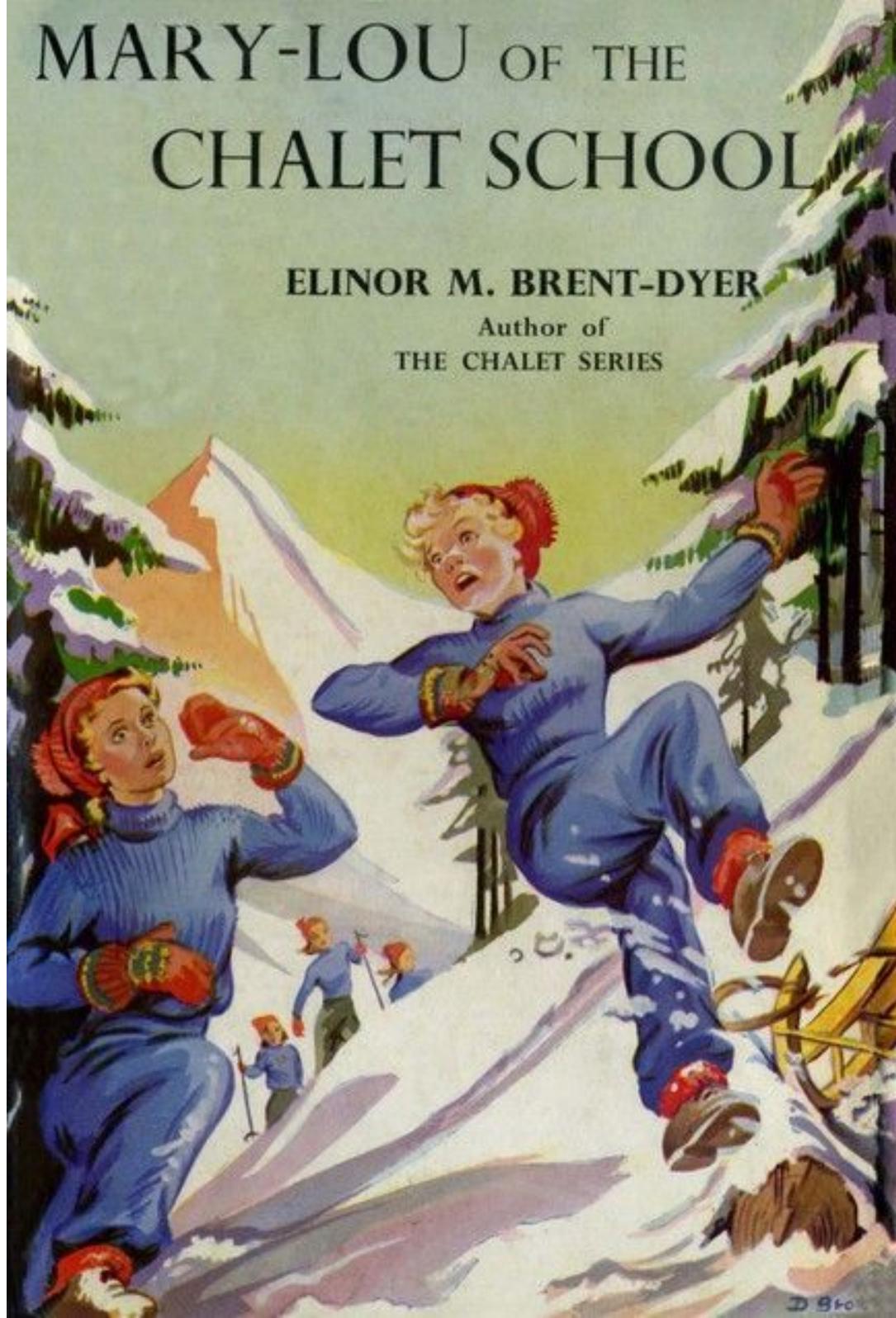


MARY-LOU OF THE CHALET SCHOOL

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

Author of
THE CHALET SERIES



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By

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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Chapter 1

MARY-LOU RETURNS

Mary-Lou Trelawney stood at the window of her cubicle in Cornflower dormitory gazing out across the valley to the opposite mountains with dreamy eyes. It was very quiet up there in the dormitories, for it was school-hours and everyone except herself was hard at it in the formrooms, which were all on the ground-floor. Mary-Lou, however, had returned to school a week late, owing to the sudden illness and death of her grandmother.

“Gran” had lived with Mary-Lou and her mother all that young person’s life and had helped to bring her up. She had firmly seen to it that her only grandchild was not spoiled as she might very well have been.

Mary-Lou’s father had been an exploring entomologist—he was responsible for finding no fewer than seven different species of butterflies in the upper reaches of the Amazon—and on his last expedition, he and most of his party had been killed in a brush with the wild Indians of those parts. Mrs. Trelawney would have been as wax in the hands of her daughter, for Mary-Lou was a decided young woman and persistent into the bargain. So it was fortunate for everyone that “Gran” was there to insist on obedience, proper manners and a few other important virtues. Even when Mother had married Commander Carey, one of the only two members of the fatal Murray-Cameron expedition to escape, Gran had remained with them and extended her training to Commander Carey’s only child, Verity-Anne, Mary-Lou’s friend and form-mate at the Chalet School.

“It’ll seem awfully—*weird* to go home at Christmas and not find Gran waiting for us,” Mary-Lou thought as she stood staring out with eyes that saw little or nothing of the wonderful view before them. “She’s always been there before. Oh, well, I gave her my word that last night that I wouldn’t fret. She did say that she was awfully tired and longing to see Grandpa and Father again. I’ve still got Mother—and there’s Verity-Anne and Dad, too. I’m jolly well off, really, and Clem and Tony have lived with us for holidays so long now, that they almost feel like another sister and brother. That’s *five* people at home as well as all the outside folk. I jolly well *won’t* fret!”

She turned away from the window to survey her little domain. It was in the applepie order that Matron always demanded—though she didn’t always get it—and there was nothing more to do now until the bell rang for the end of afternoon school. She looked at her watch and found she had another quarter-of-an-hour.

“I’d better go down to the commonroom and wait,” she thought. “Am I quite tidy?”

She tipped up the lid at one end of her bureau and examined herself anxiously in the mirror. Yes; she would do. Her long, light-brown plaits with the glints of gold in them were burnished to shining neatness. Her blouse and skirt, sign that she was now a Senior, were immaculate and her hands were as clean as soap and nailbrush could make them. She closed the lid, made sure that she had her handkerchief and, with a final look round, left the dormitory and departed downstairs.

At the foot of the staircase, from long habit she turned left and began to make her way towards the commonroom sacred to the Middles. Halfway there, she checked and swung round with a giggle.

“Goodness! What am I doing? I’m a Senior this term. You turn right about, my good girl and use your wits!” And she swung round and, taking advantage of the fact that there was no one in authority to make remarks, raced lightly back, past the foot of the staircase and along to the right to the big room devoted to the use of the Seniors.

It was not empty as she had confidently expected. Curled up in a corner of the big settee that stood between two of the windows was a girl of about her own age who was sitting crouched together, a black scowl on her face. Mary-Lou stared at her as she shut the door behind her. What was a new girl doing here? At this hour, she ought to have been in some class or other. And *what* was she frowning over so fiercely? This was something that must be investigated at once. Mary-Lou’s worst enemies had never accused her of being shy. She marched across the big room and sat herself down beside the girl demanding in a breezy, friendly way, “Hello! What’s wrong with you? Why aren’t you in form?”

The girl lifted a pair of hazel eyes and stared in her turn. “What business is it of yours?” she demanded. “And who are you, anyway?”

Mary-Lou was brought up all standing at this unfriendly response to what had been meant as kindness. However, a question had been asked and required an answer, so she replied in rather more formal tones, “I’m Mary-Lou Trelawney and I’m Head—I mean I *was* Head of the Middles. Our gang has just come up to Vb this term so I still haven’t had time to get used to not being Head. Just the same, I was expected to see if anything was wrong with anyone and find out if I could help and you rather do that sort of thing anyhow in this school. Even the kids do it when they’ve been here a term or two. You seem pretty down about something. Can I do anything to help?”

“No!” the girl said shortly. “Except go away and leave me alone. You can do *that!*”

“That’s just where your toes turn in. I jolly well can’t. I’ve just arrived—rather late in the term, for once—and I’ve done my unpacking and Matey told me to come down here as soon as I was ready and wait for the rest of our crowd,” Mary-Lou explained. “And now, what’s your name? I’ve told you mine.”

“Glare” is the only word for the look the query brought her. Then the new girl condescended to reply. “My name is Jessica Wayne. I’ve heard about you. The rest seem to think you’re the cat’s bathmat; but if you expect *me* to join in, you’ve another guess coming. Now go away and let me alone!”

Mary-Lou eyed her thoughtfully. She still wondered why Miss Jessica Wayne was not in form, but she was asking no more questions—of her. She turned to the bookshelves that lined the lower half of three of the four walls, selected a book and sat down in one of the windowseats. For the next ten minutes she was, to all appearance, buried in *The Island of Sheep*. Actually, she was wondering what on earth had happened to make this new girl so furious.

“For she’s literally raging!” she thought. “It’s just the end of the first week of term. Surely she can’t have got across anyone so badly in that short time!”

It was a problem, and one she had to wait to solve. Luckily for her, it was nearly the end of afternoon school and before she quite burst from curiosity, the bell for the end of lessons pealed out and the hush which had brooded over the place was broken by the hum of voices, the patter of feet and the slamming of doors and desk-lids. Three minutes later, the door of the commonroom was flung open and a knot of girls entered. They began to chatter in a polyglot language, known to them as “German” and to the staff as “Gibberish” the moment they were inside. Then a pretty girl of fifteen, whose bronzy curls were wildly tossed, gave a sudden yell

of “Mary-Lou!” and hurled herself across the room to the far window where that young woman had ensconced herself, demanding in plain English, “Mary-Lou Trelawney! What a sight for sore eyes! When did you arrive?”

“Hello, Vi,” Mary-Lou said with a grin. “Hello, folks.” She glanced quickly round them as they thronged about her and demanded sharply, “Where’s young Verity-Anne?”

“Putting her books away,” responded a jolly-looking girl of fifteen—Mary-Lou’s age, by the way. “Josette’s helping her out. Thank goodness you’ve come at last, or I think she’d have driven us all scatty. She’s been moonier than ever.”

Mary-Lou sighed in an elderly way. “I was afraid of that. She didn’t want to come back without me and begged to stay as long as I did, but Gran was very ill then and no one could say how long it would go on and she did so beg for me. So Mother and Dad said I must stay for her sake, but Verity had better come back with the rest of you. She would only have been hanging about and being miserable at home,” she added in matter-of-fact tones. “I was with Gran nearly all the time the last week or so.”

Her friends glanced at each other and the slight air of restraint that had been plain about most of them vanished. As Hilary Bennett said later on, they might have known that Mary-Lou would be sensible about it all. Whatever she might feel inwardly about her grandmother’s death, she would keep it to herself—or if she did talk of it at all, only very privately to her closest friends.

By this time, other girls were coming into the school and the welcome they gave the former Head of the Middles was proof enough of Jessica Wayne’s remark that they thought her “the cat’s bathmat”. Even people from VIB came over to greet her and ask what sort of a journey she had had.

“Quite all right,” she said calmly. “Uncle Jem was coming for a consultation at the San, so he brought me with him and we flew. He always does, of course, and Dad said I might as well and miss the long journey either alone or being in charge of the first decent person we could find.”

“How did you like it?” queried a slim, dark person of sixteen or so.

“Very much, once we’d started. And it certainly does save an awful lot of bother. It’s a pity it costs so much, but Dad said it didn’t matter for once.”

The bell rang at this point, so the chatter had to cease. The girls hurriedly got into line, headed by the dark girl whose name, Jessica had found out, was Elinor Pennell. At a word given by a boyish-looking individual whose straight brown locks were cropped man-fashion, they began to march out. Mary-Lou, tailing on behind the rest, glanced back and saw that Jessica was still huddled up on the settee, glowering down at her feet. She broke away and ran across the room to her.

“Come along!” she said cheerfully. “That’s the bell for Kaffee und Kuchen.”

“I’m not coming,” Jessica muttered.

“Of course you are! You’ll only be fetched if you don’t *and* have a fine old row with Matey into the bargain—and I don’t advise *that!*” said Mary-Lou the experienced. “Come on, Jessica! It isn’t worth it!”

“Let me alone! Can’t you take a telling? *I’m not coming!*”

Mary-Lou dropped down beside her. “What’s wrong?” she asked bluntly.

“Nothing! It’s none of your business, anyway! Let me alone, I tell you!”

Clearly there was nothing to be done, short of hauling her along by main force, and Mary-Lou knew that no one in authority would look with any favour on that.

"I'll just have to leave it to the prees," she said, voicing her thoughts aloud. "It's their job, after all."

"Oh, going to sneak, are you? Just what I might have expected from everyone's pet!"

Mary-Lou flushed. She rose with some dignity. "I shan't say anything, I can assure you. The prefect at your table will miss you and she'll ask questions and she'll jolly soon know all about it. Don't flatter yourself otherwise. However, as you've already told me about a dozen times, it's *your* affair." Suddenly, her chilly tone changed. "Don't be so silly, Jessica. You'll only get into a ghastly row and it really isn't worth it. Change your mind and come along with me—do!"

It was Mary-Lou at her most persuasive; but Jessica was having none of it.

"Clear out and let me alone! I don't want any tea or whatever idiot name you call it over here! Now let me alone!"

It was hopeless. Mary-Lou had to give it up. She left the room, well aware that she had spoken the truth and a prefect would presently arrive to hail the new girl into the Speisesaal for Kaffee und Kuchen as they called their afternoon meal here in the Oberland. If Jessica stuck to her present attitude, it would have to be referred to Matron and she would make short work of all this. The girl had yet to be born who dared outface Matron to the bitter end!

"I've done my best," Mary-Lou thought as she finally departed. "If she won't, she won't. But I'm jolly well going to get to the bottom of all this—and that before I'm many hours older. What's got into the young ass?"

She reached the Speisesaal to be greeted by a chorus from her own table.

"Come on, Mary-Lou!"—"Where have you been? I thought you were following on with us."—"Buck up, old fruit! You sit between me and Babs this term."

"I just waited to attend to something," Mary-Lou told them aloofly as she made her way between the tables to where Vi Lucy was signalling frantically to her. "Between you two? Good!" She looked across the table at a slight, very fair, very pretty girl of her own age and beamed at her. "Hello, Verity! Meet me after you've changed. I've piles of messages for you from Mother and Dad. Oh, and I've brought your other mac. You left it on the pegs by the kitchen door and Mother said you'd better have it in case of accidents."

Verity-Anne Carey smiled back at her. "Thank you," was all she said however, in the silvery voice that just matched her appearance.

Mary-Lou nodded and turned to attend to Vi who seemed to be bubbling over with news. She was accustomed to her "sister-by-marriage" as they called it. Verity-Anne was no talker.

"What do you think?" Vi burst out as she passed Mary-Lou the big cup of milky coffee they drank at this hour. "Barbara's jumped a form and she's with us this year in VB. How's that for news?"

"Oh, good for you, Barbara!" Mary-Lou said cordially. "Jolly good! Are you the only one or has anyone else done it?"

Barbara, fair and pretty with her golden curls and blue eyes, nodded. "Oh, I'm not the only one by a long chalk!—Pass the jam, please, Clare!—Ruth Barnes, Prunella Davidson, Clare, here, and Sue Meadows have all done it too. The rest are all in Upper IVA—and so are Monica Carr and Carol Younger. They *are* peeved about it, too."

"Hard luck on them!" Mary-Lou helped herself to the black cherry jam and passed the dish on to Vi. "Of course, Monica never could work really hard, poor kid, with those eyes of hers. As for Carol, she's lazy! She always was."

“She’s raging,” struck in Hilary Bennett from the opposite side of the table.—They were all taking advantage of the fact that their special prefect was on urn duty and had not yet taken her place, to speak English which was forbidden as this was a “German” day—“She vows she means to streak ahead this term so that they’ll move her up next. Whether she’ll stick to it or not, I don’t know.”

“Pigs may whistle, but they’ve poor mouths for it,” observed Clare Kennedy, an Irish girl of nunlike appearance which was most misleading on occasion.

Mary-Lou giggled. “Clare! What an awful expression! Where did you pick it up?”

“You may well ask,” Vi chimed in. “Clare’s come to school with a whole new batch of words that no one’s had time to call slang as yet.”

“They soon will if they hear them,” put in a round-faced creature gloomily.

“Oh, well, she can survive it,” Mary-Lou said easily. “I say, who’s Head Girl? Verity’s the limit as a correspondent—you *are*, Verity and you know it! All she said when she wrote on Sunday was that as I was returning this week, I’d be able to get all the hanes when I came.”

Verity-Anne might have had something to say, but Vi gave her no chance.

“Our new Head Girl is Betsy,” she said impressively.

“*No!* Oh, well, she’ll make an awfully decent Head Girl. What fun that she should follow on after Julie! Two of you Head Girl! You’ll have to head for it yourself, Vi. Then you’ll all three have been it.”

Vi laughed. “I daresay! I’m not keen. I’d a lot rather be Games pree. But what none of you seem to see is that it’s awfully hard on me to have first one sister and then another as Head Girl. They simply lean over backwards, trying to show no favouritism where I’m concerned. Julie did, anyhow. It’s too soon to know about Betsy.”

“Who’s Games pree this term?” Mary-Lou asked, wisely leaving this vexed question alone for the moment.

“Katharine Gordon,” Verity-Anne told her. “And Blossom Willoughby is her assistant, though she’s neither a pree nor a sub. She *is* awfully good at games, of course.”

“Who else?” Mary-Lou was making a good meal while she tallied. She kept one eye on the urn where Hilary Wilson, their own prefect, was just finishing the last cups. She glanced at the others and hissed, “’Ware German! Hilary’ll be here in a sec!”

Vi glanced across and promptly continued her information in somewhat stilted German. “The other prefects are Jean Ackroyd, Amy Dunne, Freda Lund, Carola Johnstone, Peggy Adams, Sally Winslow, Lalla Winterton and Hilary Wilson, of course.”

“Only eleven?” Mary-Lou had counted. “What’s the why of that? We usually have at least a dozen.”

“Don’t ask me! That’s all there is—so far, anyhow.”

“And,” interjected a black-haired girl from further down the table, “Sally, Lalla and Amy are only subs. Actually, we’ve only eight full prefects.”

“Goodness me! I wonder why?”

Before anyone could reply to this, Hilary Wilson came to take her seat and, in the excitement of pressing fancy breadtwists and cherry jam on her, they left it alone. Before they could return to it, the girl in charge of the next table, who had also been on urn duty, got up and came across to theirs. “May I speak to your table, Hilary?” Then, as Hilary nodded, “Thanks! Girls, do any of you know where that new girl, Jessica Wayne, is? She’s not at Kaffee und Kuchen.”

There was a pause. Mary-Lou knew, of course, but she had no idea of speaking. Luckily for her, Barbara Chester spoke up and informed the prefect that Jessica had been in the commonroom just before the bell rang.

“But I never noticed whether she came in with us or not,” she added.

“Bother!” Jean looked annoyed. “Are we going to have *another* fuss with her! What ails the silly tawpie, anyhow? Oh, very well. Thanks, Barbara. I’ll go and rout her out. Keep an eye on my crowd, will you, Hilary?” And she stalked off up the long room, indignation in every line of her lanky figure.

A buzz arose as she disappeared and Hilary looked across at the other table after glaring at her own with a glare that quieted them at once. “Less noise, please!” she said sharply in German. “And do not forget that this is German day. Do you all want order marks?”

No one did. They relapsed into the careful language which was the best a good many of them could do and the noise ceased. Mary-Lou went on placidly with her meal, asking questions and replying to others asked her. After a whole year in the Oberland, she was fairly fluent, more so than a good many of them; but even so, she had to stop and think of words and phrases and, like the rest, she let construction go to the wind on occasion.

Meantime, Jean had not returned and Hilary began to look anxious. If Jessica was behaving as she had consistently done ever since she had first come to the school, it would mean more trouble with Matron. Surely she had had enough of that already? Besides, it was a reflection on their authority as prefects.

However, halfway through the meal, Jean reappeared alone, her blue eyes emitting sparks and her cheeks flushed brightly. Even her sandy hair seemed to be bristling with rage. She sat down in a heavy silence and her table at once became unnaturally well-behaved on the spot. Jean sat down and went on with her twist and coffee without a word to anyone. Hilary’s eyebrows climbed up nearly into her hair, but she knew better than to say anything. Instead, two people at the end of her own table created a diversion by an unseemly scramble for the last of the jam. Hilary called them sharply to order.

“Lesley—Christine! What are you thinking about?” she asked. “Try to remember that you are Seniors now—not Middles! Sit up at once!”

Lesley Malcolm and Christine Vincent stopped short with cheeks like poppies and Prunella Davidson, profiting by their discomfiture, calmly helped herself to the disputed jam amidst the suppressed giggles of her near neighbours.

Kaffee und Kuchen was nearly over when the door opened again and Matron herself appeared, followed by a subdued-looking Jessica who went meekly to her seat. The room took one look at Matron and fell silent. Everyone felt sorry for Jessica. If any of them had called forth that look on the face of their beloved and feared tyrant, their one wish would have been to get under the table and stay there! No member of staff was more loved than she, but even members of the staff had been known to say that a certain expression of hers made them shake in their shoes.

All she said just now was, “Here is Jessica Wayne, Jean. Please see that she eats a *proper* meal. If she does not, kindly send for me.” Then she swung round and left the room with a resounding swish of well-starched print.

For the rest of the meal, no one talked very much. Jean did her best to obey Matron, and, perhaps, that lady had made some sort of impression on the new girl, for Jessica had choked down two twists and jam and drunk a full cup of the milky coffee by the time Betsy Lucy stood up and called for Grace.

As for Mary-Lou, that young woman was nearly gibbering with curiosity. She had to suppress it as well as she could. The prefects were all looking furious and Jean was obviously at boiling-point. It was a real relief to them all when Kaffee und Kuchen ended and they were all streaming upstairs to change into the gentian-blue velveteens with pretty collars and cuffs which were the regulation evening wear during the week for the Chalet School.

Mary-Lou contrived to keep it all in until they were safely in Cornflower with the door shut. Then she conveniently forgot rules and demanded in English and her most bell-like tones, "What on *earth* is the matter with that particular new girl, Jessica Wayne?"

Chapter II

THE LATEST ABOUT WELSEN!

Mary-Lou naturally supposed that they would all rush to relieve her curiosity. Her indignation when no one took the slightest notice of her query, but all began to babble at once about Welsen, the finishing branch of the Chalet School, nearly took her breath away. After all, Welsen was not a new story.^[1] It was three years since it had been established in the big chalet, Unter die Kiefern—Under the Pines—and though most of their last year's prefects were now installed there, she could see nothing about which to be excited. In fact, she was so annoyed, that if they had not all been doing their best to tell her the latest, they must have laughed at her. They were all far too strung up about it to heed her and the babel of chatter made it impossible for her to understand a word of what they were all saying. Finally, she jumped on a chair, clapped her hands vigorously for silence and, when the noise had died down a little, she proceeded to rend them.

[1] *The School in the Oberland.*

"Well! Of all the row! Do you *want* Matey to come hurtling into our midst and skin us all alive? For that's what it looks like and I'd rather be excused, thank you! We're supposed to be changing, in case you didn't know—"

"Mary-Lou, stop trying to be sarcastic and listen to us for a moment!" Vi began.

"Before I listen to you, I'll thank you to listen to me!" her friend retorted. "You get round to telling me about that new girl, Jessica What's-her-name. I want to know why she seems to be going about with an outsize in black dogs on her back."

"Haven't a notion," Hilary Bennett said airily. "Anyhow, who cares for a brat of a new girl?"

"I do!" Mary-Lou returned smartly. "There's something wrong there and I mean to get to the bottom of it."

She jumped down from her chair and pulled her cubicle curtains close with a significant, "There isn't any too much time for changing, remember."

A gasp of horror went round and they all dashed for their cubicles. Punctuality was one of the minor virtues insisted on in the school. Mary-Lou, however, was ready for the bathroom before most of them had got out of skirt and blouse. She emerged from her cubicle in her dressing-gown, her towel and spongebag swinging from either hand as she marched to the door remarking, "When I come back, you can tell me just why you've all let this sort of thing go on for a whole week and, judging by all I can see, haven't done a thing about it."

Hilary appeared, bent on the same errand. "It isn't quite like that, Mary-Lou. She was in the grumps on the platform of the Gare de l'Est when her aunt or cousin or what-have-you handed her over to Miss Wilmot. What's more, she hasn't cleared up for one single moment. Some of us thought she was just an outsize case in homesickness and we tried to cheer her up, but she told us to let her alone. Quite fierce about it, she was," she added plaintively.

Vi Lucy joined them. "That's the honest truth, Mary-Lou. She was downright *savage* about it, even to young Verity-Anne—and, by the way, what's all this about dropping the 'Anne' part of it?"

“No red herrings!” Mary-Lou said severely. “I’ll talk of that later. You go on and tell me—and scram!”

“Well, that’s about all. She kept on telling us to let her alone, so in the end, that’s just what we did. I don’t quite see what else we *could* have done—do you?” She appealed to the rest of the dormitory who had joined them in ones and twos till now the entire dozen that made up Cornflower were assembled in the centre aisle between the cubicles.

“Nothing else!” they chorussed.

The severe look faded from Mary-Lou’s face. “I—see,” she said slowly. “But—do you really mean she goes on like that to *everyone*—the prees and Matey and all?”

“She does so,” Clare Kennedy responded promptly.

“But she must be mad!” Mary-Lou looked blank. “We can’t let it go on. I suppose she’s in our form, isn’t she?”

“Is she not!” Hilary rolled her eyes ceilingwards. “She is, and she’s a complete ticket, let me tell you!”

“Too right she is!” the chubby-faced girl corroborated Hilary’s statement.

Mary-Lou was down on her like a shot. “Ruth Barnes! You know as well as I do that that piece of slang was put on the Index last term. It’s just as well our dormitory pree hasn’t turned up yet! Who is she, by the way?”

A joyful chorus informed her. “You are!”

For once, the wind was taken out of Mary-Lou’s sails. “*I am?*” she asked blankly. “Are you *sure?*”

“Well, look at you,” Clare said. “You’ve got the big cubicle with the corner window and special light and all. Why did you think you were there?”

“So I have! It never dawned on me. How—how *awful!* The Head never said anything when I went to report. Are you *certain?*”

“Absolutely,” Barbara Chester responded. “We aren’t trying to pull your leg if that’s what you’re thinking. You really are dormy prefect in Cornflower.”

“Oh, my goodness gracious me!” Mary-Lou thought it over while the rest watched her. Suddenly she woke up. “We must have wasted at *least* ten minutes! Come on! We’re going to be frightfully late for prep! Scram, the lot of you!” And she headed the rush for the bathrooms.

The rest followed her at top-speed and, with just a little luck, since Miss Wilmot rang the bell three minutes late, even Lesley Malcolm, the last of them, contrived to be in the formroom in time. Thereafter, for two hours they worked solidly. Preparation time at the Chalet School was always strictly limited. Any work not done during the proper hours had to be left undone, and as mistresses invariably wanted to know why, it had to be a good reason before it was excused.

As a result, no one wasted any time if she could help it.

Mary-Lou, looking round when they were all at work, saw that Jessica Wayne was present, seated somewhere about the middle of the room. She looked as black as ever, but she worked like the rest, whatever her standard of work might have been.

Halfway through preparation, the door opened and Miss o’Ryan, the history mistress and form mistress, for this year, of VB, walked in. “One moment, girls,” she said. “It’s Mary-Lou I want. Welcome back, Mary-Lou. Hope you left everyone well at home?”

“Quite all right, thank you,” Mary-Lou replied very properly, not to say stiltedly since two months of holiday had helped her to forget a certain amount of German, never her strongest

point.

“Good! Well, what I really came to tell you is that you are form prefect this year.”

“Me?” Mary-Lou looked blank.

“Why not?” Miss o’Ryan was at her serenest. “Yes; you were elected unanimously. Your second in command is Vi Lucy. That’s all. Thank you, girls. You may sit down now and go on with your work.”

She went out and VB were left to return to their work, which they promptly did. Even Mary-Lou, once they were alone again, pushed the promotion to the back of her mind and concentrated with all her force on the Virgil which had to be ready for next day’s lesson. She thanked her stars that not only had Verity seen to it that all her new textbooks were put into her desk, but that she had also kept her “sister-by-marriage’s” prep-book up to date.

Virgil was easily disposed of. So was the passage set for paraphrasing. But when she looked at the algebra, the newly-appointed form prefect only just restrained a groan. Miss Wilmot had begun the term by teaching a new rule and Mary-Lou could do nothing with the examples set for homework. She put the book to one side and turned to see what the geography was.

“South America!” she noted gleefully. “Oh, good! I’ve never done it except very generally when I was a kid in the Third—one of ’em—and I’ve always wanted to know more about it in detail. Let’s see what Verity’s put down. H’m! Climate, relief and population. I know something about all that already. Where are my synthetic maps?”

She fished out textbook, atlas and folder of synthetic maps and set to work. Five minutes later, she glanced round the form and saw at once that Jessica Wayne seemed to be in difficulties. She was staring at her maps with a hopeless expression. It was quite obvious that she had no idea how to use them. The form prefect might always give a little help when it was absolutely necessary. Mary-Lou set her work on one side, got up from her desk and went quietly across to the new girl—the only one for VB this term, since most of the others belonged to the Middle or Junior school.

“Haven’t you used them before?” she asked her in low tones, remembering to speak in German.

Jessica looked at her blankly. It was clear that she had not understood one word of what the form prefect had said. Mary-Lou guessed this and repeated her query in English first and then in German, adding in her own tongue, “It’s hard luck, but we’ve all got to try to learn, Jessica, and we all have a sticky time at the beginning. Tell me what’s wrong here and I’ll try to explain. If I can’t help you myself, you may go along to the staffroom and ask Miss Moore, but I’ll do what I can first.”

“Don’t understand a thing about it,” Jessica muttered in English.

“Try it in German. Say, ‘Ich verstehe nicht,’” Mary-Lou directed her.

Jessica gave her a glare; but evidently Matron’s dressing-down earlier on had done her some good, for she condescended to repeat the words. Though whether, ‘Eek furstayer neek’ would have appealed to any German as anything like his own tongue, is doubtful. However, it *was* an attempt and Mary-Lou, self-assured young person as she was, felt that she had better leave it at that.

She pointed to the maps and said in slow, distinct German, “Now I will show you how to use them.” And did so with a clarity that left her pupil in no doubt what to do. Ten minutes later, the form prefect was back at her own work and Jessica was actually busy with the maps

and minus the scowl she had worn all the time since she had met the rest of the school on the platform of the Paris station.

Vi Lucy, glancing up from her algebra, saw and heard enough of the little episode to tell her exactly what was going on and reddened to the tips of her pretty ears as she remembered how she herself had given up the new girl very quickly, remarking to Hilary Bennett, “Oh, well, if she *wants* to stew in her own juice, let her! I’ve quite enough to worry me without doing sheepdog and running round after someone who can’t even give you a decent ‘thank you’ when you try to help her out!”

“But that’s Mary-Lou,” Vi thought as she read the question through and tried to decide how to set the sum out. “I know one thing! In two years’ time when we’ll all be seventeenish, our Head Girl’s going to be Mary-Lou Trelawney or I’ll eat my hat!”

