fach might wake and disappear while they were in another part of the house. She was not satisfied to leave her thus, so let the others go on without her and crept back into the library.

An odd fancy seized her. She would not wake Gwyneth, but she would like to leave some token that they had been there, some sign of friendship which perhaps Gwyneth fach might understand.

She was carrying a great bunch of primroses, gathered from a bank as the pony walked lazily up a steep lane and she and the boys followed on foot. She laid them gently in Gwyneth's hand. Perhaps she would understand.

The stout white terrier winked at her without raising its head, and flapped its tail sleepily. The pup snuffled and wriggled, but was very sound asleep. From the big hall outside came Dicky's voice calling shrilly, "Robinette! Robinette! Wherever have you got to? What are you doin' now, Robinette?" And Gwyneth fach sat up suddenly with startled, sleepy eyes and tumbled hair.

"Oh, I am so sorry he woke you. But since you are awake, you'll speak to me, won't you, Gwyneth? I do so want—"

Gwyneth started up, scattering the primroses, clasping the puppy in her arms.

"I was awake in the night, and up very early," she stammered, as if in excuse; and Robin realized suddenly that if she had been out with Ivor Lloyd, as they suspected, she must have been up very early indeed.

But Gwyneth's scattered wits were returning to her rapidly. She had been only half awake at first, but now she burst out,—

"So you've found out where I'd gone, and followed me! How dare you? How can you? Why can't you leave me alone? I don't want anything to do with any of you; I only want to be left to myself. Why can't you—"

"Gwyneth, I want to be friends!" cried Robin, breaking in with difficulty.

"Friends! I'm nothing to you, and you don't want me. It's only because you have to. It's only because Auntie Gwyn asked you to, and you don't like to say no. She had no right to do it, and I'm sure I don't want you to take me in. I knew nothing about it, I tell you, till it was all arranged—as if I was one of the cows or pigs! Well, since I have to speak to you, I promise you won't have much bother with me. I don't want anything to do with you at all; I only want to be left alone. I won't live in your house—not in any of your houses! You needn't think I'm living here at Quellyn, because I'm not. I wouldn't have come in this morning if I'd known you were coming. I've got a place of my own to live in, thank you, and I know daddy wouldn't mind my being there—"

She stopped, struggling with rising sobs, and clutching the puppy to her heaving breast in a desperate effort to steady herself. Robin seized her opportunity.

"But you shall listen to me! You shall be friends—I'll make you. Gwyneth fach—"

"How dare you call me that? It's daddy's name. How dare you? Let me out," gasped Gwyneth, and came towards the door.

Robin set her back against it firmly. "I won't—not till you say you'll be friends."

Gwyneth laughed shakily. "If you think you can keep me in Quellyn if I don't want to stay, you—you're quite as silly as I guessed you'd be."

She snatched up her cap, flung open one of the long, narrow windows, and was out on the lawn in a moment, and speeding away towards the gate.

The puppy was still in her arms. The stout white mother dog sprang after them, but could not reach the window, and went nearly frantic in her distress—barking, yelping, jumping, and tearing at the wall. Robin placed a chair under the window, and she hurled herself after Gwyneth's disappearing green frock, and raced away across the lawn.

"Well, if that's Welsh, to get in a temper like that all in a minute, it's something new to me," sighed Robin ruefully, and opened the door to Dicky, who had heard their voices and was hammering on the outside.

"Whatever's happening, Robinette? Why, she's gone!"

"Well, no wonder, considering the row you were making out there. It was enough to wake any one."

"Have you been playing robins and Babes in the Wood?" demanded Dicky, at sight of the scattered primroses. "Oh, has she taken the dogs away with her? She is a mean—"

"Come away and find the others. Where's mother?" and Robin went off disappointedly.

The display in the conservatories and the splendour of the upper rooms only roused mild interest in her. The hoped-for meeting with Gwyneth fach had been a severe disappointment, and for a time she refused to be comforted.

But at length she shook off the thought of it with a final, "Well, if she doesn't want to be friends, I can't make her. I've done my best, and I shan't worry over her any more."

The boys applauded these sentiments heartily, so Gwyneth fach was temporarily dismissed from their minds.

"This is Gwyneth's bedroom," said Gwyneth Parry, leading them into one of the bedrooms, small, but bright and pretty, with little white bed and pale blue walls, and books and pictures, photographs and ornaments, which were evidently treasured possessions.

"And this was mine," she said, opening the door of the next room. "I hope you will not mind, but I have still left my books and things here. I will take them away if you want to use the room; but I hardly know where to take them to, so I thought perhaps if they were not in your way, you would let me leave them here for a little while. I feel very unsettled in Newcastle, where I am living at present. My old lady there is not very strong."

"Please leave your things here. We hope you'll come and stop with us whenever you can," cried Robinette.

"We shall not be living here at present, anyway," Mrs. Brent said quietly.

Then they went downstairs again, and presently the children left their mother and Gwyneth busy in conversation with the gardener and his wife, and sped away together to explore the gardens.

CHAPTER IX.
THE LITTLE BROWN PONY—AN ANNOYANCE.

Quite the most fascinating thing in the gardens of Plas Quellyn was the ruin. The garden studio was interesting, the lawns and flowers were pretty, the trees were splendid, the pond and stream delightful; but the ruin was beyond all question the spot that charmed the children, and the one place they were to be found, once they had discovered it.

It stood some way from the house, with trees all round, but none very close. It was perched on a mound, and seemed at one time to have been a little castle. It consisted now chiefly of one solid round tower, with walls of great thickness, and a few long, narrow windows, while the remains of other towers lay scattered over the ground, overgrown with ivy, creepers, and heather. Probably there had originally been four round towers at the corners of an inner quadrangle, but three had fallen and been scattered long since. The fourth had either been the strongest or had been rebuilt.

"D'you know, I feel as if I'd seen it before somewhere. Isn't that odd?" said Robin, and stood staring at the old round tower.

"It does look familiar somehow," Cuthbert agreed. "But of course we can't—unless we've seen something like it in a picture."

"That's it!" Robin cried sharply. "In Mr. Quellyn's pictures, you know. Don't you remember the bits of old castles in the backgrounds? Well, it was this old tower—"

"Yes, of course, that's it. He used it for his model."

"You remember the picture of Rhiannon sitting on the horseblock at the castle gate, waiting to carry people in on her back? Gwyneth showed it to us in the house just now. She was Rhiannon, in a lovely blue dress, and this was the castle, but he must have put in an imaginary gateway. I don't see any kind of entrance-way. Let's see if we can get inside, boys."

They climbed about for a while on the broken walls and over the heaps of fallen stone. But their interest was all centred in the grim round tower, and the fact that they could for a long time find no way into it roused their curiosity as to its interior to the highest pitch.

At last with some difficulty they discovered an old doorway behind the bushes which clothed its foot, but it was bolted, and the rusty iron had evidently not been handled for some time. They attacked it valiantly, but Robin soon left the matter to the boys, and sat on a big stone to watch them.

Dicky went at it excitedly, but was soon tired out, and stood aside to let Cuthbert have his turn. He faced the problem more scientifically, and tried to think out some way of inducing the bolts to slip back. This was of more practical use in the end than Dicky's wild waste of strength, for presently Cuthbert announced that he was going back to the house for some oil to ease the rusty bolts and hinges, and Robinette laughed and applauded, and rose to go with him.

"Hare and Tortoise!" she said. "You'll get there in the end, Cuthbert; you always do."

"I intend to. I don't give up cases. It's going to be my business to 'get there.'—Come on, old man, don't be humpy!" to the slightly sulky Dicky, who resented any reference to his many failures. "Race me to the house."

But at the house they found Mrs. Brent and Gwyneth fawr awaiting them, as it was time to start for Moranedd and dinner. So the conquest of the tower had to be postponed till their next

visit to Quellyn.

They walked down to the big gate in search of the trap. But there was no trap to be seen.

Up the white road came the boy who had been left in charge of it—one of the gardener's numerous family of brown-faced, dark-haired children. He was very small, but so was the pony, so he had been deemed sufficient guardian while they inspected the house.

He was crying, in evident anticipation of a scolding. His English was scanty at best, and had quite deserted him in his distress. Gwyneth Parry seized his arm and questioned him severely in Welsh.

When she turned to them again her face was full of annoyance and anger, and she stood for a moment as if unwilling to tell what she had learned from the boy.

Robin guessed the truth.

"Is it Gwyneth fach again? Has she taken the trap? Oh, please don't look so worried! We know it's not your fault."

"If I could only get a word with her!" sighed Gwyneth. "Mrs. Brent, I will really try very hard to find her and speak to her to-day. I'll make Ivor help me, and between us we ought to be able to manage it. She is a dreadful child, I had no notion she would trouble us like this."

"And the trap?" asked Mrs. Brent.

"He says she came down from the house and drove away in it an hour or more ago. He didn't understand. She may be in Nevin or Morfa by now. If you will wait here, I will walk down and send a carriage up for you. I am very sorry, and quite ashamed of Gwyneth."

"Nonsense! It isn't more than four miles, is it? I've walked it often enough, and it will do the children good. They mustn't think they're going to drive everywhere. We'll all walk together."

"There is the carriage here, of course; but the horses are out in the fields, and the boy says there is something wrong with one of the wheels, which is being repaired. So I fear there is nothing for it but to walk, as the car is out of order too, and the man has taken it in to Pwllheli."

"And that's her fault too—" began Dicky.

"Mother, we found such a jolly old ruin," Robin broke in hastily. "We're going to get inside and see what it's like." And she chattered on, with a warning look at Dicky, who subsided.

They had walked through the lanes as far as the cross-roads at Bryncynan, with many unspoken comminations on Gwyneth fach, and many sighs at thought of the long, hot stretch of switchback road, down and up again, and no shade on the way, which still lay between them and the sea, when up the road came the brown trap itself, with the brown pony panting after its struggle up the slope, and Ivor Lloyd holding the reins. Gwyneth fach was nowhere to be seen. He drew up beside them and sprang out.

"That boy again! The mean, shabby thing!" began Dicky heatedly.

"Ivor bach, I'm more glad to see you than I can say," cried Gwyneth, "and still more glad to see the pony!—Come, Mrs. Brent, and when we are in he'll tell us what's happened."

Ivor had pulled off his white slouch hat, and was waiting to help Mrs. Brent into the trap. He winked at Dicky, but glanced more doubtfully at Robin and Cuthbert. For the moment, however, they were so eager to rest that they willingly followed Gwyneth's lead and let discussion of the morning's adventure wait.

"You see," he said, when the tired pony had been induced to set its face towards Morfa once again, "there's a telegram waiting at Moranedd—"

"A telegram!" and they all looked up with startled faces.

"It's for you, Gwyneth."

"Then it means I have to go at once," she said in some dismay. "My old lady in Newcastle has been wanting me for the last two or three days, but I wanted to see you comfortably settled here first, and to bring Gwyneth fach to reason if I could. But she—my old lady—is subject to heart attacks, and when she is ill she wants me very badly indeed. So if she has had one of these attacks I shall have to go at once."

"Of course you must. Don't give another thought to us here. Everything will be all right. Just tell me as we drive through Morfa if there is anything I ought to know. It is nearly twenty years since I knew the village, but I do not think it has changed much."

"There is no great choice in the way of shops," Gwyneth said. "But perhaps we had better go in and introduce you and Robin as we pass."

"Introduce us in the shops?" asked Robin, with round eyes, and her mother laughed.

"Oh yes, I understand. It is not like London, you know, Robin. They will probably look on us as personal friends in each of the shops, and you will have a little chat every time you go in for a loaf of bread."

"And how do you come to be driving Miss Brent's pony, Ivor bach?" inquired Gwyneth.

"Oh, I haven't stolen it," he laughed; "but some one else had."

"Gwyneth fach. Yes, we know."

"Well, I was in the post-office having a chat and waiting for my letter—I'm expecting one from dad from Ceylon, and it's about due now; but the coach was late to-day—when the boy came in with the telegram from Nevin and asked if he'd better take it down to Moranedd or up to Quellyn. I said I'd seen you starting for Quellyn, but that you were going to be back for dinner"—Robin looked at him with startled, amused eyes—"and that I thought you'd probably be on your way home, so he'd better take it to Moranedd. Just then Gwyn came along in the trap, and as I'd seen you start in it, I made her take me in and tell me what was up. When I heard what she'd been at, I said she must go right back and fetch you—because of the telegram, you know. She said she wouldn't, of course; so I told her to get out and let me drive back to meet you. She was rather ratty about it"—his black eyes danced merrily as they met Cuthbert's, and Cuthbert and Robin reddened consciously, while Mrs. Brent, fully understanding, laughed out—"but when I reminded her it was for your sake, Gwyneth fawr, and that the telegram might be a matter of life or death, she gave in and got out. So I think you should all be grateful to me."

"We are, Ivor bach, very grateful," said Gwyneth; but her thoughts were evidently with her "old lady," and she was troubled and silent.

"Why does she call you Ivor *bach*? Is that the same as Gwyneth *fach*?" asked Robinette.

"Of course," he said, staring.

"But then, why is it different? Why isn't it the same? Why aren't you Ivor fach?"

"Sounds very rummy," he laughed. "I'm a boy, she's a girl; that's why. 'Bach' for a boy, 'fach' for a girl, of course."

"Oh!" and Robin opened her eyes very wide at this first meeting with an adjective which on meeting a lady changed its beginning instead of its ending, as any well-behaved adjective would do, if it insisted on changing at all.

"Then," said Cuthbert, who must get to the bottom of everything if he could, "if they wanted to call you 'Ivor big' instead of little, like Gwyneth fawr, you'd be Ivor bawr?—We'll learn Welsh in time, Robin."

"No, no, Ivor *mawr* it would be," he said, staring again at such ignorance.

"But why?"

"Why? it just is, that's all."

"I give it up. It's worse than I thought," Cuthbert sighed, and Mrs. Brent laughed.

"I'll tell you another," said Ivor, his eyes twinkling. "See that great round hill behind?—that's Bodvean."

"Yes, we know that much."

"Give it its full name, and it's Garn Bodvean—Hill Bodvean, you know. Now, this other square blue one, with the pimple on top, is Madryn; but if you put 'Garn' in front of that, it's Garn Fadryn. Changes its first letter. Oh, don't ask me why! I didn't make it up. It just is, that's all."

"I think, on the whole, I won't learn Welsh," Robin said seriously. "I haven't time. It must be nearly as bad as Chinese."

Ivor laughed.

"I say," he said. "About this morning—"

"Yes?" and all three looked at him sharply.

"I apologize. I'm sorry. I won't ever do it again. It was kind of mean when you're strangers. I did it to please Gwyn, but I didn't know then I'd like you. I want to be friends; will you?"

"Yes," said Robin instantly; "but you must stick to it, and not cheat us again to please Gwyneth, you know."

"Oh, I'll stick to it right enough. I felt a bit bad this morning, but I'd promised her I'd do it. I promise you it shan't occur again," he said solemnly.

"Shake hands on it, then," said Cuthbert. "What will she say? Won't she be mad with you?"

"She may be a bit ratty—"

"Don't!" said Robin. "You needn't laugh at us if we do talk slang. The boys bring it home from school, and I catch it."

"I like it; it says such a lot. You can laugh at my Welsh, and I'll laugh at your London. Gwyn will just have to put up with it, that's all."

"In fact, she'll have to lump it," Robin murmured. "But it's rather hard on her."

Here Dicky leaned forward and thumped Ivor on the knee.

"I say," he said, with one eye on Robin, "did you put that big stone down in the road you call the Bull, on purpose to smash the motor?"

"The Bwlch? No, I didn't. I had nothing to do with it," said Ivor sharply, and Robin looked relieved. "But," he added, in a low voice to Robin only, as they drew up before the post-office, "she asked me to do it, and I wouldn't, so perhaps she found some one else who would. The children will do anything for her. Don't you tell tales on her now."

She gave him a quick look. "All right," she said; "I won't."

"Can we drive along the shore, Ivor?" asked Gwyneth fawr, when the introductions had been duly made and they were all in the trap again.

"I'm afraid not; tide was low about ten. You wouldn't get past 'The Ship.' I'll drive you so far along the beach if you like, and you can walk the rest; but it will be rough going—the hard sand will be covered by now."

"I think it will be just as quick to cross the fields, as we did in the morning."

“Right! I’ll see to the trap.—If you’re not doing anything else,” he said to Cuthbert, as they parted at Penrhos corner, “meet me on the beach after tea, and we’ll have a walk at low tide round to Nevin Point, and a scramble on the rocks.”

“Gwyneth,” said Cuthbert, as they turned into the sandy road which led down to Porthdinlleyn, “wait just a minute, please. Those long green banks right across the headland, like giants’ graves—did any one make them, or did they just happen?”

“Make them!” scoffed Dicky again. “How you do keep on ’bout things, Cuthbert! I told you this morning it’s only the way the hill grew.”

“I know you did; that’s why I’m asking. I don’t feel so sure about it myself. And hills don’t grow, by the way.”

“I’ve been told that in British times the headland was a fortress, and those long mounds right across the neck were the walls—two, you see, with a trench between.”

“There! I thought there was something more in them than chance! Dicky, you donkey, you shouldn’t be in such a hurry.”

But Dicky was afflicted with sudden deafness, and pretended not to hear. Robin chuckled.

“Dicky the Hare, Cuthbert the Tortoise! But Cuthbert gets there every time, and Dicky hardly ever! I’ve seen it happen before,” she said.

CHAPTER X.
THE MYSTERY OF GWYNETH FACH.

Robin sat staring at Gwyneth Parry with puzzled face. All afternoon, while Gwyneth packed her bag and made her preparations for departure, she had been troubled by the feeling that there was something she wished to ask, something which must be said at once, or it would be too late. But what it was she could not remember, and even now, as they sat on the low stone wall outside the inn, waiting for the motor-bus to carry Gwyneth off to Pwllheli and the train, Robin was puzzling over that fugitive thought and failing to discover it.

Dicky had made friends with the fat white pig who lived in the sty opposite Bronwylfa, and kept begging her to come and speak to it and tickle its back. But Robin was thinking hard, trying to remember before the bus came up the hill from Edeyrn, so Dicky had to go back to the pig alone. Presently he tired of his new playmate, and tried instead to make friends with the shaggy sheep-dog who was apparently also waiting for the bus. But the dog was not friendly, and would not respond to his overtures; so Dicky retreated to a safe distance, and proceeded to call him all the bad names he could think of.

It was only when the motor had rattled away along the Nevin road, with Gwyneth beside the driver and her bag up on the roof, that Robin remembered.

They were walking down the road towards Edeyrn, to pay a first visit to the quaint little gray village, when she stopped short, and stood in the middle of the dusty white road, her face full of dismay.

"There! I knew it! I knew it was something I wanted her to tell me, and now she's gone and I can't ask her. I've been trying all afternoon to remember what it was. This morning, mother, when I was speaking to Gwyneth fach—it would be better to say when Gwyneth fach was speaking to me, for I could hardly get in a word!—she said I needn't think she was living there in Plas Quellyn, for she wasn't; and she wouldn't live in any of our houses, but she had a place of her own to live in. What do you suppose she meant? I thought perhaps Gwyneth fawr would know. Has she some secret hiding-place we don't know about? or has she friends to go to? What d'you think, mother?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," and Mrs. Brent looked troubled. "I don't mind if she's living in Quellyn, but I would not like her to go to any one else and ask them to take her in. People would think we had turned her out or been unkind to her. I'll see if Jenny can give me any idea where the child is likely to be, and you can ask Ivor what he thinks."

They met Ivor on the shore during the evening, and by their special request he showed them the path along the rocks at the foot of the cliff to Lifeboat Bay. They sat for a rest on the slip, swinging their feet above the water, and Robin put her question,—

"Ivor, do you know where Gwyneth fach is living?"

"Doesn't she come home at night?"

"She didn't last night, and we haven't seen her since the morning."

"She came down to Moranedd when you were up with Gwyneth fawr at the village."

"Oh!" and they turned to him in surprise.

"She came to hear about the telegram, and to have tea with Jenny and Mrs. Roberts. Guess she'd seen you go."

"Then she's really determined to avoid us all she can! Don't you think she's silly, Ivor? We only want to be friends with her."

"When she gets an idea into her head it takes something to get it out again. You'd best leave her alone for a while; perhaps she'll come round."

"But where is she living? we must know that."

Ivor shook his head and said nothing.

"Don't you know? Haven't you any idea?"

"I can guess, but it's no good asking me questions, for I can't tell you," he said sturdily. "I can't go back on Gwyn; you can't ask me to. We've been friends for years, and she's trusted me. I can't tell her secrets, even if she is ratty with me for being friends with you. I can't tell you anything about it."

"Then she has a secret hiding-place!" said Cuthbert slowly, considering the matter. "That's what you mean, I suppose. All right, don't tell us any more; we'll find out the rest for ourselves."

"You might as well let her alone," said Ivor sharply. "If you go trying to follow her, you'll only make trouble."

Robin turned to him quickly.

"One thing mother wants to know, and means to find out. I think you ought to tell us. Is Gwyneth fach living with some of the people about here—at some farm or cottage? And has she told them we've turned her out, or been unkind, or something like that? For if she has, you know, it isn't true or fair, and you may as well tell us at once."

"No," he said quickly; "she's not done that."

"She hasn't gone to any one and asked them to take her in?"

"No."

"Then where on earth does she live?" meditated Robinette.

"No good asking me!"

"All right; we won't. Ivor, we're going up to Plas Quellyn again in the morning. We want to have another look at that old ruin in the garden, and get inside it if we can. Will you come and help?"

Ivor had risen, and was walking up the slip.

"Come up to the top and along to the flagstaff. No, I'd better not go to Quellyn with you, I think. You see, I've been there so often with Gwyn, and we've had such games together there, that I know she wouldn't like to see me about the place with you. It would make her very—ratty!"

"But she won't see us there."

"Oh, she'll hear you've been."

"Have you ever been inside the ruin, Ivor?" asked Dicky curiously. "What's it like inside?"

"Come down and see the rocks at the point; they're well worth looking at. You must be careful, though. The tide swirls round at an awful rate, and I couldn't get you out if you went in. Neither could anybody else, for that matter. So keep back from the edge if you're not sure of your feet," and in the fascination of the scramble over such obviously dangerous places the subject of the ruin was forgotten.

"We'll call in at the post-office on our way up to Quellyn," said Mrs. Brent, as they set out next morning. "It's about time for a letter from father, and we want to hear what he has to say

about all this, you know. But of course the letter will have to follow us from London, so it will be a day later than usual."

But they were too early for the post, which came by coach from town; so they drove on, promising to call for their letters on their way home.

There were still many things Mrs. Brent wished to see in the house, but as soon as the children could escape they made off across the garden, armed this time with oil and a handful of feathers for its application.

The ruin looked as sternly forbidding as ever. Their curiosity as to its interior was intense, and grew with the difficulties of its conquest.

Cuthbert claimed the right to oil the bolts and open the door. So Robin and Dicky stood watching, eagerly expectant.

At last, creaking and groaning and remonstrating, the bolts moved reluctantly back, and Dicky gave a shout of triumph. Cuthbert put his shoulder to the door and pushed valiantly. His weight was not sufficient to move it, however; so the others willingly came to his help, and all three flung themselves heavily upon the door.

It shook, rattled, but stood firm.

"Locked!" cried Cuthbert in disgust. "I never thought of that. Come and ask for the key."

But here another disappointment met them. Evan Davies, the gardener, knew nothing about the key, and evidently could not imagine what they wanted with it. There was nothing in the ruin, he assured them, nothing indeed, but perhaps grass and weeds, and maybe birds' nests.

Robin and Dicky were inclined to give up the quest in despair, but Cuthbert strode off to find Mrs. Davies, who was in the house with Mrs. Brent.

"Oh yes," she said at once. "I hev seen the key—not so very long ago, indeed. Gwyneth fach has it, to be sure."

They looked at one another blankly, guessing what this would mean. If Gwyneth fach had the key, she would assuredly not surrender it readily.

"Where is she?" demanded Cuthbert. "Do you know where I could find her?"

"No, indeed, I do not! I saw her not so very long since—an hour, perhaps—but where she is now I could not tell."

"An hour!" said Robin. "Why, we've been here nearly an hour ourselves."

"It was an hour ago, perhaps, since she was here," the woman insisted.

"Well, I give it up! Where's she hiding now, then?"

It seemed to them all that Mrs. Davies looked conscious, but she would only repeat that she did not know, indeed, where Gwyneth fach could be now. Then Robinette asked suddenly, —

"Have you any idea where Gwyneth slept last night, Mrs. Davies?"

Mrs. Davies sharply denied any knowledge of Gwyneth's doings or whereabouts, and volubly explained that she had only seen her for a minute or two, when she came running in with some chocolates for the small children, and to ask if the trap had been sent for this morning, and if Ivor Lloyd had sent any message for her. But Robin felt doubtful, all the same, and inclined to think she could have told more if she had wished.

They were turning away disconsolately when Cuthbert paused.

"If she comes here again, tell her she's to give up that key, as we want it and are going to have it."

“That woman knows where Gwyneth is hiding,” he said with conviction, as they strolled disappointedly back to the ruin.

“Yes, I thought so too. She evidently has some hiding-place she means to keep secret, and we shan’t find it out through Ivor or any of these people. They’re all quite friendly, but they won’t turn against her.”

“She gives chocolates to the small children, you see! She’s smart—”

“We might give them chocolates too.”

“You’ll make the poor children sick if you all give ’em chocolates,” said Dicky. “If you want to get rid of any sweets, try them on me, Robinette.”

“Wonder where she’s got to now! wonder where she’s hiding?”

“Perhaps she’s inside!” cried Dicky the Hare, with a wave of his arm towards the unsociable ruin.

In one leap he had reached a point to which the others would only have come in several steps.

“Perhaps—she—is!” said Cuthbert slowly; while Robin exclaimed,—

“Well done, Dicky, well done! I’d never have thought of that. But it would explain everything—why she has the key—where she is living—how she managed to disappear just when we arrived! And, now I think of it, Ivor wouldn’t say last night whether he’d been inside or not! He changed the subject whenever we spoke about the ruin. You’ve hit it for once, Dicky, I do believe!”

“And I might do it oftener, too, if you weren’t in such a hurry to jump on me and squash me flat, Robinette. Pr’aps sometimes you’d better just listen to me—”

“I’m not sure about it, though,” said Cuthbert, ruthlessly quenching Dicky’s exuberance. “Wait a bit, old man. Could she live in there? Maybe there’s no roof—”

“Maybe there is! You don’t know. Or pr’aps she’s got a tent.”

“Well, how does she get in? Not through that door. Key or no key, it’s not been opened for ages, as you can see for yourself. Look at the trouble we had to unbolt it.”

“That’s so,” said Robin, and even grumbling Dicky had to admit it.

“Pr’aps she climbs up the wall.”

“Pr’aps she doesn’t. I doubt if I could climb it myself. Pr’aps she doesn’t live in there at all.”

“Well, where does she live, then?”

“Oh, I can’t tell you that. That’s a dark mystery, and must be investigated. Tell you what, Robin! We’ll talk ruin to Ivor bach, and watch his face. If she’s in there he’ll know it, and we’ll get it out of him that way.”

“No,” said Robin slowly, “no, we won’t. I don’t quite like that; it doesn’t seem fair. We won’t ask him anything at all about it; we’ll just find out for ourselves.”

“Oh well, as you like. But I know I’d be able to tell from his face.”

“It seems shabby, when we know he feels that he ought not to tell. We said we wouldn’t question him, and this would be just the same. We’ll wait and see if Gwyneth fach gives back the key. If she does, we’ll know all about it; if she doesn’t—well, we’ll try something else.”

“She won’t. We know that much already.”

“Then we’ll find some other way to get into the ruin and see for ourselves.”

CHAPTER XI.
TROUBLE.

There was no letter from India by the post, and Mrs. Brent acknowledged that as it was only Friday she had been foolish to look for the mail so soon. So next morning the three, in company with Ivor, were waiting under the veranda of the little post-office, criticizing the postcards displayed in the window, long before the coach drove up bringing the letters from Nevin.

There was one letter indeed for Mrs. Brent, but it was only from Newcastle, from Gwyneth Parry, so they turned disappointedly homewards.

"Is your mother worried about your father, then, that she's so anxious to hear from him?" asked Ivor, when they had saluted the white pig and were walking up the Penrhos road.

"Oh no, I don't think so. But she always does get a bit worried about mail day, till she has the letter saying he's all right. She's always afraid some day she'll hear he's ill. He's been having a lot of fever lately, but not bad—just little attacks, you know. But we haven't had an answer from him since we wrote telling him about Plas Quellyn and all that, and of course we want to know what he says about it. There hasn't been time for an answer to our letter until this week, so were looking forward to it extra much, you see."

"I see. But it's no good feeling bad because it hasn't come. Mail's late, that's all. It might only get to London to-night. Better do something to keep her from thinking about it. Would she like a row? It's a perfect morning. I'll come and row the lot of you, if I may."