The chiming of the half-hour by the great school clock recalled her to algebra and she dropped Mary-Lou and all her works and pitched in at the problem. Nineteen o’clock brought their release from work and the building, which had been more or less silent for the past two hours, suddenly hummed with noise as the girls collected their work and put it away, well aware that if they had not finished by this time, they could do nothing more about it.

Mary-Lou was saved from worry, thanks to not being able to tackle the algebra. She had finished everything else and was comfortably assured that her Latin and geography were as ready as she could make them and her paraphrasing well up to standard.

Between Abendessen, as they called supper, and prep, there was a bare ten minutes—just enough for the girls to put everything away and wash their hands. Hilary Bennett, who had a bad habit of running her fingers through her ruddy brown curls when she was puzzled, looked as if she had been through a cyclone and had to fly to comb her hair back into order. Lesley Malcolm’s fountain-pen had spat ink all over her fingers and she had to rush upstairs and see what hot water and pumice-stone would do for them. Apart from that, most of VB had time for a few words in their commonroom.

After the evening meal, they had Prayers, the Protestants going to Hall and the Catholics remaining in the Speisesaal, once it had been cleared. Prayers over, they might amuse themselves as they chose—all except the Juniors who were marched off to bed.

In the Senior commonroom, Mary-Lou and her particular set of friends who were known throughout the school as The Gang, gathered together in one corner. They had a good deal to discuss and the others had a piece of news they were anxious to tell her themselves. Indeed, so anxious were they to be first with it, that Vi and two or three others had sat through Abendessen in an agony of apprehension lest someone else should get in first. However, Hilary Wilson, having served the soup with which the meal began, made an amiable remark about possible expeditions that term and this had kept the conversation on hopes for the future, alternated with reminiscences of past trips, so the danger was averted.

Mary-Lou sat down in a wicker-chair and looked round the rest with a beaming smile. “Well, folks, I’m glad to be back and seeing all your dear, ugly old mugs!” she announced serenely.

“We’re glad to have you,” Lesley told her, ignoring her friendly insult. “We’ve miles of news for you!”

“Don’t lets tell her straight off!” cried Prunella Davidson. “Lets make her guess first.”

“She’ll never guess if she tries till Doomsday,” Vi declared. “Still, we might let her have a shot or two. Get on with it, Mary-Lou. There’s been an enormous change for the school. What do you think it is?”

Mary-Lou gasped, “That’s a nice shot to sling at anyone,” she remarked plaintively. “How on earth can I guess if I don’t know what it’s in connection with?”

They looked at each other. Then Ruth Barnes said cautiously, “We-ell, it’s connected with —”

“Be careful, Ruth!” two or three voices exclaimed together.

“I *am* being careful,” Ruth returned with dignity. “O.K. It’s connected with the—er—*arrangements* of the school.”

Mary-Lou stared. “What?” she exclaimed. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“Just what I said,” Ruth replied calmly.

“‘The arrangements of the school’,” Mary-Lou repeated incredulously. “Do you mean—oh, but you can’t possibly! That would be ghastly!” In her agitation, she had dropped into English.

“Can’t mean—what?” Barbara Chester demanded.

“Can’t mean that the houses are to belong to Seniors, Middles and Juniors instead of being all mixed up,” was her none too lucid explanation. ^[2]“Aunt Joey told me once that that was how they started in the Dark Ages when the school was in Tirol. But we haven’t done that for aeons and I don’t somehow see us going back to it, either. It wouldn’t be at all a good idea!”

[2] *Jo of the Chalet School.*

“Oh, no! It’s nothing like that, so keep calm!” Vi assured her.

“Are the different Houses to be handed over to their own special part of the building and shut off, so to speak?”

“No—though it would be awfully decent if we could,” Hilary said.

The door opened at this point and Josette Russell, the last Fifth Form member of the Gang, shot in. She came straight up to them to demand eagerly, “Have you told her yet? The Head had a letter from Mummy with piles of messages for me and I had to wait while she read them out to me. I do wish Mummy would write direct to me and not just send messages through someone else.”

“We haven’t told her a thing yet,” Barbara said soothingly. “There hasn’t been time. We told her to have a shot, but she’s got nowhere near it yet. You’re just in time to see the effect on her when she hears.”

“Yes—*when!*” Mary-Lou remarked. “So far, I haven’t got much sense out of any of you. What *is* this wonderful surprise?”

“Well, you know the finishing branch at Welsen?” Hilary began.

“Of course I do! Don’t be such an ass! Clem and the rest of that crowd are there now and how we’re going to manage with only kids like Betsy and Katharine and Carola for prefects, I just don’t know!” Mary-Lou said promptly.

Vi laughed. “Don’t you worry. I’ll bet that’s been said about every lot of fresh prees at the beginning of the year. Betsy and Co will manage all right. Why not? After all,” she added with a recollection of her own sudden thought during prep, “It’s not so very long now before *our* lot will be the prees. Have you ever thought of that, any of you? We’re all fifteen or thereabouts now. In two years’ time we’ll be seventeen and in the Sixth—bound to be. And that means that some of us, at any rate, will be prees. And then,” her voice became plaintive, “we’ll be having kids like the Maynard triplets and Isabel Drew and Connie Winter all wondering how the school will survive with just us at the head of things.”

“Heavens! I hadn’t given it a thought!” Hilary exclaimed. “You’re right, of course, Vi. Isn’t it *ageing* when you come to think of it?”

Lesley brought them back to the original topic. “You give what’ll happen in two years’ time a rest and concentrate on *now!*” she ordered. “Mary-Lou is still in the dark and she ought to know pronto. In fact, I’ll relieve her mind myself and tell her. Mary-Lou, the school’s going to use the Welsen place—Unter-die-Kiefern—as a kind of hostel for visitors with parts for convalescents and they’ve bought that Gasthaus of Herr Ritter’s for Welsen. You know the one—between here and the Elstobs’ place.”

“And that’s not all,” Josette put in. “We’re to share staff. Their Miss Norton left last term to be married, and the Head and our Miss Derwent are taking on their English. And Mdlle. Berné is going to take over some of the Junior French again and they’ll have Mdlle. from here for needlework. In fact,” she wound up, “as far as I can see, we’re going to be more or less like one school.”

She paused, breathless, and the Gang once more regarded their leader with pleased expectancy. They expected her to be completely floored by this. But, as Vi said later when she was discussing the affair with her cousin, Barbara Chester, Mary-Lou never did take things as you would expect. It is true that her eyes became blue saucers and she gave a tiny gasp; but the next moment she was looking her usual self and saying, “Not really? Well, jolly good egg! That’s all I’ve got to say!”

“We’re to have all games on our fields,” Vi bubbled, now that the great secret was out. “They’re to use our gym, too. We go to Welsen—bother! the new place, I mean!—for science and Bill’s taking it as she always used to. We’ve had one lesson already and she’s just the same as ever.”

Mary-Lou was silent. Then she said, “I see. So that’s what they’re going to do, is it? Not half a bad scheme. But tell me this, someone! Are we all one school again?”

“Of course we aren’t!” This was Ruth Barnes. “Where would be the point of having our own prees if we were? Julie and Clem and all that crowd would just have carried on as before. We’re quite separate, but it does mean that we shall be seeing them practically every day and we shall get to know the outsiders—I mean the girls who come from other schools—lots better than we have done.”

“Good! I was feeling rather peeved about Clem, anyhow. And I suppose you were the same about Julie, Vi?”

“Well, I was, rather. Julie isn’t too bad—for an eldest sister. She’s a bit stuffy in some ways; but she’s awfully decent in others. Yes; it’ll make school a good deal more attractive to know that she’s not half-a-mile away from me if I want her.”

“Same for Verity and me with Clem,” Mary-Lou said.

Vi nodded. “Julie was the limit last year as Head Girl. If she ever did catch me out, she jumped on me twice as hard as on other people—because we’re sisters, I suppose. But all the same, she was jolly useful to have around. Betsy’s a sport and all that; but Julie’s practically grown-up now and it makes an awful lot of difference in some ways.”

“I suppose it does.” It was Verity-Anne’s small silvery voice that spoke and one or two people jumped. Verity-Anne frequently had this effect on the rest. She was a silent person on the whole but, as they all agreed, when she *did* talk, what she had to say was generally full of common sense. She and Mary-Lou were diametric opposites. Mary-Lou was big and sturdy; Verity-Anne was tiny and almost elfin. Mary-Lou could talk “even-on,” to quote Clare Kennedy; Verity-Anne spoke very little. Mary-Lou was a very wideawake person; Verity-

Anne was a recognised “mooner.” Even in looks, though both were fair, it was a totally different fairness and while everyone agreed that Verity-Anne was exceedingly pretty, Mary-Lou was described by her bluntly truthful friends as the kind that would “pass with a shove.”

They were very fond of one another and, if Mary-Lou of the protective nature saved Verity-Anne endless trouble there could be no doubt that Verity-Anne’s thoughtfulness kept her “sister’s” feet well on the ground. Mary-Lou was apt to do first and think after.

Hillary now favoured Verity-Anne with a broad grin as she said, “I should think it might. Not having any sisters of my own, I can’t speak from experience. But I say, Mary-Lou—”

The ringing of the bell cut short her sentence. The Seniors, having verified the fact that it really was nine o’clock, cleared away their possessions and saw that the room was tidy before they formed into a decorous line and marched off upstairs. But not before Mary-Lou had managed to say in meditative tones, “So *that’s* the latest about Welsen? Well, well!”

Chapter III

INTRODUCING JOEY

It was Saturday morning and Mary-Lou was complacently remembering that she, at any rate, would have no mending to do that morning. The rest were almost certain to find tiny holes in their stockings or odd buttons missing from their blouses. *She* having arrived so late, could smile benignly at them while she got on with letters or her library-book. She had come safely through Friday's work, Miss Wilmot, the maths. mistress, having offered her a couple of periods of coaching to make up what she had missed. Mary-Lou had no intention of falling behind the rest of her form.

"It's odd," she ruminated as she brushed out her long hair, "that even a week can make such a difference to your clothes." She laid down the brush and picked up her comb, ready to part the mass right across her head from back to front. Suddenly, she paused and her blue eyes lit up with mischief. "I'm a Senior now. Seniors don't wear two pigtails. I'll plait it in one and give the rest a shock!"

She combed it straight back and then set to work. After two or three attempts, she finally managed it. Then she looked gravely at her reflection. The heavy hair was loosely drawn back in front by this time and dipped in a long sweep across the broad, square brow. The general effect was certainly more grown-up than her former coiffure. She had tied one big bow at the end of the thick rope and the other in a perky bow at the nape of her neck. She favoured broad ribbons and the enormous crimson bow formed a pleasant background to her face. She nodded with satisfaction.

"Well, I do manage to look a shade more grown-up!" she giggled to herself. "What a shock for everyone else! Why *didn't* I think of doing it before I came back?" She turned grave as the answer came to her. "On the whole, I think I'm glad I didn't do it before Gran died, at any rate. She did so love my Kenwigses!"

She put her brush and comb away, and turned to tidying her cubicle. Finally, she knelt to say her prayers and that done, set off from sheer force of habit to see what she could do for Verity-Anne. She had just pulled back the front curtain when she remembered that Matron had decided that the young lady really must learn to hurry herself a little and had sent her to Violet dormitory. Mary-Lou had heard all about it in a letter Verity-Anne had written home on the first Sunday. Her "sister" had read through two pages of bitter complaint and had chuckled over it. All the same, she frowned a little to herself.

"Oh dear!" she thought. "I don't know how she's ever going to manage. She's so accustomed to me being around to give an eye to her. I do wish Matey hadn't taken it into her head to do this! She'll *never* be on time!"

She glanced round her little domain. Everything was according to Matron's rule. Mary-Lou had been well-trained in tidiness from her earliest days. There was nothing more to be done there. She remembered her latest effort to add to the general gaiety and decided to go for a short promenade before the bell rang for leaving dormitories. She must be in Cornflower then, to make sure that no one had omitted any of the duties expected of them; but she had five minutes in which to startle the natives. She tossed up her curtains and strolled forth almost into the arms of Vi and Hilary who stared at her with shrieks of amazement.

“Well, why are you staring like that?” she asked amiably. “Have I suddenly developed green spots in the night, or what?”

Hilary opened her lips to speak, but Vi suddenly clapped her hand across her friend’s mouth and scowled ferociously at her. Only then did Mary-Lou remember that Matron had put the entire dormitory into silence the night before, thanks to a small riot during changing before prep. She forgot that she was dormitory prefect and led the way downstairs, chuckling to herself the whole way. In the commonroom, she faced on the pair who had fled after her and demanded to know the reason for their yells.

“Your hair!” Vi gasped. “You’ve done away with your Kenwigses!”

Mary-Lou giggled again. “How d’you like the general effect? Quite nifty, I thought, myself.”

“It adds years to your looks,” Hilary said soberly. “You really do look like a Senior now, Mary-Lou. Oh dear! There are times when I wish one didn’t have to grow up! I’m quite happy as I am.”

“Don’t be soppy!” Vi said austere. “It’s got to come and whining over it won’t keep it off. The thing to do is to look forward to it and try to make our grown-up lives as decent as we can.”

“Thus said the Preacher!” mocked Lesley Malcolm, coming to join them. “What have you been doing with yourself, Mary-Lou? You look different—Oh, I see!” She eyed the two huge bows thoughtfully, then whisked round and vanished.

“What’s bitten her?” Mary-Lou demanded.

“You growing up—or beginning to,” Hilary said. “Lesley’s gone to do something about it on her own account. Well, my hair’s bobbed and it’s going to *stay* bobbed, so I can’t make any changes. What about you, Vi? Going to change from two tails of curls into one?”

“I might try doing it in a pony-tail,” Vi said consideringly. Then she gurgled. “Can’t you just hear everyone concerned if I *did*?”

“You try it on and see how Matey takes it!” Mary-Lou retorted. “I’ll stand by and pick up the pieces when she’s finished with you,” she added kindly.

Vi thought not. But she did dash off to the nearest Splashery and return from it with the thick bronzy curls that never grew much below her shoulders clasped at the nape of her neck with one slide instead of being divided into two.

There was no doubt about it; Mary-Lou had started a new fashion in VB, though nothing had been further from her thoughts than that. Lesley spread the news of their leader’s latest when she reached the dormitory, risking awful penalties if Matron caught her breaking the silence like that. As a result, the rest decided that they must do something about it, and everyone with long hair turned up at Frühstück that morning with one plait or tail, while the bobbed-hair people eyed them enviously and made up their minds to write home for permission to grow their hair. People in the other dormitories had to leave it for the moment; but when the school went in for letter-writing, mending and any odd prep, Peggy Adams, on duty in VB, nearly gasped aloud at the very grown-up rows that greeted her eyes when she went to them.

The person who got the worst shock, however, was Verity-Anne. Her own pale-gold locks were parted in the middle and tied above her ears with bows of ribbon. With her elfin appearance, she looked little more than twelve or so. She had known nothing about the new departure until she dashed into the commonroom just as the bell was ringing for Frühstück and not even rules could keep her from voicing her surprise.

“Mary-Lou! Whatever have you done with your Kenwigses? What *will* Mother say?”

“No talking there!” said Nan Herbert, the prefect on duty. “Verity-Anne, get into line and be quiet. The bell’s rung.”

Verity-Anne did as she was told, but her eyes never left Mary-Lou’s shining head and the moment Grace had been said and they were all setting to work on the milky coffee and rolls with honey or jam which formed their usual early meal, she leaned across Prunella Davidson to ask eagerly, “Mary-Lou! Whatever made you do it?”

Mary-Lou grinned. “It started with me suddenly realising that I really am a Senior now. Seniors don’t have Kenwigses. All very well when you’re just a kid of a Middle. But when you’re VB, it’s not the done thing. And then I knew it would be a shock to you all and I just couldn’t resist it. It was, too,” she added. “I only wish some of you could have seen your faces when you first clapped eyes on me this morning! It was worth all the trouble!”

Those near enough to hear her, joined in her chuckles; but Gwen Parry, another ornament of VB, observed thoughtfully, “I suppose you’re right about Seniors not having Kenwigses, though I hadn’t thought about it. I must do something with my own mop as soon as I can.”

“I know I’m right,” Mary-Lou said, conceitedly, it must be confessed.

Gwen had her full share of mischief and she proceeded to take the wind out of Mary-Lou’s sails. That young woman must not be allowed to get away with this sort of thing as easily as all that.

“Yes,” she nodded, “you *are* right. And there’s another thing. Now you’re a Senior, we ought to drop the ‘Lou’ at the end of your name. Make you plain Mary Trelawney, I mean. ‘Mary-Lou’ is really just a baby-name, isn’t it?”

There was an explosion round the table at this. Mary-Lou’s face was a study. However, she quickly recovered herself. “Well, just you try it on! I’m Mary-Lou and I’m *staying* Mary-Lou! If you want to change it at all, you can make Mary-Louise out of it. That’s my proper name. I don’t mind that, but call me plain ‘Mary’ and you may whistle for any answer you’ll get!”

“No change there, my dear!” Zena Winslow, who was Gwen’s great friend and sat next to her at table, murmured. “Anyone who hopes to catch our Mary-Lou out will have to get up *very* early in the morning. In fact, I’d advise them not to go to bed at all. And even then, I doubt if you’ll do it!” Gwen chuckled. “She rose all right, and that was what I was after. Did you see her face, Zena? ‘Floored’ wasn’t the word for it!”

The Head caused an interruption here. She had noted the changes of coiffure among VB with amusement and her eyes danced with laughter as she heard those of the staff who faced down the room commenting on the changes, but she had said nothing. Besides, she had news to impart that, she shrewdly guessed, would turn their thoughts away from the latest vagaries of VB. At this point, she rang her bell sharply and the lively chatter round the tables ceased at once. Every girl turned to look up at the staff table. Miss Annersley rose from her seat and her beautiful voice sounded to the far end of the room.

“Girls! I understand that our St. Mildred branch as we now call our finishing school, has challenged the lacrosse and netball teams for this afternoon. The matches will begin at fourteen o’clock and Mittagessen will be at half-past twelve in order to give you time to change and be ready for them. After the matches, St. Mildred’s will have Kaffee und Kuchen with us before returning to their own house. From eighteen onwards there will be dancing and games in Hall for all those not otherwise engaged. Prayers will be after Abendessen as usual and Abendessen at half-past twenty. This morning will be occupied as usual till ten-thirty.

After that, you may do as you please until twelve-fifteen—within reason, of course. That is all. You may go on with your meal now.”

She sat down again and the chatter at VB table left Mary-Lou’s innovation in hair-dressing and turned on the two matches.

“Why on earth couldn’t they let us have their challenges sooner?” Lesley Malcolm demanded as she scraped out the honey-jar nearest her. “Oh, I know we’ve had our usual practices this week, but we still don’t know who’s in the teams. We can’t possibly be in fighting trim, you know. We’ve never played together.”

“The same applies to them, doesn’t it?” Vi Lucy asked. “I’ll bet Burnie and the Games committee have it all fixed up by this time. More honey, Jessica? Pass the pot from your end, please, Prunella. Ours is empty.”

Jessica accepted the honey with a muttered, “Thank you.” She came to meals nowadays without a fuss, but she sat silent throughout and so far no one had got much talk from her. Mary-Lou signed to Ursula Vidler, sitting at the other side of the new girl to pass up her cup for more coffee and Catriona Watson, just opposite, pushed over the plate of sugar slabs; but they took no further notice of her. This was what Jessica had asked for herself but now that she had it, she did not like it. The rest were full of jokes and chatter, but she stayed outside. She had only herself to thank for it, since she had asked to be let alone whenever anyone had tried to draw her into their conversation, but that did not seem to make it any pleasanter. She scowled to herself and wished for about the thousandth time that she had never been sent to this school—or any other, for that matter!

When the meal ended, the girls hurried to pile their cups and plates on one or other of the big service trolleys with their wire sides which were pulled up when the trolley was fully loaded and then left for the maids to wheel to the kitchens. Then they all went upstairs to make their beds, tidy their cubicles and hunt out mending. The only two in VB who had no mending were Prunella Davidson, who never let anything go, and Mary-Lou. Prunella said that if you stitched on a button or mended a tiny hole the first chance you had, it saved you a lot of trouble on Saturday mornings and it was a rare thing for her to have to spend any of the time sewing.

Jessica had none either, as it happened. She was not a girl who was hard on her clothes. She finished her cubicle work and then left the dormitory—she was in Leafy—and went out to the garden where already two or three of the others were strolling about in the sunshine. Mary-Lou arrived about three minutes later. She strolled down the drive, taking note of the broad borders where autumn flowers made a brave show. The gate clicked and she looked up. Coming up the drive was a tall, dark person with “earphones” of black hair coiled at either side of a deep straight fringe that crossed her broad brow.

Mary-Lou simply forgot the borders. She made a beeline for the lady and flung herself on her, shrieking, “Aunt Joey! Oh, Aunt Joey how lovely to see you again! I simply can *not* get accustomed to you not being at Plas Gwyn during the hols! I’ve a letter and a huge parcel for you from Gwensi Howell, by the way. When shall I give it to you?”

The newcomer laughed as she took the big, bonny girl by the shoulders and held her away to scan the fresh face with eyes like black pansies. “You ought to have got accustomed to it by this time, my lamb! Well, I’m glad to see you—and very glad to meet you like this. You’re the one I came over to see. Scoot in and ask if you may come over to me for the afternoon, will you? Beth’s coming over for the match and she’s going back with Welsen—I mean St. Mildred’s; I *can’t* remember!—to spend the evening. I shall be alone with the babies and

Mike. We sent Charles to school with Stephen this term, you know. He's eight, now, and it was high time he went. All the same, it does mean that I've only the babies and Mike for company when your Uncle Jack's out and Beth's off somewhere. I can do with a little company now and then. Besides," she added, "I want to hear all about Howells and Verity—Anne couldn't tell me much—or wouldn't."

"It's couldn't. We were in Yorkshire when—when things happened. They wired for us and Dad met us at York with the car. Gran kept asking for me, you see. And anyhow, Verity had to get her things together and pack. Aunt Madge collected everything and took her off to the Round House, and she only came over to inquire."

"So she told me. Mary-Lou, what is the meaning of *this*?" Joey felt that it would be better to change the subject and her hand had gone round Mary-Lou's shoulders to grasp the thick plait and give it a gentle tug.

Once more, Mary-Lou gave her explanation. "I'm a Senior now and I thought I'd best say goodbye to my Kenwigses. I only decided this morning. You ought to have seen the others' faces when they first laid eyes on me!" she added with an irrepressible chuckle.

"I can guess. Much the same as when *I* turned up at school one Summer term, having begun to grow my hair during the holidays." Joey Maynard gave a gurgle as she remembered. "What a time I had of it! It was never tidy for the first term and it was worse when I began to put it up. I used to carry hairpins about with me and shove them in when I felt a tail coming loose. The record was forty-nine," she added meditatively.^[3]

[3] *The New House at the Chalet School.*

Mary-Lou broke into peals of laughter. "Aunt Joey! How simply awful! You must have looked like a porcupine!"

"No-o; not quite. But I did resemble him in one way," Joey said solemnly. "I wasn't fretful, but I did shed my quills—or hairpins—wherever I went. My hair cost me a small fortune that term. Well, off you go and ask if you may come. I haven't all day to stand nattering here if you have!"

Mary-Lou nodded and went off and Mrs. Maynard sauntered up the drive after her. At the top, she met Jessica. She stopped short and greeted the girl.

"Hello! You're a new girl. Now which are you? By the way, I'm Mrs. Maynard who lives next door at Freudesheim. I was Joey Bettany. I'm telling you," she went on calmly while the stunned Jessica gaped at her, "because you're bound to hear of me and my doings. From all I can gather, those wretched girls are in the process of turning me into a legend. Besides, my eldest three are here now—the Maynard triplets. The girls call them 'The Trips' when I'm nowhere around. You've met them, of course?"

Jessica stood staring at her in silence. She simply did not know how to take this lady who claimed to be the mother of Len, Con and Margot Maynard—she *had* met them, naturally—and yet contrived to appear little older in many ways than Betsy Lucy, the Head Girl.

Joey beamed at her. "Tell me your name won't you?" she said cosily. "I—I'm Jessica Wayne," Jessica gasped.

"Oh, *I* know. I've met your aunt—she's a friend of Katharine Gordon's aunt, isn't she? The artist one, I mean, Miss Gordon—Lucia Gordon."

"I—I think I've seen her," Jessica faltered. By this time, she wasn't sure whether she was on her head or her heels. Joey Maynard often did have that effect on people who were meeting her for the first time.

She laughed now, a sweet, mellow laugh that matched the golden notes of her voice to a nicety. "I'm sure you have! Well, Jessica, I'm not going to ask you how you like school at this date. It's far too soon. But I will at the end of term. I can guess already what answer you'll have for me. I was at the school for years myself, first as a pupil; then helping out with the teaching. I may be a married woman now and the proud mamma of a long family, but I've never really left in one sense. I'm part of it, even now, and so you'll find before very long. I haven't been able to run over before because I've been hard at it, first getting the girls ready for school and then seeing to the sending off of my two eldest boys. Now they've all gone and that excitement is over, you'll be seeing me quite often. You must come to Freudesheim some day and see the babies. Here comes Mary-Lou. You've been long enough about it, my lass. What's the verdict?"

"Sorry I've been such ages!" panted Mary-Lou, "but Katt Gordon got hold of me to tell me I'm in the Netball team. We're playing St. Mildred's this afternoon, Aunt Joey, but I can come after that. I'll have to wash and change first, but I can be with you around sixteen o'clock if that'll do."

"Excellently well. Then that's all I came for. I'll expect you as near sixteen as you can make it. Oh, and don't bring Verity. She'll do very well with the others and I want you to myself today. O.K.?"

"Of course, if you say so. I say, Aunt Joey, she's in another dormy this term. Did you know?"

"Seeing that I strongly advised it—yes!" Joey retorted. "Verity's fifteen now and she's got to learn to stand on her own feet some time. She'll never do it younger."

"It's hard lines on her," Mary-Lou sighed.

"Rubbish! She can't expect to have you doing sheepdog to her all her life. It's kinder to make the break while she's still a kid than to have to do it later on when you're both grown-up. She won't hurt."

"She's not very happy about it just now, however," Mary-Lou told her.

"She'll get accustomed to it," Jo said brutally. "See you at sixteen or thereabouts, then!" And she waved gaily to the pair of them and turned to run down the drive like any schoolgirl.

Mary-Lou looked after her with a deep sigh. "Once Aunt Joey says a thing's so, it's jolly well so," she remarked to the silent Jessica. "There's the bell for Prayers. We'd better go in or we'll be late and then, my dear, I warn you we shan't be at all popular. Punctuality may be the politeness of princes, but it's jolly well the whole duty of girls at the Chalet School."

Chapter IV
CHARGE FOR MARY-LOU

Mary-Lou was once more examining herself in the mirror. She had slipped into the first frock that came handy after she had washed her face and hands and replaited her hair which had stood in much need of it after the strenuous netball match just ended. She nodded at her reflection in a satisfied way, shut down the lid of the bureau, picked up her blazer and departed to seek someone to whom she could report before going off nextdoor to Freudesheim.

In the corridor, she met Matron. That lady glanced at her approvingly. Mary-Lou fresh from tidying always looked especially clean and fresh. However, she said nothing, but waited for the girl to speak.

"Please, Matron, I'm reporting to you that I'm going to Kaffee und Kuchen with Mrs. Maynard," Mary-Lou said in her most proper way.

Matron nodded. "That will be all right. Have you a clean handkerchief? Good! And you'd better take your raincoat with you. According to the radio, we're to have showers this evening. Even the short cut through the gardens won't save you from a soaking in a blazer if *that* is correct. Call in at the Splashery and get it. I've no time to bother with people coming down with colds through carelessness this early in the term."

"Yes, Matron," Mary-Lou, still on her best behaviour, replied primly.

"That's all, then. Off you go! Give my love to Mrs. Maynard and say I'll be in some time tomorrow—probably in the afternoon.

"Yes, I will, Matron, and thank you." Mary-Lou turned and made off down the corridor, her long, thick pigtail swaying gaily down her back. Matron looked after her and laughed to herself.

"The first sign of being a Senior! The young monkey's set a fashion, too, as she very well knew she would. What a shock it was to see those youngsters turning up to Mittagessen with their hair à la Senior! Ah, well, it had to come, I suppose. Before we know where we are, Joey's trio will be at it!" Matron sighed, then laughed at herself and continued on her way to San. where she had two of the Juniors down with bilious attacks, the direct result of "midnighting" the night before. Girls must grow up and their elders might regret it in some ways, but midnighting was midnighting and to be dealt with severely and in the way that Matron found proved a very sure deterrent to most folk.

Meanwhile, Mary-Lou was racing down the path which led to the gate Joey Maynard's husband had had cut in the hedge that divided the school grounds from those of Freudesheim and which formed a real short cut. She vaulted over the gate, taking the leap in her stride with an ease that spoke well both for her muscles and the Chalet School training. Once in Freudesheim grounds, she proceeded towards the house in slightly more decorous manner. Joey Maynard was on the look-out for her and as the girl reached the lawn on to which the french windows of the Saal opened, she appeared at them with a welcoming grin.

"Here you are! Well, who won?"

"We did," Mary-Lou replied, following her hostess into the room. "Quite a good match, but we only just got the last goal before Miss o'Ryan blew for Time. Score: seven-six. Not so dusty, was it?"

“What about the lacrosse?” Joey asked as she settled her guest in a chair. “Sit down in this pew and make yourself comfy.”

“The lacrosse was a draw. None of us, either us or them, have had much chance of playing together *or* of practice. The same goes for netball, of course. I don’t think you could say these matches counted.” She sprawled at large with a sigh of bliss. “I do like your chairs, Aunt Joey. At school, even the wickers aren’t like this. You can’t *burrow* into them. Where are Mike and the twins?”

“With the Coadjutor in the nursery. I wanted a meal in peace, so she’s seeing to them and you and I can have ours like ladies and a chance to talk.”

Mary-Lou shot a quickly questioning glance at her, but Joey was pouring out the tea she often had at this hour when she was alone or with English friends, so she held her tongue. Presently, however, when they were both busy, Joey opened out.

“Mary-Lou, I’ve asked you to tea because I want your help.”

“Anything you like,” Mary-Lou said obligingly. “Want me to come over tomorrow afternoon and take charge of the kids while you entertain Matey?”

Joey laughed. “No need; Beth’s taking them off to have tea with Hilary Graves and her daughter. But you’re right in one way. I do want you to take charge of someone—that new girl Jessica Wayne.”

Mary-Lou sat bolt upright. “Jessica Wayne? But Aunt Joey, I don’t think she’ll let me. I don’t know what’s wrong with her and I haven’t really had time to find out, so far, but the only times I’ve tried to help, she’s nearly snapped my nose off. Told me to let her alone *and* all in italics! Oh, I forgot,” she added conscientiously. “She did let me give her a hand with her geog. the other evening. But that’s all. Vi and the rest say that she’s been just the same with them. Goodness knows what’s up with the little ass but no one can get much sense out of her,” she added cheerfully. “I don’t think she’s homesick, by the way.”

Joey looked troubled. “Yes; I was rather afraid of that. I’m sorry for you, Mary-Lou, but I’m still asking you to take it on for me.”

Mary-Lou bit into a creamcake thoughtfully. When she had disposed of the mouthful, “Why me?” she asked.

“Because I think you’re the most likely one to handle it. Vi’s a dear girl, but she hasn’t much patience. The same goes for most of the others. Besides,” Joey added unexpectedly, so far as her visitor was concerned, “they’re all too young to understand.”