So they spent the morning on the water, and the children had their first lesson in fishing, while Mrs. Brent showed unexpected prowess with the oars, to the great surprise of her family. But she laughingly assured them that she had rowed all about this coast years ago, and was not past it yet. She and Ivor, pulling together, took the boat along in such fine style that presently they found themselves rounding Nevin Point and entering another deep blue bay. At the children's earnest request they landed on the beach, and climbed the zigzag cliff road for a first visit to the quaint old gray town, lying under the wooded slopes of Bodvean and the bare crags of the Echo Cliff, and carried back to the boat a selection of buns and cakes for refreshment before the homeward journey was attacked.

As they lay off the beach in the little brown boat, Mrs. Brent read them the letter from Gwyneth Parry. It told of her long night journey, and of how she had found "her old lady" worse than she had ever seen her before, and more prostrated by this attack than by any which had preceded it, so that Gwyneth felt seriously troubled as to whether she had strength enough to rally. She closed with inquiries as to the behaviour of Gwyneth fach, adding that she had written very strongly to her on the subject, and had sent the letter to Mrs. Davies, the gardener's wife, at Quellyn.

"Yes!" nodded Robin. "She's hiding somewhere up there, and that woman knows where, although she says she doesn't."

"And so does Ivor bach," said Cuthbert teasingly.

"She's hiding in the old tower!" cried Dicky. "I know she is, and we're goin' to get inside somehow, and then we'll get hold of her."

Between them all Ivor did not quite know where to look, and as they were in the boat he could not escape. Robin glanced at his flushed face, and saw his annoyance.

"It's mean," she said. "Cuthbert, I asked you not to."

Ivor began to laugh. "I shall get quite ratty in a minute, and that would be a pity, as I might upset the boat, or splash you all, or something. Are you going to do any climbing while you're here?"

"Can we? Which of the hills can we climb?"

"I've been up 'em all."

"What, even the Rivals?" For they had shamelessly adopted the English modification of the name of the great twin mountain, Yr Eifl, as being easier to foreign tongues.

"Rivals!" he scoffed. "Aren't you ashamed to murder a fine old name like that? Rivals!"

"Well, it's easier, and there's some sense in it."

"Rivals! Easier! Babies!" he mocked, and they laughed.

"Can you climb them all, Ivor bach? I'd like to climb the Big Rival, and then find a path along the Little Rival till it drops right down into the sea," Robin said, teasingly insisting on the name, to pay him out for his silence regarding Gwyneth fach. "And the Middle Rival, hiding behind the others, so that you can only see it when you get out to sea, can you go up that one too?"

"I've been up them all," he said again. "But you must begin with something easy. Try Bodvean on Monday? The ground should be fairly dry after this fine spell."

On Sunday afternoon the children went to fetch him, in order that he might show them some new walk. But he was out, and they did not know where; so they wandered disappointedly off by themselves along the beach, and in the evening strolled across the headland with their mother, and along the cliffs till at last they found themselves in Abergeirch glen, where the telegraph poles come to an end and the wires drop under the sea to cross to Ireland. Sitting on a mound above the glen, with the little river running over the stony beach at their feet, they watched the sun drop into the sea, then walked home again along the cliffs while the sky glowed crimson and darkened into blue and green.

"Now to-morrow there's sure to be a letter, isn't there, mother? We'll go and fetch it early and bring it back to you, and then we'll all meet Ivor and go up Bodvean together," said Robinette.

So once more they were waiting impatiently on the veranda when the coach drew up before the post-office, and the postmaster came out to receive the mailbag, and withdrew into his sanctum to sort the letters.

It was a very small mail to-day. Here were the letters almost immediately, and they pressed forward in eager expectation.

"None for you to-day," he smiled, and their faces fell.

"Oh, but there must be! What rot!—I mean, are you sure there's no mistake?"

"There is none," he assured them, smiling at their chagrin. "No letters from London to-day."

"Why, how's that?"

"Not on Mondays. The London mail is too late."

"Bother! Yes, of course, the letters aren't lifted till midnight in town. Oh, bother the post! Then we don't get them till Tuesday?"

"Not till Tuesday," he assented.—"Here, Ivor! one for you to-day."

"You cut away home and tell your mother. I'll be waiting at the Bwlch with the trap at ten o'clock," said Ivor, understanding their feeling of blank disappointment. "We'll drive her to

Bodvean and have a picnic there. I'll take my dinner, and you bring yours. It's the best thing you can do to keep her from worrying. I'll cycle up to Quellyn for the trap."

And in the excitement of the climb and the picnic, and the enjoyment of the wide view from the hilltop—sea on both sides of the peninsula, and the Snowdon mountains and Cader Idris in the east—they found the time of waiting till the morrow pass more quickly than they had thought possible in the first moment of utter disappointment.

There were letters next morning, of course—a whole handful. Dicky grabbed them and made off up the road, without time even for a word of greeting to his friend the pig.

The others waited to make sure they had received them all, then gave chase, and caught him at Penrhos as he clambered over the first stile. Ivor, who had been sufficiently interested to accompany them, did not follow, as he saw they had got what they wanted, but strolled off towards Edeyrn, where he had an appointment with Gwyneth fach, to meet her and spend the morning on the shore at Abergeirch.

"Let me see the letters, Dicky," said Robin, as they hastened through the cabbage field. "I suppose there is one from India?"

"Course! D'you think I don't know father's writing?" cried Dicky, with vast scorn.

"But—but—it's not from India! Look at the stamp! And the postmark is Brindisi—"

"Then he's coming home!" cried Cuthbert, with a shout, and stopped short among the cabbages. "That's in Italy; he'll be here in a day or two!"

"Come on an' tell mother!" gasped Dicky, and set off at full speed.

Robin was curiously scanning another letter she had taken from the bundle.

"There are two," she said, and knit her brows over the puzzle—"two from Brindisi exactly the same, but only one is from father. I don't know this writing at all. I do hope there's nothing wrong; but there couldn't be, could there, Cuthbert?"

"Wrong?" he said, frowning; "what could be wrong? Father's all right, anyway, for there's his letter. As for this one, it's addressed to mother. She'll tell us what's in it. We'd best get home quick."

"She said she'd meet us up by the flagstaff," said Robin, and they hurried on across the fields.

Dicky had characteristically forgotten the arrangement concerning the flagstaff, and had rushed thoughtlessly down the cliff road to Moranedd. They met him toiling breathlessly up again as they passed on their way to the headland.

"She's out. Where d'you s'pose—"

"Well, she *said* she'd be at the flagstaff, so it *might* be a good plan to look for her there," said Robinette rebukingly, and Dicky subsided.

"I f'got," he admitted, and pantingly climbed up and down the long green mounds beside them.

Then they all set off at full speed across the open stretch of moorland, having learnt by this time where were the dangerous breaks in the coast which must be avoided, and reached the flagstaff mound too breathless to speak, too exhausted to do anything but toss the letters into Mrs. Brent's lap as she sat on the turf.

"Brindisi!" she said, with a startled look in her eyes. "That means—" and she tore open the letter.

She looked up presently. "Good news, children! He's nearly home. He sailed by the boat that brought this letter, but sent it overland to give us warning. He must be almost due now!"

she exclaimed, starting to her feet. “This should have reached us on Saturday, you know. And he won’t know we are here. I must telegraph—or go—”

“There’s another letter, mother,” and Robin handed it out somewhat nervously, for she had a strange feeling that this second letter brought trouble.

Mrs. Brent took it in surprise. “Read his letter out to the boys, Robin. He’s delighted with our news, but he hadn’t been well—more fever—and he was feeling very run down; so he decided to come home for a while, to see if the voyage would make him stronger. He evidently made up his mind very suddenly, and came by the first boat. That’s why—”

She paused, and began to read the second letter.

“Go on, Robinette! Read up! Do be quick!” cried Dicky.

“Why, mother—mother!” cried Cuthbert, and ran to catch her in his arms.

She had turned as white as the foam of the waves breaking away below, and the letter had fallen on the grass. She leaned heavily on him for a moment, then he helped her to sit down on a rock, and she stretched out her hand for the letter again. Robin, shaking with fear, handed it to her, and Dicky, with terrified face, began to ask what was wrong.

“He’s ill—on the ship,” she said tremulously. “I must go—at once. This is from the doctor,” she explained, beginning to recover from the shock. “He says that after writing that letter, father, who had been poorly all the voyage, was taken worse, and he fears it may prove to be typhoid, though he can’t be sure yet. But he wants some one to meet the boat at Southampton in case father is still ill, and be ready to nurse him there. I must go at once—without losing a moment. We should have known on Saturday. Come away home and help me, children. I must catch the afternoon train. Then I’ll be in London by midnight, and if I can get a good connection I may be in Southampton by to-morrow morning.”

“You’ll be worn out and not fit for anything, mother,” remonstrated Cuthbert.

“There’s no help for it. There’s no other way. I’ll try to sleep in the train. I’ll only take my bag and leave everything else here,” she said, as they hurried across the headland. Then she stopped short.

“But how can I leave you all in a strange place like this?” she cried in dismay. “It’s not as if we were at home.—Robin, can you manage? How can I leave it all to you? And yet what else can I do? I must go—”

“Mother, we’ll be all right, you know we will! We’ll get along splendidly. Jenny and Auntie will help, and nothing could possibly happen to us at Moranedd. I’ll see to everything. Please don’t worry!”

The boys also were loud in their assurances that all would be well, and Mrs. Brent, seeing no help for it, hurried on to explain matters to Jenny and through her to Mrs. Roberts, and to make her hasty preparations.

And Ivor, coming back from Abergeirch about midday, was astounded to see two sober-faced boys and a tearful girl standing in the road outside the inn, waving farewell to the green-and-white motor-bus as it rattled away towards Nevin.

CHAPTER XII.
GWYNETH FACH AGAINST THE WORLD.

Robin and Cuthbert turned homewards with sober faces and spirits at their very lowest.

Dicky had thrown off his depression more easily, and was teasing the old sheep-dog at the crossroads.

Ivor saw how they were all feeling, and was fruitful in expedients for passing the time and taking up their thoughts.

"Look here!" he said. "The *Beatrice* is going out fishing this afternoon, and they'll take us if I ask them. Care to come, and be very sea-sick?"

"Sea-sick yourself!" said Dicky. "*I* won't be sick," and he ran on down the Penrhos road to climb the door of the pigsty and call out greetings to his fat white friend inside.

"The *Beatrice*? Is that the big black boat lying near the jetty?"

"Yes. You'll get a real sea voyage in her—no keeping inshore as we did the other day. And there's a good breeze, so you'll be jolly sick and have a real good time. Come on! Say you'll go, and I'll arrange it. All right! Two o'clock at the Bwlch," and he was off before they could discuss the matter.

Of course boastful Dicky was one of the first to succumb to the natural results of the rolling, and Cuthbert jeered unsympathetically, though feeling distinctly uneasy himself. Robin thought it wiser to be silent and take no notice, for many reasons.

They were not home till after dark, and were so worn out with sea air and new experiences that they were all ready to tumble into bed, with many thoughts indeed of mother in the train and father lying ill among strangers, but with no strength left for worry or grief.

And next morning there was Ivor before breakfast, to bid them meet him at Groes—the crossroads—at nine o'clock, as he was going to fetch the pony from Quellyn and drive them all to the foot of Madryn Mountain. They would climb to the top and have lunch there, and Mrs. Davies would give them tea at Quellyn on the way home.

"I know you don't want to come a bit," he explained, as they met at the crossroads, and waited while Dicky paid his morning visit to the pig. "I know you're feeling bad about your folks and wanting to hear from them; but you can't possibly get a letter before to-morrow, and it's no use sitting down to think about it. To-morrow you'll hear your dad's much better and awfully glad to have your mother there, and as soon as he's strong enough she'll bring him up here to get quite well again. It's always best to be as busy as you can while you're waiting for anything. I know, for I'm always waiting for letters from my dad; and once his ship was three weeks overdue, and I got in a perfect blue funk about him and simply couldn't do anything. So I know how it feels."

The walk up Bodvean Hill had been a pleasant little excursion compared with the climb of Madryn Mountain. They waded knee-deep through damp heather and across boggy ground, then clambered with hands and knees over great gray boulders piled in wildest confusion over the upper slopes. It took a long, long time of the roughest kind of scrambling, with falls and bumps and bruises galore, before they reached the wide, windy plateau on the summit, and then all, of course, must climb to the top of the great mound which forms the pimple seen from below on the rugged bare crest. On the mound was a cairn of loose stones, and to the top of this also they crawled, clinging with hands and feet lest the wind should tear them off and

hurl them down into the great valley, scooped out below like a wide green wave, with tiny square fields making a chessboard pattern, and farms and villages like gray and white dots.

From this perch they took a long, wondering look over the Land's End of Wales—bays, capes, and hills spread out before them like a gigantic map—then turned unsteadily to gaze towards Snowdon, and found there the whole of Carnarvonshire, Anglesey, and the long blue stretch of Cardigan Bay, with the wavy line of Snowdonia in the background and Yr Eifl raising three bold peaks close at hand. Bodvean looked no more than a big green hillock from their superior height, while the blue bays of Nevin and Porthdinlleyn seemed more perfect in outline than when seen from their own sands.

Dicky hailed each point he knew with a fresh shout, and nearly overbalanced in his delight when he discovered the headland, Lifeboat Bay, the Penrhos chimney, and the *Beatrice* at anchor off the Bwlch. He was so restless and excited that the others felt their exalted position distinctly unsafe; so all descended from the cairn, and found a sheltered corner for lunch in one of the square enclosures, built of loose stones, which Ivor claimed as huts of the ancient Britons.

"They lived a good long way from the shops and post then," said Dicky, and was somewhat offended at the laughter of the rest.

"Ivor bach," said Robin, as they sat resting when even the last chocolate had disappeared, "do tell us where Gwyneth fach is hiding, there's a dear good boy! We haven't had time to think much about her this last day or two, but I remembered her again when you spoke of tea at Plas Quellyn. Here's five whole days gone, and we've never heard a word about her. Where is she, Ivor? It's getting past a joke. She must be somewhere. Where does she live—and sleep—and get her meals?"

He frowned. "You know I mustn't tell; she'd never forgive me. She trusted all her secrets to me before you came, and I can't tell you any of them. It's not possible."

"But we ought to know! How can I go to sleep at night and not know whether she has a comfortable bed?"

"She's all right. She's got all she wants."

"You're sure? Word of honour? She has a safe place to live in, and all she needs to be comfortable?"

"Quite. 'Well, aye, yess indeed!' as I heard one old lady say to another over a garden wall in Penrhos the other day.'

"But where can she be? She's not living with any of the cottage people or farmers, you said?"

"No."

"Nor with friends?"

"No."

"But she can't live all alone, Ivor! It's ridiculous."

He shook his head. "She's all right. Just you let her be. She's getting on fine, is Gwyn."

"Have you seen her lately?"

"Had tea with her on Sunday—"

"We wondered what had become of you!"

"And we spent yesterday morning fishing in Abergeirch. Had a good time and a good catch. She said she'd cook 'em and eat 'em for dinner and tea."

"Where *does* she live, Ivor bach?"

He laughed. "It's no good; you won't get round me like that."

"She's living in the ruin," cried Dicky, who had been listening round-eyed. "An' we're goin' to get in and find her."

"It's a deep, dark mystery," said Cuthbert, "but we'll get to the bottom of it somehow."

"Not through me. So far as I'm concerned it will remain a deep, dark mystery."

"Well, I think we ought at least to know where she is," grumbled Robin. "I know if mother was here she'd have found out somehow. And we only want to be friends with her. She's too silly."

"She won't believe that. She sticks to it that you don't really want her."

"I've told her, and I'd tell her again if I could only get hold of her. You tell her for us, Ivor bach."

"I have. I've told her there's nothing to get in such a fit over, or to be so ratty about—"

"Now you're laughing at us!"

"Let him laugh," said Cuthbert. "I'm going to get inside that ruin before I'm many days older. We'll have another try for the key to-night."

"Look here," said Ivor, as they scrambled down over the boulders on their way back to the trap. "I'm not coming to tea at Quellyn. Gwyn couldn't stand that. She's angry enough with me already, but I've managed not to quarrel outright so far. But it would be too much to ask her to see us all having a picnic together at Quellyn. 'Twouldn't be reasonable. My cycle's there—I left it when I came up for the trap—so I'll ride home, and you can drive yourselves down when you're ready, or get Evan Davies to take you."

They protested, but he held to his decision.

"Well, I call Gwyneth a downright nuisance," said Cuthbert in disgust.

"Well, aye, yess indeed! That's very much how she feels about you," Ivor laughed.

"I hear a motor!" cried Dicky suddenly, as they drove down the lane towards Quellyn. "A motor in a little road like this! Here it comes! Whatever shall we do, Ivor?"

"Hedge!" said Ivor briefly, and sprang out.

He drew the pony in towards the hedge and stood holding it while the distant hooting came rapidly closer, and round the corner swept the little brown car with Gwyneth fach's little brown hands on the steering handle, and the chauffeur beside her.

It flashed past and away up the lane towards Madryn, and it seemed to Robin that there was a gleam of triumph and conscious pride in Gwyneth's resolute little face and bright dark eyes. But she did not look at them, crushed against the hedge to make way for her, but gazed steadily up the road in front, and the car swerved smartly round the next corner and disappeared.

"Oh, she is mean!—horrid!—shabby!" groaned Dicky. "We haven't had a ride since we came, and I'm simply dying for another!"

Ivor said nothing, but climbed in and drove on; and the others were silent also, rather annoyed by the incident.

Ivor looked troubled. He seemed listening, as indeed he was, for he knew Gwyneth fach. This meeting had probably been accidental, but he had very shrewd notions as to what would come next.

Suddenly they heard the warning hoot again, and the little brown car came flying back and drove them into the hedge once more, for the lane was very narrow.

Ivor's face was black with disgust, and the other boys began to grow angry. It was obvious that Gwyneth fach could keep them there in the hedge all afternoon, if she so wished.

Then the funny side of the situation struck Robin, and she began to laugh. The others joined in after a moment, and the sound of their laughter reached Gwyneth as she raced away down the lane.

It angered her more than her trick had angered them, and so left them masters of the situation. She had intended to come back again and again for the sake of rousing their envy and annoyance; but the conviction that they would treat the matter as a joke, and would probably make for the hedge with perfect good-humour as often as she wished, caused her to change her mind suddenly, and the motor rushed away down the road towards Nevin and troubled them no more.

"The monkey!" said Ivor, annoyed in spite of his laughter. "I knew she would. Think it's worth my while getting in again? or is she going to keep us in the hedge all afternoon?"

"Let's try again, anyway. How did she manage to turn in the lane?"

"At the farm up there, Penybryn, where the road widens a bit. So the car's back from Pwllheli."

"And she was driving it herself! Oh, she is a lucky girl! And jolly mean—"

"Oh yes, she drives herself. Of course, the man's there in case she needs help."

"I would like another ride!" groaned Dicky.

"You won't get it just yet," Ivor said grimly. "She's feeling anything but amiable at present. By the way, have you heard any more from Gwyneth fawr?"

"Yes," Robin said soberly. "There was a letter among mother's yesterday. The old lady was very bad, and Gwyneth was dreadfully worried."

"Wish she'd come back here. She could manage Gwyn better than anybody."

They said good-bye to him at the gates of Quellyn, and saw him set out for home, then went in to do full justice to the tea awaiting them in the big dining-room.

"Has Gwyneth fach brought back the key of the door into the old ruin?" Cuthbert asked of Mrs. Davies before she left them to their meal.

"Indeed, she says she has lost it long since."

"Of course. That was only to be expected—if she's really hiding inside the ruin," he said, when they were left alone. "Now we'll try some other way. I believe I could smash in that old door if I wanted to. We'll have a look at it after tea."

They were getting past the stage of bread and butter and first cups of tea, and were all enjoying the luxury of rest after their hard climb, when a shadow came between them and the stream of sunlight from the long, narrow windows on the west. Looking up, they saw, to their utter astonishment, the small figure of Gwyneth fach leaning on the sill—Gwyneth in her short green frock and little cap, Gwyneth with dark curls flying, and on her determined little face the very look of the Black Curly-headed Maiden of the story, when she rode into Arthur's hall with her accusations against the hero.

She leaned her elbows on the sill and gazed in at them, and spoke.

"I want to tell you something. You may as well hear it. I hate you!—do you hear?—hate you! I hate you all. I didn't at first. I only disliked you and wished you hadn't come. I only wanted to be left alone. I didn't want anything to do with any of you. But now I hate you all, and I'll do anything I can that you won't like. Perhaps you couldn't help coming here—I don't know much about that. But you needn't have taken away my only friend—the only boy I had to play with. There's no one else. He's been my friend always, and we've done everything together, but now that you've come he's with you all the time. It's because you two are boys, I suppose, and he likes to be with other boys. I hate you for being boys. You shan't have the

motor—it's mine. You shan't have the dogs—I've got them. But you've taken Ivor, and it leaves me all alone, and I hate you for it, and I'll do anything I can—"

She had been struggling with rising sobs, as she spoke in the fierce, low undertone which Robin had heard before, which left her no time for breath and them no chance to interrupt. Now, certain that in a moment she would break down and cry before them, she turned and fled, and they sat looking at one another.

"Well, I never heard any one go on like that before! She makes me quite tired," said Cuthbert. "Wonder where she's off to now?"

"The ruin, of course!" cried Dicky.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry she's feeling like that," Robin said gloomily. "It isn't our fault, and yet you can understand how she feels. It's very hard on her, but I don't see—"

"Very hard on us, I think!" cried Dicky unsympathetically. "She's no right to keep the motor all to herself, mean, selfish thing!"

"Bother the motor! I'm sorry for her. She's miserable, and it's through us."

"If she's miserable, it's because she's made herself so, Robin," Cuthbert reasoned.

"I know. But it's through us, all the same, and I'm awfully sorry about it."

"No good worrying over her. She's a donkey, anyway."

They were still sitting silently round the table, when the door burst open suddenly and Ivor appeared.

"Have you got it?" he asked breathlessly, and they gazed at him in utter surprise.

"The telegram!" he explained, still panting for breath. "The boy gave it to Gwyn—"

Then they all started up, and Robin turned white.

"Telegram?" she gasped, seeing all the possibilities in a moment.

"I caught up to the boy and asked where he'd been. He said they told him at Moranedd to bring it on here to catch you, but that Gwyn met him in the motor and said she'd take it to you."

Robin gave a sharp cry of distress. Cuthbert sprang forward.

"Then you'll tell me where she is—this minute—and I'll get it from her.—Don't worry, Robin; we'll have it in half a tick.—See here, Ivor, she was here five minutes ago, and she's off to her ruin, or wherever she hides. Now tell me where it is; look sharp, or I'll make you."

"I won't," said Ivor, as determined as he. "But if you'll wait in this room I'll bring it to you in five minutes. Gwyneth had no right to do this, and I'll teach her a lesson, but I'll not give away her secret, all the same. Don't be a donkey, Cuthbert. You can't make me tell you. I'm the strongest, anyway. But I'll get you that telegram inside five minutes—if you'll promise not to follow me."

"Yes, yes, we promise! Go quickly, Ivor!" cried Robin.

"And the boys?" Ivor demanded, frowning.

"I'll promise for them. I'll keep them here."

Ivor looked at Cuthbert, who said curtly, "Be quick about it, then;" and Dicky cried excitedly, "Go on! go on! But if you aren't back in five minutes by that clock, I'm comin' after you to the ruin."

Within three minutes Ivor was back with the telegram unopened in his hand.

"Good news? Tell me quick."

Robin tore open the envelope, and read,—

"Safe journey. Father doing well.—Mother."

“Good business!” said Ivor heartily. “I’m glad;” while Robin sat down suddenly, finding herself shaky with relief.

“Now you’d best get home,” Ivor said presently. “There’s no need to worry any more. You’ll get letters to-morrow or next day.”

He would not ride home with them, but hurried them off in the trap, and then disappeared into the gardens—to give Gwyneth fach his opinion on her conduct, as he frankly admitted. As they drove down the road, the boys hinted at the possibility of following him now to make discoveries; but Robin would not have it, and, as usual, she had her way. Cuthbert was anxious also to make his promised attack on the door of the ruin; but she was eager to get home, and would have no delay.

“We’ll come back another time,” she said. “We’ve had plenty of excitement for one day. I’m tired.”

CHAPTER XIII.
THE CONQUEST OF THE TOWER.

Their anxiety on their parents' account being relieved, all the children, but especially Robin, began to thoroughly enjoy their orphan condition.

To be free from any kind of control was, it must be confessed, distinctly agreeable to them all, but they seldom went too far in their exercise of the unusual liberty. If rice puddings were instantly banished from their bill of fare, if Dicky was occasionally to be seen out on the shore long after eight o'clock at night, these things were not very serious, and on the whole matters went on much as if Mrs. Brent had still been at the head of affairs in Moranedd.

To arrange menus for their various meals and take the shopping entirely into her own hands would have been delightful to Robin at any time, but to keep house in Porthdinlleyn was, as she informed Ivor, "simply too lovely for words." To wrestle with the intricacies of country understanding and broken English only added zest to her enjoyment. And the sympathy and interest shown on every side in their lonely condition was distinctly comforting and helpful. Every one in Porthdinlleyn knew all about them, of course. Jenny and Mrs. Roberts had seen to that. Every woman in the little gray village was curious to hear how the unknown father was to-day, and if the poor little children were very unhappy, the dears! The poor little children, being no longer anxious, but enjoying themselves exceedingly, accepted the universal sympathy with complete equanimity, and revelled in the kindness and consideration shown to them on every side.

Jenny baked pies and cakes to tempt them to eat, and these appealed strongly to healthy appetites sharpened to the keenest by strong salt air and mountain breezes. "Auntie" came bustling in from her domain with gifts of sweets or flowers, or tiny ornaments and toys, and these were gratefully accepted by Robin, who did not want them in the least, because of the kindness which prompted the offering. In all the shops she was looked upon with interest and treated with respect and consideration, and the greatest trouble was taken to satisfy her wishes. And to the vast amusement and delight of all three, they became "Robin fach" and "Dicky bach" to every one.

Mr. Brent's illness had justified the doctor's fears, and proved to be typhoid fever. But it was not a bad case, and Mrs. Brent wrote cheerfully from Southampton that she hoped it was only a question of time till he would be well again. The fever must run its course; but unless he had a relapse they might consider him out of danger, and though his recovery might be slow she hoped it would be steady.

So their minds, easy on his account, were able to turn to other matters.

The conquest of the ruined tower and the discovery of Gwyneth fach's secret hiding-place were matters which faced them most imperatively. They all suspected, and Dicky stoutly asserted, that these were really one and the same quest, and that in carrying out the one they would also decide the other. In neither, of course, could they look for help from Ivor, who frowned upon all their proposals, and would, if he could, have dissuaded them from the attempt.

A few days of wet weather were more successful in keeping them at home than all his remonstrances. The long drive to Quellyn and explorations of the gardens there were out of the question in drizzling mist or heavy rain. While "the Rivals," though opposite the windows

of Moranedd, were shrouded in cloud, and even Nevin Point was invisible, they were forced to keep to the house. Between the showers, when the gray curtain lifted a little and showed weirdly grand "mist effects," they wandered along the shore or hurried up to the post-office for a chat with the friends there and a passing word with the fat white pig.

Then came a bright, sunny morning, and they were standing on the slaty-blue pavement under the veranda, waiting for the coach and planning a day at Quellyn, when the mail arrived and Robin presently received two letters.

Both were for Mrs. Brent, but she had instructions to open them.

One was from Gwyneth Parry, written in great haste and distress. Her "old lady" had died suddenly, after another serious attack of heart trouble; and as she was no longer needed in Newcastle, she was coming home at once. She wished to take a short holiday before looking for further employment, and would stay with friends in Morfa; but if it was not trespassing too greatly on Mrs. Brent's kindness, she would come to Moranedd for a night or two while she made other arrangements.

"That's good!" said Ivor, who was one of the party as usual. "She'll give Gwyn a good talking-to."

"Well, I just hope she will. I'm trusting to what you said, that Gwyneth was all right and safe, Ivor bach. You're sure she's been safe through all this rain?"

"Remember last Saturday?"

"Yes! It stormed and poured and nearly blew Moranedd and the whole of Porthdinlleyn into the harbour."

"I had tea with Gwyn, and we never felt a drop, or a breath of air."

"I *wish* you'd explain!" Robin sighed, and he laughed.

"Ivor, you're just a pig!" grumbled Dicky. "I like the old fat white one opposite Bronwylfa much better than you;" and Ivor laughed again.

"Of course I shall write to Gwyneth fawr and ask her to stop with us all the time. She says she'll come to-morrow."

"Then you haven't time to write. Ask her when she comes. I'm glad she's coming. It will be good for Gwyn. She needs some one to speak to her seriously, and Gwyneth fawr can do it better than any one."

"I don't know. She seemed to think Gwyneth fach didn't listen to her."

"What's the other letter?" asked Cuthbert.

"Why, it's from Jim! I wonder if he's coming too? What fun!"

"Jolly! Ripping! First class! Hot stuff!" cried Dicky.

"Yes!" she said eagerly. "He has a month's leave, and hopes to get here day after to-morrow. We'd better go home and get ready for all these visitors."