Mary-Lou turned eyes like saucers on her. “Come again! Have you forgotten that there are at least five people older than me in the form? Verity’s one, and I quite agree that *she* couldn’t do much about it. But what about Gwen Parry—or Zena Winslow—or Pen Drury?”

Joey shook her head. “I meant what I said. They may be older than you in age but in nothing else. Come off it, Mary-Lou! You know as well as I do that in mind, at any rate, you’re years older than any of the rest of your crew. ^[4]The fruits of spending all your early years with grown-ups, I suppose. I think you’ve got what it’s going to take to make Jessica snap out of her present attitude of mind, and I’m equally certain *they* have not. That’s why I’m asking you to do what you can.”

[4] *Three Go to the Chalet School.*

Mary-Lou made a face. “I don’t know that I exactly want to. When I said I’d do anything to oblige, I thought you meant something to help *you* personally. Anyhow, do you know why the young idiot’s like this?”

“Yes; and I’m more sorry for her than I can say. If I tell you, Mary-Lou, you must promise me to keep it to yourself. I may say that I wouldn’t tell anyone else of your lot. But something’s got to be done and I honestly think you’re the only one to do it—if you will.”

“O.K.; I won’t say a word. I’ll promise you that much, anyhow. I’d like to know just what’s at the bottom of all her fusses. It isn’t only just with us, you know. She’s everlastingly in rows with one or other of the staff—even with Matey. Though how she dare, I just wouldn’t know!”

Joey chuckled. “Neither would I. Even Emerence—and goodness knows she was a firebrand if ever there was one!—soon caved in where Matey was concerned. Do you really mean,” she looked incredulously at Mary-Lou, “that she outfaces *Matey*?”

“Tries it on, anyhow. So far, Matey’s always won. But you know, Aunt Joey, no one’s going to let her get away forever with all the acts she’s been putting on since she came. Sooner or later they’re going to get sick of her; and then what will happen?”

“You can answer that one yourself as well as I can. Her people will be politely requested to remove her—and I’m not going to have it!” Joey said firmly.

“I don’t see how you propose to stop it,” Mary-Lou said pessimistically.

“No; but *I* do!”

Mary-Lou looked at her apprehensively. “What are you getting at?”

“Just what I say. *You’re* going to be my—my reformer.”

“*Me?* But why me?”

“Because she’ll probably take it better from you than anyone else. You’re her own age. You’re a good mixer. And you *have* got a way with you. Now don’t try to contradict me. Whatever you were going to say in the way of denial, it’s simply not true. You lead your own gang by the nose; and well you know it!”

Mary-Lou reddened to the tips of her ears. “Well but, Aunt Joey, she won’t have a thing to do with me—told me to let her alone and go away. How on earth can I do anything for someone who behaves as if I was a leper or something equally obnoxious? It just can’t be done!”

“Oh yes, it can! It’s up to you; *I* can’t tell you what to do. You must work it out your own way. All the same, don’t think I don’t realise that I’ve asked you to take on a very sticky job. I know I have. All the same, it’s got to be done.”

“Why don’t you take it on yourself?” Mary-Lou demanded. “Say what you like, there’s no one can beat you when it comes to understanding people and getting right into their skins. I suppose,” she went on thoughtfully, “that’s how you can write your books with such *alive* people.”

“There are two good reasons why I can’t,” Joey said, holding out her hand for the girl’s cup. “Have some more tea and give your great mind to this. The first and by far the most important is that I’m not in school. *I* don’t see Jessica all day and every day. Any help I could give would be more or less spasmodic. I have my own jobs to see to, besides looking after the babies.”

“New book?” Mary-Lou asked eagerly as she took back her cup.

“That’s always one thing, of course.”

“Oh, marvellous! What’s it going to be this time?”

The reply she got was totally unexpected. “I’ve been asked to compile an anthology of less well-known poems for schools.”

“Sapristi!” Mary-Lou had spent part of her summer holidays in a house literally crammed with Edwardian novels, including *The Adventures of Don Q* from which she had lifted this exclamation.

“I’m not sure,” Joey remarked pensively, “but I have an idea that ‘*sapristi*’ is not a word used by well brought-up young ladies. I don’t think I’d use it if I were you. And why the surprise, may I ask? Do you think it’s beyond me?”

“Oh, no! Right up your street, so far as that goes! But somehow I never expected to reach the day when I’d hear that you were tackling a school textbook.”

“You never know what you may come to!” Joey told her with a chuckle. “Anyhow, that’s what I’m doing just now and you’ve no idea what a terrific amount of reading it means! And when you’ve chosen your poems, you’ve got to make as sure as you can that they really are ‘less well-known’ and the right ones for such a book.”

“It sounds as if your plate was full for the moment,” Mary-Lou agreed.

“Oh, it is! But I’ve other reasons for unloading Jessica and her troubles on to you. The main one really is what I said—that you’re constantly with her and will have far more chances than I ever should of trying to help her put things right.”

Mary-Lou considered this. “Aunt Joey, can you tell me *why* she’s come to school with such a—*grouch* on her?” she asked finally.

“Merciful Heavens! Where are you picking up your expressions just now? *That* one dates back to the first World War or I’m much mistaken!”

“Oh, I read it somewhere,” Mary-Lou said airily. “Go on, Aunt Joey. *Tell* me if you know. I’m buying no pigs in pokes, I may tell you!” she added.

“I know all right. I’ll tell you; but it’s in confidence. O.K.?”

“Quite O.K. I won’t mention it to a soul.”

“Very well, then. Take another cake and don’t interrupt more than you can help.”

Her guest helped herself to a luscious pastry covered with nuts and cream, and bit into it. While she was munching, Joey began her story.

“I had this yarn from Katharine Gordon’s aunt—the one she calls Aunt Luce^[5]. It was really owing to her that Jessica came to us at all,” said Joey who, for all her long family, was still apt to identify herself with the school. “Jessica’s mother is a great friend of hers. When Jessica’s father was killed in an accident, the kid was only two and they had no relations apart from each other. Naturally, Mrs. Wayne clung to her baby girl. She was very young, by the way—you may as well understand everything at once—only nineteen when Jessica was born, and she did everything with her girl. When Jessica was old enough to leave her Kindergarten school and go to a decent girls’ school, Mrs. Wayne moved to a town on the south coast where there was a big boarding-school that takes a certain number of day-boarders as well, so that they need not be parted for a whole term at a time. In fact until two years ago, Jessica was the one aim and object of her life. Then her bank manager, with whom she had become friendly, asked her to marry him.”

[5] *The Wrong Chalet School.*

Joey paused here and Mary-Lou whistled. “And Jessica, I suppose, loathed it?”

“No; not exactly. If he had been alone, I don’t suppose it would have made so very much difference to her. Of course, she couldn’t have come first all the time with her mother as she had done; but I think she might have settled down to the new state of things better. But Mr. Sefton was *not* alone. He was a widower with one girl a year or so younger than Jessica

herself. —No; let me go on, Mary-Lou. You can comment when I've finished.— If Rosamund Sefton had been just another schoolgirl like herself, even *then* I think Jessica would have got over it after the first. But she isn't, poor little soul! There's something wrong with her spine and she can't walk. They all say the same thing. Rosamund may live to be an old woman, but she will never be able to walk or move except in her invalid chair."

"How simply dreadful!" Mary-Lou's eyes were shining with pity.

"Yes; isn't it? Miss Gordon told me that she's often wondered if Rosamund was one reason for Mrs. Wayne marrying Mr. Sefton. She was so sorry for Rosamund and they—the Seftons, I mean—had only housekeepers of various sorts to see to things. But it wasn't the *only* reason, of course. But once they were all settled in Mr. Sefton's house which was outside the town, she did give a good deal of her time to her stepdaughter and Jessica found that from being her mother's one thought, she had to share and take turns with Rosamund and she hated it."

Mary-Lou looked serious. "But Aunt Joey, wasn't she sorry for Rosamund? After all, she could enjoy life with games and dancing and things like that and she had school as well. But Rosamund must have had precious little."

"Yes; but unfortunately, the Sefton house was about ten miles out of the town and they decided that the daily journey would be much too tiring for her. So they arranged for her to weekly-board and come home only at the weekends. That was two years ago, by the way—the term after the wedding. Jessica went off half-cocked and decided that they wanted to be rid of her as much as possible. She was horribly jealous of Rosamund and because she was Mr. Sefton's girl, she included him in behaviour that Lucia Gordon says was outrageous at times. Finally, she was so unbearable in the house, that two terms ago, they took her away from her school and sent her to another down in Devonshire."

"But," Mary-Lou interrupted, "Wasn't that rather mad? I mean she'd think more than ever that they didn't want her. Why didn't they try letting her go back to being a daily boarder? It might have done the trick."

Joey Maynard's eyebrows went up. She had not expected even Mary-Lou to be so quick to see this. She made no comment, but went on with her story.

"The pity of it is, they couldn't send her away from her own jealousy and unhappiness. She took that with her and, as a result, she behaved so badly that at the end of last term, the Head asked the Seftons to remove her."

"How did they think of sending her to us?" Mary-Lou asked.

"That, I gather, was Miss Gordon's doing. She was spending the week-end with them when the Head's letter arrived from Jessica's last school. Mrs. Sefton was in despair and Lucia Gordon said, 'Why *don't* you send her to the Chalet School in Switzerland?' just like that. She seems to have sung our praises skyhigh and instanced our one and only Emerence as an example of what we could do with naughty girls. Anyhow, Mr. Sefton took a few days off from the bank and came to see the Head and put the whole thing before her. I should add here that he seems to have felt a good deal of sympathy with Jessica; but of course she couldn't be allowed to go on as she had been doing. The long and short of it was that Miss Annersley agreed to take her for this term on trial. If she doesn't improve, then I don't know what will happen. If she does, she'll just stay on here until her schooldays end."

"Yes; I suppose so." Mary-Lou was looking very thoughtful.

Joey looked at her with a very straight look. "Mary-Lou, I mean to see that she *does* improve. I can think of nothing more likely to do her real harm than being sent away at the

end of the term. I think it would fix her in the belief that no one wants her and it doesn't matter how she behaves."

"I—see. But Aunt Joey, how do you think *I* can help her?"

"Dozens of ways!" Jo said promptly. "You can see that she isn't allowed to stand out from the things the rest of you do together. You can give her friendship. Yes; I know that friendship is usually a voluntary affair; but you *can* be chummy with her and try to bring her in among you all. Miss Gordon said she was going to write to Katharine about her and ask her to give the girl a hand, but I don't suppose she's ever remembered to do it."

"Sure she hasn't!" Mary-Lou spoke with her wonted cheerfulness. "Katt says that for once she remembers to do a thing, she forgets at least twenty times. Anyhow, it wouldn't have been much good if she did. Katt's a pree—Head of the Games at that. She couldn't possibly make a fuss of a VB-ite! It isn't the done thing. And it wouldn't help Jessica if she did. Our gang wouldn't worry, but there's plenty of little asses to go round nattering about 'favourites.' It isn't even as if they were cousins or something. She's just Miss Gordon's friend's girl. No; that cat certainly wouldn't jump!"

"I know that. At the same time, Jessica has to be persuaded to snap out of her present mood. I thought of you. I know it's a big thing to ask, but will you do it?"

"I must think." Mary-Lou got up and went to the window at the end of the room whence, on fine days, it was possible to see the Jungfrau. The mists were closing in and, in any case, she was not really looking. Her whole mind was given to this proposition Aunt Joey had put up to her.

Joey wisely left her to herself. She collected the tea things and wheeled the trolley out to the kitchen where Anna, her factotum and mainstay, took them from her. Then she came back to the Saal after she had washed her hands.

As she closed the door behind her, Mary-Lou turned back from the window.

"I wish you hadn't put it up to me like this, Aunt Joey," she said.

"Why?" Joey asked calmly, ignoring the resentment in her voice.

"Because you've made me feel I just can't refuse—and I don't want to take it on. I'm sorry for Jessica and all that, but if I've got to try to get her to come in with us, it's going to spoil a lot of my fun this term. Why can't the Head or one of the staff see to it?"

Again Joey ignored her resentment. Instead, she answered the girl seriously. "Because I very much doubt if any grown-up can do as much for her as you can. I do feel that any help will have to come from people of her own age—at present, at any rate. One term of having your fun spoiled—if it *is*—won't hurt you. It may make all the difference to Jessica."

Mary-Lou turned away again and Joey waited, watching her with more anxiety than she allowed the girl to know. She meant what she said when she told her that help would be most possible to Jessica from her own kind. She would have told no other girl in the Gang what she had told Mary-Lou, for no other girl would have grasped the situation so quickly and so thoroughly. But Mary-Lou had lived entirely with adults for the first ten years of her life and had developed an adult point of view, even at fifteen. Joey felt that she was the best help poor Jessica could have. But it must be given freely and cheerfully, or it would fail at once.

While she watched, Mary-Lou was fighting a battle with herself. Last year, as Head of the Middles, she had had, as she herself expressed it, to watch her step. This year, as a mere member of the lowest form in Senior school, she had intended to enjoy life without too many worries. But first she found that she was dormitory prefect; then she was form prefect; and now Aunt Joey had unloaded Jessica Wayne and her troubles on to her. She knew that if she

did refuse to take it on, Aunt Joey would make no difference with her, whatever she might feel.

“But,” Mary-Lou wailed to herself, “she’ll always feel disappointed in me. And I’ll feel a complete and utter pig for letting her down like that. Oh, *hang!*”

She turned round. While she had been thinking, Joey had reached for her knitting and was now clicking away at a tiny vest. Mary-Lou’s eyes widened. She dropped down on the floor at her hostess’s feet with small regard for her eyes and the proximity of the needles and said incoherently, “O.K.; I’ll take it on. But I shan’t do any good. Only—if *that’s* one of the things you’re going to be busy with—and you’re doing that anthology as well—oh, all *right!*”

Joey laughed. “You’re very quick, Mary-Lou. How do you know it isn’t for the expected Bettany baby?”

“Because I jolly well know that everything’s ready ages ago. Maeve wrote to me during the hols and said they were all wild with excitement and if it *was* twins they’d piles of everything ready. You aren’t likely to be doing anything as tiny as *that* for Auntie Mollie at this late date.”

Joey laughed again. “I’m expecting a wire almost any time now. And you’re right, Mary-Lou, but keep it under your own hat. We’re not saying anything until after Christmas. But if Auntie Mollie has twins again, she’ll be level with me and I’ve beaten them all, so far. Besides, I *like* babies.”

“But haven’t you all the baby-clothes the twins had?”

“My dear girl, I wasn’t prepared for twins when they arrived. Everything’s worn out. I have to start from scratch again, and I’m seeing to it that I’ve plenty this time. I’ll never forget the frightful scrimmage we had when Felix and Felicity came! I’m not being had like that again, I can assure you!”

“I see. I won’t say a word, of course. And I *will* do all I can for Jessica.”

Joey looked down into the beaming face. Mary-Lou was herself again—no doubt about that. “I don’t think you’ll ever regret it,” she said quietly. “Now, if you can bear to do it, I’d like some more wool wound. Over there in the work-case. And then you can mention any poems you think I might include in my anthology. Oh, and what about suggesting a title for it? I haven’t an idea, so far.”

Chapter V

PLATO BLOWS UP!

Mary-Lou went back to school through pouring rain—the radio had been right for once!—and the first thing she did was to go to a certain sheet pinned to the notice-board in Hall, and put down her name to be called for eight o'clock service at the little Anglican church at the other end of the Platz.

"I'll need all the help I can get," she ruminated as she went to the Splashery to change her shoes and hang up her raincoat. "It strikes me that Aunt Joey has asked me to bite off a tough mouthful this time. I certainly can't hope to do much about it without help from somewhere."

During the Sunday, she took every chance she saw of watching Jessica. After all, she herself had been back at school only four days if you counted Thursday when she had arrived. She had been so busy catching up on everything that she had had very little time for considering the vagaries of any new girls. In fact, if it had not been that Jessica's peculiarities stood out a mile, she would hardly have noticed her. By the time the Seniors went up to bed that evening, she had noted down one or two points for consideration and when she was in bed, she thought them over with deep concentration.

Normally, Mary-Lou was in the habit of lying down and going straight to sleep. The past fortnight, however, her rest had been broken by the demands of her grandmother and it was taking her a little time to readjust herself to her old ways. Up till the night before, her thoughts had been very much on "Gran." There had always been a very special bond between her and the old lady—a bond which had grown considerably during the past two years. Old Mrs. Trelawney's death had been a big break for her and she would hardly have been human if she had not fretted badly. Being Mary-Lou, she had kept it very much to herself, and even her mother had not realised how the girl was grieving. At least Joey Maynard's latest charge had jolted her out of that!

"Aunt Joey's right," she thought as she lay quietly. "If Jessica has to be sent away at Christmas, it'll be awfully bad for her. Well, what can I do to prevent it?"

She turned over and settled herself again. Then her thoughts went on. "I suppose I *can* see her point of view to a certain extent, though I can't see how she can be such an idiot. After all, in a way it's very much the same sort of thing for me though Verity's as fit as a fiddle, and anyhow, I *like* the kid." Suddenly, she sat bolt upright. "But of *course!* What a ninny I am! That's just how I *can* get hold of her—though perhaps I'd better not let her know I know about Rosamund. But both our mothers have married men with girls of their own. Verity and I were pals before ever Mother set eyes on Dad and I don't suppose Jessica saw an awful lot of Rosamund until Mrs. Wayne married Mr. Sefton, but it's the same idea. I don't suppose she knows a thing about us, though. Now how can I break the ice?" Here, she yawned widely, lay down and snuggled under the clothes, for the night-air was sharp. "That's better! It's still warm during the day, but the nights are getting awfully chilly." She yawned again and by this time, her thoughts were beginning to grow foggy. "I'll bet Aunt Joey saw it all—trust her! I—ex—pect—" At which point, her eyes closed and she thought no more that night.

While she was dressing next morning, Mary-Lou wondered how she was to explain to Jessica her relationship with Verity-Anne Carey. She could hardly plunge at her and remark, "I say, did you know that Verity and I are only sisters-by-marriage?"

As it turned out, the way was made easy for her. Verity Carey was known to everyone as “a mooner.” She only just got down in time for Frühstück and some of the others teased her about it during the walk before school.

“Good thing you’ve been taken off early morning practice!” Clare Kennedy remarked over her shoulder to Verity who was paired behind her with Mary-Lou. Clare herself was partnered by Jessica, thanks to the form prefect’s hurried, “Take that new kid, Jessica Wayne for the walk this morning, Clare, there’s a lamb! I’ll have her tomorrow, and I’ll get Vi to take her on on Wednesday.”

Clare was a good-natured girl and did as she was asked. Mary-Lou herself had seen to it that the “croc” was in a particular order and she and Verity were just behind Clare and Jessica with Vi Lucy and her cousin, Barbara Chester behind *them*. She had known that someone would have something to say about Verity’s lateness.

The fact that all conversation had to be in German on a Monday was less of a constraint to them than it had been, thanks to one full year in the Oberland. Verity was quite capable of retorting, “If they did *not* want me to be late, they should have left me where I was and not sent me to another dormitory. I’ve always been with Mary-Lou before and she has always helped me out. Now I must manage for myself and when you are born slow like me, it really is terribly hard to remember everything and do it and be in time.”

“Ghastly!” Vi remarked with a chuckle. “Do you have to run round after her at home in the hols, Mary-Lou?”

“More or less,” Mary-Lou returned cheerfully. “It isn’t *quite* so bad, though. Mother doesn’t make nearly as much fuss as Matey about turning beds and so on. Still,” she sighed resignedly, “it’s a hard life at times!”

Verity made a face at her. “It is not! Mother has some sense and she makes allowances. Matey makes none.”

Glancing at Jessica’s side-face, Mary-Lou saw that she looked startled, though she said nothing. “So this is where I get cracking!” the prefect thought.

“Oh, well,” she observed, “I’m used to it. After all, I had to help her out almost from the first. Just as well, too, seeing that Mother and Gran decided that so long as her father was in hospital, she had better call our place home. When Mother and her dad decided to marry each other and make us sisters-by-marriage, I knew what I was in for all right!”

There was no mistaking Jessica’s interest. She turned right round to give the pair an amazed look. Clare saw it and said in her slow, careful German, “Are you surprised, Jessica? Has no one told you yet that they’ve each got a step-parent? Sure, what have we all been thinking of?”

“No,” Jessica said shortly, but the colour flamed in her face.

“Well, you know it now,” Mary-Lou told her. “I say, Jessica, you are luckier than most new girls. At least you know *some* German! Most of them stick at *Herr* and *Frau* and *Fraulein*!”

This was perfectly true, and Mary-Lou was moved to wonder why Jessica had told her that night in prep that she did not understand. It struck her that the young woman was very much of a dark horse. However, she pushed that to the back of her mind and went on, “Have you learned before?”

“I did a little at my first school,” Jessica said shortly.

“Oh, good for you, then! You’ll soon go ahead. But may I say something? Watch your constructions. Sally-go-round-the-moon—at least I mean Miss Denny—is nuts on

construction and she hauls you up short every time you go wrong there.”

Jessica might have resented the correction, but the nickname Mary-Lou had let slip intrigued her. “*What* did you call her first?” she asked with real curiosity.

Mary-Lou’s face was scarlet as she replied, “Oh, it’s just a silly nickname^[6]. I don’t know how she got it, but it’s what everyone calls her—out of school.”

[6] *Jo of the Chalet School.*

“Do you know,” Barbara said from behind, “I’ve often wondered how it happened. No one seems to know, though. I asked Beth once and all she could say was that Miss Denny had always been called that.”

“The person to ask,” Vi put in, “would be Aunt Joey. She’s one of the school’s foundation stones. Was there when it began and, if you ask me, I don’t think she’s ever really left.”

“Girls—turn!” said the voice of Miss o’Ryan from the top of the column. “Lesley and Valerie, remember not to go too fast. We don’t want stragglers.”

The girls swung round, thus making Lesley Malcolm and Valerie West the leaders instead of the tail, and began to march back to school. No one was very fond of these early morning duty walks when you never got a chance to break ranks. However, the severe winters made it imperative that as long as it remained fine, they should have all the outdoor exercise possible and the half-hour before Prayers in the morning was never missed unless the weather was really too terrible.

They reached school and had to fly to the Splasheries to doff their outdoor garb and change their shoes. Some people found it necessary to tidy their hair; but Mary-Lou, aware that her long, shining plait was immaculate, went straight to the formroom. Here she was joined a minute later by several of the Gang *and* Clare Kennedy who was not of it, but was friendly with all its members. She attacked Mary-Lou on the spot.

“Sure, Mary-Lou,” she began in English, “And why did you make me take that silly creature, Jessica Wayne, for a partner? I had to tell Ursula I was booked and it left her with no one for a partner but Marie Dupont who still can’t speak three sentences of German together.”

“But *you* can,” Mary-Lou said magisterially. “Don’t be an ass, Clare. Do you *want* to start paying fines already?”

Clare did not. She repeated her remarks in German and Mary-Lou replied in a way that struck home to more than one girl there. “Well, from all I can see the lot of you have taken her at her word and left her alone when the poor girl is probably only half-dead with homesickness. I admit she hasn’t chosen the best way of showing it, but all the same, treatment like that is *not* according to our traditions. Now I’m back again *and* form pree, I’m not going to allow it.”

Any reply Clare might have made was checked by the arrival of Jessica herself, so the girls went to their desks and began to take out what they would need for the first lesson which was German grammar. Mary-Lou, having spoken her mind, followed suit and Jessica had no idea that she had been the subject of conversation. She sat down and hunted out her grammar, scribbler and pencilcase. Then the first bell rang, bringing the rest of the form, breathless and anxious in case Miss o’Ryan should have elected to be dead on time. There was no room for chatter. They dived into their desks, took out their requirements and sat back thankfully.

Miss o’Ryan eyed them thoughtfully as she went to the mistress’s table and sat down to take register. Herself an Old Girl of the school, there was little she did not know about it and she guessed that at least half the form had had a scramble. She said nothing—merely called

the names and then handed the book to Gwen Parry, the girl nearest her, and asked her to take it to the office to Miss Dene, the school secretary. Then she sat back. The two or three minutes between register and second bell were generally devoted to conversation and this morning was no exception to the rule. As the door closed on Gwen, Mary-Lou spoke in careful German.

"Miss o'Ryan, do you know if we are to have any expeditions this term?"

"I do. There is to be one on the Saturday of next week if it's fine," the mistress replied, smiling broadly.

"Oh, where to?" cried half-a-dozen voices at once.

Miss o'Ryan shook her head. "That, I may tell you, is a secret at present. I can tell you that it will be a most delightful expedition and one I'm sure none of you will ever forget. But I am going to say no more. Miss Annersley will be giving you all details shortly and I can hardly anticipate her, now can I? There is the second bell. Lines, please!"

It had to satisfy them. The general opinion of the school was that Miss o'Ryan was a poppet, but they knew better than to try to coax her. They formed into the two lines and while the Catholics marched off to the Speisesaal for Prayers, the Protestants made their way to Hall. Expeditions had to be put out of their heads and were. Miss Lawrence, seated at the piano, was playing softly which helped to calm them and bring them into prayerful mood and Miss Howard, one of the junior music mistresses, was doing the same thing in the Speisesaal. The girls took their seats and when Miss Annersley in Hall, Mdlle. de Lachennais in the Speisesaal, came in, their charges were ready.

After Prayers, the Catholic girls went to Hall for any announcements the Head might have to make. When the last girl had sat down, Miss Annersley rose from the fine William and Mary chair which was hers by prescriptive right, and came to stand again at the lectern.

"I won't keep you long, girls," she said, her deep, beautiful voice reaching to the very last line of girls, though she made no effort to raise it. "I just want to tell you that we propose to have the first expedition of the term on Saturday of next week."

There was a quick outburst of clapping and she laughed before she held up her hand for silence. "Yes; I thought that would please you," she told them in her fluent German. "The only thing is that it means a long day so the Juniors will not have the whole trip this time. Now don't look so miserable!" She gave the little girls who had been looking very crestfallen, a delightful smile. "You will have your share and a very pleasant share, too. There is plenty of time for you to have the rest of it later on when you are Middles or Seniors." She looked across the heads of the Juniors at the rest of the school which was sitting with expressions of pleased expectancy. "We propose taking you for a tour of part of the Rhineland. Our own coaches will take us to Zurich where we will leave the Juniors to enjoy themselves with their own mistresses, Miss Dene and Miss Burnett who have kindly volunteered to go with them. The rest of us will go on to Schaffhausen where you will see the famous Falls of Rhine. After that, we hope to go on to Lake Constance."

Again came that quick clapping and this time she let them clap for a minute before she hushed them to utter the usual warning. "Now I know you are all delighted at the idea, but I have to warn you that the usual rule obtains. Any girl who behaves badly during this week and next *will—not-go!*" She said the last three words very impressively and sundry people among the Middles and Juniors looked very conscious.

"But," she resumed when she had given time enough for this to sink in, "I hope that no one will be silly enough to deserve that. Now that is all at present. No," as she suddenly remembered. "I have one other announcement to make. The girls from St. Mildred's are

joining forces with us. Now that really is all. Later on, you will be told what arrangements we are making for travel and meals and also our entire route. Only do remember what I have said. Bad work or bad behaviour will bar you from the trip and I know you will all agree that it isn't worth it. Stand!"

The school rose smartly to its feet and she nodded to Miss Lawrence who broke into a swinging march and the girls swung round and marched out and to the formrooms every last one of them determined that neither *her* behaviour nor work should keep her from such an exciting expedition.

Back in VB, Mary-Lou uttered her own warning as she went to her desk. "You all heard the Head and I hope we aren't silly babies, anyhow. But just keep it in mind, everyone. We want every single member of this form to be with us. It'll spoil the whole trip for us if anyone has to be left out. You have been warned!"

She wound up with her broadest grin and sat down just in time. Miss Denny who was responsible for German and Italian, stumped into the room at that moment and work began in earnest.

Jessica seemed to have taken both the Head's words and Mary-Lou's to heart. The first part of the morning passed off without any trouble. Despite what she had told the form prefect that Friday night, she had enough German to enable her to work with her form and the succeeding lesson was geometry which she liked. History which followed had proved a revelation to her. Both at Cor-lan and her other school, it had been taught thoroughly, but in an uninspiring way. Miss o'Ryan, with her Irish flow of language, united to a real knowledge of European history, made it live. The period of the Thirty Years War became vividly real to the girls as they listened to her, and even Janet Unwin and Valerie West whose tastes, like Jessica's, lay along mathematical lines, joined in the sigh which rose when the bell rang for the end of the lesson and left them hung up at a most exciting episode.

Miss o'Ryan told them to write notes on what she had told them ready to show up at the next lesson. Then she gathered up her books and dismissed them. They went off to the Speisesaal for milk and biscuits while she raced upstairs to seek her mid-morning coffee.

After break, VB had singing. This would be followed by New Testament. There was little need to fear bad behaviour during the Scripture lesson which was the Head's; but singing might be another matter. It was taken by Miss Denny's brother on whom a naughty Joey Bettany in the days when she was a Middle, had bestowed the name of "Plato" because at the first lesson he had given at the school he had talked at length about what Plato, the Greek philosopher, had had to say about the importance of music in education. A good many years of association with the school had taught him to let the Greeks alone and concentrate on his work. But he still remained an odd creature. He idealised the early Elizabethan times when every gentleman could play some instrument and join in a song. He sported an Elizabethan beard and used Elizabethan idioms when he talked. Furthermore, nothing would induce him to teach in any language but his own, though he could speak both French and German fluently when he liked.

However, despite all his oddities, "Plato" was a pleasant creature on the whole, sweet-tempered and easy-going. But every now and then the singing master blew up, to quote Joey Maynard, and it took a good deal to calm him down. Verity-Anne Carey had contrived to manage it on one occasion; and there had been others; though never any as monumental as Verity's affair. Today, there was to be another episode which outdid even that one.

On thing that really upset “Plato,” was the presence of a ‘drone’ in his class. Miss Annersley was well aware of it and when any tone-deaf girl was discovered, she was kept back and handed over to one of the junior mistresses for training. As quite a number of people *can* be helped if the work is done properly, it was rare for trouble to arise from this cause.

The previous week, Mr. Denny had been away and this was the first lesson for VB this term. They were a fairly musical crowd with one star performer in their midst—Verity Carey, whose silvery, larklike notes would have been a joy to anyone. Certainly, none of them were tone-deaf—or it would be more accurate to say that so far none was. This term, however, in Jessica Wayne, the form had acquired a girl who had absolutely no ear. She knew her failing and, warned by what had happened at her other schools, she was careful to move her lips soundlessly.

All went well during the first part of the lesson. But then “Plato” distributed copies of a new song among them and blandly required them to read it at sight. It was fairly straightforward, but there were one or two pitfalls and over one, the entire form fell down. Over and over again they took the phrase, but always someone went wrong. “Plato” lost his pleasant smile and his eyes began to emit sparks. The form recognised the signs and grew nervous. The next time they went through it, quite half of them fell into the trap and the resultant discord would have roused anyone at all musical. It shook “Plato” to his depths and released a flaming temper that was usually kept well in hand. Laying down his baton, he glowered at them all with an expression that made the more nervous feel like shrieking.

“Now,” he said, his voice sharp with anger, “I should have said—nay, if any had asked it of me, I should have *sworn* that if any form in the school could master this simple little ditty, ’twas this form. Prithee, maidens, what am I to understand by this failure?”

The “maidens” stared back at him blankly. Even Mary-Lou the ready dared not reply, though she and all the rest knew that no reply was quite as likely to bring an outburst. He waited, saw that no one would say anything, and proceeded to act.

“I will hear you lilt it one by one,” he said. His long finger shot out at a shrinking Verity-Anne. “*You*, my human lark, shall open this little trial. Come hither to me.”

Crimson to the tips of her dainty ears, Verity went. When she was standing beside him on the rostrum, he said, “Sing!”

Verity opened her mouth and sang the entire phrase perfectly. Her beautiful notes soothed him slightly—but only for the moment. The next girl was Mary-Lou and though Mary-Lou could follow a tune, she was not, strictly speaking, musical. She stood beside him, shaking in her shoes, for once, and sang the first three bars—*flat!* Then came the sudden drop of a minor sixth which she missed altogether and she wound up a full tone lower than she had started.

“Plato” took her through it twice more with no better results. If anything, she was worse each time. Finally, with a lowering look that boded no good to anyone, he marched her to the piano and made her sing it five times while he played it. By the time he had done with her, Mary-Lou certainly knew that phrase thoroughly, and so did most of the others. One by one they struggled through it, not ungrateful to their form prefect for her performance, and then were sent to their places. Then came Jessica!

Now “Plato” was not really unreasonable. If she had told him that she was unable to sing and had no ear, he might have growled, but he would have sent her back and reported to the Head. But this was just what Jessica did *not* do. Instead, she attempted to get through it and droned along on two notes the whole way. Nor could he get anything more from her—naturally. Finally, he let go and stormed at her, vowing that they should all stay there until she

had sung it and sung it properly. Jessica lost *her* temper and stormed back at him and this was one time when Mary-Lou felt that she had better not interfere or goodness knew what might happen!

Thus it was that when Miss Annersley, after waiting ten minutes for her New Testament class to come to her, decided to go along to the songroom and investigate, she arrived on a scene that was to add to the legends of the school. "Plato" was stamping mad and Jessica, all self-control at an end, was shrieking, "I tell you, you stupid old idiot, I *can't* sing and I *won't* sing! So now!"

Miss Annersley swept forward, the folds of her M.A. gown flying wide with the swiftness of her motion. Silence fell as she passed, and even the pair on the rostrum held their tongues.

"What is wrong here?" she asked; and never had she sounded or looked grimmer.

"Plato" suddenly woke up to the fact that he was making a fool of himself. He regarded the Head with dismay. Not so Jessica, she was in a full-blown passion and the short pause had given her second wind. With complete disregard for the Head, she shrieked, "And I'll never come to another singing lesson! I won't—I wo—"

At that point, she caught Miss Annersley's eye and suddenly dried up. The Head looked at her for a full minute during which Jessica felt her rage cooling at railroad speed until finally she only wished that the rostrum would open and swallow her. As for the rest of VB, they made themselves as small as possible and tried to look as if they weren't there.

"First," said Miss Annersley when she had achieved this effect, "you will apologise to Mr. Denny for your outrageous rudeness to him, Jessica."

She stopped there and waited; but Jessica said nothing. Miss Annersley's face hardened. She repeated her command. "Apologise to Mr. Denny at once. I will not permit such impudence from a pupil to a master!"

Still Jessica remained silent, the truth being that she felt that if she tried to utter a single word she must break down and howl like a baby. The Head looked keenly at her, grasped the state of things and said gravely, "Very well. Go to the study and wait there for me. Mr. Denny, I deeply regret that any Chalet School girl could forget herself like this. Please accept my apologies."

Jessica heard this as she stumbled off the rostrum and down the room. Most of the other girls kept their eyes on the floor. Only Mary-Lou, glancing at her, saw that she was walking blindly. She stepped forward at once.

"Please, Miss Annersley, may I take Jessica to the study?" she said. "She—she may not be sure of the way," she concluded lamely.

Miss Annersley had seen for herself that Jessica was not in a state to find her way anywhere. "Yes; go with her, Mary-Lou," she said, still in that grave voice. "Please stay with her till I come."

Mary-Lou took Jessica's arm and steered her out of the room. As she closed the door behind them, she heard the Head asking, "And now, if I may know what caused this scene? Girls! Go to your formroom and get out your St. Lukes and wait for me." Then the door was shut and she had to attend to her job.

Chapter VI
MARY-LOU TURNS PLEADER

Jessica was shaking by the time Mary-Lou got her to the study. That young woman told her charge to sit down and departed to seek a drink of water for her. When she returned with her glass, she found Jessica, all her rage and impudence vanished, lying full-length on the floor, sobbing wildly. The Head had not come yet and the form prefect guessed that she was smoothing things over. Jessica was *her* job, therefore.

“Well, I asked for it!” she thought as she knelt down beside the other girl. Aloud, she said, “Don’t cry like that, Jessica. Sit up and take a drink. You’ll feel better then. Come on!”

Setting her glass on the floor, she got her arms round Jessica and hauled her up into a sitting position. “That’s better! Now take a sip of this. Go on! It’ll help you!” She picked up the glass and held it to Jessica’s mouth.

Jessica gasped and shook and her teeth chattered on the rim of the glass till Mary-Lou grew afraid that she would bite a piece out of it. She removed it hurriedly and set it down again and applied herself to calming the girl.

“Jessica, do try not to sob so,” she said anxiously. “You’ll only make yourself ill and then Mately will yank you off to San and that’s not much fun, let me tell you. Try the water again.”

She held it to Jessica’s lips again and this time the other girl managed to take a sip or two. The very action helped her and presently she took the glass in her own hands and drained it. She was still shaking with sobs, but she was evidently trying to check them. Mary-Lou pulled out her own handkerchief and stuffed it into the hot hand when the water was finished.

“Mop up with that,” she said firmly. “Yes, go on. I’ll get leave to fetch another presently. But just now, it seems to me that it’s a case of ‘Thy need is greater than mine’.”

Jessica mopped her eyes and when Miss Annersley, having soothed Mr. Denny’s feelings and then gone and reduced VB to a proper sense of their iniquity and left them with work guaranteed to keep them busy for some time, arrived in the study, she found the stormiest of stormy petrels seated on a chair with Mary-Lou standing beside her, an arm round her. Jessica still shook with the violence of the storm, but she was more or less in her right mind again.

The Head was in the room before either of the girls knew it and she nodded slightly as she came forward. “Thank you, Mary-Lou!” was all she said; but the look she gave Mary-Lou with the words made that young woman redden with pleasure and embarrassment.

The Head glanced at Jessica. Apart from her red and swollen eyes, the girl was as white as a sheet and plainly in no case for anything but bed just then.

“Will you go and ask Matron to come here, please,” Miss Annersley said to Mary-Lou. “Jessica, I think you will be more comfortable if you lie down. I’m certain your head is aching badly.”

She rapidly cleared an ottoman couch of the books and papers it bore and helped Jessica to it. The girl was trembling and sobs still shook her at intervals. Miss Annersley threw a light rug over her and waited until Matron arrived. She took Matron over to the window and spoke rapidly for a few minutes. Mary-Lou had gone off to her formroom after finishing her errand and Jessica was rapidly turning drowsy.

Matron nodded when the Head finished. Then she turned to Jessica and looked at her sharply. “Well, I think bed is what you need at present,” she said briskly. “Come along, child!

A tiny dose and a cup of hot milk and then you'll have a good nap and feel more like yourself when you wake up. All right, Miss Annersley; I'll see to her now."

"Thank you, Matron. Go with Matron, Jessica. I'll see you later on," Miss Annersley said with grave kindness in her voice and eyes as the half-dazed girl looked at her.

Jessica went; she had no option. Matron had flung an arm round her and though Matron might be small, she was very wiry as more than one recalcitrant had found out before now. Miss Annersley watched them out of the room before she glanced at her watch. All this had taken time and the lesson was practically over. She would have just time to set preparation. She left the room to do so and as she went she thought to herself, "I must get to the bottom of all this as soon as possible. I *don't* want to cut her out of the first expedition of the term, especially in the circumstances." Then her thoughts took another turn and as she reached Vb she said to herself, "Thank Heaven for Mary-Lou, at any rate!"

Matron's "dose"—which took the form of aspirin, powdered and mixed with water—plus the hot milk calmed down Jessica considerably. The beloved tyrant of the school packed her off to bed in her own cubicle, drew the curtains and darkened the windows and then departed on her own occasions. She returned just before Mittagessen and found the girl, as she had expected, deeply asleep. She still quivered now and then with a sob—you can't cry yourself to the verge of hysteria and recover at once—but she looked placid enough. Matron left her to it and went down to her own meal.

After Mittagessen, when they were all supposed to rest in deckchairs for half-an-hour, Mary-Lou calmly set the rules at defiance and marched off to the study, ignoring the exclamation of Betsy Lucy of, "Mary-Lou! Where are you going? Come back to Hall and sit down and don't make an ass of yourself!" She felt a qualm as she tapped at the door, but she had an object in view. During the brief space they had been alone in the study, a slightly recovered Jessica had managed to explain about her tone-deafness and, in fairness to everyone, Mary-Lou felt that the Head should know about it as soon as possible.

Miss Annersley was resting on the ottoman when she heard the tap. She sat up, wondering what was going to happen *now*, and called, "Herein!" Her amazement when the form prefect of Vb entered was only equalled by her instant belief that this had something to do with the scene during the singing-lesson.

"Why are you here at this hour, Mary-Lou?" she asked in her fluent German.

Mary-Lou sighed deeply. "I can't think how you can do it, Miss Annersley," she said. "I *can* manage to talk more or less, but it's awfully slow work. That's why I want to ask you if I may go on talking in English, please. I don't think I *could* quite say it all in German."

"Considering you've begun *without* asking my permission, I may as well let you go on," the Head responded drily; whereat Mary-Lou reddened. She stuck to her guns, though.

"Thank you," she said earnestly. "It's—it's about Jessica."

"Yes; I rather thought it might be. Pull up that chair and sit down and tell me. If you can say anything that will make her extreme rudeness and bad behaviour a little more excusable, I'll be only too glad to hear it in English."

Mary-Lou sat down. For a moment or two, she was silent from sheer nervousness. It wasn't the done thing to butt in between a mistress and a girl, and even less so when the mistress was the Head. But her strong sense of justice forced her to go on.

"I know she was outrageously rude and—and cheeky," she said at last, "but there honestly *was* some excuse for her—only it's going to be—rather hard to tell without sounding awfully cheeky myself."

“Well, do the best you can,” Miss Annersley said encouragingly.

“She told me herself—when we were alone here—after she’d stopped crying a little,” Mary-Lou blurted out. “She’s tone-deaf and nothing can help it.” Having got this out and made a beginning, she went on more easily. “You see, we all of us fell down over that ghastly minor sixth in the song and Pla—I mean Mr. Denny—got—got angry with us. Then he started making us sing the phrase separately. Verity did it all right, but I came next and—well, you know, Miss Annersley, I’m not much on music, though I love to listen. I was stupid and hashed it up completely, and that didn’t improve things, of course. By the time he’d finished with me, he was a—I mean greatly annoyed. Of course by *then* we all knew it more or less. I don’t think I’ll ever forget it myself. But then he came to Jessica and instead of telling him that she can’t sing for toffee, she went up and tried. Well,” Mary-Lou was rapidly getting into her stride, “she yelled away, mainly on two notes, and you know how it is with him. I think,” she went on thoughtfully and with considerably more insight than the startled Miss Annersley had ever expected from a schoolgirl of fifteen, “that wrong notes really *hurt* him. Anyhow, he got madder and madder and it really was awful. Then he said we should all stay there until she *had* sung it right and he wouldn’t listen to her when she tried to explain that she couldn’t—not if she tried till Christmas! Of course, that’s what she ought to have done in the beginning, but she didn’t—silly ass!”

The Head hurriedly blew her nose to hide the fact that she was on the verge of hearty laughter, but Mary-Lou was too deep in her story to notice.

“Well, that’s about all. Mr. Denny was furious and he—er—scolded her and then Jessica lost *her* temper and she shouted back at him and—and—well that was where *you* came in and heard it all.” She ran down at this point and sat silent.

“I see.” The Head thought hard for a minute. It was a difficult position for her. Mr. Denny had put himself in the wrong by losing his temper in that fashion, but Mary-Lou had plainly grasped the fact that that must be ignored. At the same time, whatever *he* might do, no girl had any right to speak to him as Jessica had done. How she was to hold the scales level, protect the master from the consequences of his own lapse and yet administer justice to Jessica was a nice point. But Mary-Lou was waiting.

The Head thought it over. Then she said, “You know, Mary-Lou, if only she had told someone in the beginning, there need have been none of this trouble.”

“I told her so,” Mary-Lou said earnestly. “She told me that she didn’t like to—not until she got all wound up and then it was too late.”

“I see. But whatever she felt, Jessica had no right to be so rude to any member of the staff.”

“Oh, she sees that now,” Mary-Lou replied easily. “She said it to me just before you came to us in the study. She said, ‘I oughtn’t to have said what I did, but I’ve got such a *beast* of a temper!’ I think she’ll tell him she’s sorry if he’ll let her.”

“I imagine she will.” Miss Annersley was at her driest. “I should certainly listen to no excuses if she did not. Furthermore, she will do it before the whole form. No, Mary-Lou!” For that young lady had begun to beg Jessica off at once. “I cannot possibly pass such disgraceful conduct in anyone. She was rude in public and she must apologise in public. If, as you say, she is really sorry now, she will see that it is only right.”

Mary-Lou looked as she felt—dismayed. She knew that the Head was in the right but at the same time she felt none too sure that Jessica would agree to humble herself before the

whole form. However, she recognised a certain inflexibility of tone in the Head's voice, so she wisely left it alone and went on to the plea she had really come to make.

"If—if she *does* do all that, will you forgive her just this once and let her come with us on the expedition?" she asked pleadingly.

The Head looked dubious. "You heard what I said about that this morning?"

"Yes; but don't you think that perhaps the—the circumstances were *exceptional*?" Mary-Lou queried; and her choice of words reminded the Head as so often before that in outlook and character she was years older than most of her contemporaries.

"I can't answer that now, Mary-Lou. I must take time to consider and I must hear what Jessica has to say for herself. If she shows herself truly penitent for her really shocking behaviour this morning and contrives to keep out of further trouble for the rest of the time, I may agree. At least I'll promise you to consider it. I can't say more now. And another thing: I must find out if she really is incurably tone-deaf as you say she is."

"I think she must be. She says that at all her schools they have tried to cure her and no one could do anything about it."

"I see. I'll ask Miss Lawrence to take her for tests and if it really is true, then I must explain to Mr. Denny and remove her from the class. It will do her no good to waste half-an-hour on Mondays and the united singing-time on Fridays."

"No—o; I suppose not!" But Mary-Lou sounded slightly flattened.

"Use your common sense, child! What can she do if she mustn't sing—and if she can't, she certainly must not. We can't have Mr. Denny exposed to a constant irritant whenever he takes your form."

"Will it mean that she'll be out of the Christmas play, then?" Mary-Lou asked. "Oh, I *hope* not!"

"Certainly it doesn't. She can be 'on' in the crowd. She might even have a speaking part. But there is no reason at all why she should be out of it. You're being very previous though, aren't you? Term has just begun." She smiled as she spoke.

"Well, I did try to think all round the situation," Mary-Lou acknowledged. "You see, Miss Annersley, I want her to feel that we want her in everything. The Christmas play is a big thing and she'd hate it if she had to stand out."

The Head gave her a keen look. "Just how much exactly do you know?" she asked quietly. "And who told you?"

Mary-Lou reddened. "It was Aunt Joey," she explained. "And then, you see, in a way, it's exactly the same thing for me. I mean *my* mother has married a man with a daughter. Of course, it isn't really the same, because Verity and I are pals in any case; but I can understand a little how she might feel."

Miss Annersley left it at that. "Very well, Mary-Lou. As I told you, I'll think it over after I've had a talk with Jessica myself. I don't *want* to punish anyone so severely; but I can't pass over anything so outrageous as her conduct this morning. However, I'll take everything you've said into consideration and if I find her really sorry for it, I may let it go this once. Now you must go and rest for what is left of the time—not very much, I'm afraid. By the way, I forbade the rest of your form to mention the affair to anyone outside the form and I'd rather you didn't even discuss it among yourselves. Can you see to that?"

"Yes, of course. Anyhow, that's gossip and I don't think we're a really gossipy crowd. None of our Gang are and the rest know we don't like it."

"Very well, then. I'll leave it to you. Now run along."

Mary-Lou stood up, put her chair back where she had found it and went to the door where she bobbed the usual curtsy. "Thank you very much—for everything," she said before she vanished.

When she arrived in Hall, her own crowd greeted her with upraised eyebrows since they might not talk, but she only shook her head and sat down in the deckchair between Verity and Hilary. Nor, once the half-hour's rest was over and they were gathering up their plain sewing for the hour's needlework that darkened Monday afternoons for a good many of them this year, would she say anything more than, "I went to see the Head. It was private business."

Mdlle. who took needlework was a punctual person, so they dared not waste time. They scurried off to the Senior commonroom where the lesson was taken and where there were three electric sewing machines, kept locked, except for lessons, and presently were hard at work on the nightdresses which they were making this term.

Mdlle. sometimes allowed talking so long as they did it quietly and did not let it interfere with their work. This afternoon, however, she had had a word with the Head before coming to them and when they had all begun, she produced a German magazine and began to read one of the charming stories it contained. Mary-Lou was thankful for this but, in any case, she was occupied in cutting out her nightdress at the big trestle-table set up for the purpose as well as to take the sewing machines which were run off the power-plugs in the wall against which it stood.

She was no needlewoman and she contrived to spend most of the lesson in placing her pattern on the material and then cutting the garment out. All she had time to do otherwise was to tack one seam ready for next time. They had games after needlework, so they had to hurry to put their sewing away and change their shoes before racing out to the lacrosse pitch and the netball courts where Miss Burnett, the P.T. mistress, kept them hard at it until the bell rang. In fact, it was not until they were in their dormitories changing into their velveteen dresses for the evening that they had much chance of discussing the morning's sensation at all. Then, however, the Cornflower crowd demanded to be told why she had gone off to the Head during the rest period like that.

"We had something to discuss," Mary-Lou told them with dignity.

"Oh, come off it!" Vi jeered. "To hear you talk, anyone would think you were one of the staff!"

"German, please!" her prefect reminded her austerely.

"Oh, bother you!" Vi hastily recast her sentence in German, all the same, thereby losing a good deal of the pregnancy of the English sentences.

"No; but what *did* you talk about?" Clare asked with a good deal of curiosity. Then she added hastily, "Of course, if it was about your home, we don't want to pry."

Mary-Lou was engaged in getting into her frock, so she made no reply for a moment or two. Then she suddenly emerged into the aisle, pulling the skirt-folds straight with fingers that held something of the Frenchwoman's touch. There, she found Hilary and Barbara waiting for her, while Ruth was standing on one leg, clinging to the standard at the corner of her cubicle, trying to change her stockings. Just as Mary-Lou appeared, she slipped and fell and nearly hauled the standard on top of her.

"Ruth! You lunatic!" the prefect exclaimed. "You'll do that once too often. Why on earth can't you sit down like a Christian to change your stockings?"

"Because I've always done it like this," Ruth retorted, scrambling to her feet.

“Well, don’t blame me if you yank half the cubey curtains over on top of you!” Mary-Lou retorted in her turn. “And shift yourself! there’s only five minutes left and you haven’t done your hair *nor* got into your frock.”

Ruth gave a squeal of horror and vanished and Mary-Lou turned her attention on Hilary and Barbara.

“You’ve been awfully quick, you two,” she said suspiciously. “Sure you’ve done everything? Folded your counterpanes and laid your pyjamas out?”

“Everything done,” Barbara said cheerfully. “Go on, Mary-Lou. If it isn’t really private, tell us what you and the Head were talking about.”

“It was Jessica—and the row this morning,” Mary-Lou said soberly.

“Wasn’t it *awful*?” Hilary’s eyes widened at the memory.

“I don’t think I’ve seen Plato quite so furious before—not even over that business ages ago with young Verity. And that reminds me. *Why* is she dropping the Anne part of it?”

“Because her father told her to,” Mary-Lou explained. “He says the whole thing is too much of a mouthful. So Mother wrote to the Head and told her and do, for pity’s sake, try to remember, you folk.”

“But what about you?” Barbara wanted to know.

“Much shorter—and anyhow, Mother likes it and it’s *her* affair. Now listen to me, all of you.” She raised her voice slightly. “First of all, try to remember that a lot of what happened this morning was *my* fault in the beginning.”

“*Your* fault? How was it *your* fault?” Vi Lucy had joined the group and was once more sinning against rules by speaking in English. “If you ask me, a good deal of it was ‘Plato’s’ own fault. That was a simply ghastly song to wish on to us for sight-singing!”

“But he thought we could do it,” Mary-Lou argued, her sense of justice coming uppermost as usual. “He said so, if you remember.” In her earnestness, she, too, was speaking in English. “Just the same, I do *not* want another lesson like that! But I started flat and I knew it and I just couldn’t sing that interval right. Anyhow, I told the Head and I told her, too, that Jessica had told me she was tone-deaf, poor kid, and simply can’t sing at all. I don’t know what will happen about the trip to the Rhineland, but the Head says that Jessica’s got to apologise to Plato before the rest of us and if she does, then perhaps she’ll be allowed to come after all—almost certainly, I think.” Which was a very free translation of Miss Annersley’s remarks.

“Oh, how dreadful!” There was deep sympathy in Barbara’s voice. “I should hate to have to do that! Oh, *poor* Jessica!”

“Yes; it’s pretty horrid, but she asked for it, you know,” Mary-Lou reminded her.

“Of course she did. She was jolly rude to him,” Ruth remarked as she joined them.

“I know. But it *will* be awful having to say so with all of us looking on,” Barbara insisted. “You wouldn’t like it yourself, Ruth.”

“Where is she now?” Clare demanded as she left her cubicle.

“In bed, I should think. The Head sent me for Matey and she’d cried till she was nearly sick. Look here, you folk!” Mary-Lou was at her most persuasive. “The Head told me that she’d said we weren’t to discuss it with anyone outside the form and she’d rather we didn’t natter about it among ourselves. I vote we let it drop. I know Jessica was an idiot, but she’s got about the nastiest punishment anyone could think up. Shall we—all of us—just look at the floor while she’s apologising? And then we’ll finish with it. We needn’t say anything.” She swung round on Ruth Barnes. “Ruth! What about you?”

Ruth looked hurt. “Why pick on me like that?”

“Because you’re the one who always argues. Will you fall in if the rest of us do?”

Ruth was an argumentative young thing, but she knew better than to go against the majority. “I won’t say a thing,” she agreed. “After all, if Jessica’s asked for her punishment, ‘Plato’ jolly well asked for all she gave him. I’ve never known him so awful! It’s odd, for he’s usually pretty placid.”

“Must have had something for breakfast that disagreed with him,” Hilary suggested. “O.K., Mary-Lou. We’ll get on to the rest of the Gang this evening and if we take no notice, most of the others won’t.”

Then the bell rang for preparation and they had to go down.

As it turned out, Matron kept Jessica in bed all next day. The girl was worn out and she had been taken to San before the rest of her dormitory came upstairs that night. Leafy were a fairly riotous crew that term, and Matron decided that a day’s quiet would help the girl’s nerves to settle down again.

The Head went to her during a free period on the Tuesday afternoon and they had a quiet talk. Jessica had enough sense to see that she owed the singing master an apology, though she went scarlet when she found that it must be in public. At the beginning of term, she would have flatly refused to do any such thing; but Mary-Lou’s unexpected kindness the day before had helped to break down her resistance a little and she agreed to eat humble-pie as the Head commanded.

On the Wednesday, when Miss Annersley’s Shakespeare lesson came after break, she brought with her to VB an uncomfortable-looking Mr. Denny and called Jessica out. That young lady came, looking like a well-boiled beetroot. She uttered the few words of apology in a low tone and stood with a hangdog look while the rest of the form became studiously interested in the covers of *Twelfth Night*. The next moment, everyone was jerked bolt upright, for Plato was asking pardon in his turn. “I must also beg forgiveness, little maid,” he said to the stunned Jessica whose mouth fell open, giving her a codlike appearance. “I did you a grave wrong in flying into the passion I did. Forgive me, prithee, and let all be well between us.”

Jessica gulped, but no coherent sound came from her. The Head, who was nearly as stunned as her pupils, quickly took command.

“Thank you, Mr. Denny. I feel sure that Jessica will never be so rude again and that she feels your generosity in trying to shoulder part of the blame. And now, Upper IVB are waiting for you and these people want me, so we must part.”

She got him out of the room and before the girls had time to get their breath, let alone discuss the queer turn events had taken, she was directing their attention to the scene where Maria comes to rebuke Sir Toby and his companions for making a noise at midnight. Further to occupy their minds, she ended the lesson by setting them an essay on “Humour in Shakespeare” to be handed in next lesson. After that, they had to share their amazement at Mr. Denny’s action with disgust over the amount of work she seemed to expect from them and, for the most part, let the whole silly affair of the singing class die a natural death. Nor was it really revived until most of them had grown up and left school, when it passed on—no one knew by whom—to people who had been Juniors at the time and became yet another of the Chalet School’s many legends.

Chapter VII

THE PREFECTS IN CONFERENCE

If the prefects of the Chalet School have not appeared much in this story so far, it is not because they were not quite as much on the spot as their predecessors had ever been. The Juniors and Junior Middles in particular considered that they were far too much so! However that may be, on the Friday evening after the explosion of Mr. Denny in VB singing-class, it pleased Betsy Lucy, the Head Girl, to call a prefects' meeting since the last period of that afternoon was free for them.

"What's it in aid of?" Carola Johnstone asked with lamentable disregard for good English construction when she came into the prefects' room at half-past fifteen after a refreshing chemistry lesson with Miss Wilson—"Bill" to the school and a good many other people besides—at St. Mildred's which contained all the laboratories under the new arrangement. "We've had a *wizard* lesson! I'm so thankful to be back with Bill! She may work you like a slave, but she does make you learn!"

"She always did," Betsy sighed from the table where she was sitting, swinging her crossed ankles. "I only wish she'd take our geog. again. Not that I've anything against Miss Moore—far from it. I think she's jolly good and a regular poppet into the bargain. But—oh, I don't know! There's something just a little *extra* about Bill!"

"How right you are! Well, go on and tell me why you want a prefects' meeting all of a sudden. What's happening?"

"Tomorrow fortnight," Betsy said with a grin at her friend who had disposed of her books and come to stand beside her.

"Oh, my only perruque! It's our turn! I'd clean forgotten about it!"

"So, if you ask me, have most of the others," Betsy remarked. "It's our first one as prefects, not to mention the fact that we've got to entertain St. Mildred's as well this time, and I want it to go off well. So far, not a soul of you seems to have given a thought to it. Yes; I know this is only the second full week of term, but do lets do something worth while. We've a fortnight to prepare for it and we're going to need every minute we can spare, let me tell you. I want to start in with a splash!"

"What do you suggest we should do?" Carola asked, perching beside her friend.

"Well, there, as the charlady said when asked for a character, you *'ave* me! I haven't a notion to my name. I thought we'd talk it over now, pool our ideas and vote on them," Betsy explained.

"I see. You know, Bets, it's not going to be easy. We seem to have done most things more or less. At the moment, I'm as devoid of ideas as you."

"That's why I'm taking time by the forelock. I don't want us to be reduced to dancing and games. But I quite agree it's going to take some hard thinking to produce anything new—or even newish."

The door opened to admit Katharine Gordon, Head of the games. She was followed by Peggy Adams, the school librarian, and Lalla Winterton, an attractive-looking girl of nearly eighteen, whose golden-brown hair was wreathed round her head in a coronet of plaits. She was older than any of the others, but had been at the school little more than three years. She had so much back work to make up, that her parents had decided to keep her at the school

proper for an extra year before sending her on to the finishing branch to join her elder sister, Polly. Beside her, Betsy, with her bobbed hair and elfin build looked a mere child, for Lalla was a well-grown young person and looked her full age. But already the new Head Girl was making herself felt. Betsy Lucy was a young person of character.

The others came crowding in in a body a minute or two later and Betsy retired to the Head Girl's chair at the top of the table and demanded that they should take their seats and hurry up about it.

"Why a meeting just now, Betsy?" Jean Ackroyd, who was second prefect, asked as she sat down on Betsy's right hand.

"Because we've got to make up our minds what we're going to do tomorrow fortnight to entertain the rest," Betsy repeated her explanation.

"Oh, my one and only Aunt Jemima!" Hilary Wilson exclaimed. "I'd forgotten all about it!"

The others joined in the chorus. They had agreed at the beginning of term to give the first of the "special" Saturday evenings and then left it alone and now it was almost on them and they had nothing planned.

Betsy stood up and all eyes were turned on her. "It's this way," she said. "We've not only the school to entertain as usual, but St. Mildred's as well. We don't want Julie and Clem and Co saying how the prefects have fallen off this term. We'd better get cracking and see what we can dream up for them. I propose that we all think hard for the next five minutes and then we'll go round the table and see what each of us can suggest. Then we'll discuss them and vote on them and I only hope," she concluded, "that we'll get something settled."

"And there's another thing to remember." This was Hilary Wilson. "Haven't St. Mildred's invited all the Seniors for the following week? They're certain to have some bright ideas and we don't want to fall behind."

"We do *not*!" Carola spoke with great emphasis. "O.K., Bets. We'll put our brains in steep and see what we can scare up. Time us, please."

Betsy glanced at her watch. "Five minutes from—now!" she said; and sat down.

There was silence in the room for the next five minutes as the eleven grandees of the school set their minds to work. As usual no one managed to think of anything in the least original. Bright ideas usually come at the most impossible times. When you are asked to produce them to order, they remain in abeyance. When Betsy announced that time was up, she was greeted by a chorus of groans.

"I can't think of a single thing we haven't done," Lalla Winterton proclaimed.

"The best *I* can do is a fancy-dress dance of some special kind—like people of many lands or other dates," Amy Dunne who was staff prefect, said mournfully.

Most of the others were in more or less the same condition. Katharine said that all *she* could rise to was an indoor gymkhana. As they had had a garden gymkhana the previous term, this was shouted down at once and they all looked hopefully at Betsy.

"You can search *me*, friends!" she said cheerfully. "I haven't an idea to bless myself with. Oh, this is mad! Here are eleven of us, all white, free, clean and in our right minds and we can't scare up one original idea among us!"

Before anyone could retort to this diatribe, there was a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of Sybil Russell, an ornament of VIB. Sybil was the eldest daughter of Lady Russell who had begun the school "in the Dark Ages," to quote her sister, Joey Maynard. It was a good many years since "Madam," as they called her, had taught in it, but her interest was

never-failing and she frequently provided the plays with which they ended the Christmas and summer terms. Marriage and a family of six stood in the way of more practical work for her. But the school at large still adored her and she was head of the limited liability company into which it had been formed a few years ago when it had threatened to become too unwieldy for one person.

Sybil was regarded as one of the prettiest girls the school had ever boasted, with her delicate features and perfect colouring. She was a very feminine creature and her great interest was needlework, especially art needlework. Her parents had promised that when her schooldays ended, she should have a full course at the British School of Art Needlework and she intended to make it her career. In the meantime, she worked hard, for the brains of the family seemed to have gone to David, the eldest, and Josette, one of Mary-Lou's Gang. It was too soon to say about Ailie and the twins Kevin and Kester, who had arrived nearly three years before to round off the Russell family.

She walked up the room to Betsy and laid a pile of essays before her.

"The Head brought these along with ours," she explained, "and asked me to hand them over to you, so here you are. She's going over them with you next lesson. Meanwhile—"

"You can stop there; I know that one!" Betsy interrupted her with a grin. She chanted in a singsong voice, "'Will everyone please look over my corrections and consider them carefully.' 'Nuff said! Hi, wait, Sybs!" For that young lady had turned to leave the room. "I rather think you can help us out if you will. You've practically been at the school since you cut your first teeth and what you don't remember, Madame or Aunt Joey will have told you. Just give us a list of the sort of things they used to do for parties when the school was in Tirol."