And they hurried off down the Penrhos road, calling out the usual greeting to Dicky's pig as they passed, and explaining Lieutenant Carradale to Ivor.

Gwyneth fawr was surprised at the warmth of the welcome which greeted her, when the motor-bus set her down at the crossroads in Morfa Nevin next day. Welcome from her friends in the village she expected, of course, and her progress from Groes to Penrhos was like a triumphal procession, so many greetings had she to receive and so many questions to answer. But she was surprised to find not only Ivor, but Robin, Dicky, and Cuthbert all waiting to receive her at the first stile, to carry her bag and books, to tell her all the news.

As they crossed the cabbage-fields and corn-fields towards the headland she learned of their motherless condition, and at once consented to stay at Moranedd and keep them

company. But when Robin remarked casually that they were expecting a gentleman friend on the morrow for a month's visit, Gwyneth fawr unaccountably changed her mind, and in spite of protests decided to keep to her first plan and find lodging elsewhere.

"Perhaps it will be better. I may be able to manage Gwyneth fach more easily if I am not with you. Tell me, are you friends with her yet?"

"Friends! How can we be? She won't let us. She won't come near us."

"What, still?"

"We've only seen her one day since you went," said Robin, with a distinct touch of ill-used feeling. "And where she's living we don't know. Ivor knows, but he won't tell," and she made a face at him.

He laughed. "She's all right, Gwyneth, honestly, or I'd have seen to it."

But Gwyneth looked worried. "I'm sorry! I had no idea of it. I'll speak to her as soon as I can."

Robin had prepared the very best tea she could muster for her guest, but she felt constrained to apologize for it, all the same.

"I went all over the place, and even into Nevin, to try and find some nice little cakes like those you toasted for us when we had just arrived, but I couldn't get them anywhere. They aren't baking to-day, they told me in the shops. Where did you get your cakes from, Gwyneth? I've searched for them everywhere. Jenny didn't make them, I know. Her cakes are nice, but so very substantial!"

"Not to say stodgy at times!" laughed Cuthbert.

"Perhaps you made them for us yourself?" asked Robin, and Gwyneth laughed and admitted it.

"I'll make you a batch to-morrow morning, if you like. When do you expect your visitor? Not till the evening? Then I'll bake for you in the morning, and postpone my business with Gwyneth fach till the afternoon."

"You *are* a dear," Robin said gratefully. "I've just been longing for some more of those sweet little cakes."

So early next morning they were all bidden to go off and find Ivor, and not come home till midday, and Gwyneth fawr took possession of the kitchen, to the great content of Jenny and Auntie, who were overjoyed to have her home again.

But the children did not go for Ivor.

"Now for the tower!" said Cuthbert, and they raced up the sandy road to the moor.

"I met Evan Davies last night, and he promised the trap should meet us at Edeyrn post-office. We'll go up that way; then neither Ivor nor any one else will know where we are, and if Gwyneth is hiding in the tower we'll take her quite by surprise."

"I thought perhaps you'd wait till Jim came to help."

"No fear! We began this ourselves, and we'll carry it through alone, if we can. We'll have one more shot at it anyway."

They saw nothing of Gwyneth fach as they neared Quellyn. Mrs. Davies, when questioned by Cuthbert, denied having seen her lately at all. Then he demanded the loan of a long, stout pole, which he had seen her use as a clothes-prop, and with this balanced on his shoulder walked off, followed by the other two, who looked at one another questioningly.

As soon as they were out of her hearing both set upon him eagerly.

"What's it for, Cuthbert?"

"Whatever are you goin' to do with that? Are you quite dotty, Cuthbert? You can't climb up a pole like that, you know you can't. *I* should think a step-ladder would be better—"

"Not so fast, dear chap! I've no intention of climbing up the pole. *You* might manage it, being half a monkey already, but—"

"I don't care what you're goin' to do with your nasty old pole! You're a horrid, rude thing, an' I do think you might—"

"Oh, don't get the hump so quickly, Stickly-Prickly! It was only a joke. I didn't mean to offend your Touchy Highness—"

"But what *are* you going to do with it, Cuthbert?" asked Robin.

"It's a battering-ram," he explained. "I'm going to have that door open somehow. Now see! We all take hold and ram it on the door—so! Try the lock once more, Robin. No good? All right. You don't mind if I smash it?"

"Not if it's the only way—"

"Right! Catch hold!" and even Dicky threw off his injured feelings and came to share in the fun.

The rotten wood cracked and splintered, and left a ragged hole. Two or three more applications of the ram, and the rickety frame gave way and fell with a crash inside the ruin. With a shout of triumph Cuthbert rushed in, the others at his heels.

Now for Gwyneth fach and an end to all secrets and mysteries!

But the tower was empty, and they stood looking round in disappointment. Grass, bushes, ferns, moss-covered stones, and the inside of the grim round wall; but no sign of Gwyneth fach and no trace of human dwelling.

"Then she doesn't live here after all!" The wail of Dicky's shattered hopes voiced the feelings of all.

"Then where does she live? It's as much a mystery as ever. I had made up my mind it was in here," Robin said in dismay. "But there's no roof, so it wouldn't have been possible."

"Well, it's a rummy thing. I can't think of any other hiding-place. I'd made certain she was in here, too."

"Pr'aps she's got a cave somewhere, or a house up in a tree," suggested Dicky hopefully.

"Or perhaps she's in Plas Quellyn all the time—in some attic or cellar, or place we haven't discovered."

"No," Robin said quickly; "Ivor said not."

"Well, I give it up."

"I think we may all give it up; it's hopeless."

"Not a bit of it!" said Cuthbert, recovering quickly. "We'll enlist Jim and have a regular scientific search for her."

"I wonder if it's a bit mean of us to keep on trying to find her?" pondered Robin. "Ivor seems to think we should leave her alone."

"Nonsense! It's for her own good," Cuthbert said stoutly. "She ought to be living with us, but we can't make her see it till we get hold of her."

"I think Gwyneth fawr is more likely to manage it than any of us. Let's search the gardens, and see if we can find any other likely place."

But their search yielded them no satisfaction, and they turned homewards at last, disappointed, bewildered, and distinctly annoyed that Gwyneth fach should still evade them thus.

CHAPTER XIV.
WANTED—A MUZZLE FOR DICKY.

It was close on midday. The motor-bus rattled into Morfa Nevin and stopped near the post-office. Jim Carradale sprang out, claimed his bag from the roof, and made inquiries as to the road to Porthdinlleyn.

The consciousness that he was not expected till the evening and would take his hosts by surprise was not displeasing to him. He felt very much at home with the Brents, and had no fear that his earlier arrival would be any annoyance to them.

The road to Porthdinlleyn was not easy for an absolute stranger to find. He paused at Penrhos corner, puzzled by the choice of paths, then called up an urchin and bade him lead the way.

The cart track through the fields and over the slanting stiles amused him considerably. Then he chanced to turn, and stopped short to wonder at the marvellous panorama behind, for they had reached the brow of the hill. The green stretch of fields; the scattered cottages of white Penrhos and gray-blue Morfa; and, behind and above, the green slopes of Bodvean and Nevin Mountain, and the crooked outlines of the Echo Cliff and the quarry; and the wide blue sweep of the sea into Porthdinlleyn Bay, with the proud peaks of Yr Eifl as the crowning glory of the whole—he took it all in with deep delight and appreciation.

As for the village he had supposed lay before him, at first he could discover no sign of it. But presently from another point of vantage he saw the cluster of gray houses nestling under the cliff in the most sheltered corner, with the placid water of the harbour creeping to their feet and kissing the outer walls of some of the cottages, and behind them the bold black rocks of the headland and the green slopes of its windy moor.

His small guide led the way across the big cornfield and along the path where the cliff, rising in a great green bluff, shut out the sea and mountains for a time, and he wondered where the cottages of his destination had vanished to, and how he was to get down to them. But here on his left were the rocks and breakers of Porthwen—White Bay—and here was a yawning black hole in the moor, with the sound of waves on rock far away below. He would have looked at it more closely, but the boy suddenly jerked, “Porthdinlleyn,” and pointed to the sandy cutting and the downward road.

Carradale gave him his promised reward and turned to the path.

Then he stopped; for in the cutting, where the blue sea had been framed by the yellow walls, stood a vision.

The sweet face of the Flower-Maiden—“the maiden formed from blossoms”—had been constantly in his mind. No one had hinted at the possibility of his meeting her in life.

But here was Gwyneth fawr, looking for signs of the children coming home to dinner. She had run out from the kitchen without thought of her possible untidiness, for she was among her own people, and cared nothing how she looked. Moreover she had no expectation of meeting strangers at this time of year—it was not as if it had been July or August—and the visitor was not looked for till the evening. She had been making some specially dainty pastry as a surprise for the children, and had been hoping to hurry them home lest it should be spoilt.

So she was wearing her big cooking-apron to cover her gray dress right to her toes, and her bright hair was loosened with the wind, with straying curls and wavy locks which had

come untidy as she worked, and her cheeks were flushed with the wind and sun and the heat of the fire. At sight of the stranger her eyes took on the very look of the blue-eyed Flower-Maiden, and grew wide and startled.

There was no doubt as to who he was. She guessed that in a moment, and recovering from her surprise made haste to welcome him, without shyness but with just a touch of embarrassment.

"I think you must be Robin's sailor friend! But we did not expect you till the evening."

"I must plead guilty. I came by the night train."

His eyes were fixed on her hungrily. He had never thought to see her in life. She reddened a little under his gaze, realizing something of its meaning. He must have seen one of those troublesome pictures!

"You should have let us know," she said severely. "Now you must accept your punishment, and wait a while till your dinner is ready. I believe that is the worst punishment one can give to a man—to keep him waiting for his dinner. It is in the house, fortunately, but it certainly is not cooked, and the fish that is ready for the children would not be nearly enough to satisfy somebody who has been travelling all night. Besides, there would not be enough to go round. Bring your bag down to the house."

His eyes were very disconcerting. She turned and walked sedately down the rough road. To his mind the way she walked was the prettiest thing he had ever seen.

"I'm just beginning to be sorry," Gwyneth fawr was saying to herself, "that I ever sat for those pictures—yes, indeed, if folks are all going to look at me as if I were a wild beast!"

Then the memory of Dicky's wild words at their first meeting brought the blood rushing into her cheeks. This brown-faced sailor fellow was "Jim," she knew. Well, she would go off during the afternoon and lodge with Mrs. Davies up at Quellyn, and she would not have to see him any more.

He had no eyes for the quaint gray village or the stretch of sea and mountains beyond. Already he had found far more than he had hoped for in Porthdinlleyn.

It was only when she had left him alone in the dainty sitting-room of Moranedd that he remembered that he did not know her name. But she was out in the kitchen superintending the preparations for dinner, giving hasty orders to Jenny and Mrs. Davies in unintelligible Welsh, so the mystery of who she was and why she was here had to remain unexplained.

He was standing by the long low window, gazing out at the harbour, when Dicky the Hare came flying down the steep road and across the sands to the cottage. Robin and Cuthbert followed, still deep in earnest discussion of the mystery of Gwyneth fach.

Dicky hurled himself into the house.

"Dinner nearly ready, Jenny? Where's Gwyneth fawr? Can't we have dinner? I'm starving, and so're the others. We f'got to take biscuits with us, an' it's an awful long way to Plas Quellyn and back, when you're hungry. I'm goin' to have some bread and butter to begin with, anyway," and he burst in upon Carradale, who stood smiling at this characteristic introduction.

Dicky nearly fell over his own feet in his astonishment at sight of him, then broke into eager, noisy welcome, in which Robin and Cuthbert joined.

"Say, Jim"—this from Dicky, as Gwyneth fawr entered quietly—"it's awfully jolly here, you can't think! We've climbed two mountains, an' I'm learning fishing, an' mother's away to S'thampton! An' we've smashed in the door of the tower this morning, but she's not inside—we were quite sure she was—so now we think she must live up in a tree, or in a hole in the

ground. You'll help us find her, won't you? It's just too mean for anything, for she's got an awfully jolly motor, but she won't let us ride; an' we only have the pony, an' she's got the dogs too, an'—"

"Is this a nightmare?" asked Jim Carradale, in amused bewilderment, but the other two only laughed.

"No, it's only Dicky.—Try again, Dicky! Have another shot at it, old man!"

"He thought he saw a big night*mare*,
That stood beside his bed.
He looked again, and found after all
It was only Dicky Brent trying to tell a story,"

misquoted Cuthbert.

"Oh, all right! I won't tell him anything, then! You can just tell him yourself," and Stickly-Prickly showed signs of taking offence, and had to be adjured not to get in a fit about nothing.

"Who is it who lives in a tree and a hole in the ground, and has a motor, and is not inside something else, may I ask? Not Mrs. Brent, I hope? And what's all this about Southampton?"

Dicky tried again to enlighten him.

"You see, there's a girl here—at least, she's not here, but she ought to be!—an' she won't speak to us, 'cept now and then to call us names, and she's called Gwyneth fach—that means little, you know. That's Gwyneth fawr—that means big," pointing at her as she stood laughing in the doorway. "An' she's got a secret hiding-place, an' both the dogs, *and* the motor, and it's not fair."

"I think it's some one else's turn," laughed Gwyneth. "Suppose you all go and get ready for dinner. It's coming in in half a minute."

"Hooray!" and Dicky fled away upstairs.

"I do assure you it is not I who have the secret hiding-place and the motor," laughed Gwyneth, giving finishing touches to the dinner-table. "I have no doubt Robin will give you a connected account of it all. Dicky's explanations are rather hopeless, I admit. I'm not sure if that constituted an introduction. I am Gwyneth Parry. Mr. Quellyn was my brother-in-law. I am staying up at Quellyn just for a few days."

How graceful she was as she moved about the room giving dainty touches here and there, altering the wild hyacinths with which the bowls on table, window-sills, and mantelshelf were filled! He was sorry when Dicky came clattering down the wooden stairs, once more clamouring for his dinner, and Gwyneth disappeared to speak to Jenny.

"What a dear, sweet little party!" said Robin, as she took her seat at one side of the table, with the boys opposite, and Jim Carradale at one end and Gwyneth at the other.

"Jim's the old father, and Gwyneth's the old mother!" chuckled Cuthbert. "Now, children, behave! Mother's got her eye on you!—Robinette, hold your back up!—Dicky, don't gobble!"

Dicky giggled, and choked over his soup. " 'Tis jolly to have two half grown-ups, but no real big proper people! They're just big enough to be good fun, but not big enough to scold."

"Oh—ho! Well see about that, young man!"

"It's awfully jolly to have you here again," said Dicky ingenuously to Gwyneth. "Won't you jus' stop an' keep us comp'ny a bit longer? I'm sure Mrs. Davies doesn't want you in that poky little cottage, an' you know we want you here. We've really heaps of room. *I* don't see why you want to go away, when you've just come," and so let the cat out of the bag in which Gwyneth fawr had intended it to remain.

“I do hope my coming has not upset any arrangements?” began Carradale in dismay.

But Gwyneth said hastily that she had never intended to stay in Moranedd, and closed Dicky’s mouth with a second helping of soup just as he was opening it for further disclosures.

“I am hoping to bring Gwyneth fach to reason, and I can do it better if I am living near her,” she explained, before the indiscreet youngster could make time to begin again. “I don’t think the situation has been fully explained to Lieutenant Carradale, so far as Gwyneth fach is concerned, Robin.”

So Robin and Cuthbert launched into an eager account of Gwyneth, her ill-will towards them, her peculiar methods of showing her dislike, and the mystery connected with her present dwelling.

“She isn’t living at Quellyn, nor in any of our houses, nor with friends, nor in any of the cottages or farms! But she must live somewhere, for Ivor is certain she’s all right and comfortable. It’s a deep, dark mystery, Jim. Of course we thought she lived in the ruined tower; but she doesn’t, for we’ve been inside it. So now we don’t know what to do next, and you’re going to help us.”

He looked across at Gwyneth Parry with lifted brows. She said gravely,—

“I have been away, and only came back yesterday. I intend now to take Gwyneth fach to live with me, of course.”

“If you can find her,” began Cuthbert.

“Oh, I can find her.”

“Then you know where she is! So does Ivor.”

“Won’t you tell us, Gwyneth dear? We’re just dying to know,” pleaded Robin.

Gwyneth laughed. “So long as I promise you that Gwyneth fach shall be well looked after by me, I don’t see that you can ask much more. And I don’t really know anything about it; I only guess. I shall take her to live with me at Mrs. Davies’s, but I can’t promise to bring her to her senses as regards you. I can only say I’ll do my best.”

“She’s the black curly girl out of the fairy-tale picture,” observed Dicky, finding leisure again at last. “She’s her very image jus’ ’xactly, ’cept she’s not black. But she goes on an’ calls names jus’ like she did. She’s just as much like her as Gwyneth fawr there’s like the Flower-Girl and all the other pretty ones.—Jim, d’you remember what you said—”

“Dicky! Dicky!” remonstrated Gwyneth hastily “You really must not talk so much. You’re quite the littlest here, but you monopolize the whole conversation at times.”

“Don’t mo’polize an’thing! Wouldn’t think of doing an’thing so horrid. But Jim did say __”

“Well, I’m going out after dinner to buy you that muzzle your mother spoke of.”

“I’m sure there’s nothing to be ratty about,” grumbled Dicky. “I was only goin’ to say he said you were the prettiest he’d ever seen—in the picture—an’ I wanted to know if he thought so still, now he saw you really.”

And Gwyneth fawr, in spite of her annoyance and crimson cheeks, could only join in the general laugh and outcry against Dicky, who retired into sulks, his feelings much injured.

“Well, I just guess he doesn’t think so, that’s all, for your hair’s coming down, I know it is,” was his last word; and Gwyneth escaped into the kitchen, to glance at her pastry, and incidentally at the looking-glass.

CHAPTER XV.
STORM-BOUND.

Lieutenant Carradale looked round the dainty sitting-room of Moranedd at tea-time and wondered what had changed it so much since their last meal. Pretty as it was, it seemed positively uninteresting now. To connect this with the departure of a girl whom he had only seen for a couple of hours would be ridiculous indeed, but certainly something had happened to Moranedd.

Gwyneth fawr had gone off to Quellyn directly after dinner. They had all driven up with her, and had introduced Jim to the glories of Plas Quellyn. But his chief interest had been in the pictures in the dining-hall, and especially in the big painting of Enid and Gwenhwyvar, which Robin had pointed out with great pride and delight.

Then they had gone for a first glance at the ruin. And here in the sunshine were the dogs—the stout white terrier and lively pup—enjoying a rough-and-tumble on the grass, and racing round and round in mad pursuit of one another. The puppy was instantly captured by Cuthbert and carried home to Moranedd in triumph, and the stout old mother followed and took her place in the trap as a matter of course, to see what would befall her offspring. Dicky would have let her run behind, saying it would be good for her health; but Cuthbert insisted that if she did she would have heart disease or apoplexy, and so would not allow it.

So now he sat playing with the squirming little wriggler, to his own great satisfaction, though possibly not to the pup's, and begging Robin and Dicky to come and admire its spine and be told the names of all its bones. But Robin was thinking.

"I do wonder why they were in the ruin! I wonder where Gwyneth fach was—if she was anywhere about. Of course if she'd been living there it would be easy enough to understand why they were there too, but she's not. Oh dear, I would like to get to the bottom of it all!"

None of them could help her towards that end, but Carradale promised to go up to Quellyn on the morrow for further explorations of the grounds. Perhaps he had some faint shadow of a thought that a certain lady might be walking in the garden. And when she was but four miles away it was hard indeed if he might not see her once a day.

"D'you know," said Robin suddenly, as they wandered on the sands in the evening twilight, "I've an odd feeling, and yet I'm not sure, but I think it's so. I wonder if you remember, boys—but I don't expect you will; and if you did, of course you'd have noticed it too."

"Dear, dear!" laughed Carradale. "Begin again, Robin."

"Go it, Robinette! You do muddle things!" cried Dicky.

She laughed. "As we looked at the pictures up at Quellyn to-day I had an odd feeling that some of them were gone."

"Well, that's plain enough anyway," cried Cuthbert. "Where d'you think they've gone to?"

"I don't know, but they weren't all there this morning," she insisted. "I missed some of the little ones. There was a tiny copy of the 'Flower-Maiden' in London—"

"We certainly didn't see that," observed Jim, who had paid most particular attention to the pictures.

"And a sweet little Olwen, and a baby Taliesin to match, all small, but beautifully painted. And that not-very-big picture of Rhiannon sitting at the gate waiting to carry some visitor into

the castle on her back, and the other of Rhiannon lying asleep with the baby in her arms, and the old women all plotting to steal it from her—you know, boys, Rhiannon was Gwyneth fawr again."

"We certainly didn't see those," Carradale exclaimed, beginning to pay more attention. "What can have become of them, Robin?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. They can't have been stolen, I suppose?"

Carradale frowned. "I hope not. I'll speak to the people in charge to-morrow. I'd like to see those pictures."

"Here comes Ivor bach! Wonder where he's been all day? He wants to see you, because his father's a sailor too."

Ivor was keenly eager to see the stranger, and had been coming towards Moranedd for that purpose. He said frankly that he had been spending the day in Bodvean woods with Gwyneth fach, but was as sturdily deaf to any questions as usual. As to the alleged disappearance of some of the pictures, he first scoffed at the idea, then, finding Robin positive, said he could not even suggest what could have become of them.

"We'll go up to-morrow and make sure," said Carradale gravely.

"Well, aye, yess indeed! I would if I were you," said Ivor.

But the morrow was very wet, and they could not venture further afield than the post-office. By the evening all were utterly weary of Moranedd, and agreed eagerly with Jim when he proposed that, as the rain had given place to drizzling mist, they should have a walk in mackintoshes.

As they walked along the shore he suggested innocently that it would be only kind and neighbourly to call on Miss Parry and see whether she had found her new quarters comfortable. The idea was received with acclaim, and they hastened off to catch the motor-bus, which would take them as far as Bryncynan inn, and so save the long slopes of the switchback road.

"Perhaps we'll see Gwyneth fach," said Robin eagerly.

And sure enough, when the astonished Mrs. Davies ushered them all into her cosy little back kitchen, there was the black curly-headed maiden seated on a stool close to the fire, reading aloud in Welsh from a big book on her knees—as gentle and peaceable a maiden as one could wish to see.

Jim Carradale said afterwards that he had never seen her. But the children cried out that this was ridiculous, for she had sat there for several minutes after their arrival, her dark little head bent over the big book on her knees, one green-clad shoulder turned defiantly towards them, her curls hiding her face.

Perhaps, however, he had only eyes for Gwyneth fawr, who had risen in surprise at their appearance; and certainly she was pretty enough to claim his whole attention, as the lamp-light shone on her bright hair and the colour rose in her cheeks.

"Whatever brings you here through all this rain, Robin? You must surely all be soaked.—How could you let them come all this way on a night like this?" she exclaimed, turning to Carradale, for she half guessed why they had come.

"It's hardly raining at all now, and we came half-way by the motor. We'd been in the house all day, and we were all sick of it," he explained. "We came to see—they wanted to know if you were quite comfortable here."

"It was you yourself wanted to know," began Dicky.

"We had better go into the front room," Gwyneth said hastily, for, like Mrs. Brent, she was beginning to dread Dicky. "You must not think we live in the kitchen all the time. We should be in Mrs. Davies's way. But the children are off to bed, and it is so cosy here that we came in for a while."

Certainly the little kitchen was very quaint and inviting, with its red-and-blue-tiled floor, old-fashioned range, big dresser, and the strings of onions, which the Breton wanderers sell, hanging from the ceiling. The children all cried out against leaving it, and found seats on the big settle and on the dresser to prove that there was plenty of room.

Suddenly Robin gave a cry of distress.

"She's gone! And I was just going to speak to her! O Gwyneth, can't you fetch her back?"

But Gwyneth fach had noiselessly made her escape, and though the elder Gwyneth searched the cottage to satisfy them, she was not to be found. She had wrapped herself in a big cloak and disappeared into the rain and the darkness, and to find her out there would have been impossible.

Robin was deeply disappointed. But the boys refused to be distressed by Gwyneth fach's vagaries, and Lieutenant Carradale was distinctly enjoying himself. He told Gwyneth fawr much of what he had seen in China, then led her into a discussion on the future of that nation, and managed to spend a very delightful evening without caring an atom what had become of Gwyneth fach.

But when the big grandfather clock chimed ten, Gwyneth realized with a start the enormity of their offence in keeping "Dicky bach" out so late. "Dicky bach" was also enjoying himself extremely, having had one eye on the clock for an hour past, and was in no hurry to go home. A hastily-contrived supper, which almost left Mrs. Davies's larder short for breakfast, put the finishing touch to his enjoyment, and the discovery, when the front door was opened, that rain was falling in torrents, and that to go out in such a storm would be impossible, raised him to the highest pitch of excitement.

"We can't go home to-night—we can't! We'd be washed away an' drowned. We'll have to stop here all night! Oh, what a joke! What fun! It's raining cats and dogs. We can't any of us go! We'd have to swim all the way. I'll sleep on the settle, Gwyneth, and Jim can have the rug before the fire."

"The children certainly can't go out in this," Gwyneth said, looking very troubled. "They'd be soaked before they'd gone half a mile. But I don't quite see how we can put you all up."

"I must go back to Moranedd, in any case," Jim Carradale said promptly, "to tell the folks there what has become of the children. But I doubt whether the weather will improve much at present. The rain looks like keeping on, and the wind has risen."

"Tide turns at two in the morning," Cuthbert said quickly. "The rain won't stop till then, at any rate; it never does."

"We had no idea of inflicting so many upon you for the night, but if you could make room for some of them—Dicky only needs a very small corner."

"The boys could sleep on the sofa in the other room," said Gwyneth, turning to Mrs. Davies, "and Robin can take Gwyneth fach's place and come in with me. We'll manage that all right."

"But what about the other child when she returns?" asked Carradale.

"She won't come back to-night."

“You don’t mean to say you’ll let her spend the night outside—in a storm like this?” and the children looked expectantly at Gwyneth fawr.

“Gwyneth will be quite all right. I’m not in the least troubled about her,” she said quietly, and laughed as they looked at one another.

“Well, aye, yess indeed! Gwyneth fach will be all right,” said Mrs. Davies from behind.

“Secret hiding-place! She’s gone to the secret hiding-place! Gwyneth, you might tell us where it is. You are mean!” cried Dicky.

“Now we’ll go and make up a bed for the boys,” she laughed.—“You have a long walk before you, and it’s getting late,” she said pointedly to Jim Carradale.

He laughed. “I’d better get along. Hope I don’t lose my way among those fields and stiles. It’s a pretty tricky path to find by night.”

“I’m afraid you will be very wet,” Gwyneth said, with some compunction, as they stood at the open door and heard the rain beating through the trees. “You shouldn’t have come, you know.”

“Oh, this is nothing! We get used to worse than this. It’s been well worth it. I’m sure we’ve all had a most delightful evening. I can answer for one, anyway,” and he set out cheerfully through the storm.

CHAPTER XVI.
A DEEP, DARK MYSTERY STILL.

"Isn't a sofa an awfully jolly place to sleep on?" cried Dicky, wriggling out of his corner in the morning.

"No, it's not! I've been hanging on to the edge all night. All very well for you, between me and the wall. You try the outside next time. I haven't slept a wink all night for fear I'd fall off."

"What a cram!" cried Dicky elegantly. "I heard you snoring something awful, jus' like the white pig opposite Bronwylfa, or the fat old mother dog at Moranedd. Say, Cuthbert, that girl never came in all night. We're next the door. We'd have been sure to hear her."

"That's so," Cuthbert said meditatively.

"So you see she must have some secret hiding-place. It's been pouring cats and dogs all night. We'll have a good hunt for her to-day with Jim. You know what Robin was saying 'bout some of the pictures being gone?"

"Yes?"

"Well, I b'lieve she's got them—Gwyneth fach—in her secret hiding-place."

"It's possible," Cuthbert said thoughtfully. "Then it can't be anywhere far from the house, or she couldn't have carried them. We'll suggest that to Jim."

Carradale turned up to breakfast, as was only to be expected. He had come to take the children home—they must not burden Miss Parry and Mrs. Davies any longer; he had come to see if they were any the worse for their wet walk up to Quellyn, and to show that he had not suffered from his long tramp home in the rain; he had come for any reason they liked, since he might not give the true one.

Dicky was the first to see him coming, and announced his arrival with a peal of laughter.

"Just look at Jim! do look at him, Cuthbert! He's got a loaf under one arm, and a huge bag under the other!—What's in it, Jim?"

"Buns, my child. Treat them with care! I had an idea that the larder nearly gave out under the sudden strain last night," he explained to Gwyneth fawr, who stood laughing in the doorway. "I know three hungry men are a serious burden to any housekeeper—"

"Fancy calling Cuthbert a man!" piped Dicky cheekily.

"And I can imagine that the addition of one Dicky with one Dicky's appetite would be too much for anybody. So I ventured to bring along reinforcements to help.—Be tender with that loaf, Robin. I'm very proud of it. I had a great hunt before I found it, and—think of it!—it's positively the last loaf to be had in the whole of Morfa Nevin or Penrhos! It's a fact. There's no bread in the place. I went to every single shop before I found that loaf in a house at Penrhos corner, along with peppermints and flour and biscuits." The children nodded and laughed. They knew that little shop. "It was the last loaf they had. They say they're going to bake to-day—as if that was any use for breakfast!—Do you often run as short as this?" he asked of Gwyneth Parry.