Sybil opened her sapphire-blue eyes to their widest extent as she sat down on the chair Lalla pulled up for her. "Goodness, Betsy! What *sort* of things do you mean? The staff have done us one or two *Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks*. Is that what you want?"

"More or less—and I remember one *Mrs. Jarley* myself, not so many years ago. Have another shot. I don't think we could use that."

"Well, Aunt Joey told me of a sma- er- gorgeous Hallowe'en party they gave when she was a pree."

"Hallowe'en's no good—not now, anyhow. It doesn't come till after half-term."

Sybil frowned deeply. Suddenly her face brightened. "I've got it! A sheets-and-pillowcases party!"

"A *what*?" At least half-a-dozen voices raised this shout.

"A sheets-and-pillowcases party," Sybil repeated demurely.

"Come again! What on earth is that? I've never heard of it before!" Betsy said hushing the rest with an imperious gesture.

Sybil condescended to explain. [7]"It was Aunt Joey told me. They had it the half-term after she'd left—as a pupil, I mean. She was down at Briesau with the school and Peggy and Rix Bettany our cousins, who were staying with us at the Sonnalpe, started measles and Mummy wouldn't let Auntie come back until quarantine was over. So she came in for all the fun."

[7] *Jo Returns to the Chalet School.*

"Yes; but what *was* it?" Carola demanded. "You cut the cackle and come to the 'osses, young Sybil!"

“It was just what it says. Matey gave out a pair of sheets and a pillowcase to every girl and they had to evolve a fancy dress out of them—oh, and they had to sew everything and not use pins. Matey said she wasn’t running any risks of torn sheets.”

“Was it *our* Matey?” Jean queried.

“I don’t know. You’ll have to ask Auntie Joey that—or Matey herself.”

“Yes; I can see myself! I’d rather live a little longer, thank you.”

“Well, you could ask Auntie Joey. *She* wouldn’t bite your head off.” Sybil suddenly began to laugh and rocked with her laughter. The others stared at her in amazement.

“Here! What’s all this in aid of?” Betsy demanded.

“It was—I’d just remembered—” Sybil roared again. Then she made an effort and controlled herself. “Auntie Joey said she’d look after Auntie Rob—you remember Robin Humphries, don’t you? She was just a tiny kid at the time. Auntie got her up as an angel and she made a halo for her out of cardboard and silver paint. The paint didn’t dry properly and when they went to change into ordinary frocks, they found it had stuck to her hair and wouldn’t come off! In the end, Matey had to cut the hair. Auntie still has it—or *had*, before she left England. She showed it to me once and you could see all the curly bits sticking to the paint!” Sybil shrieked again at this point and the rest joined her.

“Painted haloes are off!” Betsy said solemnly when they were grave again.

“Do you think it’ll do for what you want?” Sybil looked at them anxiously. “They gave prizes, you know. Can we do that?”

“Oh, I expect so,” Betsy said easily. “It’s quite an idea, anyhow.”

“It’s all that,” Katharine agreed. “The thing is, would Matey let us have the things?”

“Don’t see why not. If she did it once, she can do it again,” Betsy pointed out.

“Yes—if it *was* her at the time. Sybs doesn’t seem to know about that,” Amy said.

“We’ll have to ask, I suppose. I don’t see why she shouldn’t. Even if it was another Matron, it’s been done once. We shouldn’t be establishing a precedent,” Jean remarked. “It’s an awfully good idea. Thanks a lot, Sybil.”

Sybil got up. “Is it for the Evening?” she asked. “It is? Then I hope we get leave to do it. I’ve always thought it must have been gorgeous fun. I say, I must go. We have prep this period and I’ve oceans to get through. See you later.” And she went off, feeling complacently that she had managed to help the prefects, even if she was not one of them herself.

The prefects looked hopefully at each other when she had gone.

“Of course, we can’t do a thing about it until we’ve spoken to Matey,” Peggy Adams said at last. “If she won’t let us have the sheets and pillowcases, we’ve had it—so far as *that*’s concerned and we’ll have to think of some thing else. I may say that I most sincerely hope she *will* agree, for I can’t think of a single thing as good as that. And I don’t believe any of the rest of you can, either.”

“I can’t for one,” Katharine agreed. “We’ll just have to catch her in a good mood. That means watching for our chance. But if she agrees, then we must see the Head. By the way, when should the things be given out? If some of the kids get them too soon, they won’t be fit for any party by the Saturday.”

“Better not tell them till the Saturday morning,” Lalla suggested.

“It would be lovely idea,” Betsy assented. “They’d all be kept busy and good manufacturing dresses for themselves and we could get on with the supper and prizes and so on. At least we’d have a little peace to do that!”

“Yes; what are we doing about prizes?” demanded Hilary. “We can’t collect from the whole school as we did for the gymkhana last term. We’ll have to provide them ourselves. That’ll mean a trip to Interlaken if we can get leave—and someone for escort. We shouldn’t get much up here.”

“We can talk that over later when we know it’s going to be all right,” Betsy said. “No use worrying about it until we know *that*. But, you know, it would be something really fresh—and that’s a minor miracle, I should think.”

“After all those years ago? Well, I should think so!” Freda Lund, the Hobbies prefect put in her word. “I’d never heard of it before! Had any of you?”

No one had but they liked the idea immensely and were duly grateful to Sybil. In fact, so grateful were they for her rescue from their dilemma, that Jean was moved to remark, “You know, young Sybs ought to be a sub. We’ve only three this year so far, and all from VIA. Usually the subs are VIB. And there’s only eleven of us and we’re always twelve and generally fifteen or sixteen.”

“Well, we can’t very well go and demand three more people from VIB to join our noble band,” Betsy reminded her. “The Head *would* have something to say if we did! But I agree about Sybil, anyhow. She’s saved our lives this time.”

“If young Mary-Lou was one of us and thought we needed it, she wouldn’t think twice about going,” Amy Dunne observed dreamily. “*And* she’d get away with it, what’s more. I don’t know how that kid does it!”

“Mary-Lou is Mary-Lou. She gets away with things that none of the rest of us would dream of,” Carola joined in. “And that reminds me. Have any of you noticed that she seems to have taken that new girl, Jessica What’s-her-name, completely under her wing?”

“Don’t talk to me about Jessica Wayne!” Jean retorted. “Though I must say she seems to have piped down a little this last week,” she added consideringly. “If that’s the result of Mary-Lou, thank goodness! That’s all I’ve got to say!”

“It isn’t only Mary-Lou—it’s the entire Gang,” Freda said unexpectedly. “I saw your young cousin Barbara Chester with her only this morning, Betsy. And Hilary Bennett had her in tow yesterday.”

“Oh, well, it’s Mary-Lou at the back of everything,” Carola responded. “She leads that lot by the nose. Always has, when you come to think of it. If they’ve taken up young Jessica, there’s hope for her. They’re a very decent crew, that set.”

“Well, lets hope she’ll cease to fly up at the simplest remark, then,” Betsy said. “And lets hope it isn’t just a flash in the pan. She was a complete pest the first week or so of term.”

They all agreed heartily with this. In the short time term had been running, Jessica had contrived to get up against every single one of them.

“Well,” said Betsy, thinking that they had wasted enough time over a pest of a new girl, “that’s settled, then. We catch Matey in a good humour and ask her if we may use our sheets and pillowcases. If she agrees, we’ll send a deputation to the Head to ask for her permission to do it. If *she* agrees—you know,” she suddenly broke off, “this is awfully like the old woman and her pig, isn’t it? You know:

“Stick, stick, beat dog.
Dog won’t bite pig.
Pig won’t get over the stile
And I shall never get home tonight.”

That's exactly what it sounds like!"

"Oh, never mind silly nursery rhymes! You go on with what you were saying," Jean cried impatiently.

"Keep calm, my love; keep calm! What I was going to say was if the Head agrees, we send out our invitation to St. Mildred's—when?"

There was a pause. They had to think this out.

"We don't want to send it too soon. Half the fun will be in the scramble to produce a fancy dress from such odd materials on the spot, so to speak," Hilary observed.

"At the same time, we don't want their Matron going into a flap because the thing's been landed on her at a moment's notice," Katharine pointed out. "She might turn bad on them and refuse to have anything to do with it."

"How about asking the Head to see Bill and get her to deal with their Matron," Peggy proposed. "Wouldn't that be best?"

"Much the best! That's a wizard idea, Peggy!" Betsy said approvingly. "We could let Bill have a couple of days beforehand which ought to give her plenty of time to deal with it. She can hand it on on the Saturday morning and that'll give them just the one day, the same as our own crowd. I suppose that's the idea?" she added, glancing round the rest.

They were in full accord. As Hilary had pointed out already, half the fun would lie in making what you could of the stated materials and having to do it in a hurry. Finally, it was settled that if Matron and Miss Annersley proved agreeable, they would send the invitation to Miss Wilson on the Wednesday and ask her to pass it on to St. Mildred's at large on the Saturday morning.

"Then you'd better get cracking on the invitation itself, Sally," Betsy said to Sally Winslow, the most artistic member of VIA, and art prefect. "We'll send just the one—or do you think we ought to make it one for the staff and one for the House?" she appealed to the others.

"Oh, that, certainly," Katharine agreed. "Can you manage two, do you think, Sal?"

Sally nodded. "That'll be all right. If we'd only had the time, I'd have liked us to send one to everyone; but we'd never get through—not even if every possible member of us and VIb pitched in and helped. We'll have to make the two do. But I'll make them as beautiful as I can," she added. "Suppose I bring them up here after prep on Tuesday, Betsy? Then you can all see them. By the way, someone—you, Amy; you're staff pree—had better see about getting two envelopes of the largest size from the office. And what about our own invites, Bets? They'll go up on the notice-board, I suppose. And there'll have to be one for the staff here, as well. That means four. Oh, well, I can rope in Anne Valentine and Medeleine Tourtelle. Hilary, can you get me four quarto-sized sheets of watercolour paper from stationery? I'll give you the cash in the morning."

"Can do. That'll cost you ten centimes," Hilary said cheerfully. "Anything else, while I'm busy?"

"*Nothing* else until I've seen Matey and the Head," Betsy declared firmly. "We're counting our chickens in a way that's tempting Providence to the limit. You wait until we get permission. Then you can all go ahead as fast as you like. Now we'd best elect our deputation so that when we know Matey agrees, we can tackle the Head without having to dither for anything. Will someone propose the leader?"

"You, of course!" Hilary retorted. "It's your job, *ex officio*. I propose Katt and Jean to go with you and if you want someone else, take Lalla to represent the subs."

“I’ll second that!” cried Peggy. “Hands up, everyone!”

Everyone’s hand was hoisted on high, so that matter was settled. Finally, as the bell was ringing for the end of afternoon school, Betsy declared the meeting closed and they all went off to change for the evening, feeling that they had put in some excellent work that afternoon. If only Matron and Miss Annersley showed themselves agreeable, they had their “evening” well under way and it would only remain to get prizes and arrange a programme.

“And that,” said Betsy as she led the way to the dormitories, “is likely to be one of the very least of our headaches!”

Chapter VIII
EVERYTHING IN TRAIN

Betsy, Katharine, Jean and Lalla duly picked their time for an advance on Matron and found her in a most complaisant mood. She made one stipulation—that no pins should be used. Everything had to be stitched and there must be no cutting of anything either. However, this was only what they had expected, so it did not worry them. Indeed, encouraged by her pleasant manner, Betsy plucked up courage to ask, “Was it you who did it before—when the school was in Tirol, I mean, Matron?”

Matron laughed. “Not I! I was off on a trip. It was Matron Gould who took over—Matron at Carnbach, I mean. But I heard all about it, including Robin’s mishap when I returned.” Her face suddenly grew grave. “It’s funny to remember now, but at the time, we had no thought for funny things. That was the week-end that Mademoiselle Lepattre began that dreadful illness that finally ended her life. I remember how Miss Annersley and I found her unconscious in her room on the Tuesday morning. She had been under the weather for some time, but none of us knew how really ill she was till then. Sir James Russell—he was Dr. Jem, then—said that he had no idea how she had managed to keep going for so long. She must have been in continual pain almost the whole term. I know that a good many of you girls who never knew her, rarely remember her,” Matron went on, “but she had as much to do with founding this school as Madame had. But except when the Thérèse Lepattre Scholarship comes up, I don’t think you people think about her.”

“We never knew much about her,” Betsy said humbly. “She died during the first or second year of the war, didn’t she? I was only a tiny then. I wasn’t even at school, I believe. I remember Julie telling Mummy about it, though.”

“I don’t want you girls to forget her,” Matron said, still in that oddly softened mood. “I found some snaps of her today in a box I haven’t opened since we came out here and looking at them made me think that she is in danger of being forgotten.”

“Could we see them, please, Matron?” Katharine asked shyly.

Matron produced them and the girls looked in wonder at the somewhat plain Frenchwoman who smiled pleasantly at them from the faded snaps. What could there be about her to rouse the affection and respect in which Matey obviously held her. That lady, watching the young faces, guessed what they were thinking.

“No; she wasn’t much to look at,” she said as she took the photos back from Lalla, “but she was a saint, one of the unknown ones. Madame herself would tell you that if it had not been for Mademoiselle, she could never have done all she did. Now you must go or you’ll get no work done. You may go to Miss Annersley and tell her that so far as I am concerned, you may have your party.”

They went off, rather more serious than they had been, and Matron laid her snaps carefully away, then, being Matron, turned back to her work.

“Well, it’s only what we expected,” Betsy said as they went downstairs to seek the Head. “But I don’t quite know how the Juniors are going to manage. We’ll have to let them know before Saturday morning.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Carola said easily. “Someone will help them out. Let the details alone, for goodness sake, Bets! Matey proved jolly good about it, but we’ve still got to ask the

Head.”

“Exactly!” Betsy spoke impressively. “And let me remind you all that details are a thing she’s likely to ask about before she gives us any permission. We *must* have some idea about how we’re going to handle them. That includes the Juniors. Oh, not people like Nan Wentworth and the Maynards and Elsie Morris and so on. They can all sew—or enough for what’s wanted. But what about the Thirds? I don’t see my cousin, young Janice, managing without help—or Judy Willoughby—or Ailie Russell or any of that crowd,” she added.

“No; I suppose not. I hadn’t thought of all that.” Carola looked gloomy. “What are you going to suggest?”

“That’s what I want to find out now. Back to our room and collect the others up! I’ve an idea, but I must see if you’ll all back me up.” And Betsy swung round and led the way back to the prefects’ room where, since this Saturday had turned out to be stormy with a high wind and torrents of rain, the prefects were occupying themselves with books, games, jigsaws and needlework and, above all, chatter.

When the deputation arrived, everyone stopped what she was doing to join in an anxious chorus of, “What luck?”

“Oh, it’s all right so far as Matey is concerned,” Betsy told them. “Are we all here? Because I’ve got to know how we propose to manage all round before we go to the Head. Matey forbids using pins. Every blessed thing has to be sewn.”

“Well, Sybil told you that was what happened before,” Hilary said.

“I know. But you all see what it means, don’t you? The babies can’t be expected to manage a lot in the way of sewing and I want to know how you think we ought to fix that for them.”

Peggy Adams, the proud owner of two small sisters, at present at the school’s branch at Carnbach in South Wales, heaved a sigh. “There’s only one thing for it. *We* aren’t in it for any prizes, of course. We must tell the Head we’ll help the kids.”

“That’s rather what I thought,” Betsy assented. “And look here, you people; suppose we all agree to turn up in a uniform dress. Anyone seeing say a— a—”

“An Indian lady in a saree,” Katharine helped her out. “That’s about the quickest thing to do, I expect.”

“O.K.; well, if we were all dressed alike, people would know who were their hostesses. And I may as well remind you now that though at least two-thirds of St. Mildred’s are our own Old Girls, the others aren’t and some of them won’t know us from Adam.”

Carola looked at her with respect. “I say! That certainly *is* looking all round the details. I never thought of that one myself.”

“Then hadn’t we better say no one else is to choose that?” Amy asked.

“We can put it in to the invitations,” Sally giggled. “‘Indian ladies barred.’ Lets hope no one’s mad enough to think we’re starting a kind of colour bar in the school!”

“Very well, then. We’ll put ‘Indian dress barred,’” Betsy told her. “Now is there anything else before we go to see the Head?”

“How are we managing for prizes?” Freda asked.

“Just as we did last term—except that we keep it among ourselves,” Katharine responded. “Give me a sheet of paper off that pad of yours, Freda, and we’ll make out a list of the classes. Prettiest, of course, and Most Original. What else?”

“Funniest?” Lalla suggested. “Sure to be some funny ones.”

Katharine scribbled it down. “Well, what else? We must have more than that.”

“Most like the girl that’s wearing it?” Peggy asked. “What’s the word I want, someone? Most Applicable! That’s it!”

Katharine jotted it down and then looked expectantly round the others.

“Could we have Most Dignified, d’you think?” Jean proposed. “I mean someone might come as a queen or—or an abbess.”

“We’ll have it, anyhow. That gives us five. Can’t we make it the round half-dozen? Hasn’t anyone else got an idea? Wake up, do!”

They racked their brains but everything seemed to have been suggested. Then Hilary gave a sudden whoop. “Got it! Best Use Made of Materials? How’s that?”

They all clapped, laughing, and she stood up and bowed. “Glad you all recognise my genius! Make the most of it, for it doesn’t often come on top! That gives us six prizes to provide, Bets or, if you’ll fall in with my suggestion, eighteen. I vote we divide the classes into Senior, Junior and Middle.”

“What about the staff?” Carola queried. “Don’t they come into it? There’ll be all our own and St. Mildred’s as well. Surely we can’t leave them out of the prizes?”

“Of course not! Four classes in each class, then. That means twenty-four in all,” Betsy said, sitting down heavily on the end of a table, whereat a shriek uprose from Peggy Adams!

“Betsy Lucy! You great, clumsy oaf! Just look what you’ve done to my jigsaw!”

Betsy got up in a hurry. “Oh, sorry, Peggy! I didn’t see it. I really am most awfully sorry. Have I ruined it completely? Wait till I come back and I’ll help you make it again.”

“You’ll do no such thing!” Peggy retorted as she stooped to pick two pieces which had fallen on the floor. “It isn’t as bad as all that. But I wasn’t expecting you to sit on it!” She laughed up at Betsy and dropped the pieces on her tray.

Katharine created a diversion by suggesting that they should make out a tentative programme for the evening itself. The more detail they had ready for the Head, the more likely she was to agree to their ideas.

Betsy nodded. “Good for you! And one thing, everybody; I’ve a suggestion to make. Will all of you think before you decide on it, please? It’s that seeing Sybil Russell gave us the idea, we should ask the Head to let her count with us, even if it’s only for the one evening, and as a hostess. What do you think?”

There was real anxiety in her face as she looked round them. Carola was first to reply. “I call that a jolly good idea. If it hadn’t been for Sybil, we might still have been racking our brains for something new. I’ll agree for one, anyhow.”

“So will I!” Katharine spoke up quickly. “Sybs jolly well deserves it.”

That set the ball rolling. Carola’s final remarks had reminded them what they owed Sybil and they all agreed that if Miss Annersley would agree, the girl should be co-opted as extra hostess for the evening.

“Now is there anything more we ought to discuss before we go to her?” the Head Girl asked with a quick look at her watch. “Time’s getting on and we don’t want to land in on her afternoon meal. It might look as though we went hoping to be invited!”

“Only the programme,” Hilary said. “We’d better have something for you to show.”

“And while I think of it,” Jean spoke for the first time, “we’d better avoid anything very wild and woolly. I believe sheets are hottish things to wear and they certainly are a lot thicker than our usual kit. You’ll have to give our own patent form of *Family Stagecoach* a miss, Katt.”

The others chuckled. The form of *Family Stagecoach* which was peculiarly their own, could certainly be described as “wild and woolly.” People in sheets would be very heavily handicapped if they included *that* in their programme!

“What about *Sir Roger*?” Amy asked rather wistfully.

“I don’t see why not. You needn’t jig up and down all the time if you don’t want to and the rest of it can be made into a very stately dance,” Betsy responded.

“Right!” Katharine was scribbling hard. “What other dances? Waltzes? A Paul Jones to start off with, of course. Everyone likes that and it does break the ice. Shall we shove in any country dances? What about *Hunsden House* and *Oranges and Lemons*? They’re both pretty stately. Any more suggestions? Don’t all speak at once!”

Eventually, they managed to evolve a programme that was not too exhausting and Katharine gathered up her papers and handed them over to Betsy with the remark, “Here you are! Now you trot along and see what you can do with the Head. Be your most persuasive, Bets. Make big eyes at her and look little-girl.”

The said brown eyes widened. “*Me*? Do you really think I’m going alone? Because if you do, you’ve another think coming! Why do you suppose you were shoved on to the deputation? You three are coming with me and no nonsense about it!”

“There’s not the slightest need. You can do all we want bee-you-tifully all by your little self.”

“That’s what *you* think. Come off it, Katt! You and Carola and Lalla are accompanying me to the study or not one step do I take from this room!” Betsy’s puckish face was screwed up in a scowl and she looked as fierce as Nature would let her.

It was not very successful, for the scowl merely tilted her already tilted eyes further up until she looked like an outsized elf. Hilary winked at the nearest people, stretched out her hand and lifted the golden-brown bob off her friend’s ear.

“No; round not pointed,” she informed the others. “She’s human still.”

“What are you doing?” Betsy cried, pushing her hand away.

“I thought your ears might have changed,” Hilary told her with another grin. “All the fairy folk have pointed ears—or so I was always told.”

“You unmitigated ass!”

“Tut-tut! What unbecoming language in a prefect, let alone the Head Girl!” Hilary remarked with a gurgle. “Pull yourself together, Bets. Where’s your sense of humour?”

“Gone in search of your brains!” Betsy flashed back at her. She swung round on Katharine, Carola and Lalla. “Now listen to me, you three. We went to Matey as a deputation and we’re going to the Head as a deputation and you’re three-quarters of it! Comprenez-vous?”

“Oh, all right,” Katharine said resignedly. “Come on, you two. We’d better go with her to hold her hand. Besides, in this mood, goodness knows what she might unload on the Head! Am I quite tidy, anyone? By the way, I suppose she *is* in school? I don’t want to go trailing down to the study if she’s jaunting off somewhere else along the Platz.”

“She’s in all right,” Jean replied. “I met her in the entrance hall when I came upstairs. But I rather think the drawingroom will be your best bet a day like this.”

“So it will. Thanks for reminding me. Come on, folks!”

With a final look in the oval mirror hung between the two windows, the four left the room, all that any Head Mistress, however exigeante, could ask of her prefects. The rest turned back

to their various ploys until their deputation should return “Bearing their shields or being borne on them,” to quote Hilary.

It was a good hour and a half before the quartette showed up again. The prefects’ Kaffee und Kuchen which they always had by themselves on Saturdays, was nearly ended when the sound of footsteps told them that the wanderers were returning and everyone sat up alertly and gazed at the door.

“You’ve been long enough, I hope!” Jean grumbled as they walked in.

“What’s the reason for the-cat’s-drunk-all-the-cream expressions?” Peggy demanded, eyeing them keenly. “Come off it, you four, and tell us what she said!”

They spoke not a word until they were seated at the table in their usual places. Then Betsy looked round with a benignly indulgent smile, an example followed by her coadjutors.

“We,” she said complacently, “have been having tea and cakes in the drawingroom. The Head treated us to the most marvellous cream-and-honey-and-nuts cakes and fancy rolls *and* tea! Bill was there, too—”

“*Bill!*” The rest of the party was roused from the stupor into which the Head Girl’s announcement had thrown them. “Why didn’t you say so sooner?”

“Because this was the soonest we could do it,” Carola pointed out sweetly. “Bets told you as soon as we were settled and I don’t know what more you want. No thanks, Freda; I couldn’t touch another bite—not after all the glory we’ve had in the drawingroom. I must say the Head does herself and her visitors well at times!”

“Oh, well, we can discuss all that later,” Jean said impatiently. “You forget it for the moment and go ahead and tell us what she said about our party. Is it O.K.?”

“Quite! We told her about Sybil and what *you* said, Jean, about she ought to be a sub—”

“What? You awful idiots!” Jean’s face was scarlet. “What will the Head think of me, criticising her arrangements like that!”

“Keep cool, lassie; keep cool! She quite agreed with you and she said we might co-opt Sybs as an extra hostess. She also told us—and said we might tell you folks though it’s not to be broadcast to anyone else—that on Monday she’s announcing three more prefects at Prayers—their names, I mean—and Sybil’s one of them. It seems that there were five or six of them that all qualified more or less for the job and they couldn’t choose between them. So they decided to wait for the first three weeks of term and see who made the best grades. Sybs is one of them. She didn’t mention who the other two were. However, we shall all know all about it at Prayers on Monday, so it needn’t bother us too much.”

“I’m jolly glad to hear about Sybil,” Peggy said seriously. “She’s seventeen in March so at most she’ll have just one more year here and it would be hard lines if Madame’s own daughter couldn’t say she had been at least a prefect in her own mother’s school!”

“She’s going to St. Mildred’s next September with our crowd,” Betsy said. “She told me so last term. She’ll have a year there like most of us and then she’s going on to do art needlework thoroughly. She’s taking it up professionally, you know. If any of the Russells is Head Girl, it’ll be Josette—unless Ailie gets there. But she’s just a kid. It’s too soon to say.”

“It won’t be Josette,” Katharine said with decision “She’ll be Sixth with Mary-Lou and all the Gang and Mary-Lou’s slated for Head Girl all right.”

“Yes; you’re right there,” Betsy agreed. “It’s jolly hard on young Vi and Co, for they haven’t a hope of the job—unless Mary-Lou leaves before then which isn’t at all likely. But don’t forget that Josette is nearly a year younger than the rest of the crowd. Madame may decide to keep her on here for that extra year.”

“Would she do that?” Jean asked thoughtfully. “Josette would hate being left behind when all her little friends had gone on to St. Mildred’s.”

“Not *all* of them. Jo Scott, at any rate, will still be here and Jo and Josette are by way of being pals. However, all that’s beside the point just now. There’s a year or two to go before anyone need worry about the Gang and prefectships. At the moment, we’re supposed to be going ahead with our plans for the ‘Do’. What shall we do about prizes?”

“I can let you have a box of hankies,” Jean replied. “I had a birthday in the hols and three of my aunts weighed in with boxes of hankies. And you can have that pink china dog from my shelf. I certainly don’t want to take *him* to St. Mildred’s when the time comes. What about your pink pig, Bets?”

“You can have him—and the inkstand shaped like a parrot. I’ll wash out the inkpot and then it’ll be all right. I haven’t used it more than once or twice and I don’t need the thing.”

Katharine looked up. “Aren’t you going to tell them what the Head and Bill said?”

“Oh, yes! I’d forgotten for the moment. The Head and Bill are each giving three prizes—but they won’t say what for. We aren’t to say anything about it, either. It’s some idea of their own and they’re going to spring it on us on the night.”

“Oh, well, it’s their affair and nothing to do with us,” Hilary observed. “I can give you a blue silk head-handkerchief and a cheapish biro I bought when we were in Exmouth. I’ve scarcely used it and I can get a refill for it. And there’s a pair of bedsocks one of my grandmothers gave me when we first came out here. She said she’d always understood that the winters in Switzerland were terribly cold and I might find them useful. I’ve never worn the things—I wouldn’t be seen dead in bedsocks—but they’re here. They might do for one of the staff.”

“How many is that?” Betsy demanded. “Have you put them down, Katt?”

“I have; and it’s seven. Come on you folk! We’ve got to scare up twenty-four altogether. I’m giving a kind of hussif I got at a missionary sale in hols. You paid half-a-crown and they gave you a parcel. That was in mine. It’s rather sweet—a crinoline doll with needlebook, pincushion, thimble and wee scissors—which wouldn’t cut butter melted, but if you use it for a Junior, I should think she might like it.”

“That reminds me; I’ve got a darning set I can spare.”

“And I’ve got a pencilcase complete with pencils, penholder and bungee.”

The offers came in quickly and by the time Katharine had written down Ailsa Thompson’s offering of a painted wooden box which she proposed to supply with coloured crayon pencils, they had amassed prizes which left them only four to buy.

“We’ll have to see to that nearer the time,” Betsy decided. “Perhaps we could get them during the expedition next Saturday. Oh, and about the supper. The kitchen will provide the eats but we’ve got to see to laying and decorating the tables.”

“What did she say about us all being dressed alike?” Peggy asked.

“Thinks it an excellent plan. She says we must borrow all the strings of beads from the acting cupboard as Indian ladies in native dress are generally loaded with jewellery. I’d forgotten about that.”

“Nose-rings included?” Hilary demanded with a giggle. “I can fix curtain rings with narrow ribbon or embroidery-silk, but I draw the line at a nose-ring!”

“Nose-rings will be *out*!” Betsy told her firmly. “But if we can get some big enough brass curtain-rings, I think we might run to anklets.”

“You’ve got a hope!” Carola informed her, stretching out a pair of size 7 slippers. “I’ve never seen the curtain-ring big enough to go over *my* feet. *You* might manage it, seeing you’re so small; but most of us couldn’t dream of it.”

“That’s the worst of these cheap, Woolworth feet and ankles!” Betsy said with a giggle. “Anyhow, what I meant were those things that open like key-rings. We could all manage those, I hope!”

“Well, if you can get hold of them,” her friend agreed dubiously.

“We might manage it in Zurich or Schaffhausen,” Jean suggested. “We can but try.”

“Then shoppers will have to be people who speak decent German,” Carola said decidedly. “That’s you, Bets, and Katt and either Ailsa or Sally. Why not the four of you? We’d better ask the Head if we can have Bank on Friday. You’ll have to see to that, Lal, as you’re Bank pree this year.”

Lalla groaned. “Suppose so. Thank goodness it doesn’t happen often. I’ve never sympathised enough with bank people before. I can just see myself quite innocently embezzling funds from you folk! Oh, well, Miss Burnett is the real court of appeal thank goodness! I’ve just got to hand out the money as she says it. And now, have we settled *everything*?”

“I wouldn’t know; but I’m going to settle the awful row that’s just broken out!” Betsy leapt to her feet. “Just listen to the yells! If this goes on, half those kids will miss their trip! Come on!”

She hurtled from the room downstairs to the Middles’ commonroom whence the noise was coming. Everyone there was talking at the top of her voice and it was not until she had hammered on the nearest table with her fists that she got silence. Then Maeve Bettany, cousin of Sybil and Josette Russell and the Maynards, came up to her, waving a telegram and announcing excitedly, “Oh, Betsy! This is from Daddy and we’ve got a new little sister born yesterday. Listen!” And Maeve read out the lengthy telegram. “‘Theresa Daphne arrived yesterday. Prettiest of all! All well and very happy. Peggy writing all about Daphne. Love Daddy.’ There! Theresa’s for Grannie Kennedy and the Daphne’s after Auntie Madge—it’s her second name and that’s what we’ll call her. Oh, isn’t it a *thrill*?”

“It certainly is. But I’d stop making all that din about it if I were you.” Betsy was very much the Head Girl. “Have you *quite* forgotten what the Head said about next week’s trip and good behaviour?”

Horror all round! They had indeed forgotten in the excitement of hearing that, as Maeve said, the Bettanys were now seven and only one behind their Aunt Joey!

Chapter IX
EXPEDITION!—ZURICH

The laden motor coaches from the Chalet School had been running steadily for the past hour and a half and a good many of the girls were beginning to feel tired and stiff. They had been on the road since half-past seven and it was now nearly midday. They had stopped for twenty minutes in Lucerne for coffee but, apart from that, they had gone straight on. This was a lengthy trip and the Head and Miss Wilson had ordained that there could be few halts until they reached Zurich where they were to have Mittagessen before the Seniors and Senior Middles went on to Schaffhausen and the Falls of Rhine.

The Gang had contrived to get seats together in the same coach and Mary-Lou had seen to it that Jessica was with them. That young woman had been very subdued ever since the day when "Plato" had answered her own rather unwilling apology with a very eager one of his own. Quite apart from her desire to take this trip with the others, she had been completely puzzled by the treatment meted out to her at this school. She knew well enough that at either of the others she would have been severely punished if not sent away for such an outburst. Here, once the apology was over, nothing more had been said to her and Mary-Lou and Co had been friendly and kind to her instead of behaving as if they thought she was an escaped lunatic!

The big coaches held forty-two people each so there was plenty of room for everyone. The school proper had attained the number of ninety-three that term and that had left so much free space, that Miss Annersley had insisted on her close friend and co-Head, Miss Wilson, abandoning her own charges at St. Mildred's and joining the party. The girls had been delighted. Most of them knew "Bill" very well and had missed her crisp personality when she had first left the Chalet School to take charge of the finishing branch at Welsen. When they saw that she had also brought along Mdlle. Berné another former mistress when the school left Tirol, and her secretary, Gillian Culver, an Old Girl and a great favourite, they had been thrilled to the limit. Gillian had left her mark on the school during the year she had been Head Girl and quite a number remembered her well.

In the same coach with the Gang were Maeve Bettany who had slightly recovered from her excitement over her baby sister by this time; Clare Kennedy; the Maynard triplets; and Sue Meadows. Sue was a very quiet, reserved girl and though she had been at the school ever since it arrived in the Oberland, her form-mates felt that they knew her little better than they had done during the first term. She was there mainly on account of her frail little cousin, Leila Elstob. Leila had been brought out to the Alps that she might benefit by treatment from the doctors at the great Sanatorium at the far end of the Görnetz Platz. During the previous term, a very serious operation had been performed on her and the doctors now hoped that when she was fully convalescent she would be stronger than ever before. Even so, she was never likely to be anything but delicate and most of Sue's weekends were spent at the pretty chalet Mrs. Elstob had rented midway between the school and the Sanatorium, amusing her small cousin. Later, of course, when the winter storms arrived, she would be full-time at the school and Leila must do without her. But by that time, they all hoped that she would be out of bed and able to amuse herself with the magnificent dolls' chalet that had come to her from the Chalet School Sale last Easter.

Today, in view of the trip, the Head had begged her off for the day and the Gang, aware that she had made no special friend of her own, had calmly co-opted her among its members. Prunella Davidson, a comparatively new member, had taken charge of her and she was sitting beside her with Len Maynard, the only other girl with whom she seemed to be really friendly, just in front, partnered by Heather Clayton, a very naughty member of Upper IVA though this term, she had shown some signs of reforming.

"It's an awfully long way!" Ruth Barnes sighed as she changed her position for about the twentieth time. "—Oh, sorry, Lesley! I didn't mean to upset you!"

Lesley, who had very nearly landed on the coach floor, retorted wrathfully, "It isn't so much what you mean as what you do! That's about the tenth time you've nearly had me on the floor! Can't you sit still for five minutes?"

"Well, I *said* I was sorry!" Ruth returned huffily.

"Fermez les becs, toutes les deux!" Mary-Lou intervened with a piece of French slang that would have got her into trouble if anyone in authority had overheard her. The two mistresses, however, were at the back of the coach and she had enough discretion to mutter it so that only the people nearest could hear.

Ruth subsided with a glare and the rest giggled under their breath.

"Mary-Lou! You really are the limit!" Vi Lucy hissed at her.

"Well, we don't want any barneying. Anyhow, I believe I see water over there. Yes, it is! O, goody, goody! This is Lake Zurich—must be! Look at the size of it! We'll be in Zurich itself in half no time now and then you can stretch your legs all you want!"

"Yes; that is the lake," observed Miss o'Ryan from the back. She had overheard this. "As for being nearly there, we're in the outskirts now. Zurich is a big city: the largest in Switzerland, and this is one of the suburbs."

The girls crowded eagerly to the windows to catch the first glimpse of the lake. It lay, long and crescent-shaped, placid and blue under the October sun which shone down on the quiet waters, gemming them with millions of diamonds. They had reached it at Kilchberg, once an independent village, but now swallowed up in the tentacles the great city that stretches out among the rolling green hills that ring the lake. Beyond them lie snowclad peaks, many of them crowned with glaciers. The girls exclaimed with delight when they saw them, for it was a clear day with a steadfast blue sky of autumn overhead.

Josette turned to grin at Jessica. "You know, Jessica," she remarked, "I do think this is one of the loveliest lakes I've seen yet—and we've seen quite a few now, haven't we, Jo?" She turned to back her great chum, Jo Scott.

"Oh rather!" Jo agreed enthusiastically. "Look at all the little yachts with their white sails! Oh, aren't they *pretty*?"

"Lovely," Mary-Lou butted in. "But surely it's rather late for yachting on the lake? I mean you get such sudden storms on the Swiss lakes."

"But the radio foretold fine weather over the week-end and the glass was steady," Miss Burnett said, joining in. "I expect they're making the most of it. For you're quite right, Mary-Lou. At this time of year it's rather risky to go yachting hereabouts."

"I think they're simply sweet! I must get Dad to bring Mummy and me to Zurich for a week in the hols," Jo observed. "She's so much better now I'm sure she'd love it."

Those who heard her looked sympathetic. Jo's pretty mother had had a hair-raising experience in Kenya only a few months ago when she and Mr. Scott had been captured by Mau-mau. Mrs. Scott had been very ill for some time. When she was well enough to face the

journey, Mr. Scott had brought her to Switzerland where Joey Maynard had found a chalet for them at the Rösleinalp which was rather higher than the Görnetz Platz. Unfortunately, her heart had been affected by her experiences and she could not stay there. However, Mr. Scott had finally found a charming little house near Thun on the Thunersee, one of the two lakes between which Interlaken lies, and there, as her daughter said, she had “perked up” almost at once and there seemed to be every hope that when the Christmas holidays came, she would be nearly herself again.

“Lucky you if it comes off!” Mary-Lou said. “Oh, what a lovely promenade this is! Just look at those gorgeous trees!” She broke off to address Miss o’Ryan. “I say, Miss o’Ryan, I thought you said Zurich was the biggest manufacturing centre in Switzerland as well as being the largest city?”

“So it is,” Miss o’Ryan returned, looking amused. “Why?”

“But it’s so *clean!*” Mary-Lou protested.

“And why not? Have you forgotten that industry in Switzerland is run on ‘white’ coal?” Then, seeing the bewildered looks on the faces of the younger girls, she added, “I mean electric power. And all power in Switzerland is made by water. It’s called hydro-electricity. You won’t see smuts and soots and dirty streets here as you would in England—or France or Germany, for instance, where electricity is made from coal. The people of Zurich pride themselves on the fact that they live in one of the cleanest cities in Europe.”

“What do they manufacture?” Hilary Bennett asked.

“Oh, machinery of all kinds, silk ribbons and other silks, jewellery, locomotives and diesel engines, cotton goods—will that do you, Hilary? Of course, all these aren’t in Zurich itself. Many of them are in the suburbs and the villages round the city and the lake. This is the most highly industrialized part of Switzerland.”

“It doesn’t look like it,” Vi commented. “Oh, look! There’s a San over there! And just a little way back I saw part of the university.”

The two mistresses looked at each other and laughed. “Not a San at all,” Miss Burnett told her. “It’s a factory of some kind. All the factories are built to look like sanatoria or are erected round a green space so that they might almost be colleges in some modern university as you say, Vi. And you’ll find no slums, either. The workers live in pretty chalets with flowers growing in their front gardens when they don’t live in the most modern of apartment houses—that means flats,” she added for the edification of two or three who looked mystified.

“Like they have in Canada,” Margot Maynard put in. “They have some gorgeous apartment houses in Toronto. We knew lots of girls who lived in apartments when we were at La Sagesse.”

“But how on earth can they afford it?” Christine Vincent, who came from Leeds demanded. “I know that nowadays lots of people do live on council estates and all those houses have gardens. But in Leeds, at any rate, there are just as many who live in back-to-back houses in long rows with frontdoors right on to the street.”

“Well, the people of Zurich are about the highest-paid workers in Europe, for one thing,” the history mistress explained. “For another, the Swiss as a race are thrifty. The Zurichers are so more than most. The girls are all trained from childhood to be good housewives, whatever other job they may take up when they leave school. The average Swiss girl would feel herself disgraced if she couldn’t cook, clean, sew and knit, buy thriftily for the house and so on. When they marry, they don’t fritter their husband’s money away on silly trifles and needless expenses. This is especially true of Zurich which is one of the great Puritan cities. For

instance, Zwingli preached here from 1519 to 1531 when he was killed with hundreds of his fellow citizens in a battle with the men of the Four Forest Cantons. It was after that battle that Zurich became a member of the Swiss Confederation, for if the Zurichers lost hundreds of their men, so did the other army. You'll see a bronze statue of Zwingli behind the Grossmunster if we've time for it."

"What is the Grossmunster?" Mary-Lou queried. "Is it the cathedral?"

"Yes. The other famous church is the Fraumunster in the Munsterhof."

"And who was Zwingli?" Josette enquired with interest.

"He was one of the great Protestant Reformers. He is said to have been one of the more tolerant of them." Miss o'Ryan paused to laugh before she added, "If that's so, I'm glad I didn't live anywhere near him. Judging by his statue, he must have taken a very dim view of any form of wrongdoing."

"The Great Church and Our Lady's Church," Len Maynard said thoughtfully. "Which is the older of them, Auntie Biddy?"

Miss o'Ryan gave her a quick frown. The brevet title was not supposed to be used at school. Then she relaxed as Len turned pink and said, "Oh, the Grossmunster, beyond a doubt. It's said to have been founded by the Emperor Charlemagne."

"The Emperor who was crowned all in a moment on Christmas Day at St. Peter's while he was saying his prayer?" Con, the third of the Maynard triplets gasped. "But goodness, that was centuries and centuries ago! It must be terrifically old!"

"I said he *founded* it," the mistress reminded her. "This isn't Charlemagne's building. This was built between 1100 and 1200. The Fraumunster was not begun till a century later. Now that's enough information at the moment. You're missing all the sights. Ask me later on the way to Schaffhausen and I'll expand then."

"But *we* shan't hear it!" Margot complained with a toss of her golden curls. "We're staying in Zurich and not going to see that Schaff place!"

"Then ask one of the mistresses with you. They can tell you about it as well as I can. *You* people will see Zwingli's statue, anyhow. You're going to see the Grossmunster, I know. I doubt if the rest of us will, though."

"Oh, well, you'll be seeing those marvellous falls," Len said consolingly. "*We*'ve got to wait for that till we're older."

"Plenty of time for you folk who are Juniors. Look at these lovely public gardens we're just passing. They're beautiful now, but when I saw them in the summer they were exquisite!"

She kept their attention on the sights and ten minutes later, the coach rolled up to the Kongresshaus and came to a halt. They had finished the first part of their journey and here they would leave the younger girls when they had had their midday meal. Miss o'Ryan turned them out of the coach, bidding them line up with those ahead of them and keep quiet until they had been marched into the garden restaurant where Matron had arranged for their Mittagessen if it were a fine day.

The girls sat down to enjoy Zurchertopf, a sausage made of macaroni, minced veal, spices and a dash of tomato sauce, all baked in a casserole and brought to table piping hot and very delicious. With these they had tiny potato-balls, cooked in butter, crisp and brown outside and melting within. This was followed by Dampfnudeln mit Pflaumen—yeast dumplings cooked in plum syrup with butter and then popped into a hot oven to bake twenty minutes with a little milk and finally served with the plums out of the syrup heaped round them. It sounds solid,

but is actually very light and delicious and the girls revelled in them. They drank lemonade with this luscious meal and those who wanted had coffee to wind up.

Then Miss Annersley and Miss Wilson hurried them out of the restaurant, marched them across a bridge over the Sihl, through the Burkli Platz, across the long Quai Brucke which bridges the rushing Limat, and down the Limat Quai to the Grossmunster.

“Just time for all of you to get a glimpse of Zurich’s famous Cathedral,” Miss Annersley said. “Some day, I hope we can bring you elder girls here to see the city properly; but today we want you to go on to the Falls of Rhine. I was told that, thanks to the heavy rains they’ve been having here the past three weeks or so, they are simply magnificent and I’d like you to see them at their best. Now, Miss o’Ryan,” she turned with a smile to the history mistress, “if you will lead the way with your party, the rest of us will split up and follow you.”

Biddy o’Ryan nodded and called the Gang with its additions, the Maynards and Clare Kennedy with her and marched them round the great edifice to see the statue of Zwingli first. They gazed awe-stricken at the severe face of the man who, with Martin Luther, caused the first great split in the Protestant churches.

“Yes,” Mary-Lou told the mistress when she had taken him all in. “You’re right! To say he looks austere is simply understating the case. I wouldn’t have liked to get across *him!*”

“I don’t see how anyone could call him tolerant—not if looks are anything to go by,” Vi agreed. “But perhaps the sculptor wasn’t very good,” she added hopefully. “Anyhow, I think he looks as if he didn’t know how to smile!”

“Who *was* the sculptor?” Hilary asked.

“A man called Natter. He was supposed to be very good. However, the Puritans of that time were mostly on the severe side, looking on fun and jokes as too light and frivolous for this life,” Miss o’Ryan said.

Ruth looked shocked. “But surely they didn’t expect that sort of thing in Heaven!” she exclaimed.

“No; I’m certain they didn’t. But why shouldn’t we? Or do you think we’ll go round pulling long faces all the time?” the mistress asked. “Do you think Our Lord never laughed when He was on earth, Ruth? I’m sure He did—and enjoyed a good joke as much as anyone. The children would hardly have run after Him as they did if He hadn’t.”

This was a new idea to Ruth whose notions of the future life were very nebulous and who looked both startled and thunderstruck. Mary-Lou, however, had thought a good deal about it since her Grandmother’s death and she nodded.

“Yes; I see what you mean. Heaven is the happiest happiness and laughter is a part of happiness. Yes; I like that.”

Then Miss o’Ryan led them off to the cathedral, pointing out the west tower where Charlemagne is enthroned, complete with gilded crown and sword, before she took them in. She told them that it was dedicated to three saints—Felix, Regula and Exuperantius who preached Christianity to the inhabitants of the town in the third century.

“What happened to them?” Con Maynard asked.

“The governor, a man named Decius, tried to make them renounce their faith and when they refused, tortured them in various horrible ways. Finally, when he found that he was merely wasting his time, he had them all three beheaded. They were buried in graves on a nearby hilltop which, so tradition says, they had dug themselves. There’s a legend that when they were executed, they picked up their heads and walked to their graves and laid themselves in and the Great Seal of Zurich shows them carrying their heads under their arms. But that, of

course, is only a legend. What *is* a matter of history is that they did die for their faith and they did establish the Christian Faith in these parts.” She stopped and glanced at her watch. “Well, I’m afraid that’s all we people who are going on to Schaffhausen have time for today. You three Maynards, tack on to some other party—which ever will have you. Mary-Lou, go and ask the other mistresses to bring or send their girls outside to me. Clare, you might ask Miss Wilson if she’s ready. She’s coming with us and Miss Annersley is staying with the Zurich party. Hurry up; or we shan’t have time to see much when we get there.”

The girls scattered at once. Darkness came early nowadays and they were not minded to miss anything they could help. As a result, twenty minutes later, the biggest coach of the lot, which held forty-eight people, swung out of the last of the northern suburbs and headed for Schaffhausen and the Falls of Rhine. The others, left behind, were consoled for missing the famous Falls by being informed that the other coaches were to take them to Trogen where the city has established the Pestalozzi Village where war orphans from many countries are brought up in a peace and security unknown all too often in their own countries.

Miss Annersley explained that it was called after Johann Pestalozzi, a great Swiss thinker, who did so much for education and under whose training the great Froebel, the founder of our modern Kindergartens, learned so much. Then she led the way to the Munster Platz where the two remaining buses were awaiting them and they piled in and set off, the Falls of Rhine forgotten for the time being.

Chapter X
EXPEDITION—THE FALLS OF RHINE

“Tell us something about Schaffhausen, Miss Wilson,” Betsy begged as they left the houses behind them and were running between fields and through quiet little villages dotted here and there.

“Bill” considered. “What do you want to know? If it’s history, Miss o’Ryan is the one to ask. Who am I,” she added, laughing, “to try to take the place of our history mistress? Go ahead, my child, but let them down gently when it comes to dates.”

Biddy o’Ryan, flashing a laughing look at the co-Head of the school, returned demurely, “Sure, and you could tell them as much as they’re likely to assimilate on a trip. Oh, all right! I’ll tell them,” she added hurriedly, for “Bill” had given her a mock severe look. “Now let me see. What sort of things do you want to know?”

“Everything you can tell us!” It came as a chorus from the girls.

“That’s too large an order entirely,” she protested. “I’ll tell you a little of the history—just an outline—and then Miss Wilson or someone else can tell you the rest.”

“Good!” Mary-Lou had swung round to see the speaker. The others imitated her and Miss o’Ryan proceeded to give them a very bare outline of the history of Schaffhausen.

“First of all,” she began, “you’d better know that the name means ‘Skiffhouses’.”

“Why on earth?” Peggy Adams asked with interest.

“In the Middle Ages, when so many goods were moved by water, since the roads were dangerous from a good many points of view—half of them not properly made and robbers and so on—Schaffhausen was an important depot because cargoes from Germany had to be unloaded there from the river skiffs which brought them and then reloaded again further down the river. That, of course, was because of the Falls.”

“How did they get the things past the Falls?” Katharine Gordon queried.

“Mainly by pack mules and waggons. We don’t know much about the beginnings of the city. The first records date from 1050 when All Saints monastery was founded. It became a free imperial city and after 1501, when it was freed from Austria, it joined the Swiss Confederation. After that, its history is mainly the history of most of this part of Switzerland until we come to the War. Then, by a tragic mistake, Schaffhausen was bombed by the Americans. That little mistake cost them £10,000,000 in reparations. The railway station got a direct hit and about thirty people were killed in the raid.”

“Oh, how dreadful!” Mary-Lou cried. “Someone must have got into an awful row for that!”

“History doesn’t tell. Anyhow, it’s over and done, now. What is more interesting to you people is the fact that the Habrecht family, the great watch and clockmakers who were responsible for the wonder clock at Strasbourg, lived and worked there. So did the artist Stimmer, the two great doctors, Wepfer and Ammann and a good many more important people. Now that’s all I’m telling you. Miss Wilson can take over.”

“Bill” laughed. “Well, you must see the famous Haus Zum Ritter,” she said. “The cathedral, I’m afraid, is very bare and cold, but it has a bell that is known all over. It is in the courtyard and was cast in 1486. It has an inscription, ‘Vivos voco, mortuos plango, fulgura

frango,' and the poet Goethe was so impressed by it, that he wrote his beautiful 'Lied von der Glocke' or 'Song of the Bell'."

"What does the inscription mean, Miss Wilson?" Hilary Bennett asked.

"Construe it for yourself, Hilary."

Hilary thought. "'I call the living, I mourn the dead, I break the—the splendour'—is that it, Miss Wilson?"

"Near enough. Never mind. You can look it up when you get back to school. Meantime, and as we are nearing Schaffhausen, I'll just point out that you mustn't forget the Munot Castle which is on a hilltop overlooking the city. It is mainly a round tower, built between 1564 and 1584, and has walls sixteen feet thick. They believed in building things to last in those days!"

"It sounds like it!" Carola laughed. "And what about the Falls?"

"Ah, the Falls! They are the largest in Central Europe—some say in the whole continent. Ruskin evidently thought them magnificent. In his book *Praeterita* he has written some of his most magnificent prose about them. You can see them from various points. We are going to the Belvedere where there is a platform which looks down on them. You *can* see them from the Fischez, an iron platform which juts almost into the spray; but it's a rather damping performance and not suitable for this time of year. And you can see them through coloured glass from the Pavilion. I think, myself, that the Belvedere is one of the best view-points, though. Oh, one more thing! Embedded in the Fall is an iron cross with 1850 inscribed on it."

"Why?" Mary-Lou asked curiously.

"Because that year was the year of the Great Drought when the river fell so low that it could be forded on foot. Such a thing has never happened since. I'm not sure if it ever happened before. But once of that sort of weather would be enough for a few centuries, I should think." She sat down and the girls turned back to chatter among themselves.

"This is a gorgeous expedition!" Vi remarked as she produced a slab of chocolate from her coat pocket. "Help me break this up, Verity. It'll go round our lot, anyhow."

"I wish Bill would let us go on that iron platform. It'd be a lovely yarn to be able to tell the kids when we got back!" Hilary said yearningly.

"Well she won't. She's said so, so you just keep your head and don't play any mad tricks," Mary-Lou said warningly. "You're not a kid now, you know."

"Keep calm! I'm doing nothing idiotic. All the same, I wish she *would* have let us go. We could have brought our raincoats."

"I doubt if they'd have been much use. I should think the spray is terrific there. We'd all be drenched—and this is October, remember!"

Verity Carey lifted up her voice. "I'm very glad we aren't going to see them from there. Matey would have a lot to say if we all arrived back looking like drowned rats! She'd probably keep us in bed all tomorrow and dose us with that awful mixture of hers in case we started colds."

"How right you are! I'd forgotten that! I wouldn't want to get wet seeing *Niagara* if that was the price we had to pay!" Hilary declared.

"Anyhow, I rather think we're just entering Schaffhausen, so we can forget it," Mary-Lou said firmly. "Stop nattering, you people, and remember that our crowd sticks together unless Bill and the rest insist on dividing us up."

However, nothing was further from the minds of the mistresses. Miss Wilson handed over the Gang to Miss o'Ryan with the remark, "You take Mary-Lou and Co, will you? We'll have

to split up, you know. Too many of us to go marching through the streets in a pack! Oh, add Sue and Jessica and Clare—and you'd better have a couple of prefects as well. Who will you have?"

"Give me three—Betsy, Katharine and Carola," was Bidly o'Ryan's modest request. "Sure, 'twould be a shame to part them! They're as much a triumvirate as that trio we had years ago—when you were Head Girl, Gill—Gill and Gay and Jacynth."

Miss Culver blushed at this reminiscence, and the three prefects beamed on the history mistress. Miss Wilson laughed and gave way. "Very well. I'll take what remains of Upper IVA for my share. Mdlle.," she swung round on Mdlle. de Lachennais, "Will you be responsible for Upper V? Then you, Miss Burnett and Miss Armitage and Miss Moore can go off with the odds and ends of VB and Miss Lawrence, would you and Miss Culver be responsible for VIB? Then that's settled. Choose your prefects, but I'm having Jean and Ailsa, and we're going straight to the Falls. Which reminds me; no monkey tricks, girls! Keep with your own group and don't try to take any silly risks. Is that a promise?"

"Yes, Miss Wilson!" came as a chorus from everyone.

"Good! Then as we seem to be creating something of a sensation, my party will return to their coach and the rest of you can go off where you like. We meet at the Restaurant Frieden for Kaffee und Kuchen at half-past sixteen. Until then, auf wiedersehen, everyone! Come along, VB—all except the girls I mentioned!"

She waved her hand, climbed back into the coach, followed by her party and they were off, leaving the rest still standing in a mob in the Fronweg Platz where the coaches had halted.

"Well," Miss o'Ryan said, getting in first, much to the joy of her group, "we are going to the Museum to see the wall pictures that give us the history of the great Fischer family who first established iron and steel foundries here and also the diorama of a Cave Man's Home. Pair off, girls, and lead the way, Mary-Lou and partner! Goodbye, everyone!"

The Gang hurriedly got into line and she marched them off in triumph to seek the Museum. They went down the Verdergasse, past the magnificent Haus Zum Ritter where Bidly o'Ryan halted them that they might see the frescoes of Tobias Stimmer who lived and worked in Schaffhausen in the days when our own Elizabeth I was reigning.

"Isn't it gorgeous?" Vi exclaimed. "How did they manage to mix their paints so that they've stayed bright all this time?"

"Oh, Vi! Use your brains!" Lesley Malcolm scolded her. "It must have been repainted dozens of times since!"

"Well, not exactly that," Miss o'Ryan said. "But it *has* been recently restored. Hence the glowing colours! This is the most famous of Schaffhausen's frescoed houses. The other two most famous are the Schmiedstube and the houses that are numbered 43, 28 and 26. We'll look at those when we come back. But before we go on, notice the number of oriel windows. You'll find any amount of oriel windows and green shutters wherever you go in this city. They seem to be a speciality here."

"What is that church?" Clare asked.

"That's St. John's church—built about the same time as the Haus Zum Ritter. I don't think we'll bother it with our presence. We haven't too much time for all we have to see. Cross the road, girls. Now then, here we are at the Museum."

The Museum, as she told the girls, had originally been a convent of which the Munster had been the abbey church. When the Protestant Reformation came to this area, it had been turned into a museum and also houses, nowadays, the town library. The girls enjoyed their visit,

especially the mural paintings which give the history of the Fischer family, whose foundries are world famous.

“The founder of the whole thing was Joseph Conrad Fischer,” Miss o’Ryan told them. “He started out as a poor apprentice and he rose to become so important, that on one occasion he entertained the Tsar Alexander of Russia who gave him a magnificent jewelled ring when he left. I want you to see his illustrated journal which he kept for the sake of his grandchildren.”

The girls looked at it with delight and then she led them to the diorama which is in a dimly-lighted passage so that, standing in semi-darkness themselves, they could gaze on the scenes in the caves and see the far, far distant ancestors of the present inhabitants of Schaffhausen busy about their daily work. In the near distance lay a huge glacier, grey and chilling, to remind people that at the time these men and women lived, much of Europe shivered in the bitter winter of the Ice Age.

Jessica stared and then voiced almost her first remark since Mittagessen. “Oh, how thankful I am that I didn’t live then! It must have been simply awful!”

“It seems so to us,” the mistress agreed as she waved to them to follow her. “But do remember, Jessica, that they didn’t know anything better. The chances are that a couple of thousand years hence our own descendants may be standing looking at movies of us and our times and pitying us because we hadn’t the marvels they have—such as trips to the other planets or—or the interior of the earth or along the floor of the ocean, for instance.”

“Sounds like a Jules Verne Story,” remarked Barbara Chester, sister of many brothers and brought up like them on a good many of the old, well-beloved classics of the last century. “But if we go on having wars like the last one, Miss o’Ryan, they may be envying us for what we’ve had that they haven’t.”

“Or there mayn’t be anyone left on the earth at all,” Vi Lucy chimed in.

Miss o’Ryan laughed at them. “You pair of pessimists! You deserve a good shaking! Well, we’ll forget it and go to the electric tramway for our trip to the Falls.”

“Aren’t we going by coach like the others?” Mary-Lou demanded.

“No; the coaches have gone off and in any case, why do you want a few like us to be rattling about in a great motor coach like odd peas in a pod?” the mistress flashed back at her. “The electric tramway will do us very nicely. Come along, all of you. We can’t waste time. It’s fifteen o’clock already.”

They followed her out of the building and were lucky enough to catch a tram almost at once. On their way to the Falls, they passed a city-bound tram on which were Miss Wilson and her party who made various wild signs to show how thrilled they had been with their trip until evidently called to order by their leader.

They passed through Neuhausen where the river bank has been spoilt by great, hideous industrial buildings, barely concealed by a few ragged trees that looked very sorry for themselves. In some places, in fact, the buildings extend to the water’s edge, and Miss o’Ryan groaned over the lack of imagination shown by the men of the nineteenth century who had so defaced what was once one of the most picturesque districts in Switzerland.

“’Tis a pity that when the Americans bombed the place they didn’t wipe out all this!” she said to Betsy who was sitting beside her. “’Twould have been no great loss, I’m thinking! However, I suppose they felt they might as well use the power from the Falls.”

The Falls proclaimed themselves long before they could be seen. A dull thunder was heard which grew louder and louder. Then they reached the stopping-place and tumbled out and were enveloped in a din that was terrific.

They had to shout to make themselves heard and Miss o’Ryan, bawling at the top of her voice, ordered silence until they had reached the Belvedere from which they would have their view of the famous Falls.

Standing gazing at them with awe, the girls were almost stunned by the magnificence of the scene. In mid-stream stand four mighty pinnacles of rock round which the water hurls itself in boiling rapids to plunge in an unbroken mass over one ledge, down a second one before hurling itself into the seething cauldron about forty feet lower, whence the dense mist of spray rises as if trying to join its parent body once more. As they stood watching, the sun, which had been overcast, suddenly broke through the clouds and, to the ecstasy of the girls, delicate rainbows formed and dissolved in rapid succession. It was difficult to get them away, but at last they stood on the bank, nearly deafened by the noise of the roaring water and overwhelmed by the glorious sight.

“What is the exact height of the Falls, Miss o’Ryan?” Katharine Gordon asked when they were returning to Schaffhausen to join the others for Kaffee und Kuchen.

“Reckoning in the rapids, 110 feet,” the mistress said. “But it isn’t only the height that makes them so impressive. Just above them, the Rhine is 700 feet across. I read somewhere that 80,000 cubic feet of water per second crosses the top ledge. That may give you some idea of its volume. But more than that, did you notice the four limestone rocks that rise—three besides the centre pinnacle? The one nearest the left bank was so worn with the action of the water that it had been reduced to a third of its original size. However, it has been buttressed with masonry to save its being washed away entirely.”

“I wish they hadn’t built that ghastly railway bridge just where they did,” Mary-Lou said with a sigh.

“So do I! However, I don’t suppose the government would agree to its being blown up—much too useful! The only thing to do is to try to shut your eyes to it.”

Carola Johnstone suddenly said, “My cousin with whom I used to live came here ages ago and she saw them from a boat below and she said it looked as if the pinnacles were actually *trembling* with the force of the water. I’d like to see them like that some day. It must be even more marvellous than from the Belvedere.”

“I’ll tell you something odd,” Miss o’Ryan observed. “No one seems to have mentioned the Falls anywhere before about 960 A.D.”

“Goodness! Why ever not? Weren’t they discovered before then?” Hilary asked.

“My dear girl, the Romans had colonised all round. Have you forgotten the Helvetic wars? But it is a fact that none of their records say anything about them.”

“How awfully queer!” Mary-Lou looked at her. “Is there any reason for it? I mean did they think they were too—too—well, did they think it was something their gods had made and they thought it too *sacred* to talk about?”

“No; geologists have a much more commonsense explanation than that. They think that the Falls just weren’t there.”

“Not *there!*” several people uttered this exclamation.

“So they think. They say that they probably didn’t exist till about a thousand years ago—more or less. The idea is that the water deepened the bed of the river below the Falls where it is softer rock. But the limestone barrier—of which the four pinnacles are the highest part remaining, prevented the upper bed from following suit. I believe they are right, for old guide-books say the falls are less than eighty feet high—that was in the seventeenth century—and now we know that, with the rapids, as I said before, they are quite 110 feet. The bed of the

Rhine below them is deepening every day, you see, even if only by the infinitesimal part of an inch.” Then as they stared at her in amazement, she added, “Sure, you all know that at one time, the Niagara Falls were much nearer to Lake Ontario than they are now. There, it’s all soft rock and the Falls are eating their way back and back along the river. The Falls of Rhine are unlikely to do that. Limestone is a hard rock and it is the limestone ridge that is responsible for the Falls themselves.”