"They only bake on certain days, of course, and sometimes there is no bread to be had till then, certainly," she smiled. "But everybody knows when the shop is going to bake, and gets in enough to last. You would surely have found plenty at Moranedd."

"Oh, no doubt. But I didn't think of it till I was crossing the last stile. I brought the buns as I was quite sure one loaf wouldn't be enough."

"It was truly very thoughtful of you," she laughed. "We were getting rather short of bread."

Fortunately the Quellyn cows and hens had risen to the occasion and responded nobly to the sudden demands upon them, so Mrs. Davies had no difficulty in satisfying the big party who crowded round Gwyneth Parry's breakfast-table in the front room.

They were just finishing the meal when the blast of a motor horn outside took Dicky to the window.

"It's that mean girl! She's just come to show off again and make us want a ride! It is a mean trick!"

"Auntie Gwyn!" called Gwyneth fach's clear little voice, in very distinct and intentional English instead of the Welsh which the two Gwyneths usually employed—"Auntie Gwyn! Are you ready?"

Gwyneth fawr sprang up and hurried out, and they heard her remonstrating hastily.

"Gwyneth fach, you know I can't—"

"You *promised*! You know you promised that if it was fine we'd have a run to Aberdaron, and home by Pwllheli for tea at Glynyweddw. We were to start at nine, and it's that now, and a lovely morning, and I'm all ready. You *promised*, Auntie Gwyn!"

"But, Gwyneth fach—"

"You know you promised, and Ivor's to meet us at Groes. If you don't come it'll be *mean*."

Robin sprang up. But Carradale was before her. He hurried out to Gwyneth's side.

"Miss Parry, I hope you will not let our presence interfere with any arrangements. We shall be starting for home in a few minutes, in any case. Please go off at once as you had planned, or we shall feel very guilty."

"If you don't come just because of that girl and those boys, it will be *mean*, Auntie Gwyn."

Gwyneth hesitated. But Robin appeared suddenly.

"Please go, or we shall feel dreadfully bad," she said, and Gwyneth fach's little face took on an ugly scowl at sight of her.

So Gwyneth fawr went to fetch her golf cape and tam-o'-shanter, and Jim Carradale strode forward to close with the enemy.

"Good-morning, Miss Quellyn. What a fine little car!" and Robin and the boys looked at one another. They had never heard Gwyneth fach called that before, but on consideration they supposed it must be right.

"What make is it—Panhard, Daimler, Napier? I'm afraid I don't know very much about motors. Wouldn't you like to give me a lesson?"

"It's a Daimler, 20 horse-power," she said, frowning.

"Really! That's delightful. And you drive yourself? I suppose you fly all over the country in no time? What's your longest run so far?"

"Last spring we went to Beddgelert and Llanberis, and home by Carnarvon and Llithfaen, the whole of us—mother and daddy and Auntie Gwyn and I. But I wasn't driving that day."

Her lips had tightened at the memories thus recalled. Carradale said quickly,—

"That must have been a delightful trip. So you can carry quite a big party? Don't you think you could find room for us all to-day? Dicky takes up very little space—sometimes, when he

wants to, you know."

"No," said Gwyneth curtly, and Dicky's rising excitement suffered sudden check.

"I'll take you, if you like," she said suddenly to Carradale; "but I won't have those others."

"They really aren't so very unpleasant as you think, you know," he remarked. "I'm sure once you were used to them you wouldn't mind them a bit."

The children began to laugh. Gwyneth gave him a quick, angry look, and bit her lips in vexation as she saw his eyes twinkle. But he went on calmly,—

"Perhaps Dicky is a bit trying at times, and Cuthbert might want to feel your ribs.—It is ribs just now, isn't it, old man?" and Cuthbert nodded and laughed.—"But on the whole they really aren't half bad to get on with. Ah, here comes Miss Parry! Well, if you won't have our company—but, now I think of it, we couldn't have come to-day anyway, as we have some most important business to attend to at home. Pleasant ride to you, and don't have a smash-up! Good-morning!"

"Nasty, mean, shabby thing she is!" grumbled Dicky, as the brown car shot away down the road.

"What was that you said about important business, Jim?" queried Robin.

"My dear girl, don't you see? They're out for the whole day. It's a splendid opportunity. Ivor's to be with them—there's absolutely nobody to interfere with us. If we don't get to the bottom of that little monkey's mystery, with the whole day before us, it's funny! Somewhere near the house, you say, but not in it! All right! The first item on our programme, lady and gentlemen, will be another, and thorough, inspection of the ruin, which is strongly suspected of holding the key to this deep, dark mystery, in spite of appearances to the contrary. In fact, I don't see where else she can hide. But I've been thinking about that ruin, and I want another look at it. Come along!"

"Hip, hip, hip!" shouted Dicky. "We'll find out all about it, and it will serve that mean girl jolly well right!"

Robin followed more quietly, being troubled by the thought of Gwyneth fach's feelings in the matter. But the boys must be satisfied now, and she was keenly curious herself. She knew that it would be impossible to restrain Jim Carradale at present, so she awaited developments, with her mind made up as to what she must do if necessity occurred.

"We have to face the fact," said Jim, as they reached the tower, "that Gwyneth has either not been using the inside of the ruin at all, or that there is some other entrance, as she obviously did not use the door for which Cuthbert needed his battering-ram."

"That's so. We didn't think of that."

But a careful search of the base of the wall revealed no second entrance, and the children turned to Carradale to know the next step.

"She evidently doesn't go through the wall," he said didactically; "then she must either go under or over it. Under is unlikely, I think. Now, could she get over? Let's have a look. Of course there's no ladder about?"

"I'll get one from the house!" cried Dicky, and set off at a run.

"No, that's no use. Dicky, wait a bit! The question is not, can we get in, but does Gwyneth get in?"

"Sherlock Holmes!" laughed Cuthbert. "You'll solve the mystery after all, Jim."

"Perhaps! You see," he said, entering the dark little doorway, "the walls are quite five feet thick. It's a regular tunnel of a door. There must be quite a broad walk round the top of the wall."

“Let’s get up! Do let me go for a ladder!” cried Dicky eagerly again.

“Wait a bit!” Carradale reminded him severely. “The question is, could Gwyneth get up, and if so, how?”

He went outside again and proceeded to a careful examination of the wall. It was mostly built of smooth stone, but here and there was rough and broken.

“I wonder if she could climb it, now! I could,” said the sailor thoughtfully, “but I doubt—ah!”

He and Cuthbert had forced aside the growth of bushes and slim young rowans, and here, behind and completely hidden, were distinct traces of broken steps—an outside staircase, crumbled almost entirely away, but still sufficient to give support to nimble toes and fingers.

Dicky gave a shout and began to jump with excitement. He made a rush for the wall, but Carradale held him back.

“I go first, young man, for safety’s sake,” and he tried the stones carefully. “Strong enough! This looks more likely, Cuthbert,” and they scrambled up one by one.

The broad top of the wall was level, and offered a pleasant walk, with a fine outlook over the garden, to those with steady heads. Robin hesitated, but Dicky ran away round at once, then stopped with another shout.

“Here’s a hole—an’ steps goin’ right down into the middle of the earth! O—o—oh! Let’s go down! Come on quick, do! D’you think it’s safe? Looks like the place a dragon might come out of, like in the fairy tales. Don’t you think we ought to have a pistol, Jim? Have you got a ’volver with you?”

“You cut away for candles and matches, Cuthbert. I think we’re on the right track now. We’ll wait for you.” And while he ran back to the cottage they stood at the top of the flight of stone steps which led down inside the wall, and made various suggestions as to what they would find at the bottom.

Dicky clung to the thought of his dragon. Robin inclined more to the idea that it was Gwyneth fach’s secret hiding-place, and Carradale agreed with her.

When the candles arrived he led the way down, and they followed, all curious and eager for the end of their quest.

But disappointment met them again. A hiding-place certainly, and a good one, but hardly all that they had expected.

The stair widened suddenly into a narrow stone chamber in the wall, with paved floor and bare sides, which had certainly not been used as a dwelling by Gwyneth fach or any one else. She could not possibly have slept here the night before. Shelter it would have given her, but nothing more, and Ivor had insisted that she was quite comfortable and had everything she wanted.

In one corner was a great heap of stones and rubbish. In another stood a big garden watering-pot, and tied to its top handle was a long strong rope. They looked at it curiously, but it could tell no tales. There was nothing else in the bare little room.

So they turned disappointedly and retraced their steps, not at all satisfied with this result to all their endeavours.

“Rotten!” was Cuthbert’s verdict. “But there’s evidently nothing more to see here. Let’s go up to Quellyn and see if you were right about those pictures, Robin.”

CHAPTER XVII.
THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

"Well, Robin, if you're right about those pictures having been here once, they're certainly not here now," said Jim Carradale, after a careful inspection of the paintings in the various rooms.

"But the boys remember seeing them too, and I showed you where they were hung, and you said it looked as if something had been taken down."

"I know. The question is, where are they now?"

"In Gwyneth fach's secret hiding-place," said Dicky promptly.

"Or perhaps she's hidden them in her bedroom upstairs," suggested Cuthbert. "That's more likely. They may have been special favourites of hers, and she thought she'd keep 'em for herself."

"Well, I don't wonder if she did. The tiny Flower-Girl and Olwen were beautiful, and exactly like Gwyneth fawr, and the baby Taliesin was just sweet. And the big ones, especially Rhiannon lying sleeping with her baby in her arms and the ugly old women at the back, were awfully good."

"Ripping; and just like Gwyneth, as you say."

"We must find them," said Jim Carradale with conviction; "we must, and we will! What about this room upstairs?"

"Gwyneth fach's bedroom. It's locked. It was open the first time we came, but it's been locked every day since. She doesn't want us going in to look at her things."

"I'll have a look at it anyway."

To their intense surprise they found the door of Gwyneth's bedroom unlocked. She admitted afterwards that it was sheer carelessness, as the key was in the door and she had simply forgotten to turn it. Every other day she had been most particularly careful to lock the door and take the key away, but on this one day, when as it chanced they were eager to enter, she had forgotten.

Robin stood on the threshold with a cry of surprise. "What a mess! What does it mean, d'you think?"

They remembered the neat, pretty little room they had first seen. It looked now more as if undergoing a severe course of spring cleaning.

The bed was stripped bare even of mattresses; the rugs were gone from the floor; the dressing-table was empty; books, pictures, and ornaments had disappeared. Everything movable had been removed.

They looked at one another in astonishment. Then Cuthbert laughed. "Everything's gone to the secret hiding-place! She's worked pretty hard, or had help from Mrs. Davies."

"I do wish we could find it," groaned Dicky.

"Why doesn't the little goose live here?" queried Carradale.

"She won't, you know. We'd be only too pleased if she would. But she won't because it belongs to us."

"Well, well! Verily the ways of little girls are strange! There's the postman! Race you for the letters, Dicky."

“Can’t—be—the—postman,” panted Dicky, chasing him down the great staircase. “Doesn’t come up here. There! it’s only one of the Davies boys.”

“That’s the point, my boy. I caught Evan Davies, junior, and promised him threepence if he fetched up any letters there were for us, and sixpence if there was one for me, and ninepence if they brought good news.”

“Oh, what a shame!” cried Dicky; but Robin laughed, suspecting that Evan bach would pocket his ninepence in any case.

There was no letter for Jim. Robin and Cuthbert were reading one from Southampton, while Dicky demanded impatiently to be told the news.

“Oh, I say, here’s a good ninepenceworth! Dicky, just listen to this!” cried Cuthbert. “You know school begins next week, and we’d been wondering what was to happen. Well, mother says she’d been wondering too, and she wrote asking if they’d have us as boarders—”

“I won’t go—I won’t! ’Tisn’t any good!” cried Dicky excitedly.

“Wait a bit, stupid. Don’t be in such a hurry, and don’t get in such a fit till there’s some need for it. You do waste a lot of time. She’s just heard that one of the servants has had scarlet fever in the house this week, and they’re going to have all the drains up, so they can’t take any boarders at all.”

“Hot stuff!” said Dicky expressively. “That servant’s bricky. Well?”

“So we’re just to wait here for a while, and miss the first few weeks.” And Dicky sprang up and gave three cheers.

“They think Robin will be better out of school for a while anyway, because she’s been so funny and groggy all winter. So we’re to wait here till father’s well enough to come.”

“He’s getting on nicely,” said Robin, “and says he’ll soon be strong enough to climb the Rivals. But he’s not out of bed yet.”

“Where’s Jim?—where’s he off to? He’s disappeared.”

They waited impatiently, not knowing where to look for him; and presently he came hurrying in, his face alight.

“I’ve found it! Come away, all of you, and see. I’ve really found it at last.”

“What?—found what?”

“The secret hiding-place—Gwyneth fach’s retreat.” And Dicky gave a shout of delight, while the others sprang up with eager questions.

“Where? How? Where is it?”

“In the tower. I had a sudden thought, and went to see if I was right.”

He led the way back to the ruin and up the rude steps to the top of the tower, then down into the little stone chamber in the wall once more; and they followed with wide eyes and faces full of questions.

“Now look.” He removed the big can. “I meant to search the whole floor, but tried this corner first, and found what I wanted.”

In the stone floor, which was formed of great square flags, was a small iron ring.

“Lift it, Dicky. Pull! Quite light, you see, and easy from constant use—Miss Gwyneth’s front door.”

As Dicky pulled the little ring, the big square stone swung on a pivot, and stood on end in the black opening, leaving just room for one to squeeze through. Cuthbert raised a shout of triumph, and Carradale lit the candles and handed one to each.

“I’ll go first,” he said. “Dicky’s dragon may be lurking in the dark down below;” and a delightful shiver of anticipation ran through all three.

Jim's broad shoulders proved a difficulty, but the boys were only too delighted to lend a helping hand and aid his passage. They pushed and laughed and gasped and pushed again, and he struggled through at last.

"I'm bigger than Gwyneth fach," he laughed, and led the way down a narrow stone staircase.

At the bottom was a door which proved to be bolted, and they held their breath, anticipating another disappointment. But it was not locked, and the bolts slipped back easily, and gave them at last admittance to Gwyneth's castle.

It was a small, square room, built of stone—an underground vault or cellar of the tower. The door was in one corner, but on the opposite wall another flight of steps led up to the roof, where there was a trap-door.

The little room had been made warm and homelike with furnishings from Plas Quellyn. Gwyneth fach's mattress and bedding were spread on the floor, all very neatly arranged. A low table held a lamp with soft rose-coloured shade; there were rugs and cushions on the stone floor, two low chairs by the table, and round the walls was a long, low seat draped with crimson hangings—the curtains from Gwyneth's bedroom. On this lounge-seat were ranged books and ornaments, and leaning against the wall were the missing pictures. In a cupboard, cleverly contrived from several wooden boxes of equal size standing one on the other, and all draped in muslin, were cups and saucers, a teapot, a plate with cakes and buns, a jug of milk, and a can of water. A spirit-lamp and kettle stood in one corner, and a little fire was neatly laid on a bare stone. On the table, on the cupboard shelf, on the low seat beside the books, on the stone steps of the inner staircase, were dainty glass vases with branches of hawthorn or bunches of wild hyacinths. It was as cosy a dwelling as any one could wish—a perfect little home for a girl who wanted to play at housekeeping for a time.

Robin looked round with eager, wistful eyes, but did not join in the boys' triumphant exclamations over the discovery.

"It's awfully jolly," she sighed. "But I do wish we could come here with Gwyneth fach as friends. I don't like being here on the sly, and it seems rather like it. Dicky, don't touch! You mustn't meddle anything. Remember they're not yours."

"But they're yours."

"No, they're not; they're Gwyneth's. Look here, boys, I won't have anything touched. We've found out her secret, but I don't want her to know. We've made her miserable enough already, without meaning to, and this would only make matters worse. I want nothing said about it. We'll go away again and shut the door, and she need never know we've been."

"Oh, I say, don't be a rotter, Robinette! What's the fun in that? We want her to know we've found out her secret. Serves her jolly well right."

"But I don't, and you're going to do what I want, Dicky.—Back me up, Jim, please.—I won't have Gwyneth fach made unhappy. It pleases her to think we don't know, and it's the only way we can please her just now."

"Don't want to please her! She's a mean—"

"But I do, and I'm going to have my own way," and she stood facing them defiantly, her face very determined.

"Oh, well, if you've made up your mind, it's no use saying anything," said Cuthbert, shrugging his shoulders.—"It's no good, Dicky. She always does get what she wants, you know."

“I mean to this time, anyway. It’s my house,” she argued, falling back upon an argument she rarely used, “and you’re to do this to please me, boys. I mean to be friends with Gwyneth some day, and I won’t do anything that could make her more angry than she is already.—You agree with me, don’t you, Jim?”

He had been watching her and listening quietly to the discussion.

“I think you are far more generous than Gwyneth has any right to expect. But of course it must be as you like, Robin. If you choose to leave her this hiding-place, and be content to know that she has a safe retreat, you must have your own way. I think Gwyneth fach is safe enough down here. What is it to be, then? Are we to leave it to her?”

“Yes, please. And I want you all to promise you won’t come here again without me, and you won’t speak of it to anybody at all—Ivor, or Gwyneth fawr, or any one. It’s to be a secret still.”

The boys grumbled, and Dicky was very indignant. But she held to her opinion, and they had to give in. The promises were solemnly made, and they all took a long look round the little room before withdrawing.

“But the pictures ought to be in the house, Robinette; they’re yours,” cried Dicky suddenly.

“They’re safe enough here, and they weren’t doing us any good while they were at Plas Quellyn and we were at Moranedd.”

“I hope they are safe enough,” Carradale said soberly, as he studied the sweet face of Rhiannon—was it not rather Gwyneth Parry?—lying asleep with a tiny baby on her arm. “I’m none too sure of it. These pictures are valuable. If some folks knew they were here, they might be tempted to try to get hold of them. We don’t want burglars. They really ought to be in a safer place.”

“But no one can know they’re here. No one could ever find a secret place like this.”

“I hope not. You’re content to risk it, then?”

“Oh yes. I really think they’ll be all right, Jim.”

“I’ve been wondering how she gets enough air in,” said Jim Carradale, and ran up the inner staircase. “Ah! I thought so. This trap-door opens to the air. It’s all covered with bushes and tangle, so we would probably not have found it; but plenty of air gets in to keep the place fresh.”

“It is pretty. I would like to come here with Gwyneth and be friendly,” Robin sighed. “Think what good times we’d have!”

“That will come later,” said Carradale, to comfort her.

Then by her wish they withdrew, leaving no sign of their visit, but bolting the door and placing the turning stone carefully in position again.

“It’s sporty,” said Cuthbert, as they stood on the wall.

“It’s Gwyneth fach’s,” said Robin, “and we mustn’t spoil her secret.”

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE SECRET HIDING-PLACE.

For once Robin was alone.

Ivor had infected the boys with his own delight in fishing, and part of every day was spent out at sea. But Robin did not care for fishing. She strongly disliked having wet, slippery fish flapping about her feet in the bottom of the boat, and had an incomprehensible objection to seeing them die. So she preferred to let the three boys go out alone, and found amusement enough ashore, on the beach, among the rocks, or in one of the villages.

She had made numerous friends in Porthdinlleyn, though at first had been distressed by the shyness of both the children and the cats. She would have liked to pet them all, but for a time all her advances only gave the signal for flight on the part of these timid ones. But by degrees the children at least grew more friendly, and though in many cases they could not understand her words, yet smiles, sweets, and pennies are current coin anywhere, and so they got on very well together.

"But of course," she said to herself at times, as she wandered alone along the footpath among the rocks under the cliff, or searched the sand of Lifeboat Bay for shells and cornelians, "I ought to have Gwyneth fach to keep me company while the boys are out with Ivor. That would be just right. She is a silly."

Ten days had passed since the discovery of Gwyneth's hiding-place, and the secret had been well kept. As Robin said, "Nobody knows that we know." They had not been near the ruin again, having lost interest in it since they knew its secret and since they must not enter it. They had heard from Ivor glowing accounts, inspired no doubt by Gwyneth herself, of the delights of their motor trip to the Land's End of Wales—of the mighty rocks and cliffs presenting their boldest front to the wild Atlantic breakers; of Abersoch sands and Llanbedrog Head; of the gardens and old mansion of Glynyweddw, where they had stopped for tea—and Dicky greeted it all with indignant protests and lamentations. The others, however, refused to be roused to any expression of envy, whatever they might feel privately, and Cuthbert sent back a message through Ivor to Gwyneth fach that they were glad to hear she had had such a good time.

The boys had been out fishing all morning. The total catch, after three hours' waiting, had been solemnly presented to Robin on a big plate—one tiny whiting and a huge dogfish. Robin always screamed when she saw a dogfish, so the gift had not been greatly appreciated. Now they were away out with Ivor again to set the long line, and the first business in the morning would be to row out and see whether anything had been caught during the night.

As for Jim Carradale, he had gone up to Plas Quellyn on business. He had much business in that neighbourhood at present, and the sheltered glens at the foot of Madryn Mountain, or the shady paths through Bodvean Woods, found their solitudes invaded by a couple as intent upon this particular kind of business as any of the other couples who had long ago discovered that in these lonely haunts "business" throve apace.

The boys, interested in the fishing and satisfied with Ivor's company, did not trouble over his defection. Robin laughed at times, when she remembered how much they had hoped from his coming; but she had fullest sympathy with him, and never hinted that he should spare more time for Moranedd and less for Quellyn. She invited Gwyneth fawr down to tea in the

cottage as often as she would come, and if only Gwyneth fach would have come too she would have been quite content. But they never saw Gwyneth fach.

On this particular day "Gwyneth Little" had sent an invitation through "Gwyneth Big" to Carradale to join them in a motor trip to Criccieth Castle, taking the outward road through Bodvean Woods and Chwilog, and returning by the coast route through Abererch and Afonwen to Pwllheli.

So Robin, being all alone, and supposing the grounds of Quellyn to be empty for the day, set off after dinner to walk thither. She had a craving, which she would not have confessed to the boys, to see that underground chamber again, and surely, she thought, a visit in Gwyneth's absence could do no harm.

She no longer demanded the pony trap to carry her over the four miles to Quellyn. She was learning, as were the boys, to think nothing of the ups and downs and long white levels of the country roads. But she wanted companions, so invited the stout white mother terrier to come for a walk; and when the lazy one would have pleaded age and maternal cares as an excuse, she picked up the lively pup and carried it off, and the mother had to follow.

As she walked, Robin studied that morning's letter from Southampton. Mr. Brent was not yet well enough to write himself, but sent cheery messages that he would soon be able to travel to Porthdinlleyn and once there the bracing air would quickly set him right, so that he would soon be strong enough to climb the Rivals.

Ivor and Carradale had proposed a drive to Llithfaen several days ago, for the express purpose of climbing the three-peaked mountain; for, as Ivor insisted, any one who could manage Madryn need not be afraid of Yr Eifl. But the children, and Robin especially, would not agree to it. They were going to climb the Rivals with father. They must wait till he was able to go with them.

The white pup raced up the road before her, ears flying, tail wagging wildly in excitement at this great excursion, little legs carrying him bravely. Occasionally he ran too fast, and tumbled over his own feet, but after a roll in the dust was always up and away cheerfully again until the next time. Occasionally his mother chased and caught him, knocked him down, and rolled him over; but it was only a game, and gave great satisfaction to both.

Suddenly Robin sprang after him, and catching him up retreated to the side of the road while the motor-bus rattled past and left a cloud of dust. Then she laughed down at the wrinkled little face, with one black eye and one white, and little square nose, and the restless little body wriggling impatiently in the effort to get down and make a sacrifice of himself under the rushing wheels.

Cuthbert's interest in ribs had been satisfied for the time, and now he delighted to feel the folds in the loose white skin, and, drawing it out, show how much room was left for growth. He was always very gentle; but the pup did not appreciate his attentions, and strongly resented having his double chins made a spectacle of, or the creases and wrinkles in his neck investigated. Robin laughed again as he reared up his head and kicked and struggled in her arms, then put him down, and he rushed away with his mother in close attendance.

The Quellyn gardens were deserted. The tower looked very lonely. Robinette left the dogs barking and yelping at the foot of the broken stair, and climbed to the top of the wall.

She found the walk round the unfenced edge of the tower a slightly nervous proceeding, now that she was alone. There was a sharp wind blowing. She kept well to the middle of the wall, away from either edge, and was undeniably unwilling to cast her eyes down to the grass below.

She would just have a peep at the fascinating secret hiding-place, and then she would hurry home for tea.

But she did not know that in the shelter of the winding stair a little figure was crouching, with white face and wild, desperate eyes. This retreat was all that was left to her. Was she to lose it also?

Gwyneth fach understood the situation between Carradale and Gwyneth fawr perfectly. She liked Carradale, and was prepared to further matters as far as she could. So when the little brown car arrived for the run to Criccieth, she had suddenly refused to go, and had disappeared into the gardens of Plas Quellyn, leaving the chauffeur to drive the car. Gwyneth fawr had hesitated, but Jim Carradale had blessed Gwyneth fach and insisted, and was engaged at the moment in searching the shops of Criccieth for a sufficiently suitable gift in recognition of her thoughtfulness.

"She doesn't know I'm here," she was saying to herself, as she crouched in the shadow, watching Robinette. "She's afraid she's going to fall. If I jump out and scream, she will fall; if I don't, she'll find out. She's almost here. Why *should* she find out? She's taken everything else—"

Robin paused to throw a word to the excited dogs, and glanced nervously down at them as they jumped about the foot of the stair and reared themselves up on the first step. She hesitated, to make sure of her balance, then came slowly on round the top of the tower.

From the shadowy entrance to the winding stair came a sudden rush, a shrill scream, a dark figure waving wild arms, and Robin, echoing the scream, stumbled backwards, lost her footing, and fell, with another sharp cry.

Gwyneth fach stood alone on the tower, her breast heaving, her breath coming quickly. Her secret was still safe.

She looked down at the grass. Robin was lying there, white and still. The stout terrier was licking her neck in puzzled surprise. Then, as she did not stir, it sat up and begged, in pathetic dismay at its own helplessness and her unusual lack of response. The pup had discovered the end of her long brown plait, and found it a most delightful plaything. He was tugging at it and dancing about with the end of it in his mouth, but she never moved.

Gwyneth fach stood gazing down, and grew slowly as white as Robin herself.

Suddenly she swung herself over the edge, hung by her little brown hands, and dropped lightly to the grass. She drove off the dogs with sharp Welsh words, and bent over the quiet figure.

Her heart was thumping in a strange, wild way. She turned and fled across the lawn and through the trees to the Davies's cottage.

While Robin was lifted and carried away by roughly gentle hands, Gwyneth stood and watched, her face still white. Robin gave a little moan as they raised her, and Gwyneth's eyes grew wild and scared. They carried her off to the cottage, and Gwyneth turned and disappeared into her retreat.

Little Evan Davies was sent off to Moranedd in the trap, with orders to call at the doctor's on the way. He found the boat just grounding on the sand, on its return from the long line, so gave his tidings in excited Welsh. Ivor translated hastily, and the boys exclaimed in characteristic fashion.

"Tumbled off the top of the tower! What a donkey! Just like a girl. *I* wouldn't ever have tumbled!"

“Is she badly hurt? What’s wrong? Can I do anything? Where is she? Up at Quellyn? I’m going at once,” said Cuthbert sharply.

The doctor had reached Quellyn before them, and was able to give them reassuring news as he met them on the threshold. Robin was badly bruised, and had some nasty cuts, which might keep her in bed for a few days. For to-night she must stay in the cottage and keep very quiet, but if she kept on improving he thought she could probably be taken home to-morrow. In answer to Cuthbert’s insistent questioning he explained that he had at first feared concussion of the brain, but that Robin had only been stunned by the fall and was now sleeping quietly, so he hoped that all danger was past.

“Fell off the tower!” said Carradale in dismay, when he and Gwyneth fawr found the boys awaiting them outside the cottage. “How did that happen, I wonder? She managed it all right the other day.”

Gwyneth hurried in to see for herself how much damage was done, but returned presently to assure them that Robin was still sleeping quietly, and would have every attention during the night. So they set off soberly for Moranedd, with many discussions by the way as to how the accident had been caused.

“If she’s able to talk to-morrow she’ll tell us all about it,” said Carradale.

“I’m glad she’s asleep, anyway, for I’ve read that it’s always good for people to sleep,” said Cuthbert, stifling the yelps of the white puppy which he was carrying home. “Be quiet, you noisy little beggar!”

“She was an awful donkey to fall. Can’t think how she could do anything so silly,” remarked Dicky.

CHAPTER XIX.
THE GUILT OF GWYNETH FACH.

Gwyneth fach, buried in her secret hiding-place, was in the throes of a moral crisis. It was the birthnight of her conscience.