“Well,” said Mary-Lou, first as usual to recover her breath, “I call that—weird!”

The inadequacy of the remark made the three prefects choke.

“Oh, Mary-Lou!” Betsy chuckled. “What a description!”

Mary-Lou flushed, but she stood to her guns. “Well, it *is* weird. You know, I’d never thought of that sort of thing happening *now* though I knew about Niagara, of course. Bill herself told us years ago when we were Juniors. Only somehow one doesn’t really think of any kind of rock being *soft*. It’s frightfully interesting!”

By this time, they were back in Schaffhausen where lights were beginning to twinkle in the windows, for the narrow streets darkened the rooms in the houses with their small windows. The tram took them to the Fronwag Platz where two other parties had also just arrived, and they all set out to the Restaurant Frieden where they had Kaffee und Kuchen in a place that looked delightfully antique.

“What about going on to Lake Constance?” Betsy asked Miss Wilson during the meal.

That lady shook her head. “I’m afraid not, Betsy. Schaffhausen has taken us so long that we’ll have to leave it till another time—perhaps when the winter frosts have frozen parts of it over and you have a chance to skate on it. You’d all like that. Besides, Constance—or the Bodensee, as the Germans call it, looks wonderful under winter conditions. However, you’ve had a glorious time, haven’t you?”

“Oh, rather!” Betsy agreed. “I’m awfully glad to have seen the Falls of Rhine. I’ve heard so much about them. And Miss o’Ryan told us some jolly interesting things—though Mary-Lou did say they were weird!” she added with a gurgle.

Luckily, Mary-Lou was at another table and heard nothing of this. “Bill” laughed and the conversation went to something else. Katharine asked if it was true that escaping prisoners of war had often made for Schaffhausen? Miss Wilson nodded.

“Quite true. And what is more, it was expected that if the Germans did try to invade Switzerland, it would be at Schaffhausen. All the bridges across the Rhine were mined and when news came that the invasion was expected, most of the townsfolk fled in a panic; and at the end of the war, thousands of Germans tried to cross the border to escape the Allied armies.”

“It’s a blessing Switzerland was *not* invaded,” Betsy said thoughtfully. “She’s always been neutral, hasn’t she? I wonder why?”

“Because all roads radiate from her. Also, all the big Powers agree that she must remain neutral because she is central and a neutral Power is a necessity in these days. But, please God, there won’t be any further need for that sort of thing.”

“I see. But I suppose neutrality didn’t make life much easier for her,” Betsy said. “I mean she must have gone short of piles of things.”

“Yes; the Swiss went very short of a good many things. War, especially global war, hurts more people than the actual belligerents.”

“Well, it’s over now and lets hope and pray no one starts up anything more!” Carola suddenly put in.

Miss Armitage came across from another table at that moment, and murmured something to Miss Wilson which made that lady glance hurriedly at her own watch. She murmured back and the interested girls saw the mistress going from table to table until Miss Wilson called for their attention by rapping on the table.

“Girls! Hurry up and finish! We have ten minutes left before we join the coaches. Be quick and don’t chatter. You can do that when we are on our way again. Remember, we have to pick up the Juniors and the mistresses with them at Zurich and *then* we have to get back to the Görnetz Platz. Don’t loiter, any of you!”

Judging by what was happening, the other mistresses were saying much the same thing. However, the girls reached the coaches on time, to find that the dusk was falling. They piled into the coaches, and set off for Zurich where they picked up everyone else and when the last mistress—Miss Annersley—had taken her seat, they set off for home, having had, as Mary-Lou said to Jessica beside whom she was sitting for the return journey, a really gorgeous expedition.

Chapter XI

MARY-LOU STARTS IN

It was Sunday again. Mary-Lou, waking early as usual, burrowed under her pillow for her watch and a tiny pencil torch her stepfather had given her. She discovered that it was not quite half-past six, so she tucked everything away and then tumbled out of bed to say her prayers. She had a reason for this very early start. She had decided, not without some inward quakings, that today she must begin on her campaign to bring Jessica Wayne to a decent frame of mind where her stepsister, Rosamund Sefton was concerned.

The evening before, the prefects' sheets-and-pillowcase party had taken place and had been a huge success from the moment when the first guest—Bill—had entered, attired as a Greek lady, to the time when St. Mildred's cheered the Chalet School prefects with cheers that might have been heard halfway to the Sanatorium. Mary-Lou herself had won a prize for being most helpful, for she had showed worried Juniors and Junior Middles what to do with their materials, helped Juniors not otherwise provided for by the prefects, and generally pushed her own affairs into the background to help the rest.

As she rose from her bedside to get back between the sheets, she suddenly remembered what Miss Annersley had said when she named the three prize-winners of the prizes she herself had offered and her cheeks burned.

"Senior—Mary-Lou Trelawney. She has helped wherever help was asked and offered help where it wasn't and left herself very little time to concoct a dress of any kind for herself. Come along, Mary-Lou. You deserve the prize, for you have been unselfish and kind throughout."

Mother would be pleased. Mary-Lou had no intention of repeating the Head's words, but she knew that Verity would report them in full. It was partly that little speech that had goaded her into immediate action where Jessica was concerned.

Once in bed again, the leader of the Gang settled down to planning the beginning of her attempt. She knew that she must be careful. A more touchy young person than Jessica could hardly have existed. True; there had been no more outbursts like the one with "Plato," but the girl seemed to be always on the lookout for slights—usually where none was intended. She was still very silent with the rest and apt, if allowed, to go off into corners by herself. Still, she had responded whenever Mary-Lou had spoken to her or tried to bring her into some plan of theirs.

"And that's so much gained," that young woman thought as she snuggled under the bedclothes. "I don't want to set her off again, but I did promise Aunt Joey I'd do what I could, so I'd better have a shot at it *now*. Anyhow, after all the Abbess said last night, I don't see how I can get out of it. At least she's not *quite* so bad as she was when I first met her. Oh, the little ass! Why *can't* she see that it's that poor kid Rosamund that has the heavy end of the stick?"

By this time, she could hear some of the others stirring. She looked at her watch again and found that it was just on seven. There was half-an-hour before they need get up and the rule was that if they sat up in bed, and in cold weather, wrapped themselves up, they might read. This was the third week in October so the nights and early mornings were chilly though there had been plenty of sunlight during the days and the air had been unusually mild for the time of year. Mary-Lou heard a slight cough from Vi and tumbled out of bed again.

“O.K.,” she said softly, so as not to disturb anyone who might still be sleeping. “I’ll switch on the lights now. Mind you put on your bed-jackets and don’t make a row.” She switched on the lights as she spoke and there was a rustle and a stir as five of the people in the dormitory sat up and prepared for the Sunday morning treat of reading in bed.

Finding that thinking had not helped her much, Mary-Lou reached for her own book, but the task before her got between her and the pages of *Mansfield Park*. On the whole she was glad when the rising-bell rang and books had to be put away.

“Partner me for Church this morning, Mary-Lou?” Hilary demanded from the other end.

Mary-Lou paused in her headlong rush for the bathroom to say, “Sorry, but I can’t. I’m booked already.”

“Oh, bother you! You had Vi last week and Verity the week before. Who’ve you taken on this?” But she was speaking to the empty air, for Mary-Lou had departed on her last word and, at that moment, was running her bath.

When she returned to the dormitory, fresh and glowing, Hilary went into the attack again. “I say, Mary-Lou, who’ve you chosen that you can’t partner me?”

“Jessica Wayne,” Mary-Lou replied in muffled tones, since she was holding the end of her pigtail in her mouth while she hunted out fresh ribbons for Sunday.

“Mary-Lou Trelawney! Are you *eating*?” Vi exclaimed in shocked tones. Food or sweets in the dormitory were strictly forbidden.

“Only my hair!”

Their prefect had found her ribbons and was tying the first enormous bow at the tail of her plait, so her voice was clear as usual.

Giggles sounded, as Christine and Josette came hurtling back from the bathroom. They came last on the Sunday morning list and, as Josette had complained bitterly more than once, it always meant a scrimmage for them to be ready in time. They had arrived as Vi had asked her question and got the full beauty of Mary-Lou’s reply. Everyone knew that young lady’s weakness for keeping her long, thick plait out of the way by holding it in her teeth—she had even had to be rebuked in form for doing it! The pair were in a hurry, but they found time to chuckle over it now.

“Must be ravenous!” Josette cried as she vanished into her cubicle where, to judge from the sounds, she was making hay in her drawers. “Oh, bother! I can’t find a clean blouse! What on earth—”

“Didn’t you put it over the back of your chair last night?” her prefect asked her.

“Good for you! So I did! I chucked the bedclothes on top of it when I stripped the bed just now. Hope it isn’t crushed to death! No; it’s O.K., thank goodness!”

Frühstück was at eight o’clock on Sundays instead of at half-past seven as it was on weekdays, but the girls were expected to be on time, just the same. Mary-Lou, always a quick worker, settled the skirt of her Sunday suit, pulled on her blazer and then, after a quick look round her cubicle to see that all was as it should be, went to look in on everyone else and proffer help where it was needed.

Hilary, busy brushing her short curls, turned on her as she popped her head in between the curtains. “I say, Mary-Lou, what on earth do you want to go round with that girl for? She’s a complete dreep if you ask me!”

“That’s why,” Mary-Lou said calmly. “*No* girl in our form is going to be allowed to get away with that sort of thing if I can help it. Furthermore, the rest of you are going to give me a hand where and when necessary.”

“Oh, *are* we?” came an ironical chorus at this.

“You are, my loves!” Suddenly, she altered her tone. “Don’t you *see*, all of you? That sort of thing isn’t done here. I don’t know what happened at her other schools, but we don’t let it go on. I’m going to see what I can do about it and I want you all to back me up. If Jessica’s a complete dreep, something must have happened to cause it. I’ll try and find out what and then we can see about showing her that we don’t let it happen—not in the Chalet School. You will, won’t you?”

Vi appeared beside her. “If you say so, I suppose we must. But I can’t say I’m very much struck with her. She never opens out, no matter how much *you* try. Look at last week during the expedition! She scarcely opened her mouth all day.”

“I agree that that’s unusual at our age,” Mary-Lou replied. “That’s one reason why I’m certain it isn’t natural. Even Sue Meadows talks on occasion; but Jessica just glooms along and I don’t like it.”

“If it’s anything at home I don’t see what you’re going to do about it,” Josette said from her corner. “It may not be anything at school, you know.”

Mary-Lou, knowing all too well that it was that exactly which was wrong with Jessica, had nothing to say. Instead, she changed the conversation. “Hurry up, you folk. It’s five to eight. Have you all said your prayers—and stripped your beds? Then buck up with your oddments and line up at the door. You know what the Abbess said last week!”

“That was that wretched Heather Clayton and Emerence Hope,” Josette grumbled. “I honestly don’t see why everyone should be penalised just because those two—oh, well, I suppose it *was* more than them; but they were the worst!—I don’t see why the rest of the school should be penalised because that crowd chooses to be rowdy on the stairs. They’re rowdy everywhere, if it comes to that.”

“They are! But as the Abbess has told us we’re to line up and march downstairs just as we used to do instead of being able to go as soon as we’re ready, we’ve nothing to do but obey.” Mary-Lou suddenly giggled. “The rest of their own crowd have told that pair exactly where they get off, though. No one’s loved them very much since last Sunday. I only hope it’s done some good, though I doubt it!”

“So do I. They’re incorrigible!” Barbara Chester agreed, as she joined the line that was forming by the door. “O-o-oh! There goes the bell! Hurry up, Josette, for mercy’s sake! *I* don’t want a late mark if you do!”

“Ready now!” Josette came flying, pinning her brooch into her blouse, and Mary-Lou opened the door and gave the word and they marched out to join the long line of girls descending the stairs very properly.

The cause for all this was that Heather Clayton of Upper IVA and Emerence Hope of the B division of the same form, two thoroughly naughty girls, had started squabbling on the stairs last Sunday and ended by grabbing at each other. Emerence missed her footing, caught at Heather and pulled her down and the pair of them rolled the rest of the way, involving five other girls in their fall, including Katharine Gordon who caught her thumb against the newell post at the bottom and strained it badly. Miss Annersley had said a few scorching words about babyish behaviour to the culprits which, as Heather said, left them feeling half-skinned, and then ordained that the school should go back to old ways and no girl might leave her dormitory to go down until the dormitory prefect marched them all down in line when the bell rang.

The girls had been very pleased by the new arrangement that they might go down in the mornings when they were ready and the sinful pair had heard all about their iniquities from almost everyone. For once, even Emerence went about with a hangdog look, while Heather was so subdued that she was hardly recognisable. Not that it would last; but, as Bidly o’Ryan had remarked in the staffroom on the Thursday evening following, it was good while it did!

They went to Frühstück and after, when they were all streaming upstairs to make their beds, Mary-Lou caught Jessica, drew her to one side and said firmly, “Be my partner for Church, will you, Jessica?”

“Yes, if you like,” Jessica said before she went off and Mary-Lou retired to her chores feeling that she had burnt her bridges this time.

There was no chance of talking on the way to Church—or not privately, at any rate. There were so many of the girls, that they had their own service at half-past nine in the tiny chapel halfway along the Platz. The main service, for the dwellers on the various shelves and ledges further up the mountain, was held at eleven. The Catholic girls attended the Catholic chapel in the other direction which was served by one of the monks from a nearby monastery, and their service was at ten. Twice in the month, there were communion services in both chapels at eight o’clock and those who wished to attend might do so as long as they put their names down on Matron’s list the day before.

Mary-Lou sat in the carved pew with Jessica beside her. She herself lifted her voice gaily in the hymns and psalms, but Jessica remained mute. After that appalling scene in the song room, she had never attempted to sing again, not even at school Prayers. Miss Lawrence officiated at the harmonium and the prefects collected. Quite often visitors to the Platz or one of the other alps came, so apart from the fifty odd girls, there was a good congregation. Mr. Lord, who served the little place, preached a brief sermon which was simple but forceful as a rule. On this day, he had elected to preach on the evil of jealousy and envy. Sitting beside the very still Jessica, Mary-Lou felt her wince more than once as if what the good man said had hit home.

The sermon lasted ten minutes. Mr. Lord had an eye to the Juniors, and he was a sensible man and never tried them by lengthy preachments. Betsy, Katharine, Jean and Ailsa passed the collection bags while the school and the two or three outsiders present sang lustily, “Fight the good fight.” They all knelt for the blessing and the service was over. They came out of the chapel into bright October sunshine and Miss Annersley looked round.

“Too bright to last,” she murmured to Miss Wilmot who was nearest. “We have been having wonderful weather, but I rather fancy it’s going to break before long. Did you happen to look at the barometer, Nancy? I hadn’t time this morning.”

“I did, but it was steady at Fair. It won’t break today, anyhow. But, as you infer, we’re rather far on in October. Last year at this time, we were having sudden rainstorms every now and then. From what I remember of Tirol, when it comes, it’ll come with a vengeance after all this glorious sunshine. We’d best make the most of it. Shall we give them a good walk?”

“Yes; I think so. March them back to school quickly for their elevenses and I’ll tell Karen to keep Mittagessen back an hour and they can have a real ramble. The Catholics will have got back before we finish, so we can wait for them. Tell the rest of the staff to come to me in the drawing room for coffee as soon as you get in. I’m just going to call at the Elstobs to inquire for Leila.”

The Head nodded and turned off and Miss Wilmot hurriedly informed those of the mistresses present before they gave the girls the command to march. Those young ladies were

not told definitely until they had reached the school when Miss o’Ryan told them to go quickly and change into their everyday things as they were to have a ramble.

“Good-oh!” Hilary Bennett said joyously as she and the rest of Cornflower took themselves off to obey orders. “I *thought* I saw ‘ramble’ in the Head’s eye while she was talking to Miss Wilmot!”

Mary-Lou nodded. “I rather guessed at it myself. Look here, you folk,” she swung round on them as she followed them into the dormitory and shut the door. “Be pals and leave me alone with Jessica when we break. I’ve promised—” she stopped and then went on, “myself that I’ll get to the bottom of all this rot today if I possibly can. But she won’t say a thing if anyone else is there. I know that. She mayn’t say anything to me when we’re alone; but I can try, anyhow.”

Vi had kept her deeply pansy-blue eyes on Mary-Lou’s face while she was talking. She had noticed the sudden break in the speech, but she realised that her friend was in deep earnest. Before anyone else could speak, she had leapt in.

“Yes; do! She’s a real gloomer, even though she seems to have bolted down on her temper since the Plato affair. If you *can* do something to yank her out of the Slough of Despond,” with a sudden memory of their last literature lesson, “it’ll be one of the best things you’ve ever done, Mary-Lou. We’ll play ball all right. Don’t worry about that. I should hope we were decent enough not to butt in on anything of *that* kind!”

She turned the scale as she knew she would. Hilary had been about to protest. So had Ruth and one or two of the others. But Vi’s remarks put an end to it. They murmured assent, and went to change into school clothes. Shoes had to be attended to in the Splashery, but in record time they were ready, and Mary-Lou led them downstairs where a number of people were already pulling on coats and berets and changing into stout walking-shoes. Betsy Lucy came along, paused, and then smiled at Mary-Lou.

“It’s to be a go-as-you-please ramble,” she said. “Miss Burnett has just been telling us so. What about joining on with Katt and me?”

It was an honour. The Head Girl and the full-blown prefects might always ask a younger member of the Seniors to join them, but the privilege was not often extended. For a moment, Mary-Lou felt inclined to accept and leave Jessica for just one more day. Then she gave herself a little shake. This wasn’t keeping her promise to Aunt Joey! She looked at Betsy who was just below her in height.

“That’s awfully decent of you, Betsy. I’d love to come, only I’ve got something I simply must do, so I can’t. But I’ll tell you what,” she went on quickly. “If you and Katt really do want someone else to tack on, would you take Jo Scott?”

“That wasn’t the idea,” Betsy said slowly. “We meant you. Why should we take young Jo instead?”

“Because I’ve just overheard her telling Josette that her mother’s had a bad heart attack, so they won’t be coming up this afternoon as they’d promised to take her out. The poor kid’s fearfully let down, even though she isn’t saying anything much. But you know how anxious they’ve been about poor Mrs. Scott. If you and Katt would take her, it would help her, I think. And I’ll tell you what; get leave to go to Freudesheim and tell Aunt Joey and ask her if you can take Bruno with you. She hasn’t much time for taking him for really decent walks and neither has Uncle Jack.”

Betsy eyed her curiously. “I’ll have to ask Katt. Oh, she’ll agree all right, but it would be only polite to *ask* her. And Bruno’s a jolly good idea. I love having a dog when we go

rambling. But I'd like to know what's behind all this."

"Nothing I can tell you, so don't ask. Thanks a million, Betsy! You're a pet!" Mary-Lou moved away and Betsy was left looking after her with that inquiring look on her face. Then she turned round and went back to the prefects' splashery to convey to Katharine the news that Mary-Lou couldn't join them and wanted them to take Jo Scott instead.

"And I'd like to know what's at the bottom of it all," she wound up, "Oh, she won't say; but there's something or I'll eat my Sunday hat!"

Katharine agreed. However, no one could relieve their curiosity so Betsy went to catch a very solemn-faced Jo and invite her to go with them before she raced off to get leave to run over to Freudenheim for Bruno, Joey Maynard's St. Bernard puppy, who was a rollicking gentleman of eight months old who needed far more exercise than his mistress could give him at present. Joey cordially accepted the Head Girl's offer and handed over his lead and harness with a warning to keep him on lead until they were well away from the Platz.

"O.K.," Betsy said. "How are the twins? Sorry I haven't time for a peep at them, but Miss o'Ryan told me to come straight here for Bruno and then go straight back."

"Well, you have him, so you'd better be off," Joey said cheerfully. "Go on, Bruno! Go with Betsy! No; Missus isn't coming this time. Get him away, Betsy, do! There's Mike on the bubble! I must fly!" And she fled as the sound of her third son's bubbling chuckle, which was always a danger signal, swelled up.

Betsy managed to drag Bruno through the garden and once he was satisfied that Missus really wasn't coming, he went with her gaily enough. Ten minutes later saw them all setting out—the Middles and Juniors with mistresses for the most part, though Miss Annersley had agreed to Betsy and Katharine taking Jo; and the rest of the Gang going in a body. They had their bounds and even Emerence, Heather and Margot Maynard, the three naughtiest girls in the school, would behave themselves on a ramble. They knew that the punishment was formal walks for a longer or shorter period, according to the gravity of the offence.

Once they were well away from the school and making for their favourite place, the Echo Auberge, the Gang broke up into twos and threes. Mary-Lou slipped an arm through Jessica's and drew her back a little to let the rest go ahead. Then, strolling casually along, she uttered a swift, voiceless prayer for help and started in.

Chapter XII
JESSICA CAPITULATES

“Well, isn’t this a marvellous idea?” Mary-Lou turned to the silent Jessica when they had reached the rack-and-pinion railway that served the various tiny villages perched like eagles’ nests on the shelves and alpes of the mountain. “Turn down, my lamb. You only come to the San if you go straight on as you ought to know by this time. We go down here about a quarter-of-a-mile—not quite so much, perhaps—and then cross over.”

“Oh? I didn’t know,” was all Jessica vouchsafed; and her partner thought to herself rather ruefully, “It’s just as well that I can talk even on when put to it!”

She was silent for a minute or two. Then she tried again. “You know, Jessica, we really are awfully lucky in some ways—in lots of ways, in fact.”

“Yes; I suppose so! I know that none of my other schools would have let even the prefects go for walks by themselves. We always had an escort mistress with us.” Jessica seemed to have decided to spread herself a little. “What is this echo you and the others were talking about?”

“Oh, a most gorgeous one! You’ll see when we reach the Auberge. It’s directly in front of it and you get the whole mountain wall to fling it back at you.” She took Jessica’s arm at this point to steer her across the railway. “This way—we turn here.”

Jessica went without comment. She had grown so accustomed to keeping her thoughts to herself except when she flew into a rage, that she found it hard to talk now, even when she was longing to do so. That row with Plato had made a big crack in the wall she had built round herself and she had an idea that if she only could talk, pour out all her unhappiness to someone and empty her mind of the jealousy and misery she had been storing up in it all this time, she might feel better and be able to settle down to making a real effort in the Chalet School. She had got as far as this, anyhow. By this time, she knew that she longed to stay on at the school. Only she *must* be able to begin afresh. That she had already made the beginning was something she was too muddled to see as yet.

Mary-Lou glanced at her. She had a feeling that the girl wanted to speak and did not know how to begin. Being Mary-Lou, she promptly plunged in with both feet.

“You know, Jessica, you really ought to be happy here. It’s a simply smash—er—marvellous school! I’ve been here for five years now and I know what I’m talking about. I’ve loved every minute of the time. The others would say the same if you asked them. Why don’t you try to cheer up a little? Are you thinking of the Plato row? Forget it! It’s over and done with. No one’s going to reap it up again. Of course,” she added with her usual insouciance, “I don’t mean that it won’t be *talked* about. After all, it’s given us another legend. But then, it’s only what dozens of other folk have done. ^[8]Did you ever hear of the *lovely* barney my sister—I mean Verity Carey—had with Plato *her* first term at school? And Aunt Joey—Mrs. Maynard at Freudesheim, you know—had an even lovelier one with Herr Laubach when she was a Senior. The yarn goes that he wound up by chucking all her drawing things at her head before he flung her out of art for keeps!”

[8] *Three Go to the Chalet School.*

Jessica said nothing for a minute. Then, after a look round to see that there was no one within earshot, she said haltingly, “I—I wanted to talk to you about—about that—about Verity Carey, I mean.”

Mary-Lou felt a queer little thrill go through her. Was Jessica really going to get it out of her system at last? She replied carefully, “What about young Verity? She isn’t actually any relation to me—except a connection by marriage,” she added with a chuckle. “But you knew that, didn’t you? Her dad married my mother. He and Father were pals. They were with the Murray-Cameron Expedition, if that means anything to you. They were exploring part of the upper reaches of the Amazon and the camp was suddenly attacked by a band of wild Indians.” The blue of her eyes darkened as she went on, “Father wasn’t in the camp at the time. He was off somewhere, collecting new insects. He was a lepidopterist—the official one to the Expedition. He landed half-way through the affair and just hurtled in to try to help the rest. He needn’t have. The Indians didn’t know he was there and he could have backed away and got off easily. But,” with a sudden proud little lift of her head, “he wasn’t going to do that. From what Dad says, he simply waded in and laid about him with his butterfly net first and then with his fists. He hadn’t a chance, of course. He was stabbed to death. I was ten when it happened, but first Mother and then Dad told me all about it. Dad was cartographer to the party—he made maps and so on. He and the doctor were both left for dead. The Indians looted the camp and then cleared off. But Dad and the doctor were alive and the doctor was able to keep up enough to attend to both of them. They got back to Mañaos finally—that’s the city furthest up the Amazon, in case you don’t know. There, of course, they were taken to hospital and later, they were sent home—to Glasgow, actually. Verity was at school and in my form. She’s a queer fish now,” Mary-Lou broke off to ruminate, “but she was a jolly sight queerer fish then. Mother was desperately sorry for her for she had no one but Dad, poor kid, and she couldn’t go to him. Then he came to see her. He met Mother then, of course, and though he had to go back to hospital for treatment and two operations, they made friends and Verity spent her hols with us—though Mother took her to Scotland to spend a week each time with Dad.”

“But he’s all right now, isn’t he?” In her interest in this story of friendship and heroism, Jessica forgot her own woes for the moment.

Mary-Lou nodded. “Oh, he’s well again—except that he can’t go exploring any more. He’s lame in one leg and limps very badly. The doctor is worse off. He lost the sight of an eye and the other never fully recovered from a nasty blow he took, so he is partly blind. He often comes to stay with us. You see, he can’t go into practice, but he writes books and Mother acts as his secretary. She’s quite a good shorthand typist.”

Jessica was thoughtful for a moment or so. The pair went on in silence though ahead of them they could hear the voices of the others. Presently, she halted and faced on Mary-Lou.

“Tell me this. When did Mr.—no; didn’t you say he was Commander?—Carey marry your mother?”

“Rather more than a year ago,” Mary-Lou replied. She spoke calmly enough, but inwardly, she was thrilling with excitement. Was it coming now?

Evidently it was, for Jessica asked slowly, “And—and—how did you feel about it? I mean, didn’t you *mind* awfully? You don’t mind my asking?” she added hastily.

“I don’t mind in the least. Why should I? I don’t know that I felt very much about it one way or the other. You see, I never really knew my own father. I was just a small kid the last

time he was at home. He got only short leaves and, as I told you, I was only just ten when he was killed.”

“But,” Jessica insisted, “it meant having Verity to live with you. You had to share your mother with her. Surely you hated that?”

For a moment, Mary-Lou was gravelled. Then she suddenly remembered something her grandmother had said to her at the time of her first term in school. Old Mrs. Trelawney had said that the child would not understand what she was told, but if she could remember it, it would help her later.^[9]

[9] *Three Go to the Chalet School.*

“How right Gran was!” Mary-Lou thought. “It’s going to help me this very minute!” She turned to the waiting Jessica. “No, Jessica; I didn’t,” she said very gravely. “You see if your love is to be worth anything it must be big enough for you to be glad if the people you love have other friends and—and people besides you. You’ve got to share and be *glad* to share. If it’s worth having at all, you *will* share.”

Jessica stared at her speechlessly. Mary-Lou made a big effort and called up all her resources. She went on shyly, for she was speaking of things that lay deep down and she rarely talked of them, even to her nearest and dearest. To talk to a girl who was comparatively strange, made it even harder. But Jessica had asked her for help and it was not in Mary-Lou to refuse that call if she could do anything.

“Listen, Jessica! I’ll try to show you how I mean. Go right back—to Bible times. When St. Andrew first met Our Blessed Lord, what was his first idea? He asked to be excused and rushed off home to fetch his brother along, too. He felt that this new Friend was Someone so—so wonderful and so—so *big* that he just had to share Him. And then,” speech was coming more fluently now, when she was fully embarked and there was no going back, “when Christ made friends all round with everyone who would have His Friendship, did the Apostles go sulking round about it and say and think that He ought to be satisfied with them? I don’t think so. We never hear anything about it, anyhow. It seems to have worked the other way round and they were maddest with the people who wouldn’t have anything to do with Him—like those Samaritans that James and John wanted to call down fire from Heaven on.”

“But—but that was different,” Jessica said. “What happened in those times can’t be the same as *now*.”

“It’s exactly the same,” Mary-Lou told her inflexibly. “They were human beings like you and me. Don’t you think anything different.”

“But—but it was *Him* they had for a Friend. That would make it different.”

“I don’t think so—not if they hadn’t it in them to be *willing* to share. God doesn’t force us to do anything. We’ve got to *choose*.”

“But you can’t say sharing a friend is the same as sharing your mother,” Jessica insisted.

“I don’t know. In some way, I believe it may be even harder. You do rely completely on your mother; but often you can’t be absolutely *sure* of your friends.” Mary-Lou was getting out of her depth here and decided to change the subject a little. They had been walking on and had now reached the end of the walled passage and reached a little shelf. A fallen tree-trunk lay at one side, and she pulled Jessica over to it. “Let’s sit down for a minute or two. We’ve heaps of time.”

They sat down and the form prefect thought with a little inward shudder of the adventure that had taken place here the previous term.^[10] That adventure might so easily have ended in

tragedy! Thank goodness the courage and endurance of one girl and the sense of everyone else concerned had saved the school from that!

[10] *A Chalet Girl from Kenya.*

Meanwhile, Jessica was digesting what her new friend had said. Presently, she turned to her. "I'd like to say something," she began.

"Go ahead!" Mary-Lou replied, thankfully turning away from Emerence Hope and Jo Scott and that escapade to this problem which now interested her so deeply.

"Well—I—that is—" Jessica was finding it hard to make a start. Mary-Lou wondered if she ought to help her out. Then she decided against it. Jessica must find her own way, for only so could she tell everything freely.

Even as she reached this decision, Jessica suddenly burst forth: "Did you know I'm like you? I mean *my* mother has married again—and a man with a daughter. I—I've got a sister-by-marriage—and I simply *loathe* her!"

"What on earth for?" Mary-Lou was completely matter-of-fact about it.

It was the last comment Jessica had expected. She stared at the form prefect for a moment. Then the torrent suddenly broke bounds and the barriers were swept away.

"Don't you *see*? Mother and I were together always. My father was killed when I was even younger than you—just a baby. We did everything together—almost like sisters. She's—she's an awfully *young* mother! Then she went and married Mr. Sefton and his girl Rosamund is an invalid and Mother's always with her now, running around after her and doing things for her and she has no time for me. They don't want me at home and I was bunged off to boarding-school to get me out of the way. Rosamund's taken my place! Mother doesn't love me any more—not as she used!"

"Who says so? Has *she* told you so?" Mary-Lou was sitting bolt upright and looking very judicial.

"Not exactly. But she's *acted* like it."

"What's wrong with Rosamund, anyhow? *How* is she an invalid?"

"She can't walk. There's something wrong with her back and she's always either in bed or on her invalid couch. Mother sits beside her for hours at a time and plays games with her and shows her how to do embroidery and knitting and things like that. She used to give all her spare time to *me* but she hasn't any use for me now. Rosamund's everything and I'm nothing!" Jessica choked and fell silent.

With another swift inward prayer for help, Mary-Lou spoke. "But don't you see," she said quietly, "that you are strong and well. You can play games and go for walks and run about and garden and everything like that. You have all the fun of school and meeting new people and making fresh friends. You can go to the shops and choose your own materials for embroidery and knitting and—and raffia-work. You can pick your own books and visit the cinema—if you like cinemas and they let you go—and do everything like that. You have such lots, Jessica. But Rosamund has to depend on other people for every blessed thing. She can have very little choice. How would you like it yourself?"