Some excuse may be offered for her. At Quellyn, as the adopted child of a lonely bachelor, she had been spoiled. Then, as the pet and plaything of the childless young wife, she had still been indulged to her hearts content and far beyond her good. And Gwyneth fawr, it must be remembered, was only twenty when the Brents arrived at Quellyn, so had been too young to undertake much responsibility as to the forming of the child's character, and had been quite unable to counteract the influence of the elder folk. Moreover, she had been away from the neighbourhood for nearly a year, during much of which Mr. Quellyn had lain ill in Moranedd and Gwyneth fach had run wild.

So Gwyneth fach, motherless, ill-trained, had no sound moral principles with which to meet the crisis which faced her when Robin Brent came into her life. The difficulties of the situation had to be met, and she had no reserves to call to her aid.

In her unreasoning dislike to them all she had been without compunction or remorse, but these were born when she saw Robin lying apparently dead at her feet. The feelings which crowded in upon her now were utterly strange, and she failed to understand them.

She kindled her little fire preparatory to spending the night in her retreat, and sat down to think the matter out. She had waylaid the doctor as he drove home, and had learned that Robin was not very seriously hurt, but must spend the night in the cottage. So Gwyneth made her preparations for a night in the tower.

She wondered much what they would all say when Robin recovered enough to explain that her accident had not been a simple fall, as was at present supposed. Gwyneth fach was not exactly afraid of any consequences to herself, but she confessed in the privacy of the secret hiding-place that she would have liked "Auntie Gwyn" not to know. She had no fear of the others, who might say what they liked; but Gwyneth fawr's reproachful face would, she knew, make her sorry and ashamed. She had a suspicion, also, that Ivor would condemn her action as mean and shabby, and that would not be pleasant.

Of course, she could avoid them all for a little while, but she doubted whether she could permanently defer the evil day in that manner. Sooner or later she would have to face their reproaches, and she foresaw an ugly quarter of an hour.

But this she had felt before. Gwyneth fawr's opinion of her conduct towards Robin and the boys she knew very well, but had not allowed it to weigh with her. Ivor's condemnation of the various motor-car incidents, and especially of the accident in the Bwlch, she had shrugged aside and refused to listen to.

But at sight of Robin lying on the grass, wounded and silent, perhaps broken, perhaps worse, something new had stirred within her and was troubling her greatly. What it meant she did not know, but she could not sleep that night for the sight of Robin before her eyes.

She watched next day from among the trees of the Quellyn gardens while the trap, piled with cushions, carried the invalid away to Moranedd. Gwyneth fawr had been anxious that she should rest in the cottage for a few days, but Robin wanted to get home; so a time had been chosen when the tide was low and she could be driven across the sand to the door. She still

looked white and heavy-eyed, and was quieter than usual, with few words for the boys, who had come to escort her by way of showing their relief at her quick recovery.

When the trap was out of sight, Gwyneth fach turned and went slowly to the cottage for her well-deserved scolding. She had only had sufficient food in the secret hiding-place to provide her with tea and supper, so was now in quest of breakfast. She had fervently hoped that Gwyneth fawr would think it necessary to see Robin safely to Moranedd, and so leave the way clear for her to visit Mrs. Davies and disappear again before she returned; but as she had not done so, there was nothing for it but to face the storm.

She went towards the cottage with heavy feet and shamefaced air, dreading the first sight of Gwyneth fawr's face and the sound of her reproaches.

"Gwyneth Big" was still standing at the door after seeing the last of her patient. She had seen "Gwyneth Little" coming, and was waiting for her.

"Come away, Gwyneth fach! Have you had any breakfast? I've kept some for you, so just say if you want it, and I'll have it ready in three minutes," she cried cheerily.

Gwyneth fach gave her a startled look.

"I—haven't had any," she faltered.

"Come along, then. Why didn't you come home last night, you silly girl? I suppose you knew Robin Brent was here? I do think, when you knew she'd had such a nasty accident, you might have come to cheer her up, Gwyneth fach."

Gwyneth gave her another bewildered look, then began hastily to spread bread and butter, her lips pursed in puzzled wonder.

"Of course she couldn't talk last night, but this morning she would have been pleased to have a chat with you, I know. She had only me to talk to until the boys came. She was telling me how it happened."

Gwyneth fach kept her eyes fixed on her plate, and waited in deepening surprise.

"I don't think she has found out your secret, so you needn't be worrying over that," Gwyneth fawr said, with a quick look at her. "She says she found the steps up the tower, so climbed up to see what it was like at the top. But she didn't like it: it made her nervous to be up so high, and the dogs were making a row down at the bottom; and when she stopped to call down to them to be quiet, she lost her balance and fell off the wall. She's not used to climbing about like you and Ivor, you know. In London girls don't go climbing walls and trees and tearing their clothes and stockings. She had a nasty fall, and might have been very badly hurt."

Gwyneth fach had nothing to say; the situation was utterly beyond her. When presently Gwyneth fawr set out for Morfa to fetch her letters, if any, Gwyneth fach hurried away back to the secret hiding-place, and there sat down on her bed in a state of complete bewilderment.

Was it possible Robin did not know? But it had been in broad daylight. How could she have failed to recognize her?

Moreover, she had said nothing of the sudden alarm which had caused the accident. She had deliberately been silent upon that point.

Was it possible that she knew and did not mean to tell?

It looked like it. She had certainly suppressed those facts which were known only to herself.

But perhaps Robin had only been waiting till she had her brothers and Jim Carradale around her. Perhaps even now she was telling them the story, and Gwyneth fawr would hear it in Morfa.

Only time could answer that question. Gwyneth fach pondered it all deeply, and sat and thought and thought, and that new sense of shame and regret troubled her more than ever, which was surely unreasonable, since now she knew that Robin was not badly hurt.

CHAPTER XX.
GWYNETH FACH COMES TO MORANEDD.

For the sake of the cuts and bruises on Robin's limbs and sides, the doctor insisted that she should rest for a few days, if not in bed, then on a couch. She herself would have disregarded her wounds, and considered ungratefully that every one was making a great fuss about nothing. But in the absence of Mrs. Brent, Carradale joined forces with the doctor and insisted also, so she had to submit. And when first she tried to walk across the floor, she found herself so shaky and stiff and sore that resting was more pleasant than movement, after all.

So she asked that the long, low window-seat of the sitting-room of Moranedd be turned into a couch by means of cushions and pillows, and was quite content to lie there all day.

There was so much to see from that window! She could call out greetings—"Boreu da," "Prydnawn da"—to the children as they went to school, for her knowledge of Welsh was increasing. She would call Jenny in from the kitchen to ask, "What's the Welsh for 'Isn't it a nice morning?' " and would make a valiant attempt to repeat Jenny's smilingly uttered gutturals for the benefit of some woman coming back from the cliff with a basket of washing, or setting out with her cans to trudge for water to the spring away along the shore. Her efforts at the language were always received with smiling surprise, and occasionally drew forth a Welsh response ending with the friendly "Robin fach." Her greetings to the children evoked shy smiles and waves of little hands, and she delighted to toss a biscuit or peppermint or chocolate drop to their feet, and receive a shy "Diolch mawr"—very many thanks—in exchange.

From her window she could see the whole of Porthdinlleyn, from the whitewashed cottages turning their backs to the sea, and presenting sheltered creeper-covered faces to the little enclosure in the stone wall, as far as the imposing entrance and tunnel-way of the old coaching inn on the shore, where the timid cats sleep on the doorsteps and the hens wander loose, pecking in the drift seaweed and dry sand. Beyond the cottages were the piles of black rock, clothed above with soft green turf and below with golden-brown seaweed, and, in the sheltered corner under the headland, the green waters of the harbour, the fishing smacks, and the small boats. Still beyond lay the wide blue stretch of the bay, with Nevin Point tapering like a green finger to its rocky tip, and above the point the peaks of Yr Eifl—"The Rivals"—sometimes clear against a bright sky, sometimes capped in cloud.

Now and then a distant rumble came over the bay, like a single peal of thunder, and Robin, glancing up at the green hills above Nevin, saw the white face of the quarry veiled for a moment in mist, which, drifting slowly away, showed itself as the smoke-cloud of the explosion.

Sometimes the *Dora* came panting heavily in to her anchorage, and then there was bustle indeed as the little tug plied between her and the shore, laden with sacks and barrels and casks. Sometimes the *Beatrice* spread her sails and crept away for a day's fishing or a trip to Carnarvon. Sometimes one of the fishing-boats came in, and grounded on the sand so close to the houses that she could see the catch from her window.

Yes, there was plenty to see from the windows of Moranedd.

Cuthbert and Dicky offered to stay in the house to keep her company—Cuthbert willingly enough, Dicky because he thought he had to. But she would not hear of it.

"It's only for a day or two, and I've plenty to do here. Go along out with Ivor. Have you been to the long line to-day? What was there on it—another dogfish? Where are you going this afternoon?"

"Well, if you're quite sure you don't want us—"

"Ivor knows a man who's going bass-fishing over by the headland, so he's going to make him take us too! It's awfully exciting! You have to—"

"Among all those rocks? Are you quite sure it's safe, Cuthbert?"

"Jim's coming too, so it's all right. He's away up to Quellyn to invite Gwyneth fawr," Cuthbert explained, seizing the white puppy as it dashed at his legs, and swinging it on to his knee by the nape of its neck.

"Don't hold it like that! I know it doesn't like it."

He laughed, and held the squirming little body at arm's length.

"It's the right way to hold him. Doesn't he pull faces? Look at him showing his teeth!"

"Well, he can't help it. You're pulling his mouth all out of shape. Do put him down, Cuthbert."

"Nonsense! It doesn't hurt him, you know, whatever he says. Just look here, Robin! I made him into a Chinee the other day. You see if he doesn't make a perfect Chinaman."

He put his hand over the puppy's face and gently drew back ears and brow till the little dark blue eyes were aslant and narrowed into slits. The pup struggled and kicked and tried frantically to escape, but Cuthbert held him securely under his arm and cried eagerly,—

"There I Doesn't he look Chinese?—Be quiet, you stupid little beast! I'm not hurting you an atom—"

Dicky shouted with laughter.

"It's not a Chinaman he's like, Cuthbert, it's a rabbit! He's the very image of a rabbit."

Robin laughed also, but pleaded for the pup.

"Let him go, Cuthbert; he hates it."

"It doesn't hurt him in the slightest," Cuthbert protested. "Just look at all this skin! He's got enough for two. You might put a pleat in it for him, Robin. I'm sure he could do with it."

"Or run a tuck round his neck," she laughed. "Do let him go, Cuthbert!

"And look at his double chins! He's got about six—"

"Look at the old mother! Look at the old mother! Do just look at her!" cried Dicky, going off into another peal of laughter.

The stout white terrier was begging anxiously, with paws crossed, and eager, troubled eyes fixed on the pup squirming in Cuthbert's hands.

"She's begging for her baby. You can't resist that, Cuthbert."

Cuthbert could not, so the pup was released for that time, and scampered off with his delighted mother, and Dicky ran to the door to see if Ivor was coming along the shore.

"He's not in sight yet," he said disappointedly. "D'you s'pose he's not coming? Cuthbert, what shall we do if he doesn't turn up? Oh, won't it be a shame! It will be mean! When we're looking forward to it so much, an' it's such a splendid afternoon, an' we've waited all this time for him—"

"Don't get in such a fit about it, man! He said three o'clock, and it's only a quarter to. You're always in such a hurry."

"Say, Robinette, I've been wanting to ask you something, an' forgetting every time!" began Dicky eagerly. "What were you doin' up on the tower that day? Were you goin' to have another look at the secret hiding-place?"

"Dicky, Dicky, I thought I asked you not to say anything about that?" cried Robin, with a look of dismay at the kitchen door. "What a dreadful boy you are! You must be more careful."

"But what were you trying to do when you tumbled? You were a duffer to fall! Fancy not being able to walk straight along a wall!"

"I'm not used to the tops of walls," Robin objected, colouring a little.

"But you managed it all right the other time."

"Well, I didn't manage it all right this time, so that's all there is to say about it. As for what I was doing, that's my business, isn't it? Here's Ivor coming now, and Gwyneth fawr and Jim are with him."

Dicky fled with a whoop of delight, and presently Robin was left with only the dogs for company.

But she was content, for she was very busy. Some days ago she had bought, in the stationer's shop in Nevin, as Morfa did not boast a bookshop, a pamphlet of Welsh words and phrases, in the hope of learning Welsh some day. With the help of this she was writing a Welsh letter to father, copying each sentence out of the book, with careful attention to the number of *d*'s and *f*'s, which surprised her by generally coming in couples. At thought of the bewilderment the document would cause in Southampton she laughed continually, but decided to have pity on her parents and enclose a translation.

At first she was deeply in earnest, and began in correct style with "My dear father,—How are you to-day? I hope you are better. I am quite well"—this last a polite fiction to ease their minds, for at her earnest desire no mention of the accident had been made. "The weather is very fine. I think it will rain to-day"—these two phrases because they happened to follow one another in the book.

Then the humour of the collection of sentences struck her, as she looked through the pages wondering what to say next, and she decided to make the most of the possibilities before her. With suppressed chuckles and continual outbreaks of laughter she wrote on,—

> My dear Father,—How are you to-day? I hope you are better. I am quite well. The weather is very fine. I think it will rain to-day. It is not likely it will cease raining to-day. The rain will soon be over. Is it possible? What a misfortune! Come and see us. Pray walk in—upstairs—downstairs. Exactly. Just so. Of course. Do not disturb yourself. Are you hungry—thirsty—sleepy? No; I am a medical man. Whatever friends you have, do not forget us. Whoever she may be, we must assist her. Bring us two glasses of wine. Where is the butter market? Have you any apples? They have cut off your arm. How is that word pronounced? Have you some soap? I have washed my face. They are always complaining. My brother has broken his leg. He awoke suddenly. I quite believe it. Are we troublesome? Yes, yes! What is his age? I was thirty last week. You must be very tired. Are these your stockings? Put on your hats. Do not quarrel so! See how it snows! I am enchanted—delighted. I am ill for want of sleep. I am indisposed; something has disagreed with me. It is very doubtful if he can recover. An unfortunate accident happened to me. I do not feel well—"

She looked up, a smile still on her lips, as the kitchen door opened. She would show Jenny the Welsh letter, and would watch her face as she read it.

Gwyneth fach stood in the doorway. She had watched from the cliff while the fishing party set out, and knew that Robin must be alone.

At sight of her Robin's pencil dropped and the book fell from her hand. She knew that Gwyneth fach was given to sudden decision and impulsive action, but she had hardly looked for a visit so soon.

Gwyneth came to the point with no waste of words.

"Why haven't you told them?" she demanded.

Robin gasped. She had expected excuses, denials, or at least some hesitation in facing the subject. This sudden plunge into the midst of it left her breathless for a moment.

"I didn't want to," she said at last, while Gwyneth watched her face keenly.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I just didn't want to. I suppose it was because I knew you'd get into trouble if people understood."

"Why didn't you want me blamed? You knew I did it on purpose."

"I know. It was too bad of you, when I only want to be friends. But I didn't see what good would come of telling people."

"Why were you up on the tower?" demanded Gwyneth, coming to her second point with equally startling suddenness, and frowning in her anxiety over the safety of her secret.

Did Robin suspect anything? Was she only waiting till she was well enough to continue her investigations? Must Gwyneth keep constant guard over the tower? And could she play the same trick again?

Robin looked back at her seriously.

"I found the steps, and went up to see what it was like. There's a jolly view over the garden from the top of the wall, isn't there? But I felt rather giddy I don't think I'll trouble to go up again."

Gwyneth fach was distinctly relieved. So her secret was safe, after all.

"I'm sorry," she said abruptly, and Robin leaned forward eagerly.

"Won't you be friends? I do wish you would."

"Although I knocked you off the wall? I thought you wouldn't ever want to speak to me again. I—I didn't like you. That was why I—"

"I do so want to be friends, Gwyneth! Won't you?"

"I—don't—know—"

"Do say you will! Say you'll come and live with us! Say you'll show us your secret hiding-place!"

"No, I won't. It's mine, and you shan't discover it," and Gwyneth fach, her friendly feelings nipped in the bud, turned and disappeared.

"Oh, why did I say it? Why couldn't I wait? Why did I make such a mistake?" wailed Robin. "Oh, what a donkey I am! She's gone, and it may be ages before I have such a splendid chance again."

For a while she was too deeply disappointed to think of anything else, and felt no interest even in the letter which had so amused her a few minutes before. But at length she roused herself with a disappointed sigh, and remembering what she had been busy about, called Jenny in from the kitchen and handed the letter to her for her approval.

"I've been writing a letter in Welsh to my father, Jenny. Would you mind reading it and telling me if the Welsh is all right?" she asked ingenuously, and slipped the phrase-book out of sight.

“You write Welsh?” asked Jenny, with widening eyes, and began to read the letter.

“You write this?” she asked again, pausing after the first few lines and looking down at her with such amazement in her face that Robinette felt a fraud, and, producing the book, explained the matter.

Jenny broke into a laugh, and read the letter through, with bewildered exclamations at every second sentence.

Then, “I show this to Auntie?” she asked, and carried the letter off to the kitchen, whence presently came peals of laughter when Auntie understood the joke.

“Say, Robinette, they say that girl was here this afternoon,” cried Dicky, during the evening. “What did she want now? Was she still calling names like the black curly girl? Or had she guessed we’d discovered the—”

“Hush, Dicky, hush! I told you to be careful. I think she was afraid we might have some idea of it, but I didn’t tell her we knew;” and so Robin still succeeded in preserving the secret of the accident.

“Gwyneth fach seemed more friendly to-night,” she said. “I think in time she’ll come round all right. Boys, come and read my Welsh letter to father!”

CHAPTER XXI.
GWYNETH'S MAYING.

On the day after her visit to Moranedd, Gwyneth fach woke very early in the morning. She was used to early rising, and, moreover, this was her birthday.

It was hardly six o'clock when she sat up, and, shaking the tumbled dark curls out of her eyes, looked down at Gwyneth fawr lying asleep beside her. She was just like that picture of Rhiannon sleeping with her baby, the picture Gwyneth fach had always loved. Golden hair spread upon the pillow, soft, light lashes kissing cheeks just tinted with rose, like the delicate shells on the shore, white throat throbbing gently—she only wanted the tiny, fair-haired baby on her arm to be a living copy of the picture.

Gwyneth fach looked down at her. What a darling she was! No wonder that sailor-man—

She bent and kissed her.

"Wake up, Auntie Gwyn! wake up, dear! It's morning, and the sun's shining, and you know you promised—"

Gwyneth woke, and lay rubbing her eyes.

"Morning already, Gwyneth fach? So it is. Is it a fine day?"

"Perfect, and it's my birthday, you know. You'll keep to our plan, won't you, Auntie Gwyn?"

"Yes, to be sure," and Gwyneth sat up. "Anything to please you on your birthday, my dear! But if you'd taken my advice and invited Robin and the boys, it would have been much more fun, Gwyneth fach! It's always better to have a big party."

"Not if you don't like the party! It will be much better to be just you and me. Remember, now! We're going to pretend it's this time last year, before any of the sad things happened, and we're going out, you and I, to gather may to decorate the tower for my birthday feast. You know—it was while daddy was painting you as Rhiannon sitting at the gate waiting to carry people into the castle on her back, and you wore your long blue gown, and mummy put on the golden dress he made her get to be the queen, and I wore my green riding-dress that I had for the picture I was in, and we had breakfast in the tower, and lunch out on the lawn, and then we all sat round while daddy read the old stories aloud. Wasn't he fond of them? It was the very next day that mummy was ill," she added thoughtfully, and stood gazing out of the little window with eyes full of memories.

"Well," she said presently, "we'll pretend it's last year, just for this day, and have another birthday feast, and we'll pretend they're still with us, and you'll wear your blue gown and I'll dress up too, and we'll go maying now at once, very early before breakfast, while the dew's still on the grass, and then we'll spend the morning in the tower, and you shall read out of the old book. And you see it wouldn't be any good asking those others, because it's last year and they couldn't possibly be here, for we hadn't even heard of them then!"

Gwyneth fawr laughed. "Well, my dear, if you wish it! You shall have your own way to-day! But we mustn't forget the others entirely, you know, Gwyneth fach; for if they should come up to Quellyn and interrupt us, they'd think us quite mad, indeed!"

"That girl can't, and the boys will stop with her. They were going to take her out in the boat. I told Ivor to see to that. And if Mr. Sailor-Man should come along, that would be a great

joke. He would understand when we explained, and anyway, you look ten times prettier in that Rhiannon dress, Auntie Gwyn!"

"A poor lookout for my everyday looks!" laughed Gwyneth. "Gwyneth fach, do you positively insist that I do my hair as it is in the picture? Mrs. Davies will think us quite mad too."

"No, she won't, she won't! You'll tell her I wanted it, and she'll just say, 'Is it Gwyneth fach? Well, aye indeed!' Of course you must, Auntie Gwyn. You couldn't possibly put your hair up with that dress on, and anyway we're only going into the garden, and nobody'll see us there."

"Indeed, I hope not!" laughed Gwyneth fawr, and began to braid her bright hair into two long shining plaits which fell nearly to her knees. After all, it was only for the garden, and there was nobody about. And it would please Gwyneth fach.

Presently she donned a loose, graceful robe of deep blue velvet, which had been laid away at Quellyn, but had been brought to light the day before by Gwyneth fach. She clasped a yellow girdle with flowing ends about her waist, then turned, and lifting the loose skirt of her gown, made a low curtsey.

"Art content, maiden?"

Gwyneth fach laughed delightedly.

"Yea truly, lady! Auntie Gwyn, you're a darling! Do fasten my dress, and then we'll go out into the fields. I'm longing to get into the sunshine."

The riding-dress of the Black Curly-headed Maiden was too long for easy walking, but happened to be suited to her mood. She gathered it over her arm, and they crept down the stairs together.

Mrs. Davies was washing behind the cottage. The boys were out of sight. The two fair ladies of olden times crossed the drive and disappeared among the trees.

The morning breeze was fresh and sweet, and laden with scent from the hawthorn hedges. Gwyneth fawr had draped a soft white veil over her hair, and Gwyneth fach wore her little green cap with the white feather.

The fields around Quellyn had high green hedges, heavy with their weight of hawthorn. Branch after branch Gwyneth fach cut down, struggling up into the bushes and tossing the twigs to Gwyneth fawr below. Journey after journey they made through the garden to the tower, and, entering by the low doorway, dressed the inside of the ruin with blossoms till it was a bower of green and white, placing boughs in crannies and windows, thrusting them into the bushes, and filling bowls and glasses which came from the secret hiding-place. Thence also came table and chairs, dishes and kettle, and an ample, if perhaps frugal, meal of bread-and-butter and eggs. These were cooked by Gwyneth fawr while Gwyneth fach put finishing touches to the decorations, and presently they sat down to a picnic meal.

"It's all much nicer out of doors, isn't it? I do think people ought to live outside in the summer," and Gwyneth fach heaved a sigh of deep content.

She had insisted that neither should bring any watch or clock, so that they could have a lazy morning without thought of time. When breakfast was over, she produced the big Welsh book of legends and hero tales, and bade Gwyneth fawr read aloud while she lay on the grass and leaned against her knee. Once or twice the elder girl remonstrated that it was time to go home and dress themselves decently, but Gwyneth fach would not hear of it.

"Wait a little while—just a little while longer, Auntie Gwyn! Remember it's my birthday!" she pleaded; and so Gwyneth yielded, and the morning drew on.

Jim Carradale carried Robin's Welsh letter up to the post that day when he went to fetch the letters. He had formed the habit of going up to the post-office every morning, since he had discovered that Gwyneth fawr generally walked down from Quellyn on the same errand. The postman would of course have delivered the letters sometime during the day, if they had been willing to wait. He usually reached Porthdinlleyn during the forenoon on week days, but on Sundays not till the afternoon; but neither Carradale nor the children would have had patience to wait so long when they knew they could have their letters by nine o'clock by calling for them.

As for Gwyneth fawr, she felt it would be unreasonable to ask that her letters be delivered to her up at Quellyn, when no one else up there ever received any. She could not ask the postman to come so far for her sole benefit, so, not being burdened with household cares, she walked down to Morfa every morning, and awaited the arrival of the mail-coach on the veranda of the post-office—in company, as a rule, with Jim Carradale.

The children, no longer in any degree anxious about their father, and untroubled by business matters, were content to leave the fetching of the letters to him, and were quite willing to wait for them till he returned. On the day when he went to post the Welsh letter, they were, at Ivor's suggestion, taking Robin out for a long morning's row, as the sea was quiet, the sun bright, and she could lie in the little brown boat as comfortably as on the window-seat at home. They were going to row her along to Lifeboat Bay, and then right across past the Bwlch towards Nevin Point, calling at the long line on the way and circumnavigating the *Dora* and the *Beatrice* as they went.

When Jim Carradale had dropped the Welsh letter into the box he turned hopefully to look for Gwyneth Parry. The coach was not due for nearly half an hour, so he looked forward to a pleasant chat till it came.

But it was too early. She had not arrived. So he strolled up the road to greet the old sheep-dog at the crossroads, and then down again to tickle Dicky's friend the white pig, who lived opposite Bronwylfa. But still Gwyneth did not come. She was not expecting letters to-day, and was devoting herself to Gwyneth fach, but he did not know that. So he went into the post-office to buy some picture postcards and to have a chat, and while he was in there the coach came rumbling along the road from Nevin, and all was bustle in a moment.

There were no letters for the children, and none, for Gwyneth fawr, but there was one for himself.

He read it standing out in the road. Then he turned, and set out for Moranedd in haste.

But when he had hurried down the Penrhos road and over the stile, and was crossing the cabbage-field, his pace began to slacken, and he went heavily, as if carrying some burden. On the slanting stile by the cornfield, where the cart-track runs down to Edeyrn, he paused, and stood thinking, and gazing down at Porthdinlleyn harbour with eyes which saw nothing.

How to tell them? How was it possible?

Across the still water came peals of laughter and merry chatter. He followed the sound, and looked out at the crowded boat, creeping slowly across the blue bay. Dicky's shrill peal drowned the talk of the others.

How could he tell them?

They had long ago been relieved of all anxiety on Mr. Brent's account, and were looking forward to welcoming him and their mother at Moranedd very shortly. Only that morning Dicky had exclaimed that he wished father would make haste and get strong enough to climb

the Rivals, as he was dying to see the old British fort on Tre'r Ceiri of which Ivor had told him; and he wasn't going to wait much longer either, so that was all about it.

How could he tell them—how *could* he?

Robin was hardly strong yet after her accident. This news would be a terrible shock to her. Was it safe? But how was it possible to suppress the news? How dared he keep it from them? To-morrow's letter might bring the worst news of all. They must be prepared for it at once.

But how could he tell them?

He shrank from the task. He did not know how—he had never done anything of the kind; it was for some one who could break the news gently, without letting it be too much for Robin.

He stood hesitating on the stile, and his mind turned to the girl he had learned to love. Dared he ask her to help him in his difficulty? She could break the news gently. The children were fond of her, and would take it better from her. She could speak to them as their mother would wish. It seemed cowardly to trouble her, and yet he could think of nothing better. At least he would ask her advice. If she would not undertake the duty, perhaps she could at least advise him as to the best way of breaking the news.

He turned and strode back across the fields, up the Penrhos road, and through the long street of Morfa. So by the lonely stretch of switchback road, down and up again, he came to the crossroads, and turned west up the lanes to Quellyn.

Mrs. Davies informed him that she thought the young ladies were in the tower. He hastened through the garden, but when in sight of the ruin he stopped short among the trees and forgot his errand for a moment in the picture which met him.

The gray walls of the tower had always been familiar to him and the children from the Quellyn pictures. Certainly Robert Quellyn had used it as a background in many of them—as King Arthur's Castle, as the Tower of the Lady of the Fountain, as the home of Pwyll, and many others.

Was this one of the pictures come to life?

The Gwyneths had left the tower in search of better shade, and were sitting beside the low doorway. Gwyneth fawr, seated on a big stone, was surely Rhiannon sitting on the horse-block at the castle gate—in long blue gown sweeping the grass about her feet, bright ropes of hair falling over each shoulder nearly to the ground, and eyes bent on the page of the big book lying on her knees. Gwyneth fach, sitting on the grass, was leaning against her, listening to the tale and weaving chains of buttercups, her dark curls uncovered and blowing in the breeze, the lap of her long green dress piled high with flowers.

She turned and threw a finished chain over Gwyneth fawr's head to join others already on her neck, then gave a startled cry.

"Here's Mr. Lieutenant Carradale! Oh, what fun! What a joke!"

Gwyneth looked up in dismay, thinking it anything but a joke. The warm colour rushed into her face as he hastened forward, and she rose to meet him.

"We were not expecting you! I'm afraid you will think—"

"Excuse me! but I have come to beg your help, Miss Parry."

Then she saw the trouble in his face, and asked sharply,—

"What is wrong? Is it Robin—or Dicky—or—?"

"It's a letter from their mother. It came to me this morning. Their father has had a very serious relapse, and she fears he is dying. She asks me to tell them, as she did not think he could live through the night—last night. They know nothing of it, and are all out happily

together. I don't know how to tell them," and he looked into her face with distressful eyes. "It will break their hearts. They are quite happy about him. I'm afraid to tell them. I don't know if Robin can stand it. You see, I'm only a man, and clumsy. Can you help me?"

Gwyneth fawr was listening with face full of deepest distress and pity, Gwyneth fach with startled eyes.

"They must be told, I suppose?" Gwyneth Parry faltered. "Couldn't we wait—till to-morrow—and see if there is no better news?"

"Mrs. Brent seems almost to have lost hope. And if the news to-morrow should be worse __"

"Yes, they ought to know—they must know," and she stood hesitating.

"I will go and tell them, if you like," she said at last. "Poor Robin! Poor little Dicky! Poor boys! It will be very difficult; but they must be told. I'll go at once.—Gwyneth fach, run and tell them to get out the trap. I must go and change my dress—"

"There's the motor," said Gwyneth fach unexpectedly. "I'll have it ready in three minutes, and drive you down in ten, and you needn't stop to change. You can put on your coat and veil, and no one will see you."

"Will you really be so good?" Carradale said gratefully. "It will be a great help to them if you will go. They'll want their mother, and you'll be able to comfort them better than any one."

"Oh, I know a woman always has to do the unpleasant things in life," she said, with a wan smile. "That's what we're here for."

They were walking towards the gates in the wake of Gwyneth fach, who had disappeared, her long dress thrown over her arm and held up to her knees.

"I had to walk up," said Carradale. "I'm afraid I lost some time, though I came as quickly as I could. But there's no bus at this time, and I have no cycle here."

"We shall be there in a very few minutes by Gwyneth's car. Here it comes! Then I won't keep you waiting. As she says, no one will see."

She wrapped herself in a big motoring coat, cap, and veil, to hide her gown and loosened hair, with no thought at the moment for anything but the children in their trouble. But in spite of his distress and sympathy, Jim Carradale could not forbear to glance now and then at the sweet, troubled face within the veil, with wind-blown rosy cheeks framed in soft bright hair, and he never forgot the picture which had greeted him at the ruined tower.

CHAPTER XXII.
GWYNETH FACH TO THE RESCUE.

The little brown car, being in charge of Gwyneth fach, knew no obstacles. In a very few minutes they had rushed down through Morfa, scattering children and dogs and hens, and, turning away from the Penrhos road, were half-way to Edeyrn. Carradale wondered whether she had made a mistake, but a glance at the determined little face, with steadfast eyes and set, firm lips, showed that she knew what she was about.

A little way down the road she slackened speed suddenly, and they waited with restless, throbbing engine while the chauffeur jumped out to open a white gate. A short run down a lane, between high banks crowned with blackberry hedges, brought them to another gate, and they crept through a farmyard, astonishing a flock of geese and some collies and a couple of labourers.

"Won't they object?" he asked of Gwyneth Parry.

"Not to Gwyneth fach," she replied.

Gwyneth fach waved her hand to the men, and drew up before another gate. The lane here was so narrow that the bushes brushed against the side of the car and threatened their faces; but weight and speed carried them through, and after passing through another gate they rode triumphantly out on the open moor of the headland.

"I wouldn't have believed that was possible," said Carradale.

"I have only once before seen the car come this length," Gwyneth replied, but was too full of dread of the task lying before her to have much to say.

Gwyneth fach drew up at the top of the sandy road down to Porthdinlleyn.

"Here you are," she said briefly; and Gwyneth fawr gathered up her long gown and the skirts of her coat and stepped out.

"They're home again," said Carradale: "there's the boat on the sand."

Gwyneth fach followed them soberly down the road through the cliff, leaving the man in charge of the car. Dicky and Ivor were bringing up the oars from the boat. Dicky let his end fall, and came running to meet them.

"We did have such a jolly row!" he cried. "We went right into Nevin Bay. Have you come for dinner, Gwyneth fawr? We've told Jenny to get it ready at once, for we're all starving. I'll tell her you're here. Why, there's the black curly girl! Has *she* come to dinner too?"

Gwyneth Parry turned to Carradale.

"I'll go in to Robin. Keep him here for a few minutes."

As she went into the cottage she heard Dicky beginning again.

"Were there any letters, Jim? I s'pose not, as you didn't bring them home quick."

Robin was sitting on the low window-seat, a little tired after the morning's excursion, but feeling stronger for the long dose of fresh air and sunshine. Cuthbert, standing by her, was enlarging upon the beautiful colouring and shapely form of a fish which had come from the long line, and was trying to make her understand its breathing apparatus; while she looked and listened, with a touch of aversion to its staring dead eyes, and would not have touched its wet cold sides for anything.

She looked up and laughed, as Gwyneth fawr paused in the doorway.

"Do come and rescue me! I can't understand gills a bit! I thought they had something to do with pints and quarts—'four gills one pint,' you know. Of course, you say it differently, but still— And now Cuthbert says they're part of a fish."

"Robin fach—"

Robin gave her a startled look.

"What is it? Is anything the matter? What's wrong?" she asked sharply, frightened by Gwyneth's white face.

"We have a letter from your mother, Robin fach—"

"A letter! And is there none for us? Is it bad news?" she cried, understanding partly, and growing white to the lips. "Is it—father? Tell us, please. He was all right yesterday," she said piteously.

Cuthbert had instinctively slipped his arm round her to support her, as he had sometimes done his mother. There was that in him which told him how to help in time of trouble.

Gwyneth never knew in what broken, incoherent words she told them, but they understood instantly, though almost unable to grasp the news at once. "He was so much better—he was almost well," Robin kept repeating, with white lips and a dazed look. Gwyneth sat down beside her and took her in her arms.

"Dicky doesn't know, unless they have told him out there," she said, with a piteous look at Cuthbert; and poor Cuthbert went out to find the child.

Robin was very quiet, her face hidden on Gwyneth fawr's breast, her shoulders shaking with sobs now and then.

"I want mother," she whispered once, and Gwyneth whispered comforting words in reply.

"She's taking care of him, Robin fach."

"But that letter was yesterday. By this time he may—may be—"

"Much better, Robin fach."

Gwyneth fach stood watching in the doorway. Suddenly she turned and slipped noiselessly away to find Ivor.

Dicky was desperately asserting his unbelief in the news. It wouldn't be true—he wouldn't believe it—it was impossible—father was nearly well again! Carradale, sitting on the low white wall, had his arm round him, while Cuthbert had disappeared to his own room upstairs.

Gwyneth fach seized Ivor by the arm.

"I want you; come over here. See, Ivor, you're to go to Nevin at once on your bike and send a telegram—one of those where you get an answer by paying for it—and wait till it comes, and bring it back to me—to *me*, d'you understand? They don't know I'm sending it. I want to know how he is, and if it's good news I'll tell them; if it's bad I won't. I'll meet you at the top of the cliff here. You should be back in less than an hour. I haven't any money here; but use your own, and I'll pay you back sometime. I've got a shilling. Now go quick."

Ivor stared at her. "Why do you care? he's not your father."

"My daddy died four months ago," said Gwyneth fach, her face quivering, "and I know how they feel. I've been dreadfully mean to her too. Don't lose a minute, Ivor."

He gave her another quick look.

"Well, you do change in a moment! Oh, I'll go. I'll go halves in it, too, if you'll let me. I'm sorry for the boys—and Robin too, of course. All right, Gwyn. I'll scorch, and if I get summoned we'll pay up between us."

"I'll wait for you at the top here; I can't go back there."

She watched him set off at full speed along the sands towards the white cottages at the Bwlch, then climbed the sandy road and wandered restlessly about on the moor at the top of the cliff, up and down the long green mounds like giants' graves, out towards the flagstaff and back again, over to look down into Porthwen, and along towards Abergeirch, and then through the cornfield to the top stile to see if he was in sight yet. But it was too soon, so she wandered back to Porthdinlleyn again.

Dicky and Carradale had disappeared into the cottage, and the sands were deserted. Dicky was crying his heart out in the kitchen, with Jenny offering comfort and hopeful words in English, which nearly deserted her at this crisis, while Auntie had gathered him up into her arms and was murmuring motherly sympathy which was quite intelligible and very soothing, although it was all in Welsh. Carradale was upstairs with Cuthbert, striving to help him through this trouble with strength gained in his own bereavement some years ago, finding words difficult and yet infinitely helpful to the boy. Gwyneth fawr, of course, was with Robin in her little room, doing and saying what she could, and trying in vain to coax her to eat, for Robin was worn out, and dinner had been forgotten.

Gwyneth fach stole down to the cottage to reconnoitre, saw how things were with them all, and turned away again, more impatient and restless than ever. If only Ivor would come and end this suspense! Surely this morning's news must be good! If Mr. Brent had rallied a little, there would surely be sufficient ground for hope of his final recovery.

As she turned to climb the sandy road again, she heard her name called, and looked back. Carradale had seen her from the window, and was running after her.

"Look here!" he said. "Couldn't we wire for news of him this morning? It would be some relief to them to know he was still holding on. I suppose the nearest office is in Morfa? I'll go along—"

"You can't telegraph from Morfa; you have to go all the way to Nevin."

"Bother! Will you lend me the car?"

"No," she said abruptly; "I want it here for something else."

He was turning away with an angry exclamation when she caught him by the arm.

"Ivor went to Nevin half an hour ago. He may be back any minute."

He stared at her incredulously. "Ivor?—to telegraph?"

"Yes, and bring back an answer. I sent him."

"God bless you, Gwyneth fach! Whatever made you think of it?"

"I want to know. If it's bad news we won't tell her," she insisted.

"I don't know. You'll tell me, anyway?"

"Yes; I'm going to meet him."

He hurried back to the cottage, surprised and grateful; and she climbed the sandy road, and hurried across the moor and through the cornfield to the highest stile once more.

At last she saw him coming, a mere speck on the bare white road, far up beside the home of Dicky's friend the white pig. He was pedalling at full speed, but yet to her impatience he seemed to come slowly. She saw him alight at Penrhos corner, leave his cycle in a garden, and come speeding across stiles and through fields towards her.

They met in the middle of the cabbage-field, and he thrust the telegram into her hands, too breathless to speak.

"Slightly better to-day—still very weak, but condition more hopeful.—Quellyn.—Nevin"—and it had been handed in at Southampton at 12.30, twenty-five minutes ago.

"Good! *Diolch mawr*, Ivor bach! Come along and tell them. They're feeling very bad. How tired you are! Thank you so very much! They'll all be so very glad." And they hurried back across the fields together.

Carradale had been watching for them. He met them at the door, but Gwyneth fach passed with a brief, "He'll tell you," and hurried up the stairs.

Gwyneth Parry opened the door of Robin's room.

"Gwyneth fach?" she said in surprise.

"I want to see her; I've news for her," and she pushed her way into the room.

"Robinette," she said to Robin, who was kneeling by the bed—"Robin, here's to-day's news of him, and it's good—as good as it could be. This was sent off half an hour ago by your mother. Listen!" and she read the hopeful words.

Robin and Gwyneth fawr listened in utter amazement. Gwyneth fach explained hurriedly how the message had been obtained, and Robin, in sudden relief and awakening hope, broke into a storm of grateful tears.

"Now, Gwyneth fach, this is the very best thing you've done for a very long while!" said Gwyneth fawr, in deep surprise and gratitude.—"Hush, Robin fach, don't cry too hard! He'll get well now, and you won't help matters by making yourself ill too.—Do the boys know, Gwyneth fach?"

"Mr. Carradale does."

"Then I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Gwyneth fawr, with quick decision. "I'm going down, to help Jenny to get in some dinner, and you're all coming down, to take a little, at any rate—yes, indeed, and whether you want it or not! It will do us all good. Gwyneth fach, you stay with her, and don't let her cry too much. She's tired out already."

Robin was still sitting on the floor, her face hidden against the bed. Gwyneth fach sank down beside her.

"Robin, he's better—do you hear?—he's better. Your mother's beginning to hope again. You mustn't cry now that he's better, you know. I know how you felt. I felt just about as bad myself. That's why I sent Ivor to Nevin. It's dreadful when you haven't any hope, but now that he's better you'll begin to hope again, Robin, and he'll soon be well."

"How do you manage to understand? He's not *your* father."

"My daddy died at Christmas, and I know how I felt then. I don't want to talk about it—I can't," Gwyneth said shortly. "But I know what it feels like, Robinette; and it was worse for you, for you thought he was out of danger, and here it's all come back. I knew for days that daddy couldn't get well. It's awfully hard on you; but you'll be all the gladder when you have him well again."

"Was it because you could understand that you thought of the telegram?"

"Of course. I knew you'd want to know. I wanted to know myself."

"It's awfully good of you to care."

Gwyneth fach felt herself reddening, and was overwhelmed with a sudden rush of that newborn feeling of shame.

"I've been horribly mean to you," she said, and turned to the window to avoid Robin's startled look. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I was so unfriendly. I'll try to make up for it now, if you'll let me. And I'm sorrier than I can say about knocking you off the wall."

"H'sh! don't speak about that. Nobody knows, and the walls are awfully thin."

Gwyneth fach laughed shakily. "You aren't going to tell?"

"Of course not. You will be friends, won't you?"

"Yes, if you will."

"I want to. I'm lonely sometimes. I want a girl to be friends with."

"You're sure you want to? It's not just because—because—you think you ought to?—because of what Auntie Gwyn—"

"Gwyneth Quellyn, if you ever ask me that again, I won't forgive you. I won't speak to you."

Then they both laughed, and Gwyneth fach remarked,—

"Now you'd better get ready for dinner. I know Auntie Gwyn, and she'll make you go down, so you may as well be prepared."

"Why has she got on that funny dress? And I believe you're dressed up too! Why is it?"

Gwyneth fach rejoiced in this sign of recovery.

"Yes, I couldn't wear this kind of thing every day. I hate holding it up, but if I don't I fall over it, like Cadwaladr does over his feet when he runs too quick."

"Cad—? Who's that?"

"The white puppy, you know. Did he never tell you that was his name? Ivor and I christened him one day. It's my birthday, you see, and we were having a birthday feast when Mr. Carradale arrived. I made Auntie Gwyn dress up, and then when she heard the news she had no time to go and change, but just came as she was. Doesn't she look sweet? I love her in that blue dress, and with her hair plaited."

"Don't you love her in any other dress?" queried Robin, and raised another laugh.

Gwyneth fawr and Jim Carradale heard their laughter, and he looked at her in surprise.

"It's Gwyneth fach," she said. "She's the good angel of the moment."

"One of them," he murmured, and marvelled much at this sudden change of front.

"Gwyneth fach always makes up her mind quickly, and acts upon it," said Gwyneth Parry. "As a matter of fact, she's a mixture of imp and angel, and it just depends which happens to be uppermost. No, that's hardly fair; but she is certainly very thorough in her methods, in one direction or the other."

"I agree. She has undoubtedly been quick to act and very thorough about it to-day. She's been a complete surprise to me," said he.

CHAPTER XXIII.
THE SURRENDER OF THE SECRET HIDING-PLACE.

No one had very much to say as they sat down to dinner that day. Robin and her brothers were very subdued and silent, though Dicky's spirits soon began to revive. Ivor and Jim Carradale tried to keep up some conversation on the subjects of fishing and the defective telegraphic arrangements of the village, but found the talk left almost entirely to them.

Gwyneth fawr, pretty as a picture in her quaint blue robe and braided hair, apologized for her costume as she sat down, but was, of course, unable to make any alteration in her dress. She would willingly have disposed of her hair in some more usual fashion, but lacked hairpins, so yielded to Gwyneth fach's urgent request and left it hanging in its long braids. The boys and Robin, with interest to spare now for other matters, eyed her approvingly, the situation having been fully explained. As for Carradale, he could have gazed at her all the time, if he had not feared to cause her discomfort.

Gwyneth fach was very silent also, being full of thought and indeed engaged in a severe struggle with herself.

Dicky asked for a third helping of pudding, and Gwyneth Parry gave it to him gladly.

"Now what are you boys going to do with yourselves this afternoon?" she asked.

Cuthbert was not eager to do anything. He had no spirit for any discussion, but Carradale had no intention of leaving him to sit and brood over the trouble.

"Don't you think it would be a good plan," he said, looking across at Gwyneth fawr, "if we boys went off for a long tramp somewhere? I scarcely know the neighbourhood yet, but perhaps Ivor or Gwyneth fach can advise us."

"Walk to Pistyll along the shore and up on top of the Bird Rock," said Ivor promptly, "then home by the road through Nevin."

"Very good.—You don't mind, Robin?"

"She's going somewhere with me," said Gwyneth fach suddenly, her struggle coming to an abrupt end.

"Oh? that's a good plan."

"Are you goin' to take her to the secret hiding-place?" cried Dicky enviously.—"Say, Jim, I think I'll stop at home! I can't walk all that way, 'specially after pudding."

"If Dicky has really had enough pudding at last, perhaps you had better all start," said Gwyneth Parry, seeing that Gwyneth fach had frowned.—"Can you manage any more, Dicky bach?"

"It's awful good! Jenny's puddings are first class. But pr'aps I'd better not."

The others fully agreed, and declined also to take any notice of his hints as to staying at home, so hasty preparations were made for the afternoon's expedition. Shoes and stockings were sought out and slung over shoulders in preparation for the rocks at Nevin Point, and in a very few minutes they all set out along the sands.

"Now, Gwyneth fach, what are your plans? I want to get home and make myself fit to be seen. Remember that Robin can't do very much yet."

"She's coming with us in the motor. I won't ask her to do too much." She turned to Robin with a touch of shyness. "I'm—I'm going to take you to my—hiding-place. Will you come?"

It cost her a severe effort to surrender her secret, but she knew that, in spite of the telegram, Robin was still in suspense and full of grief and anxiety. In her wish to ease the trouble, she was willing to yield what no coaxing or scolding could have wrung from her.

Robin looked up, with sudden brightening of her sober face.

"Will you really? Oh, I'd like to awfully! I thought I didn't want to do anything to-day, but I would like that. It is good of you."

"I don't want the boys," Gwyneth fach said frowning, "but you may come, if you like."

So Gwyneth fawr covered herself up in her coat and veil again, and the little brown car bore them swiftly up through the lanes to Quellyn.

Gwyneth Parry they left at the cottage, but drove on themselves into the gardens and walked across the grass to the tower.

"Did you see those two men we passed in the lane?" asked Gwyneth fach suddenly.

"Yes. I thought they looked bad-tempered, and they said things as we passed."

"They used to work here. They were turned off last week, because they weren't honest. I don't like them. I hope they'll go right away. Now we must climb up the tower. You're sure you won't fall? You won't be afraid?"

Robin certainly was a trifle nervous, but concealed it valiantly.

"Are we to go up to the top?" she asked innocently.

"Yes. I'll go first," and Gwyneth led the way round the tower and down the steep steps into the little stone chamber.

"This is my secret place," she said with an effort. "I don't want to show it to you one bit, but—well, it's because of your father, you know. You can't sit and think about him all the time; you must have something to do."

She raised the swinging stone, and stepped down into the darkness.

"There are steps here, but if you wait a moment I'll light the lamp, and you'll be able to see."

With the rosy glow of the lamplight streaming through the open doorway at the foot of the stair, Robin had no difficulty in following. Gwyneth fach looked round her castle proudly, then turned to see the effect on her guest.

"It looks a bit empty just now, perhaps, because the table and things are outside. Auntie Gwyn and I used them for breakfast. Sit down and rest, and I'll put the place tidy."

"It's awfully jolly!" Robin said fervently, with an eager look round. "It is good of you to let me come! How did you discover it first of all? And how did you manage to make it so pretty and cosy?"

"Oh, Mrs. Davies and her boys helped me. Daddy—my daddy—showed it to me long ago."

Down the stair from the trap-door in the roof she brought the folding table and chairs and everything they had used in the morning, and soon had set the little room to rights. She brought down a quantity of the hawthorn boughs and placed them in every possible spot, till the air was laden with the heavy scent, and Robin sniffed delightedly.

"I like it; don't you?"

"Love it," Gwyneth fach said briefly, and moved about arranging and rearranging books, pictures, and china to show them off to the best advantage.

She awoke suddenly to the fact that there had been a long silence, and turned quickly to look at Robin. But Robin was sitting staring at the lamp with puckered brows and troubled face. To Gwyneth it was plain that she was thinking of her father, and that was the thing she

had set herself to combat. As a matter of fact, Robin was wondering whether she ought to confess her previous knowledge of the secret hiding-place, or whether it would be possible to keep it hidden still. She could see no reason for speaking out, but would she be able to keep Dicky from betraying her? As they grew more friendly with Gwyneth fach, the secret would be sure to leak out sometime and somehow. Would it not be better to confess honestly at once? But might not that endanger the new friendship, which was hardly strong enough yet to bear any great strain?

She was wondering and arguing thus, when Gwyneth fach came up, intent on banishing her grief and anxiety.

"Look here! I think you'd like to see this," and she placed on her knee a great portfolio and untied the strings.

It was full of sketches and drawings, in pencil, charcoal, or colour—studies for the large pictures—dainty bits of drapery and background—delicate pencil portraits of Mrs. Quellyn and the two Gwyneths, very many of which had never been used in his paintings, and had been drawn chiefly for pleasure in the family circle. There were bits of scenery, too, in the gardens and woods—the ruin from different points and in various lights—the hills and cliffs—and studies in the painter's earlier style, of sea and sky and sunlight.

"These are mine—my own," said Gwyneth fach jealously. "Most of the things are yours, I know; but these—"

"I can't help it, Gwyneth. I didn't want them."

"But these are mine. Daddy never used to think much of them, and he gave them all to me. I used to go out with him when he was sketching to amuse himself, and when he'd done two or three he'd tear them off his block and hand them to me, and say, 'More rubbish for you, Gwyneth fach.' I kept them all. I loved every line he ever drew. When he'd finished a big picture he'd give me all the studies he had made for it. That's how I have so many. Look at these dear little sketches of Auntie Gwyn! Here he was trying to get her as Olwen—and these were for Blodeuwedd—and these are Rhiannon. Isn't that like her as she looked to-day! Have you seen the pictures in London?"

"Yes; mother took us. We knew Gwyneth fawr the minute we saw her.'

"I remember. Your little brother—"

"Oh, Dicky's an awful little donkey!" said Robin, reddening at memory of Dicky's introductory remarks.

"It must be fine to see them all together. Here we only saw one at a time, and then it was sent away."

"You must go to see them when we go back to London."

Gwyneth fach gave her a quick look. "Would you take me with you to London?"

"Of course—if you'll come. You'd like it."

"I'd like to see it. I don't know if I'd like it altogether."

"We'll see what mother thinks is best."

"Is your mother nice?"

Robin stared, then began to laugh, and Gwyneth, after a moment, joined in.

"I suppose it was a silly thing to say! You see, I never had one, except Auntie Gwyn. I think she's been my chief mother. Mummy—Mrs. Quellyn—was very nice, and very, very pretty, but she wasn't—well, quite—"

She paused, in hopeless difficulties of expression, then suddenly started up.

"I'm going to fetch Auntie Gwyn and bring her here for tea. I'll make her keep on her pretty dress, and we'll have an afternoon birthday feast as well as a morning one! Why shouldn't I have two birthdays in one day if I like? Or we'll call it a feast of rejoicing because your father's going to get well. You be looking at the pictures till I come back."

Robin sat turning over the sketches for a time, then relapsed into deep thought once more. She was sitting on Gwyneth fach's bed, leaning back against the wall. It was very cosy. The soft shaded light and the heavy scent of the hawthorn made her drowsy, and after the strain of the morning she was very tired. She slipped down on the cushions and lay there sound asleep.

The two Gwyneths came quietly down the stair. Gwyneth fawr had first remonstrated, then yielded to the pleading of Gwyneth fach, and was still a pretty picture in her blue gown and long ropes of hair. She signed to Gwyneth fach to be quiet, and pointed to Robin lying asleep.

"Get the tea ready," she whispered. "Let her sleep if she can."

So they moved quietly about, and set the table, boiled the kettle, and made a plateful of buttered toast, with scarcely a sound.

"Now wake her, Gwyneth fach."

So Gwyneth fach, with a gleam of amusement in her eyes, took a handful of wild hyacinths from a bowl and laid them in Robin's hand.

"In return for the primroses!" she laughed, as Robin sat up suddenly, scattering the flowers by her sudden movement.

But Robin had settled a certain question as she fell asleep.

"I've something to tell you," she said abruptly. "I don't know whether you'll be angry—I do hope you won't!—but anyway I've got to be honest, and I've been cheating you. I'd rather tell you all about it, but I do hope you won't be cross."

They looked at her in surprise. Gwyneth fawr paused, teapot in hand; Gwyneth fach stared.

"I'd rather tell you before we have tea, or anything else. Gwyneth fach, we found out your secret days ago. We came down here—oh, please don't be angry! You knew we were looking for your hiding-place. We found it. Jim discovered the way down; we couldn't have found it by ourselves."

"But when? how long ago?" cried the astounded Gwyneth fach.

"Oh, days and days!—quite a fortnight. It was on the day you motored to Aberdaron."

"And none of you said anything about it?"

"I wouldn't let them. I knew you didn't want us to know, so I made the boys keep it a secret still," Robin faltered. "Please don't be angry! We never came back after the first time. We never touched a single thing. We left it all for you."

"But why?" cried Gwyneth sharply. "Why didn't you come and turn me out? Why did you keep from telling me you knew? Do you mean—you can't possibly mean—that you left it because I wanted it; that you wouldn't take it away from me?"

"Of course I wouldn't. I wanted you to have it for your own as you'd done before. I didn't want to interfere. The boys won't come here without your leave; I won't let them. It's your place. I didn't want you made miserable about it."

Gwyneth fach still looked at her incredulously.

"If that's true, it was—well, awfully decent of you, as your boys would say."

"Of course it's true. You don't think I want to make trouble, do you?"

Gwyneth fach grew scarlet. "And you never told about—"

"Of course not! I wouldn't think of it. But you needn't go and tell yourself, either."

Gwyneth laughed, with a hesitating glance at Gwyneth fawr, who saw there was a secret, but had the wisdom to make no inquiries.

"And you really knew my secret two weeks ago, and said nothing because you thought it would make me unhappy? It seems to me you've been very good to me all round."

"I've tried to do what I thought you'd like, because I wanted so much to show you that I only wanted to be friends, Gwyneth."

"It seems to me, Gwyneth fach, that Robin has been very generous."

"And I've been very the other thing!" pondered Gwyneth mournfully.

"But you'll be friends now? You'll believe I really want it?"

"Yes!" and they shook hands on it across the tea table.

"And now let's have tea," said Gwyneth fach.

CHAPTER XXIV.
HOPE FROM THE SEA.

They sat for a long time in the secret hiding-place. When Robin at last reluctantly suggested that it was time she went home, Gwyneth fach opposed the idea vigorously, and seemed anxious that she should stay a while longer. When later on Gwyneth fawr made a suggestion to the same effect, it was received in the same manner, and at length Gwyneth fach explained that she was waiting for something, and that she wished them to wait also, but what that something was she would not explain.

So Jim Carradale, returning from the long tramp to Pistyll, and reaching the tower according to previous arrangement with Gwyneth fach, found a hearty welcome and a pretty sight awaiting him in the secret hiding-place. A cheerful little fire burnt in its appointed place, its dancing flames throwing bright lights and sudden shadows across Gwyneth's eager face and dark curls as she sat on the floor looking through one of Mr. Quellyn's sketchbooks with Robinette, who was leaning back against Gwyneth Parry's knee, her face white and rather tired, but full of interest, her long brown plait hanging over her shoulder. The soft glow of the shaded lamp lit up the bare stone walls, the branches of hawthorn and bowls of wild hyacinths, the curtains, rugs, and cushions, the pictures, books, and photographs, by which the cold little chamber was changed into a cosy dwelling-place, and shone on the bright ropes of Gwyneth fawr's braided hair as she sat in a low chair by the table, her fingers busy with some soft white material which was going to be a summer blouse for Gwyneth fach, and which was spread over the lap of her rich blue dress. She looked thoroughly in keeping with the old stone walls and mysterious entrance, which told of olden times, and made one look instinctively for mail-clad knights and beautiful ladies. Certainly she was a prettier picture to find at the bottom of the dark stair than the dragon which it had suggested to Dicky.

Carradale had been ordered by Gwyneth fach to find one of Mrs. Davies's boys, who would show him the way into the tower. But as he naturally did not require such escort, he came alone, and entered so quietly that he had time for a long look at his dainty lady sitting there in the lamplight, before she, feeling his gaze upon her, glanced up involuntarily, and started at sight of him.

"Why, what are you doing there?" she exclaimed, her colour rising in her surprise. "You must have come creeping down like a mouse."

"I was just wondering if this was really the twentieth century, or if at the bottom of the stair I had stepped back into the eleventh or so."

"Oh, it's much earlier than the eleventh, I assure you! Also, you know it is still Gwyneth fach's birthday, and she must have her own way to-day."

"Have you got it?" demanded Gwyneth fach, with apparent irrelevance, and Carradale handed a telegram to Robin.

"The very latest news, so there's no need to worry during the night."

She read it hungrily, then looked up, her eyes filling with grateful tears.

"*Condition slightly improved—more hopeful—don't worry.—Mother.*"

"How good of you to take the trouble! Oh, I am so glad!"

"So am I," and Gwyneth fach pressed her hand sympathetically, while Gwyneth fawr, who had risen in sudden anxiety at sight of the telegram, bent and kissed her.

"No trouble at all, I assure you! We had to pass the office, and were only too glad to rest awhile. What a pull it is up to Pistyll; and what an unpronounceable name, by the way! Ivor drilled us in how to say it all the way up that long steep road, but—"

"But you don't say it right yet!" laughed Gwyneth fach. "How could you? You're only English, you know! Yes, it's a steep two miles up to the village, but isn't it fine to see Nevin and Morfa and Porthdinlleyn opening out below you as you go! I always want to walk backwards up that hill. Did you get a drink of milk at the cottage with the fuchsia trees? Ivor knows."

"Yes; he saw to that. And weren't we ready for it too!"

"And did you get to the Bird Rock? Did you see all the nests and hear the gulls? And the view of Yr Eifl close at hand?"

"I find Dicky persists in calling them 'The Rivals,' by way of teasing Ivor."

"Now you won't worry during the night, will you, Robin fach?" said Gwyneth Parry, under cover of the intentionally careless chat of the others. "And perhaps to-morrow there may be a letter, if your mother had time to write."

Robin was reading and re-reading the telegram, and trying to gather more from the few satisfying-unsatisfactory words.

"I would have done but for this," she said. "I had just been thinking how impossible it would be to go to sleep."

"But now it's all right, and you must sleep every minute till the morning."

That indeed Robin could not compass. The habit had been growing in her, ever since that first morning in Porthdinlleyn, of waking at dawn and creeping out of bed to the window for a glance across the cold gray sea and cold gray sky to the cold gray hills—or more often to the cold wall of cloud in which they were wrapped. The cosy, sleeping village, the heaving waste of waters, the anchored boats, the wet sand and bare rocks, or in their place the waves washing the outer walls of the cottages—all had a fascination for her, and she rarely missed the chance of a glance at them in the first morning light. Sometimes there were colours in the sky—gorgeous sunsets at the wrong side—wonderful swathes and strips of bright cloud streaming out from behind "The Rivals," which, however, hid the sun. Sometimes the tide was coming up and it was raining, and she crept back to bed shivering and gloomily deciding how best to spend a wet day, but often woke a few hours later to find brilliant sunshine, clear-washed hills, vivid colours over sea and coast, and a falling tide.

So on this as on other nights she woke in the cold gray morning and stumbled drowsily to the window for her usual peep at the sea. Then thoughts of father and mother came back to her suddenly, and she was very wide awake in a moment, and sank down on the window-seat, wrapped in a quilt from her bed, and sat there thinking and wondering and dreaming.

It was very cold out there. The waves were breaking on the cottage walls in sheets and columns of spray. The wind blowing in from the sea made the windows rattle, and drove the spray higher still. It was just high tide, and there were drops on the window. Was it rain, or only spray? Would the weather change with the tide, and to-morrow be cold and wet?

What news would to-morrow bring? Last night at this time father had been dying, and they had not known. This was the dangerous time—Cuthbert had said so. Would father have strength to fight through another night?

Mother must be watching beside him at this moment. If he was in danger, she would be praying. The thought came to Robin with startling suddenness that she might join in the prayer. In Southampton or in Porthdinlleyn, what did it matter?

When she looked out at the sea again the wind had dropped a little. The gleaming wet high-water mark on the cottage walls and rocks was beyond the reach even of the seventh big wave, for which she and the boys had looked so often that they had come to doubt the saying. On the beach was a high new ridge of shells and brown seaweed, which the waves no longer touched. The tide had turned and the threatening rain had not come. From behind the cloudy peaks of "The Rivals" came faint golden light, which strengthened and widened and gave glowing linings to the breaking clouds over Holyhead.

To-morrow would be fine. The cocks over by the inn woke and began calling to their neighbours across the bay. The seagulls came squawking discordantly to look for breakfast in the refuse of the tide, and a small girl shivered with sudden remembrance of the cold and crept back to bed, comforted and very much more hopeful for the morrow.

CHAPTER XXV.
THE DISCOVERIES OF DICKY.

The news of Mr. Brent continued to be good, but this time the rejoicing of Robin and Cuthbert, at least, was tempered by remembrance of what had been and might be again. Dicky was exuberantly glad and full of high spirits at once, but the others were more quietly grateful, and their hopes for the future always held just a hint of anxiety.

"When father comes," "When father climbs the Rivals," came once more to be Dicky's synonym for all that was joyful, but the other two could not forget to add that "if."

The new friendship of Gwyneth fach filled Robin's thoughts and kept her busy. Gwyneth withdrew no single point of what she had offered on that one anxious day, and the secret hiding-place and the motor-car were at Robin's disposal whenever she desired them.

But further than that Gwyneth fach would not go. She would not throw open her retreat to the boys. She would not come to live in Moranedd—not yet. She must stay with Auntie Gwyn at the cottage. And she jealously kept the little brown car to herself and withheld from the boys the permission without which they would not make use of it. That is to say, Cuthbert would not. Dicky would have jumped in at any hour of the day or night, if he had had the chance; but even he could not venture in it alone, and the others would not help him. Cuthbert did not care sufficiently to tease Gwyneth about it, and his indifference piqued her more than all Dicky's impatient wails.

Robin also would not avail herself of privileges which were not extended to her brothers, so she only rode in the car or visited the secret hiding-place when specially invited to do so, and was too loyal to the boys to allow them to feel that she was favoured beyond them. Not only Dicky, but Cuthbert also, would have been delighted to have free admittance to the tower, and often mourned over the games they could have had there if Gwyneth fach had not barred the way.

Their right of entry was finally gained through an adventure which caused much excitement, and was the talk of Morfa and Porthdinlleyn for a time.

One of the Quellyn fields, being level and well cropped by sheep, had been appropriated by the boys and Ivor as a cricket ground. Ivor's advantages in the cricket line had been very limited, and at first his hitting was so wild and his bowling such palpable throwing that Cuthbert was convulsed with laughter and Dicky wild with indignation. But he was eager to learn their superior methods, and cared nothing for Dicky's jibes and jeers; and when presently he had practised for a while, with careful attention to their instructions, he proved himself a valuable recruit, and the cricket field vied with the fishing in providing them with occupation while the girls were in the secret hiding-place together.

So one day they all went up to Quellyn early in the afternoon, and Robin went off to look for Gwyneth fach while the boys put up the stumps.

Dicky went in first, of course.

"Trial ball, Dick!"

But Dicky sent the ball flying to the boundary fence, and attempted to claim four for it.

"I didn't want a trial! It's silly! It ought to count!"

"Nonsense! Ivor wasn't ready. Don't be a donkey. Play!"

This second ball sent the bails flying, and Dicky, vastly disappointed, attempted to claim it as a trial also. Cuthbert naturally would stand no such nonsense, and in his indignation made a rash reference to cheating and unfair play, which was too much for Dicky's fiery temper. He threw down the bat, and, bidding them bowl to one another and field for themselves, ran off in the sulks.

Beside the most direct path between the ruin and the big gates stood a dense grove of trees and bushes, forming a small wood with matted undergrowth. The bank sloped gently from this wood down to the tower, which lay in a hollow with only a few bushes and scattered trees near, so from the path by the wood a good view was obtained over the tower itself and any one coming or going from it.

On the outskirts of the wood was an old tree, so low and twisted as to present an irresistible attraction to a boy like Dicky. He had climbed it often, and gloried in the feeling that, though shut out from the tower itself, he could from this point of vantage overlook it and keep constant watch upon it. Once he was up among the branches he felt like a sentinel keeping watch over a besieged castle, and had often called out remarks to that effect to Gwyneth fach as she passed below on her way to her hiding-place.

It was to this tree he withdrew in a state of highly offended dignity, leaving Cuthbert and Ivor in possession of the cricket field. With him went "The Scarlet Herring" from the Quellyn library, for he was deep in the adventures of Tomakin in search of the Golden Jujube. The fact that "Pater was ill," and not able to come to Nevin, appealed strongly to Dicky, and he had easily read himself into the place of Tomakin, and was enjoying the book with a zest quite new to him, for as yet he had shown himself anything but studiously inclined. His absorption in Tomakin had been a distinct relief to Robin and Cuthbert, who had often found it difficult to get peace for any reading themselves.

He was deep in the account of the climbing of the Glass Mountain, when the sound of footsteps made him look up. Jim Carradale was coming towards the tower, and Gwyneth fach was coming away from it. They met beneath him, and he looked up from his book to listen.

"I was looking for Miss Parry," said Carradale.

"She's in the garden somewhere. She was in the ruin ten minutes ago. I don't know where she is now; but I think Robin's there, if she'd do instead," Gwyneth added teasingly.

"Gwyneth fach, I want to ask you something."

"Oh? very well."

"I want you to teach me some Welsh."

"*Oh*, I'll be delighted! But you won't be able to say it properly, you know."

"I'll do my best. If you were fond of somebody and wanted to make her—or him—or it understand, how would you say it?"

"I don't quite understand," said Gwyneth fach, understanding perfectly, but desiring fuller information, and not unwilling to tease him a little. "What do you want to say? If you wanted to call her 'dear,' for instance; would that do?"

"That might do, Gwyneth fach."

"Well, what would her name be? Suppose it was Jenny; would that do?"

"That would do very well."

"Well, then, 'Jenny dear' would be 'Jenny fach,' you know."

"No, surely! I thought 'fach' meant 'little.' "

"Oh, not always! If you call a mountain or hill or house or river 'bach' or 'fach,' that means 'little,' of course; but if it's a person it means 'dear' just as much. You don't suppose

everybody means to call Robin little when they say Robin fach, do you?"

"Then you call yourself Gwyneth dear, do you, miss?"

"Certainly! I am, and always have been—and always mean to be!" she called over her shoulder, as she ran laughing towards the ruin.

Carradale laughed also.

" 'Gwyneth fach!' Very good!" and he went back into the garden in search of Miss Parry.

Dicky returned to his story, with a grunt of disapproval at the interruption.

"Stupid thing! Fancy him trying to learn Welsh! An' he only found out one word then."

He looked up again presently for Robin was coming up the path on her way to the tower.

"Hi, Robinette! Gwyneth fach's there, an' she thinks you're there already, so she must have been making a mistake—"

"I went back to the house for a book."

"An' she's been teachin' Jim Welsh; but they only got to one word, an' she says she means 'dear,' and fach is only 'little' when it's a mountain or a—"

"What are you talking about?" and Robin climbed up beside him for a moment. "Why aren't you playing cricket with the others?"

" 'Cause that horrid Cuthbert bowled me first ball, an' 'twasn't fair; for when I hit a boundary they wouldn't count it, an' when I got out they did count it, an' trial balls are as much cheating as anything, *I* think. Anyway, I didn't ask for one, and I didn't want it either, and 'sides that, Cuthbert needn't have said—"

"Don't get so excited about it, or you'll tumble off that branch. Why, here's a man! What does he want, I wonder?"

"It's only a silly old gardener. They're cutting the grass everywhere, an' I do wish they wouldn't—"

"It's not one of the gardeners," said Robin, frowning; "it's one of those horrid men we met that night. Gwyneth said they'd been dismissed for stealing, or something. I wonder what he's doing here? She hoped they'd go right away."

"Well, he isn't doing anything bad just now—"

"No, but I'd like to know why he's come back. If he wasn't honest before he won't be honest now, and anyway he has no business here."

"If he was a thief before he may be a burglar now," said Dicky, with round eyes.

"I shall tell Gwyneth fach, anyway," and Robin watched the man and frowned after him as he disappeared among the trees. "He shouldn't be here; but of course he may only have come to speak to some of the other men."

Presently she sprang down from her perch and went on her way to join Gwyneth in the ruin, and Dicky returned to Tomakin and the Golden Jujube.

But he was doomed to interruption that afternoon. At another slight sound he looked up again. This time it was Gwyneth fawr who came along the path, dressed in white, the sunlight in her hair, in her arms the white puppy, Cadwaladr, which she had rescued from Cuthbert, who had been seized with a sudden thirst for knowledge concerning teeth, and had been searching poor little Cadwaladr's gums for information on the subject.

Dicky drew a pebble from his pocket, and was taking aim at Cadwaladr when he paused; for Carradale appeared again, coming up the path to meet Gwyneth Parry.

"Where are you taking the little beast?" he asked, as she paused beneath the big tree.

"I rescued him from Cuthbert," she laughed. "He was searching his mouth—for wisdom teeth, I think—and Cadwaladr didn't appreciate it."

"Poor little beast! Cuthbert is the terror of his life, I expect.—Gwyneth fach!"

Gwyneth Parry looked round quickly, then gave him a startled look.

"She isn't here! What do you mean?"

"No; but she's been giving me a lesson in Welsh, and I've discovered the real meaning of 'fach.' I'm afraid Gwyneth Little will have to take a back seat, as far as I'm concerned, and be content with plain English, as I have found some one with a better claim to her title. Gwyneth fawr, will you be Gwyneth fach for me? May I call you Gwyneth dear?"

Then Dicky, finding the conversation uninteresting, dropped his pebble on Cadwaladr's restless little head, and, peering out from among the leaves, cried,—

"If a thief grows into a burglar, and a white puppy into an old white fat dog, then if 'fach' means 'dear,' won't 'fawr' mean 'dearest darling,' or something like that?"

Carradale gave a sharp exclamation. Gwyneth Parry, with a sudden laugh, disappeared into the wood; and he strode after her, flinging to Dicky in the tree some sharp information as to what would happen to him when he had time to attend to him.

"Gwyneth fach!" he called after her. "I'm going to motor to Tydweiliog. Will you come?"

"He's a silly old thing," grumbled Dicky. "And 'tisn't fair to let him go in the motor when the rest of us mustn't. She is mean, that girl," and he returned to Tomakin.

He was beginning to think of tea, some time later, when he heard voices, and expecting to see Ivor and Cuthbert, fumbled in the depths of his pockets till he had a handful of pebbles ready to drop upon their heads. But it was not the boys, so he stowed the stones away again for future use, and lay on a branch to watch and listen.

Three men came along the path. Dicky's detective instincts were strong, and his suspicions had been aroused by Robin. If they had been the most innocent creatures in the world, he would probably have found something suspicious in their movements. Certainly the way they skulked among the trees, instead of walking openly along the path, was very unusual. They were trying to keep out of sight. They knew they had no right to be there. Dicky lay motionless along his branch, and waited.

One of the three was the man who had passed before. The other was his companion in disgrace—both short, dark, sturdy Welshmen. The third was a stranger, tall and muscular, with sharp, shifty eyes, a big nose, and a keen, eager face.

They paused beneath the tree, still keeping as far as possible hidden among the bushes.

"That the place?" asked the tall man in English, looking down at the tower in the hollow.

"Ay!"

"Mean to say there's pictures in a hole like that?"

"Ay!"

"Sure they're worth it?"

"Well, aye indeed—worth a heap."

"How d'you get in?"

"By steps—in the wall—and a hole in a stone," said the Welshman, whose English was doubtful and hesitant.

"An' no one about?"

"Just children—girls; they go home soon."

"Why not try the house?" with a nod in the direction of Plas Quellyn. "More worth it surely. Bound to be pictures there."

"Ay indeed! Too big. We would need horses and a coach to take them to Carnarvon."

"These are small things, then?"

“Ay, but plenty.”

“Quite sure they’re worth it?”

“He had hundreds of pounds for one small picture,” said the second Welshman shortly.

“Aye indeed!” put in the first.

“Oh, all right! The trap will be ready?”

“Ay!”

“Then we’ll lie low till it’s dark and the kids go home.” And they disappeared into the wood.

Dicky had been drinking in every word. He lay motionless for some minutes still, then dropped to the ground and raced across the grass to the secret hiding-place.

CHAPTER XXVI.
WAITING FOR THE ENEMY.

In the secret hiding-place Robin and Gwyneth fach were very busy.

The morning's post had brought Robin a very great surprise in the shape of a letter from her father written in Welsh. Her own Welsh letter, posted on the day which brought the news of his serious relapse, had been carefully kept by Mrs. Brent, and given to him when he was able for amusement. It had given him his first hearty laugh for many days, and she had been so overwhelmed with effusive thanks for her trouble in learning the language simply to write to him, and with sarcastic congratulations on her success in the study in so short a time, that she had been meditating a second letter, when to her astonishment a reply arrived worthy of her own effort, and with no single word of explanation or translation. It was just a couple of pages of long words and unpronounceable syllables, and after her first surprise and indignant laughter were over, she had been forced to put it aside till she could consult one of the Gwyneths or Ivor Lloyd.

How father could have written in Welsh she could not imagine, for he certainly knew no single word of the language, and mother had often said she had forgotten all her Welsh. The letter, when translated, contained no explanation of the mystery, and it was only long afterwards that Robin accidentally learned that the doctor in attendance on Mr. Brent had borne the name of Davies-Hughes, and drew her own conclusions.

Gwyneth fach read the letter to her with much amusement, when the joke of the first epistle had been fully explained.

> "My dear Robin fach,—I think you are very clever to learn Welsh so quickly. You will see I also am learning the beautiful language, so we will talk together when I reach Porthdinlleyn. I am now nearly strong enough to climb Yr Eifl. Can you yet say Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch? How is that word pronounced? Has the rain ceased yet? No, but I have plenty of apples. I have not been to the butter market to-day. They have *not* cut off my arm; but I assure you I have no soap. Have you yet visited Dinasglaslynlifgergwenwyddfa? It is near Llanenddwyncymllandwywe. Which of your brothers has broken his leg? We would like to know if it is Cuthbert or Dicky bach. Has he also broken anything else? No; but mother has a bad headache, a sore finger, and a cold on her chest. She is enchanted—delighted! Medical men are never hungry, thirsty, or sleepy; but Jim Carradale seems to be making the most of his time at Quellyn. I also am enchanted —delighted—"

They stared at one another, utterly taken by surprise by the inconsequence of the last few phrases. Then Robin said with a laugh,—

"I'll write a good one to pay him out. You'll help me, won't you, Gwyneth fach? There are so many things the book doesn't tell."

"Oh yes, I'll help. Let's begin at once. What shall we say?"

Then Dicky rushed down the stone staircase and hammered on the door.

"Let me in! let me in! It's most important, I tell you. It's burglars, an' they say they're worth heaps of money, an' they've got a trap waiting, an' they're going to hide till the kids have gone home—that's you girls. An' the Welshman said hundreds of pounds for one, an' the Englishman didn't think so, an' you'd better look out—"

Then they opened the door, Gwyneth incredulous, and distinctly annoyed at the intrusion.

"What do you mean by coming down here? I thought you had promised not to come without Robin's leave or mine."

"And what are you making such a noise about, anyway?" demanded Robin.

"Oh, well, if you're going on like that, I won't tell you, that's all. But some day you'll be sorry you didn't listen, for they *are* burglars, an' they're only waiting till it's dark and the kids have gone home. But if you don't want to hear *I* don't care. I'll go an' tell the boys, an' perhaps they'll listen."

Gwyneth caught him by the arm as he was turning to go.

"Don't be so silly! tell us at once."

"Don't be a donkey, Dicky. You're too stickly-prickly for anything to-day. Tell us what it's all about, and don't make it more of a muddle than you can help."

"Won't tell you anything if you—"

"Come on, Dicky bach. Don't be a goose! Tell us the worst at once. And how did you manage to find out about it, whatever it is?" said Robin, descending to flattery.

"Well, then, you're to listen, and not be mean. I was up in the tree—*you* know, Robin—an' some men came along in the wood, hiding 's if they might be burglars. One was the one we'd seen before—*you* know, Robin—an' two more with him. One was English, an' one was Welsh, an' the other mostly said 'Ay, indeed,' so he must have been Welsh too, I think. And they stopped under my tree an' talked, and it was all about this tower, an' the pictures, an' were they worth it, an' they'd wait till after dark when the kids had gone home. An' the trap was waiting all ready, an' it wouldn't do to burgle the big house instead, because the pictures there were so big they'd need a coach to take them to Carnarvon; but the pictures here were small, but worth hundreds of pounds, so that was all right, an' they'd lie low in the wood till after dark an' the kids had gone home. So there," and he stopped, panting with excitement.

The girls looked at one another.

"You're sure, Dicky?"

"Sure an' certain. What'll you do?"

"Go and tell the boys, and fetch them here, Dicky bach," said Gwyneth sharply. "We must defend the tower, of course. What else could we do?"

Dicky turned with a whoop, and sped off up the stair, and Gwyneth continued hastily,—

"Who can we get to help? Is Ivor here?"

"Yes. Jim, I suppose? And John Davies from the cottage? Shall I go—"

"John's away to Pwllheli. It's Wednesday," Gwyneth said, frowning. "He's no good."

"Wednesday? Oh yes, of course, the market. But won't he be back?"

"He was going to stay the night with his brother in the town. He told me so. And Mr. Carradale and Auntie Gwyn are off in the motor to Tydweiliog, and perhaps farther. What *shall* we do?"

"They'll be home before dark, and nothing will happen till night."

"Yes, of course. We'll leave a note for Mrs. Davies to give them the moment they get home. They're sure to be in time."

"Is there no police station?"

"Yes, on the lower Nevin road, you know. But we haven't the motor. Did Ivor cycle up?"

"No; we all walked together."

"That's a bother. He could have cycled in to Nevin for help if we needed it. But I'd rather fight it out ourselves; wouldn't you? If we could defend the tower without help from outsiders it would be splendid."

"Ripping!" said Robin, her eyes sparkling. "I know the boys will say so. I'll help. But do you think we could?"

"He said there were only three, and there'll be five of us, without Mr. Carradale. He's sure to be here in time, and we could get Evan Davies from the cottage to be one more added to the garrison."

Then with a noisy clatter the male part of the garrison came stamping down the stone stair, full of eager excitement.

"I haven't told them. They don't know 'bout it yet," cried Dicky. "I did begin, but Cuthbert made me stop, the mean thing. So you can just tell them yourselves."

"He was shouting at the top of his voice about burglars in the wood," Cuthbert explained, "so I thought if there was anything in it he needn't inform the whole neighbourhood."

" 'Form the grandmother!" said Dicky rudely. "Wasn't anybody there to hear, anyway."

"Hush, hush, Dicky! You're too excited already. You won't be any good if you don't cool down a bit. Be quiet now, while Gwyneth fach explains."

"Dicky heard three men arranging to come here and steal the pictures as soon as it's dark to-night. We're wondering if we must send for the police, or if we could defend the tower ourselves."

"Do it ourselves, of course. What a joke! I've always longed to defend this tower against some one in earnest," Ivor said eagerly. "We've played it often enough—haven't we, Gwyn? —Now we'll have a real chance. Oh, don't worry the policeman! Besides, he might not be in. He might be away up at Pistyll, and that wouldn't be much good to us."

"We can do it, can't we?" said Cuthbert more cautiously. "But of course we can. We're five to three. That's all right."

"But they're men," Robin objected, "and Gwyneth fach and I aren't, and Dicky's only a quarter."

"Go on, Robinette! I'm worth two of you at fighting any day. You are mean."

"I expect you are," she laughed.

"Jim Carradale will be home soon, you know, and he'll come to help us."

"Good! Yes, that's all right. What shall we do first? You'd better take command, I suppose, since it's your tower we're to defend, Gwyn," said Ivor.

Gwyneth fach accepted the position as her right, but had the wisdom to consult rather than command.

"I'll write a note to leave at the cottage for Jim and Auntie Gwyn. Then I'll take it to Mrs. Davies, and bring back provisions. Of course we mustn't leave the tower unguarded for a moment. They're probably keeping watch from the wood all the time. So we must have enough food for tea and supper."

"We're going to stand a siege, so we must see to the larder, of course. What about water, Gwyn, and weapons, and ammunition? Have you a decent supply? or shall Cuthbert and Dicky and I see to that?"

"We haven't much water. We ought to have a lot in. You might get some more, Ivor," and Gwyneth fach scribbled away at her note.

"See!" she said, when she had finished. "Ivor and I have often had sham fights here, of course, so we kept a supply ready. We used to play here long before I thought of using it as a secret hiding-place."

She led them up the stair and through the trap-door to the bare stone chamber in the wall.

"All those stones in the corner are very useful, if any one's trying to climb the outer wall. Then underneath," and she burrowed among the stones in the corner and drew out several long, stout poles, "these are useful too. We'll show you how later on.—Ivor, we could do with some more, I think; and I saw somewhere a bundle of stakes for the roses, with good sharp points. If you could find them they might come in handy. And get us a lot more water, Ivor bach; we can use all you like to bring," and she ran off across the grass towards the cottage.

With no slightest doubt as to their power to defend the ruin, they threw themselves into the adventure with great energy, the fact that there was a real enemy in the case of course adding immense zest to their enjoyment.

"How do you get water down here? Where does it come from, and what is it for?" asked Robin.

"To throw down on the enemies' heads, of course, while they're climbing up the wall," cried Dicky, understanding a simple little thing like that at once. "But how d'you get the water up, Ivor?"

"You'll have to help at that. Come along and you'll see. We want all the cans there are about the garden, and any pails you happen to come across will be useful too."

The well was some little way from the tower, and Dicky's exuberance calmed down a little when he found that all the water had to be carried in cans and then hauled up the wall by ropes. The hauling up was more to his taste than the carrying, but Ivor made him do his share, and they all worked well, till they had a fine supply of water in the chamber in the wall.

"It ought to be boiling water for the enemies' heads, oughtn't it?" asked Cuthbert suddenly. "I seem to have heard somewhere of boiling water being used—or was it boiling oil?"

"Cuthbert, how can you? What a horrid idea!"

"It's a very good one," said Ivor. "We'll suggest it to Gwyneth fach."

The kettle for tea was filled directly from the well, and not from one of the cans, at Robin's suggestion. Ivor assured her that as it had to be boiled it did not matter what it had been carried in first; but she thought otherwise, and preferred it clean from the beginning.

"Wonder what the enemy's thinking of all this! D'you suppose they're watching us?" asked Dicky. "D'you think they'll guess that all this water's going on their heads and down their necks very soon?"

"I don't suppose they're watching. If they are, they'll only think it's some game we're up to."

"Game! They'll change their minds pretty soon, won't they, Ivor?"

Presently Gwyneth fach arrived with a big basket of provisions for the beleaguered garrison.

"The Davies boys have gone to Pwllheli to the market with their father, so we can't have any of them to help," she said. "But we'll get on all right without them. Now I'll make the tea."

The table in the secret hiding-place was far too small for such a company, so tea was laid on the floor, and they all sat round on cushions picnic fashion. The boys were full of the coming combat, and could talk of little else, and in their excitement and eagerness for the fray

Cuthbert and Dicky forgot to comment upon the astonishing fact that they were having tea inside the secret hiding-place, and that they were there as a matter of course and quite uninvited. But Gwyneth fach was thinking of it as she poured out the tea, and presently she remarked,—

"I didn't mean to have you boys down here if I could help it; but as you're going to help me defend the tower, I suppose I'll have to put up with you. Robin's turned out really much better than I expected, so perhaps you'll do the same. I wonder what time they'll make the first attack, and how they'll do it?"

"Of course they may not know we're all here. They probably think we've gone home, although they didn't see us go; so they'll come expecting to walk in without any trouble."

Dicky chuckled. " 'Tis goin' to be fun! I'm jolly glad I heard them."

"I'm glad you did, too," said Gwyneth fach. "I certainly didn't want to find all my pictures stolen."

"D'you suppose they're really worth so much?"

"Jim Carradale said they were," said Robin. "He didn't think they ought to be down here, but I thought no one would know."

"These men had been working about the place, you see. They'd hear from the Davies boys, or any one. I suppose they went away and found some one to help them."

"He's English, number three," said Dicky. "He talked just like the message boys do at home."

"When they find we're here, what d'you suppose they'll do then?" queried Cuthbert.

Ivor and Gwyneth fach were prompt in their reply.

"They'll attack either by the steps up the wall or by the hole in the roof up there—if they've heard of it," and Gwyneth pointed to the trap-door at the head of the stairs. A little light filtered in through the covering of bushes which disguised the entrance from the outside, and it offered an easy way of entry to any one who had discovered it. "If they come there we'll fight them off with those sticks and poles, but I don't think they will. Nobody knows of it but Ivor and me, I *think*. But we'll have to keep watch at both places to make sure."

"And when do you think Jim will be back?"

"By seven o'clock surely. I don't think Auntie Gwyn will stay later than that; so he'll be here in plenty of time."

"I do hope they don't attack till quite late," said Robin eagerly. "I've always longed to spend a night down here, but nobody would hear of it."

"It's rather eerie in the middle of the night, when the garden's all quiet," said Gwyneth fach. "They certainly won't come till it's quite dark, and that is pretty late just now, you know. But, all the same, I think we ought to keep watch. It will make it seem more real too. Let's have half an hour at a time each."

But when that plan was tried, it was found that all were eager to be sentinels, and none were willing to stay down in the secret hiding-place while the sun was shining outside. Yet they deemed it essential to keep out of sight, and would not have dreamed of deserting the tower even for a little while. Finally Dicky established himself at the top of the staircase in the wall, out of sight, but able himself to see and hear, and returned to the adventures of Tomakin with much content.

At first, indeed, the importance of his position possessed him so completely that he could not think of reading, but crouched in the shelter with eager face and restless eyes, on the lookout for any sign of the enemy. But time passed and nothing happened. No one seemed

stirring in the garden. It was difficult to believe that an "enemy" lay in hiding so short a distance away. Very soon Dicky grew weary of his watch, and was glad to turn to his book for amusement.

Once, indeed, there was momentary excitement when noisy barking attracted his attention, and he threw down his book and climbed to the ground to bring up Cadwaladr and his mother, who had escaped from the cottage, and were in quest of amusement in the garden. They were informed that they had been rescued from the clutches of a bloodthirsty enemy, whether they knew it or not, and that they ought to be very grateful and very glad to find themselves safe inside the secret hiding-place.

Robin and Gwyneth fach and the elder boys were playing snap and beggar-my-neighbour round the table, and the bare walls of the tower echoed with their laughter and shouts at times. The dogs were received with acclaim, and Cuthbert grabbed poor little Cadwaladr at once.

"Come here, you beauty! You're more use than anything I've had this long while. He's worth any number of books and diagrams," he explained, gently smoothing back Cadwaladr's ears till his eyes seemed starting out of his head. "There's a Chinee for you! S'pose we make little holes in his ears with a darning needle or something, like people do for earrings, you know. Then we could tie them back with a bit of blue ribbon, and he'd look ripping."

He only laughed as Robin and Gwyneth fach protested.

"I'm not hurting the little beggar. He only squeals for fun. It's to show he likes it. Kind of 'Encore, do it again,' you know. Look here! I discovered this the other day, when I was having a little private conversation with him. If you poke him *here* he twitches *here*. Funny, isn't it? Nerves, I suppose. He's awfully ticklish, too. You poke him under the arm, and you'll see."

"Never you mind, Cadwaladr bach! He shan't do it any more," and Gwyneth rescued the struggling pup, and made a bed for him in her lap.—"Cuthbert, it's time for your watch. Hadn't you better go and relieve Dicky?"

"If Dicky's coming here, you'll have to play old maid. He's sure to insist on it—he loves it. Somehow he never is old maid himself. I believe he does tricks with the cards," said Cuthbert, and went off up the stair, so Cadwaladr had peace for a time.

"Keepin' watch for an en'my's awful fun," said Dicky, clattering down the stair. "But if the en'my doesn't happen to come, it gets a bit slow after a while. What are you all doing down here? Cards? I say, let's have a game at old maid! When we play at home, Robin's old maid every time."

"We'll try and make Cadwaladr old maid this time," said Gwyneth fach. "I'll play for him."

"Old man, you mean!"

Cadwaladr kicked and squirmed and whined in his sleep, and they all laughed.

"He's dreaming of Cuthbert."

"He doesn't want to be old man."

"He shan't, then! he shan't be anything he doesn't want to be.—Never you mind, Cadwaladr bach! We'll make your fat old mother old maid instead," said Gwyneth fach.

CHAPTER XXVII.
THE DEFENCE OF THE SECRET HIDING-PLACE.

"Say, Gwyn, there's a gorgeous sunset! I know you like 'em, so you'd best come up and have a look," said Ivor, putting his head in at the door of the secret hiding-place.

They had grown tired of cards, and were all busy with books from Gwyneth's cupboard. Robin's Welsh letter to her father had been written with the help of Gwyneth fach and many ridiculous suggestions from the boys. Gwyneth was cuddling Cadwaladr to keep him out of Cuthbert's reach, and now she rose with him in her arms.

"It would be time for my watch in ten minutes, anyway; so you can come down if you like, and I'll wait there," she said.

"I'll come with you; I like sunsets too," and Robin followed her up the stair.

They sat on the top step and watched the colours spread up the sky and deepen and die away, and still the enemy made no sign.

"I wonder what time they'll come! And how soon do you think Jim will get back?"

"I thought he'd be here by this time. They are having a long ride. They must be enjoying themselves."

"I guess Jim's lost his way," said Dicky, appearing suddenly below them. "He was trying to talk Welsh to Gwyneth fawr before they started. I heard him under my tree. But he was calling her 'Gwyneth fach,' so he was getting pretty muddled even then. I'm sure he's lost his way.—Say, Gwyneth, can't we have some supper? I'm starving, and so're the others, so they told me to ask you."

Gwyneth glanced at Robin, and explained in a low voice.

" 'Fach' means 'dear,' and I think Mr. Carradale's getting fond of Auntie Gwyn—you know what I mean."

Robin nodded. "I know. Of course he is; he couldn't help it."

"Come on an' let's have supper! What are you whispering 'bout, Robin?—Say, Gwyneth, what'll we do if Jim doesn't come and the enemy attack? We'll have to beat them off alone, won't we?"

"Do you think we could?" Robin said doubtfully.

" 'Course we could, Robinette! there's five of us."

"We might be able to, but I hope he'll come in time. It isn't dark yet. There's still a good while before they're likely to attack."

" 'Course there is! He'll come all right. Do come to supper, Gwyneth fach! Ivor's going to keep watch while you give me mine; then, when I've had enough, we're going to change places."

"Poor Ivor! I wonder if he knows how long he'll have to wait!" Robin laughed, and followed Gwyneth down to the hiding-place.

By the time supper was over it was dark outside and the stars were shining. There was no sign or sound of any one in the shadowy garden, and they were all wondering greatly what had become of Carradale and Gwyneth fawr. Dicky and Ivor had no slightest doubts as to their power of defending the tower against any assault without his help; but Cuthbert was more cautious, and, though as ready for the fray as any, would have liked that feeling of certain success which Jim's presence would have given, and the girls were inclined to agree with him.

Gwyneth fach again volunteered to keep watch, and as the novelty of it had worn off to the boys, they willingly left it to her, only bidding her be sure and keep a sharp lookout, as this was the critical time.

Robin once more went with her, and they settled themselves on the top step again, with Cadwaladr sleeping happily in Gwyneth's arms.

The garden all around was still, and dark, and mysterious. The black masses of trees swayed gently, and there was a constant murmur from the branches, while underneath was dense, gloomy shadow. The sky was very clear and dark, and there was no moon. Each star was a brilliant blazing point of light, clearly visible as red, yellow, or white.

Robin looked round and up, awed by the silence everywhere.

"Aren't they wonderful? I don't think I ever saw so many before. Do you know their names?"

"A good many. Ivor taught me. His father's a sailor, you know."

"Tell me some."

"You know the Plough, of course! Here's the Northern Crown, high up overhead—isn't it pretty?—with Alphecca, that bright one, in the middle. There's the Lion—Leo—going down in the west, and the Sickle—do you see?"

"Yes, yes; I see!" Robin said eagerly.

"There are the Twins, of course, and the Lady in the Chair—Cassiopeia, the big W spread across the sky. You know that?"

"I've seen it. I didn't know it had a name. Well?"

"They've all got names, and once you know them they're just like pictures in the sky, and always changing. There's Virgo—and Arcturus, very bright—and Vega—and Capella—and those three are Perseus. And do you see the three little ones behind Capella, in a long triangle? Those are the Kids, you know—"

"How do you remember them all?"

"You should get Ivor to take you out on the bay at night in the boat. It's fine."

"I wish Jim would come," said Robin, suddenly reverting to the business of the moment. "I'm not looking forward to fighting unless he's here to help."

"I wish he'd come too. Perhaps something's gone wrong with the car. It's always possible. We'll hope for the best. Listen! That's a nightingale;" and they sat breathless.

Suddenly Gwyneth gripped her arm and pointed to the shadowy depths of the wood. Surely something moved?

They saw a darker shadow on the dark grass. Then another appeared, and they heard voices. The enemy, not knowing they were an enemy, and supposing the garden to be empty, did not see any need for special caution.

Gwyneth slipped away down the stair, with Robin at her heels. The plan of campaign had been very thoroughly discussed during supper, and every one was ready.

Books were dropped at once, and the boys sprang up eagerly.

"Jim?"

"No, the enemy."

Cadwaladr was dropped on the bed beside his mother. He gave a sleepy grunt and cuddled his nose down close to his tail. Robin took her place on the stair leading to the trap-door, to keep watch and give the alarm if an entrance was attempted there. The boys, armed with cans of water, climbed to the outer wall and crouched there above the broken steps. Gwyneth fach

hastily filled a jug with hot water, and put the kettle on the fire again for a second supply, then joined the boys, and they waited in breathless silence.

Dicky gave a giggle of suppressed excitement. Ivor seized his arm and pointed down the stair. Dicky shook his head violently, but managed to restrain himself from any further sound.

The three men came across the grass, talking and joking in undertones. They paused below the wall and walked round to the broken staircase. That they knew what they were about was evident, for one of the Welshmen unhesitatingly drew back the bushes to show the way, and the Englishman pushed forward and began to climb up.

Then a slight sound above, a splash, an angry exclamation of surprise, and he was on the ground again, gasping, soaked, with water in his eyes, in his ears, and trickling down his neck. The Welshmen broke into amazed ejaculations and pressed upon him with a torrent of questions, and Ivor and Gwyneth fach, crouching in the darkness just above, grinned across at one another in amused understanding.

But the Englishman could not understand their Welsh, and could not have spoken in any case. They only faintly understood what had happened, and so far did not realize its cause at all. One of them turned and attempted the climb, but another splash, and the contents of a large can full in his face, took away his breath also, and he dropped to the ground, gasping out words which were fortunately beyond the comprehension of Dicky and Cuthbert.

The Englishman, however, recovered rapidly, and, still half blinded by the water in his eyes, came raging to the steps. He stumbled at the first, fumbled for it, and found it, and came up the wall.

This time it was Gwyneth fach's turn. She had covered her jug with her hand lest the water should grow too cold. Now she emptied it with accurate aim upon his head, and he fell back, more astonished and helpless than ever, uttering fierce half-choked exclamations of surprise and disgust.

Then the Welshman who was still dry seized the other two by the arms, and they withdrew a little way for recovery and consultation.

The children on the wall were panting with excitement and relief.

"First wicket down—one man out for duck!" gasped Dicky, in wild delight.

"First round to us!" whispered Ivor, in exultation. "What now, do you suppose?"

"Now we'll soon know if they've heard of the other entrance. If they have they'll try it next."

"They're ratty now," said Cuthbert, more soberly. "If they do get in they'll be furious with us. We shall have to stand up for the girls, boys. Wish Jim was here! I don't think we were wise to try it without being sure of him."

"But we thought we were sure," Gwyneth fach replied, and ran along the wall to call down to Robin that so far all was well.

Another breathless pause in the dark and silence, and then the enemy, recovered in the matter of breath, but with a distinct loss of temper, came back to the assault. They had agreed that there could only be children in the tower—the children they had seen, but had supposed gone home to bed long since—and were not to be turned from their purpose so easily.

This time they came straight to the door of the ruin, and entering, began a search for the second entrance. The Welshmen knew of its existence, and had very shrewd ideas as to its position.

The children made for the stair, to join Robin at the post of danger. But Dicky had not yet emptied his can, and was panting to do so. He paused, raised it over the stooping, searching

men, and the sudden heavy rain of water drew another fierce outburst of angry Welsh and English from the surprised enemy.

"I'll keep watch here," whispered Gwyneth. "You boys go down quick."

Armed with pointed poles they lay in wait at the top of the inner stair, just below the covering of bushes, and heard the heavy feet tramp and crash and rustle in the undergrowth above. Robin withdrew into the hiding-place, ready to hand up fresh poles in case of need. And while the men searched and swore and discussed their failure in low tones, Gwyneth fach cheerfully deluged them with water from one of the reserve cans whenever they came near her.

But no amount of cold water would have been sufficient to upset such well-laid plans. This opposition was certainly unexpected and annoying, but hardly to be considered serious. There was no one of importance with the children, they were sure of that. And once they found the entrance they would soon put an end to the nonsense.

A shout from the Englishman announced his success, but it was followed instantly by a yell of surprise. His foot had gone through the bushes, and had found the first step of the staircase; but it had also found a sharp prod from a rose-stake awaiting it, and Dicky chuckled complacently.

"Hot stuff!" he whispered. "That went right into his leg, I do b'lieve! 'Nother man out for duck!"

A short consultation followed above; then the bushes were torn aside, and the three attempted to carry the entrance by united assault. But it was not pleasant to step down into a dark hole which held three resolute boys with pointed sticks, and the enemy withdrew in a very few seconds, smarting this time at the other extremity.

"Good business!" whispered Ivor, and Dicky jumped to the floor and began to dance in wild delight.

"We're goin' to win! I know we are! Won't it be ripping? Aren't you glad Jim isn't here? We'll win without him! We'll do it all alone!"

"Shut up, Dicky! Don't be a donkey! We haven't won yet," and Cuthbert ran up the stair to Gwyneth fach.

"Look here! Some one's got to go for help. We can't keep them out like this for more than a minute or two. They're mad now, and they'll be worse when they get in. If they think of separating and rushing both doors at once we're done for. They're men, and if they get to close quarters we'll find it hopeless."

"But who can we get to help? What can we do, Cuthbert? We've left a message for Mr. Carradale, and there's no one else."

"Perhaps the woman's forgotten to give it him. He may be at the cottage all the time. He may be starting for home, knowing nothing about it. Where's the nearest house, if we have to go for help?"

"Pen-y-bryn, half a mile up the road towards Madryn. John Evans would come if he knew."

"Right! Who shall go?"

"I'm not going; I won't leave the tower."

"I'd sprint along to Pen-y-bryn in no time, but that would leave you a man short here, and you need all you've got," Cuthbert said, frowning.

"Could Robin go? she won't fight."

"If she will; the road's easy enough to find."

Robin was waiting, and watching, and listening, but took no part in the fray. She could not help it. She felt that she ought to do what she could and join with the others in the defence, but the thought would come upon her of the other side of the matter—of how the enemy would feel this or that—and she could do nothing which was deliberately intended to hurt some one else. She felt very much ashamed that she was not doing her share, but she could not help it.

"I'll go for help, if you'll tell me what to do," she said eagerly, feeling that this at least was within her power.

They gave her full instructions, crouching the while on the wall, with one eye on the enemy, who were still discussing their next move.

There was only one way to leave the tower, under the circumstances. Of course the enemy must not see, so to leave by the broken stair down the wall was impossible.

Gwyneth fach led the way, stepping carefully in the darkness to the side of the tower which was farthest from the enemy. She knelt on the wall and gave her hands to Robin.

"Now climb over the edge and drop. I'll hold you, and you'll only fall three feet. There's grass underneath. I've done it dozens of times without any help when I was escaping from Ivor."

It was nervous work for a girl who had fallen off that very wall not long ago. But Robin would not show her fear. She set her teeth and said nothing, but gripped the strong little hands, wondered for a moment if Gwyneth could hold her, hung, dropped, and found herself rolling unhurt on the grass.

"All right?" whispered Cuthbert.

"Yes, quite all right."

"Cut along then. Don't lose a minute." And Robin sped away across the dark grass to the shelter of the trees, and so to the highroad.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
THE GREAT VICTORY.

It was very dark, surprisingly dark and still, as Robin raced through the lonely gardens of Quellyn towards the big gates.

She glanced up as she ran at the clear, dark sky, powdered with those dazzling points of light of which Gwyneth fach had told the names. For long afterwards the sight of Cassiopeia's big W spread across the sky, the Lion and the Sickle and the Northern Crown riding high overhead, or the Plough pointing to twinkling, dancing Arcturus, brought back to her that night of excitement and that long, nervous run through the quiet gardens.

Mrs. Davies met her at the cottage door, her face troubled. No, Miss Gwyneth and the gentleman had not come back yet, nor the motor. They were very late—well aye indeed! She could not think— But Robin had turned and disappeared up the dark road towards Pen-y-bryn.

There was no chance of losing the way. The lane was very narrow, and ran between high bramble hedges. She hurried on, panting, intent on finding help somewhere for the defenders of the tower.

Suddenly she paused. The sound of whistling and of heavy feet came round the next corner; then a man, and she sprang to meet him.

"Please, are you John Evans from Pen-y-bryn?"

"Eh, Miss Robin fach! No indeed," and she recognized the voice of the chauffeur of the little brown car.

"Oh, is it you? What's happened? And where are Mr. Carradale and Miss Parry?"

He nodded up the dark road.

"Coming. We had a breakdown just outside Tydweiliog. Back tyre—"

"Oh! then I'll go and meet them. And if you don't mind you might hurry on into the garden to the tower—Gwyneth fach's tower, you know. There are burglars, and the boys and Gwyneth are fighting them, but they want help," and she left him standing in amazement, and ran on.

Jim Carradale and Gwyneth fawr were so far behind that she had almost reached Pen-y-bryn before she met them. They had forgiven the car for its inconsiderate behaviour for the sake of that long six-mile tramp together in the cool, dark evening. Now Gwyneth fawr had admitted that she felt ready for rest, and was leaning on his arm, to his great content.

They were chatting merrily, and Gwyneth's laugh told Robin that she had found them before she could see them. She grasped Jim's other arm and leant upon him, panting.

"Burglars—in the secret hiding-place—the pictures, you know—the boys are fighting—but they'll get in if you don't go to help. There are three of them."

Carradale asked a hasty question or two, then turned to Gwyneth fawr.

"You don't mind if I go on? You'll be all right?"

"Yes, yes, go! We'll come too, as soon as Robin is fit."

"I'm—all—right!" panted Robin, as he disappeared down the lane. "I've quite—got my—breath—again now! Let's go back—and I'll tell you all about it—on the way."

When Jim Carradale and the man ran shouting across the grass, the defenders of the tower were at the point of despair. No one had put it into words, indeed, but they all, except perhaps

Dicky, realized that another moment would see them vanquished. What would happen then none of them had had time to stop to consider.

Gwyneth fach and Dicky were prostrate on the wall, bombarding with stones one of the Welshmen who was trying to climb the outer wall in the face of their fire. Cuthbert and Ivor, on the inner stair, we're repulsing the other two, who were forcing an entrance by sheer weight and numbers. The enemy had separated, as Cuthbert had feared, and were trying to rush both points at once. All the beleaguered garrison were worn out with excitement and effort, and another minute or two would certainly have seen the end of the defence.

But the enemy, surprised and disheartened by the strength of the resistance with which they had been met, were losing spirit also. At the unexpected arrival of reinforcements, of whose numbers they knew nothing, but whose strength, judged by the noise of their approach, must be considerable, the two Welshmen gave up the attempt and fled. Sudden hope filled the weary garrison, and they shouted cheerful welcomes in reply; and the Englishman, finding himself alone in an awkward position, disappeared among the trees.

Carradale ran up to the tower.

"All right there?"

"Yes, all right now; they've gone—"

He turned and gave chase, with the chauffeur at his heels, and the beleaguered garrison gathered in the secret hiding-place, breathless but triumphant.

"We've won! we've won! Knew we would! Didn't I say so all along? Whole side out for duck, all of 'em! We've won!" and Dicky executed a war dance among watering-cans and broken sticks.

"Well, that was a fight—well aye yes indeed!" panted Ivor.

"Isn't anybody wounded? Are there no broken heads for me to bind up?" asked Cuthbert, with a touch of disappointment.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you all. I've been sure for the last ten minutes that my pictures were as good as gone," said Gwyneth fach, and sank down on the bed beside Cadwaladr, her knees trembling.

She was ready to cry with relief, now that she knew that her treasures were safe. Cuthbert saw her condition, and looked round for some restorative.

"You ought to take something. Got any brandy down here? Girls always collapse when a thing's over. Take some hot water," and he seized the boiling kettle.

"No, no! I couldn't. That was meant for the enemies' heads," she said, with a hysterical laugh. "I'll make some tea. We're all ready for something to steady us a bit." And by the time Gwyneth fawr and Robin arrived the tea was made and the hiding-place had been set to rights by the boys.

"All well, Gwyneth fach?"

"Quite, Auntie Gwyn. They've run away, and Mr. Carradale's gone after them. It was William Griffiths and Griffith Williams, who used to work here, you know.—Robin, I'm awfully obliged to you! Weren't you afraid alone in the dark? I thought afterwards it was mean to let you go. What happened?"

Carradale arrived presently in much disgust.

"They've got away. They had a trap waiting, so it was hopeless. If the car was here I'd send word to the police at once, but it's reposing comfortably at Tydweiliog, and we had to walk home. Now let's hear all about this business."

“I’m more obliged to you all than I can say,” said Gwyneth fach, pouring out a cup of tea for him. “Dicky heard them and gave us warning, Robin fetched you just in time, and Cuthbert and Ivor have been fighting like anything. The pictures are almost the only precious things I have, and I’d have lost them to-night if you hadn’t all helped to save them for me.”

She looked round the secret hiding-place. Gwyneth fawr and Robin were sitting on the bed with cups in their laps, and Cadwaladr lying snoring between them. The fat white mother dog was begging hopefully before Dicky, as he nibbled a biscuit, held it tantalizingly near to the twitching white nose, and nibbled it again himself. Cuthbert and Ivor by the table were discussing how broken heads would have been best treated, if there had happened to be any broken heads. Carradale had seated himself on the floor at Gwyneth fawr’s feet.

“I suppose this will have to be the end of my secret hiding-place!” said Gwyneth fach. “You’ll all say I mustn’t keep things down here any more, now that this has happened. And it’s not a secret any longer. I’m so much obliged to you all that I couldn’t think of keeping it to myself any more. So it won’t be either a secret or a hiding-place. I hope you’ll all come down here often—as often as you like,” she said with an effort. “I’m afraid it’s been rather mean of me to keep it to myself for so long. And when the motor’s set right again I hope you’ll all come for some rides with me.”

“Hot stuff! That’s jolly decent!” cried Dicky. “How soon d’you s’pose it’ll be ready?”

“That’s doing the thing handsomely, Gwyn,” Ivor remarked in an undertone.

“They saved my pictures—well, aye, yes indeed!” said Gwyneth fach.

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE LITTLE BROWN CAR AND GWYNETH FACH.

It was very many days before the promise of a ride in the motor could be fulfilled. The damage to the little brown car proved to be more serious than had at first been discovered, and it had to be sent away for repairs.

One day the three and Ivor sat on the slip in Lifeboat Bay, with feet dangling over into the water and faces turned to the wide blue bay and Nevin Point. The two Gwyneths were still living in the cottage at Quellyn, so Gwyneth fach had not yet put in an appearance, as it was still early in the morning.

They were discussing the future, and settling the affairs of their elders for them.

"We heard from Jim yesterday," said Robin, turning to Ivor, for Carradale had been obliged to rejoin his ship several days before. "Gwyneth fawr says she'd like to live abroad, and he's just heard that his ship is to be stationed at Malta, so that's jolly for them both. I'm going to ask mother if we can go to live up at Quellyn in the autumn, and have a big wedding there for Gwyneth and ask all the people she knows. Then they'll go off to Malta for a while and come here whenever they can, and when they tire of it he'll retire and come to live here. He says he's going to buy a house in Porthdinlleyn sometime, and settle down here for the rest of his days. He's found somewhere for a honeymoon, and it isn't ten miles from here, but where it is he won't tell us exactly."

"Might be at Llanbedrog or Abersoch, on the south coast; or Llithfaen or Porth Sgadon or Llanelhaiarn or Clynnog fawr, along this way; or over in Anglesey yonder there are heaps of jolly places. Heard from your mother again?"

"Yes; they're coming next week."

"Isn't it ripping? An' father's nearly well enough to climb the Rivals. He's looking forward to it awf'lly, he says."

"I say, you ought to bathe to-day, you know!" Ivor exclaimed. "It's as hot as hot—"

"Coo—ee!" came shrilly from the cliff above them, and they started up.

"That's Gwyn!" said Ivor, and they saw a small green figure waving wildly from the cliffs.

"Well, Gwyneth fach? What's the matter with you?" cried Robin.

"A letter for you; that's all!"

"Surely the post's in early!" said Cuthbert, as Robin seized the letter eagerly.

"No, but the motor's come home! So I brought Auntie Gwyn down to get her letter—there's one every morning, you know! Dreadful waste of stamps, isn't it?—and as there was one for you I brought it along."

"Hip! hip! Then are you goin' to take us riding, Gwyneth fach? Do, there's a jolly girl!"

"I say!" cried Robin, her face ablaze. "They're coming to-day—by the afternoon train!"

"What, your father and mother?"

"To-day? Hot stuff!" cried Dicky.

"But why? What's up?" queried Cuthbert.

"It's dreadfully awfully hot in Southampton, and they think it's doing him harm. He wants fresh bracing air, so he's coming to Moranedd at once."

"Then look here!" said Gwyneth fach quickly. "This morning you'll come all round everywhere with me in the motor, and then this afternoon you shall have the car to go and

meet them and bring them out here quickly."

"You *are* decent!" said Dicky appreciatively.

So they walked across the fields to Penrhos, where the car and Gwyneth fawr were waiting, and then Gwyneth fach carried them all off for a long morning ride—hooting noisily through the gray streets of Nevin; crawling, with panting snorts of disgust from the engine, up the long slope to Pistyll and round the sudden corners of the winding road, still up and up, to Llithfaen; then, after wondering glances at the splendour of "The Rivals" close at hand, away through the lanes and woods back to Bodvean, and so nearly home again. But turning off by the little post-office in the woods, she bore them away to the south, with Nevin behind and the southern sea in front and the round green crest of Bodvean lying between them and home. At Pwllheli they found the wide blue stretch of Cardigan Bay, and it kept them constant company as they sped away to the west, through white villages and past bold headlands and dreamy, lonely bays, till the wild promontories of Aberdaron and Braich-y-pwll were all about them, and they gazed in wonder and awe at the bold rock cliffs and surging waves and quaint little town of the Land's End of Wales. Then through the rough roads of the country districts home again, bumping over ruts and stones in a way that made them sorry for the new tyres and grateful for the strength of the car, and Gwyneth steered through the long street of Edeyrn and up the hill to Penrhos once more.

After dinner at Moranedd they were off to Pwllheli again to meet the train. But this time Gwyneth fach refused to accompany them, or to let Ivor do so either.

"You're going to meet your mother and father, and they won't want us. There isn't room for so many in the car anyway. The man will drive you all right. Auntie Gwyn's going to make you cakes for tea, and Ivor and I are going fishing for to-morrow's breakfast. There are mackerel in the bay to-day; can't you see them? That line on the water—over there—that's mackerel, thousands of them! You'll be glad of some for breakfast. You'll be far too early for the train, but it's Wednesday, so I'd advise you to have a look at the market. It's good fun, but we hadn't time to stop this morning. But you saw the crowds, and the pigs in the carts, poor things! Now you should go to the hall and see the stalls there. But don't forget the time and be late for the train, after all."

It was a very happy party that filled the little brown car as it rushed down and crept up the slopes of the switchback road that evening. Father was well muffled up, for the sweet salt air was fresh and sharp after the heat of the south; but he looked wonderfully well, and it was very comforting to have him there at last. Mother looked tired with the journey and rather pale after her weeks of nursing, but deeply content to see her family safely united once more. Robin had wedged herself in between her parents in the sheltered back seat where she and Gwyneth fawr had sat in the morning; the boys would, of course, be satisfied with nothing but the more exciting position in front.

Suddenly Robin leaned forward.

"Stop, please! There's Gwyneth fach. We can make room for her; can't we, mother? It's just time to get out anyway."

They had reached Penrhos corner. The trap was to meet them at the Bwlch to drive the invalid across the sands. Gwyneth fach was sitting on the stile which led to the field path, her green cap on her knee, her dark curls blowing back from her face.

She had seen them like a speck in the distance far up the long white road, but coming rapidly nearer till they shot past her and came to a sudden stand beside the milestone. She was strangely nervous of the meeting, afraid of she knew not what, but anxious to get it over. She

had wondered if they would see her, if they would stop. Then the car drew up, and Robin came running to her.

"Gwyneth fach! Come and see father! Come and speak to mother! They want to see you."

"Are you sure? Don't they want only you to-day? I'll come down in the morning. They don't want—"

"Don't be silly! Look here, Gwyneth, you'll make me ratty with you in a moment. I tell you, you're one of the family now. Of course they want you to come! Come on, do, and don't keep father sitting there in that wind!"

Gwyneth fach laughed, put on her cap, and went forward shyly.

"Come along, Gwyneth dear!" and Mrs. Brent leaned out of the car and held out her hand. —"Father, here's our second girl. You know we always wanted another one."

At her kiss Gwyneth's face quivered. She turned away quickly, and spoke to the chauffeur in Welsh. He climbed down from the car, and she sprang up into his place.

"Since you stopped to speak to me, I'm going to take you home through the lanes. They wouldn't let *him* drive across the farm; but nobody minds me, and it will save you going down the Bwlch and across the sands. It's warmer in the lanes, and the Bwlch is bumpy sometimes."

The car crushed and squeezed its way through the blackberry lanes, and came out triumphantly on the open moor. Gwyneth fach brought it round with a fine sweep to the head of the sandy road, and it came to a stand above Porthdinlleyn.

"This is home," she said. "And here comes Auntie Gwyn, to say she is so very pleased to see us—well, aye, yes indeed!"

[The end of *The Girl Who Wouldn't Make Friends* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]