Grown-up people had tried to make Jessica see this point of view, but it was the first time anyone of her own age had put it to her. It struck home as Joey Maynard had known it would. From the elders she had dismissed it as just what grown-ups *would* think and say. Coming from another girl, it gave her pause.

"Well—I suppose I should hate it, really," she said uncertainly.

“You *suppose!* You jolly well *know!*” Mary-Lou retorted forcibly. “Of course you’d hate it! You wouldn’t be natural if you didn’t!”

Jessica was silent; but for the first time, she felt a sense of shame over her own behaviour. She had been so taken up with her own grievances, that she had refused to see how things must be for Rosamund. She remembered with a sudden stab that the other girl had never grumbled in her hearing. Certain wistful looks she had caught came to her memory to torment her. Even if she hadn’t liked the new arrangements, she might have been kinder to Rosamund.

Mary-Lou saw the colour in her face. “How old is she?” she asked.

“Fourteen—fifteen next month.”

“Just around our age, then. Is there any hope that she can ever be better?”

“I don’t know—I think not.” Jessica spoke very low.

Mary-Lou surveyed her thoughtfully and decided to rub it in. “Oh, Jessica! And you’ve been silly and jealous and horrid to her just because your mother’s tried to make up a little of what she’s missing all the time! How could you!”

“I felt she was taking Mother away from me,” Jessica muttered.

“That’s complete rot! Your mother’s your mother! What she feels for you—her own child—is quite different from what she feels for Rosamund. I know that by Verity and me. Mother loves Verity all right—I do myself, so far as that goes!—but it’s a different kind of love. It’ll be the same with Mrs. Sefton and you. She loves Rosamund because she’s so tied and so helpless, poor kid! She loves you because you’re her very own.” A remembrance of something Joey Maynard had said to her at the time of her father’s death, came back and she used it. “You see, you’re a part of her and a part of your father. Rosamund isn’t any part of either of them. It’s bound to make a difference—couldn’t help it!”

Jessica was beginning to see. She said, “Yes; perhaps you are right. But—oh, can’t you guess how miserable it’s all been made for me?”

“I can guess—some of it, anyhow. No girl who wasn’t utterly wretched would go on as you’ve been doing. But you do feel better now you’ve stopped bottling it all up inside you and told someone, don’t you?” Mary-Lou pleaded.

Jessica thought. “Do you know, you’re quite right,” she said in surprised tones. “I *did* want to say something to you, especially after you were so decent to me over the row in the songroom. I did think it might help me, but I never guessed it would make so much difference. I feel—I feel as if I’d had a sort of bath in my mind and it was all scrubbed and clean and fresh.”

“When I was a very little girl,” Mary-Lou said in her most grandmotherly way, “I used to think when I’d been naughty, that my soul was a little room and being naughty made it all dirty and messy. Once I was sorry and told Mother, I used to think I’d been having a spring-cleaning. I expect that’s how it feels to you. Well, that’s all right. Shall we go on and catch up with the others?”

“One moment!” Jessica begged. “Mary-Lou, you *have* made me feel different. I can see straighter now. But—oh, you don’t know how awful I’ve been at home! How on earth can I put things right there?”

“I can’t tell you that—or not yet, anyhow. You must give me time. And you ought to think it out for yourself, too. If you can manage it alone, it’ll be a lot better than if you just do something because someone else has told you. But I’ll promise you to do what I can. Meantime, suppose you stop being the original muzzled bear and try to pal up a bit with other people. We’re quite a decent crowd when you come to know us!” Mary-Lou finished with a

gay laugh as she caught Jessica's hand and pulled her to her feet. "Come on! Don't you want to try the echo out?"

Jessica said no more. She allowed herself to be hustled along the path till they came to the broader shelf where the Auberge stood. The rest of their party were there, leaning on the wall and taking it in turns to make various noises which came back to them, transmuted to music by the echo's magic. Just as the pair arrived, Verity, who had the best voice in the school, stood by the wall, opened her mouth and sang the first line of Schubert's setting for "*Hark, Hark, The Lark.*"

Even Jessica the unmusical was almost stunned with the fairy loveliness that came back. Vi glanced up and saw them.

"Come on, folk!" she called. "Buck up, Jessica! Come and make a noise—*any* noise!—and see what happens to it."

Urged by this and Mary-Lou's arm thrust through hers, Jessica came to join the group. Hilary and one or two of the others shot curious glances at her; but everyone ignored the long delay in their arrival and united in coaxing her to try the echo.

"I'll show you!" Mary-Lou climbed up on the wall, threw back her head and gave vent to a long, clear yodel, much to the admiration of the others who had had no idea that she had mastered this accomplishment.

Back it came again and again, growing fainter each time, but always lovely.

"I say!" Prunella said enviously, "I'd no idea you could do that! When did you learn? You couldn't do it last term. You made the most ghastly noises when you did try; but that was nearly as good as Miss o'Ryan can do."

"I got Auntie Madge to show me one day when we were up at the Round House," Mary-Lou explained. "She showed me and I practised. That's all. Go on, Jessica! Yell, if you can't do anything else! Or you can whistle if you like."

Thus urged, Jessica scrambled up on to the wall. Standing erect, she put her fingers into the corners of her mouth and emitted an ear-piercing whistle that made those nearest put their hands over their ears with cries of protest. But even this outrageous noise returned to them, soft and sweet as the echoes caught it and whirled it back at them.

"What a ghastly din!" Hilary cried. Then she added, "But I wish you'd show me how you do it, Jessica. I've often tried but got no further."

"It's easy!" The old, tongue-tied Jessica had gone—not very far yet, perhaps, but her career was definitely ended. She gave Hilary an impish smile and added, "Put your fingers into your mouth like this. Now blow hard!"

"Not this minute she doesn't!" interjected Ruth Barnes who had been consulting her watch. "Do you folk know what the time is? We're going to be frightfully late if we don't get off at once. Come on, all of you!"

They hurriedly looked at their watches and a concerted shriek of dismay gave the echoes a little more work. Mary-Lou assumed charge at once.

"Pair off, everyone! Vi and Verity, you lead the way. Jessica and I'll be whippers-in. Don't moon, Verity! We'll hear *all* about it if we're late! Bustle her along, Vi; you know what she is when she starts mooning! Come on, Jess!" She caught Jessica's arm as the rest hastily paired off and set out at their best pace. Vi obeyed her leader literally, clutching Verity's arm and bustling her along at a pace that left her breathless and gasping by the time they had mounted the path by the railway and reached the Platz. There they met Dr. Graves, husband of pretty

Hilary Graves who had once been Games mistress at the school. He had his Convertible and seeing the girls breathless and perspiring with their rush, he pulled up and turned round.

“Bundle in!” he called. “I’ve just time to run you back to school before lunch. It’ll mean close sitting, but you can all pack in if you try.”

They did and so it was that after all the Gang were *not* late for Mittagessen that memorable Sunday.

Chapter XIII

A NEW EXPERIENCE FOR THE SCHOOL

“What simply *awful* weather!” Biddy o’Ryan turned from the staffroom window where she had been standing for the past three minutes, trying to see out, and went to sit down at her table which was piled high with exercise-books, Sixth Form essays and an untidy heap of drawing-paper rolls which meant that she had set some luckless form on to making out synchronizing tables of dates and events in various countries.

“Well, you utilize the time by clearing up some of that lot!” retorted Miss Derwent who was struggling with Lower IVA’s ideas on the subject of essays. “Your table is a complete disgrace to any decent staffroom. There! That’s the end of that lot, thank goodness!” She piled up the exercise-books into a tidy pile and set them to one side. “Now for Upper IVB! Do get something to do, Biddy, and don’t sit there glooming. No one can help the weather. It seems to be the same all over!”

Peggy Burnett looked up from the drill tables she was making out. “It really has been ghastly all this week, Ruth. I never remember such a week before.”

October had gone and November had come in with roaring winds and torrents of rain. It had been impossible for the girls to go out since the Sunday morning, for on the very rare occasions when the weather had improved slightly, the garden and playing-field had been seas of mud. The road was so dangerous, that Jack Maynard had put up his car for the time being, unless there should be a real emergency, and walked the three miles or so between Freudesheim and the Sanatorium, looking, as his wife did not fail to tell him, like a stranded deep sea fisherman, in his sou’wester, oilskin and enormous wellingtons. The only thing not in keeping with his costume was his alpenstock and that he carried as a precaution against being blown down by some of the furious gusts that came ravening down the valley, making the thickly clustered pines in the wood at the back of the Platz shiver and groan and causing some of the more imaginative girls to wonder if the enormous stones roped down on the roof would be blown off and what would happen if they were!

The high winds had brought down telegraph poles everywhere, so that the Görnetz Platz was isolated at the moment. Even the railway had ceased to run since the heavy rains had caused a wash-out halfway down the line, so that for about thirty yards there was a gap over which the rails stretched unsupported instead of being firmly moored to solid rock and earth. This had meant that the only way of reaching the valley was by the coach-road that twisted down and through the mountains, adding a good hour and a half to the journey in fine weather and anything you liked in such weather as this. Three days ago, however, news had come of a landslide which had blocked the road completely and, until it was cleared, the people above it were prisoners.

It was Saturday morning and the members of staff who were not on duty were supposed to be hard at work, correcting exercises and essays or preparing work for the next week. To be truthful, however, most of them were growling about the rain and the subsequent imprisonment inflicted on the school.

Biddy yawned and turned to the history exercises of Upper IVB with a groan. “Well, there’s not a chance of going out as long as this continues. I suppose I’d best do as you

suggest, Ruth, and be getting on with these. Will anyone be kind enough to tell me why I elected to teach Swiss history to Upper IVB this year?"

"You know best yourself," Peggy Burnett told her. "What's the matter? Can't they grasp it?—Well, what's the joke?" For Bidy had suddenly spluttered.

"Whoever was responsible for promoting Emerence Hope at the end of last term will also be responsible when I take to sticking straw in my hair! Just listen to *this* effort on Peter of Savoy!" And she read aloud amid the laughter of the rest, "'Peter of Savoy lived about the time of our Henry III. He was Duke of Savoy. They have the Alps there and the country is noted for cabbages and biscuits. Peter is said to have been very clever. He built the Castle of Chillon in Lake Geneva.'—I ask you!" Then she added, "And Emerence is *fifteen!* Janice Chester could do as well."

"No one ever truthfully called Emerence Hope a student," Nancy Wilmot observed. "Still, that *is* beyond words. Perhaps it's the rain," she continued hopefully. "Giving her water on the brain, you know."

"*Who* has water on the brain?" demanded a clear voice from the doorway; and the staff dropped what they were doing and rose to welcome Miss Wilson who had braved the weather and come to see what was to happen about the evening's entertainment at which St. Mildred's were to have been hosts to the rest of the school. "How nice of you all to be so pleased to see me! What's the matter with you? Do you want something? Or are you all so bored that the arrival of even an old stager like myself is cheering?"

"Oh, it's so nice to see a fresh face!" Miss Bertram, one of the Junior mistresses, replied fervently. "You haven't been along all the week and I, personally, am tired of gazing forever at the same uninteresting countenances that you see before you!" She waved her hand solemnly at her indignant colleagues who did not fail to rise to this.

"Uninteresting, is it?" Bidy cried, rather more Irish than usual. "Sure, 'tis yourself had best be quiet, Joan Bertram!"

"She hasn't looked at herself in the glass lately," Nancy said lazily. "She'd hold her tongue if she had—not to mention making sure that her hair's all right. *What* an example for our youthful hopes!"

"People that live in glass houses—" Miss Derwent began. Then she stopped short and began to giggle wildly.

"What's the joke?" Miss Wilson demanded as she swung round a chair from someone's table and sat down.

"Just Len Maynard's latest," Ruth Derwent replied, amidst her giggles. "Emerence may be the world's worst ignoramus, but Len has been simply *wild* over her last English." She stopped to giggle again. "Her winding up to that proverb I was about to use is one of the funniest things I've seen for a long time. Where's her book?" She rummaged through the pile and produced it. "Hear this, you folk!" And she solemnly read out, "'People that live in glass houses should always undress in the dark.'"

The staff were in the state when small things set them off and the staffroom rang with their peals of laughter at this unexpected ending to a respectable proverb.

"What on earth was she getting at?" Miss Wilson demanded when she could control herself. "Why has my god-daughter produced such a thing? What did you set them, Ruth?"

"Why, I gave them the beginnings of about a dozen well-known sayings and told them to finish them. It was classwork, of course. They ought to know them and I wasn't giving anyone

a chance to look up. Isn't it amazing," Ruth Derwent went on, "how your memory can fail you on occasion? Only two girls got everything right—"

"Who were the geniuses?" Biddy asked as she wiped her eyes.

"Nesta Williams and Con Maynard. Everyone else had at least one wrong and some of them either left blank spaces here and there, or produced their own endings. But Len's is the gem of the bunch."

"You must let Joey have it," Miss Wilson said with decision. "She'll love it—especially as it emanates from her own daughter. It almost beats Con and Daniel in the den of lions!"

The staff roared again. ^[11]Con's solemn statement that Daniel had *bitten* the lions on that occasion had passed into Chalet School legend. Con herself had been well teased about it and, as a result, had contrived to keep her own works of literature and her lessons well apart. As for Joey, she had literally yelled with laughter and promptly incorporated the effort into the school story she was writing at the time.

[11] *The Chalet School Does It Again.*

When everyone was serious again, Miss Wilson explained her reason for coming out on such a stormy morning. "I'm afraid we'll have to call off tonight's do. We might try to dodge it in later on in the term; but the Juniors and Middles, at any rate, wouldn't be allowed to come. I don't see Matey letting the Seniors risk it, either. I'm sorry, for this is the second time we've had to postpone. But there it is."

"Oh, you're right, of course," Biddy o'Ryan said quickly. "But if you want Matey's opinion, why don't you go and ask her yourself, Nell?"

"And get my nose bitten off for having no more sense, Oh, no, thank you!" Miss Wilson retorted. "I tried to find Hilda Annersley but she seems to have vanished. I looked in at the office, but all Rosalie Dene could say was that she had been in and said she was going to take the opportunity to make up some of her back correspondence and gone off with a bunch of letters. I've tried the study and the drawingroom and her own bedroom, but she's nowhere to be found. I looked in on the prefects, but most of them appear to be on duty this morning. Only Katharine Gordon was there and she said that she hadn't seen the Head since Frühstück, so *she* wasn't much help!"

"Well, try the san and Matey's room," Nancy suggested. "She may be in one or the other—though I doubt you finding her in san. So far as I know we haven't anyone there at the moment."

"I think I'll wait till the bell goes for Break and see if that brings her along. She still has her Saturday coffee with you people, doesn't she? It's nearly time for elevenses, so I'll wait and have my coffee with you just to give you a treat."

"What's that about coffee?" It was Matron herself who had arrived. "Unless the rain lets up soon, there'll be no coffee for anyone, let me tell you. I've just been interviewing Karen and she tells me she's down to her last bag of coffee berries."

"Can't they get through by the coach-road yet?" Ruth Derwent asked, sitting up.

"My good girl, how do you imagine any men could get going on the clearing up as long as this rain lasts? If you ask me, there's quite likely to be another landslide if something doesn't happen soon. The whole ground must be sodden, what with the rain and all the little waterfalls that come dripping down wherever it's collected anywhere. And no one is likely to want to try the direct road. They tell me it's a minor torrent at present."

“Oh, goodness! I hope it’s only coffee we look like being short of?” Nancy exclaimed. “Don’t say we’re going to have to stand a siege, Matey!”

“Oh, we’ve plenty of flour and fats and so on; but we have no meat at all and the eggs are running short, too.”

All wish to laugh had left the mistresses. This looked like being serious. They could carry on for a day or two, but if the rain continued and the roads remained blocked, it would mean short commons for everyone on the Platz. No one was likely to have anything to spare. And it would be a serious matter for the great Sanatorium at the other end. They were all largely dependent on Interlaken at the foot of the mountain for such things as meat, tea, coffee, sugar and so on. It would be bad enough for the school and the people living in the chalets scattered around. For the Sanatorium with its colony of tubercular patients it might mean disaster if it were prolonged.

Miss Wilson jumped up. “I hadn’t thought of *this* happening! I’d best get home and go into a huddle with our own Karen and see how we’re situated. No; I won’t wait for coffee or anything else, thank you. I’ll take it for granted that tonight is called off until further notice. I must find out as soon as possible how we can stand a siege. Perhaps we have plenty of what you’re short of and in that case, we must pool our resources. But I shan’t know until I’ve seen Karen. Tell Hilda I was looking for her, will you, Matey. If it eases off a little this afternoon, I’ll come over again, but not otherwise. I nearly had to swim as it was! Goodbye, everyone! Auf wiedersehen—but goodness knows for how long!”

She fled and the mistresses were left looking at each other anxiously. In all the years the Chalet School had been running, they had never had to face such a situation before.

“Just how bad is it, Matey?” Ruth asked of that potentate.

“Well, we can manage for another day or two. After that, if it hasn’t cleared up, it’s going to mean strict rationing. Mercifully, Karen canned and bottled any amount of fruit and vegetables in the summer, so we shan’t actually starve. But the girls ought to have meat—so ought you, working as hard as you do—and you can’t have it for there isn’t any. And unfortunately the hams and bacon were to have come up on Wednesday when the road was first blocked, so we haven’t even them to fall back on.”

There was a pause. No one was very sure what to say. Then Joan Bertram asked, “What shall we do if it goes on like this for long?”

“You know as much about it as I do. If someone could get round the mountain to one of the other places, it might be possible to get down to Interlaken and bring something back. But I doubt if it’s possible. The paths must be in a most dangerous state with all this rain we’ve been having.”

Mdlle. de Lachennais entered at this point, carrying the tray laden with cups of steaming coffee which she set down. The rest turned to her quickly.

“Jeanne! Have you heard what’s likely to happen?” Biddy o’Ryan asked.

“But yes, my Biddee. But we will hope that something may intervene to prevent the worst. At least Hansi has gone to see if he can make the descent by the direct route.”

“He won’t manage it,” Matron said decidedly. “When Pieter Koch came this morning to make up the furnaces, he told me that the water was pouring down there like a mill-race and it was nearly knee-deep then.”

“And if he did manage it, how is he going to get back? He may very well be stranded in the valley,” Joan Bertram pointed out. “What will happen to that water? Is there any channel to carry it off, or will it just spread out into a pond?”

No one could answer this, but in any case, it didn't matter, for Hansi returned to the school at noon to say that the road was impossible. The force of the water had nearly taken him off his feet and it was deepening with every hour. There was no help for it. They had to face the fact that they were marooned.

The Head turned up before then. She had been over to Freudesheim where she had found Joey Maynard tearing her hair over the same difficulties. She had, like Karen, canned and bottled with vim during the summer. She had also put down several buckets of eggs, thanks to the foresight of Anne, her faithful maid and factotum; but she had no meat and she was running short of flour which was even more serious.

"What can we do about it?" Nancy Wilmot asked.

"Nothing, I'm afraid. Luckily, every other person keeps a cow or cows, so we shan't want for milk or even butter. We shall just have to make the best of it," the Head replied. "Surely it can't go on raining like this much longer! Even in Tirol I never knew it last so long."

Frau Mieders, who took Domestic Science in the school, looked up. "But if Joey is short of flour, I can send over half a barrel," she said. "For I think you will not wish us to hold our usual cookery classes, Hilda?"

"Certainly not!" Miss Annersley was in no doubt about that. "Have you any more, Anna?"

"But yes; two barrels untouched and the big crock full. We can well spare the half-barrel to Joey."

"I'm thankful to hear it. She told me that her Anna said she had enough for a batch of bread and then only a bowlful left. Mercifully, they are all right at the Sanatorium for at least another week, though the meat question is nearly as difficult for them as for us. Tell Hansi to take the flour over to Joey some time today, will you, Anna?"

"Certainly. And the girls may do extra polishing and cleaning and also make up their notes," Frau Mieders said. "Did anyone hear the weather forecast this morning?" No one had. As Nancy said, they had been bored quite enough by hearing all the week that the rain would go on. Why worry to hear it once more?

When Mittagessen came, they found that Karen had solved the difficulty for one day by making one of her delicious vegetable stews. Saturday was the day for hot joints but the girls liked Karen's stews, so no one made any comment, though some of the more conservative remarked on the change of menu. But when it was followed up by milk puddings instead of pastry and jam, quite a number of people remarked on it.

The Head, knowing that Abendessen would not make up for it, had wisely prepared. Before she said Grace at the end of the meal, she tapped her little bell smartly and the murmur of talk ceased as the girls turned to look at her.

"First," she said as she rose, "I have to tell you that the evening at St. Mildred's has had to be postponed once more. I don't think anyone will be surprised to hear that, though. We'll make up for it by providing a programme for ourselves. Our evening will begin at eighteen o'clock and each form is to provide one item. You may choose what you like—game, dancing, competition, songs, recitations—anything. Abendessen will be at twenty o'clock and we will finish our programme after. Prayers will wind up the evening and then you will go to bed. Now we'll have Grace and you can spend the afternoon preparing your items."

As a result of this, no one had any time to worry about either food or rain. The girls had a fine old time arguing as to what they should do and then making preparations for it. VIB retired to the songroom, so everyone could guess what *their* contribution would be. The two Lower Fourths and the Third joined together for theirs and shrieks of laughter were heard

coming from the Junior and Junior Middle commonroom. VB finally elected to act a charade. After a good deal of discussion, they finally chose 'tornado' for their word.

"It's topical, anyway!" Mary-Lou said with a giggle.

"How'll we do it?" Vi asked.

"'Tor-nay-do'—and you pronounce the last bit 'doh,' don't forget," their leader told her. "We can have something about Devon for the first part—Oh, I know! We'll have a tourist office and people coming to ask about places to go to. Someone can ask what there is to see in Devon."

"Zena could do that," Hilary said. "She can be a widow with three children—Verity, you can be the little girl and Pen and I can be the boys. Come on, Pen! There's some suits in the acting-cupboard. Best go and bag them before anyone else gets there!"

The pair rushed off and Mary-Lou, with an indulgent grin, remarked, "Such excitement! Well, I'll be the clerk in the office and some of the rest of you can be tourists."

"We could do something historical for the 'nay'-part," Prunella proposed. "Then we could use it easily. Lets do 'When did you last see your father?' I'll be the Puritan asking the questions and Monica can be the mother looking scared out of her wits."

The rest chimed in and presently got it settled to their liking. The question of 'do' was answered by Lorraine Varley, a very musical girl who usually stayed in the background. She suggested that she should take a singing class and use the tonic sol-fa. For the whole word, Lesley insisted that they must be in Jamaica and have an earthquake and a tornado both together. This fixed up, a deputation went to the acting-cupboard to collect any garments that seemed to them suitable for the second part of the word, while the rest remained to plan out how the words were to be introduced.

In passing, it may be stated that they were completely successful in puzzling the audience, for Vi had guilefully suggested that they should also introduce the word "hurricane" which was easily done. As she herself shrieked halfway through the second part, "Ee, what a lie!" while Lorraine promised to cane at least half of her outrageously-behaved class, and they called the supposed storm a hurricane or a tornado quite indifferently in the final act, the rest all shouted "Hurricane!" when Mary-Lou as form prefect asked what they thought it was, and when she denied it, went on to several others it *might* have been and had to give it up in the end.

It must be owned that when they came to take their seats to listen to the three part-songs contributed by VIB, the entire form wore satisfied smirks.

The little girls contributed a series of competitions like fixing the donkey's tail; drawing a pig with your eyes shut; fishing for boot-buttons with a bent pin on the end of a long thread; and tossing pingpong balls into an empty bucket. In fact, the evening was a complete success and no one even worried when Abendessen turned out to be more of the stew. Luckily Karen had opened some of her treasured jars of gooseberries and made gooseberry fool to follow on.

But the next day was very different. The rain still came down in torrents and when Frühstück came, it was only small portions of scrambled eggs on big rafts of toast instead of the boiled egg apiece they always had. When vegetable pie appeared at Mittagessen, the elder girls, at any rate, began to guess what was happening and the Head, seeing by their faces that this was so, decided to explain.

Ringing her bell for silence, she told them exactly what had happened and that there would be no meat until it was possible to get down to Interlaken.

“No one can say when that will be,” she said cheerfully. “We hope in the course of a day or two. Meanwhile, we shan’t do badly. Karen has plenty of vegetables and we can have all the milk we want and bread-and-butter in reason. So don’t imagine that we are going to be reduced to starvation!”

It was as well she spoke, for the rain never ceased until late on the Tuesday night when Mary-Lou drew back her window-curtain before getting into bed and saw, for the first time in many days, moonlight straggling through flying cloud-wrack. Even then, the journey to the valley was impossible for another two days. But on the Friday, the authorities had got the railway working again and the first train up brought a load of meat, coffee, tea and all the other things that had been running very short at the Platz and other villages. The school feasted that night on fried fish and on the Saturday, they sat down to bacon for breakfast and roast beef for Mittagessen, whereat, Upper IVB jumped to their feet and sang “The Jolly Roast Beef of Old England.” The rest, seeing that the staff were only laughing, joined in on the third line and they sang it to the end before they sat down to enjoy the generous platefuls sent them.

“And that’s the end of the Great Famine!” Mary-Lou said, summing it up afterwards. “Well, I don’t mind telling you I don’t much want to see vegetables again for a few days. I’m fond of them in reason, but I’ve had my share for a week to come at least!”

Chapter XIV

A NEW FESTIVAL

What Mary-Lou called the “Great Famine” being safely over and Jessica well on the way to becoming a normal member of society, Miss Annersley decided that it was time to break to the school the news that this year there would be no Christmas play.

“What *are* we going to do at the end of term, then?” Betsy asked when she informed the prefects first as was their right.

“We are having a carol concert, but that is all. Neither Madame nor Mrs. Maynard has had time to write a new play for us and we have already repeated the old ones at least once each—some of them more than once. I can’t think of anyone who either could or would step into the gap, so we have decided that it will be better to give no play and hope for a new one next year. Besides, changes are lightsome, you know. I think you’ll find that a carol concert will be as much enjoyed as a play. Then again we want you people to be out as much as possible just now. You’ve been kept indoors for nearly a fortnight, thanks to the rain. The real winter is coming quickly and you all know what the snow is like when it comes in real earnest. Lessons can’t be neglected, so they must be taken later in the day after you’ve had your walks and rambles. That isn’t going to leave us much time for rehearsing. St. Mildred’s will give their pantomime next term and we are hoping to get up a musical play as the chief entertainment for the Sale at the end of term.”

“So that’s that!” Betsy said dismally when she had left them. “I’m sorry. I’d have liked to be in one more Christmas play and I’m going to St. Mildred’s next September. I knew Madame wasn’t likely to write anything for us. When Mummy wrote last week, she said that they were leaving the Round House next week and moving to another much nearer the San in the mountains. They’ve always wanted that, but couldn’t find a house that would suit them until this autumn. With those twins of hers *and* a removal, Madame simply couldn’t be expected to add a new play to everything else!”

“Oh, I see that,” Hilary Wilson said. “But what about Mrs. Maynard? *She* isn’t thinking of a removal and she has Beth Chester to help with the twins and Mike.”

“I don’t know. I shouldn’t have thought she was so full up that she couldn’t oblige for once,” Betsy said doubtfully.

“Oh, well, we did give a carol concert one year—remember? When Verity-Anne had that barney with Plato,” Sybil Russell reminded them. “I knew ages ago that Mother couldn’t do a thing about it. The removal’s going to be an awful chore and Kevin and Kester are one person’s work at any time. I only wish they’d have let me go home for the last half of this term so that I could help. But neither Mother nor Dad would hear of it.”

“I should think not!” Betsy sounded scandalised. “You need all the school you can get, my child, and don’t you forget it!”

There was a tap at the door and four people from St. Mildred’s walked in. The prefects stared at them dumb-foundedly.

“Goodness!” Betsy exclaimed. “What on earth are you folk doing over here?”

“A very cordial welcome!” retorted her sister Julie, last year’s Head Girl. “Don’t you want to see us?”

“Oh, yes; but we don’t expect visits from you at this hour during the week!” Betsy returned. “What’s happened? Has Bill got so sick of you that she’s turfed you out? Or are you coming here for a little change?”

“Neither! We’ve come to rejoice your little hearts,” Clem Barrass said with a grin.

“Oh? In what way, may I ask?”

The four elders found seats for themselves and Julie proceeded to explain.

“Bill’s told us this year’s play is off as no one seems to have time to write a new one for you and no one wants to have any of the others repeated yet again. That being the case, sooner than you should miss all the fun of a play, we’ve come to invite you to come in with our pantomime next term. Some of you will have speaking parts—quite a lot of you, in fact. Some of you will be chorus. The kids will be fairies and elves and whatnot. And if anyone over here knows anything about ballet-dancing, she’ll be welcomed with open arms by Tatiana Khavasky who is running the ballet scenes this time. She’s done piles of ballet dancing herself and it looks rather as if that side of the show will be a real knock-out. Anyhow, that’s the proposition. Bill and the Abbess have both agreed to it. It lies with you to say if you will or you won’t.”

She had no need to ask twice. They had only one reply to such an idea and in the general excitement, their disappointment over the Christmas play was forgotten.

Beauty and the Beast had been chosen for the story and as St. Mildred’s was smaller than usual that year, there were plenty of parts for them. Verity Carey was cast for the Fairy Queen by an almost unanimous vote. Her delicate beauty, grace of movement and lovely voice all made her ideal for the part, especially as no great acting ability was required for it. Between fifteen and twenty people claimed to know something about ballet dancing and were turned over to Tatiana whose aunt was, as Margot Maynard told her mother with bated breath, “A real ballet dancer!”

A number of the prefects were cast for Robin Hood and his merry men, headed by big Carola Johnstone as Little John and Ailsa Thompson as Robin himself. Betsy was chosen for Puck and a select bevy of Seniors were told off for servants at the Merchant’s and in the Beast’s Palace. Some of the Middles were Pages and Heralds and the rest had to be satisfied with being in the chorus. Miss Annersley promised that when they were casting the next play, these people should have speaking parts as far as possible. As for the Juniors and the Junior Middles, they were to be a fairy band with nothing to say but plenty of dancing about to keep them busy.

All this left no one with any room to grumble. In any case, the ten days’ rain and wind had given place to November sunshine, fresh winds and a keen air that brisked them all up, as Peggy Burnett said. They were out for walks and rambles every morning from nine o’clock onwards, and the staff, conspiring together, arranged to take each form in turn for the day down to Interlaken and the twin lakes between which she stands. Lessons were taken in the afternoons and early evenings, but preparation was cut to the minimum, so no one objected.

So November went by, with all Saturday and Wednesday evenings given up to rehearsals for the pantomime, until it slipped into December and December brought the first real snow of winter. They had had some light falls now and then, when the snow melted almost as it fell, so that there could be no ski-ing nor sledging, nor even any snowfights. But the first day of the last month of the year was ushered in by a snowstorm that, as Hilary Wilson joyously said, gave promise of real fun and games.

It lasted all that day and the next, but during the night the snow ceased to fall and the girls found when they went downstairs that the windows there were drifted halfway up and they

had to have the lights on all day. It was still too soft and light for them to go out, but a bitter north wind was blowing, bringing hard frost with it, and on the fourth, the snow was hard as iron and they were told to bundle up and go out and enjoy themselves in the school grounds.

Next day Mary-Lou, having finished all her cubicle chores and got out the books she would need for lessons, wandered along to Hall, since none of her own clan had arrived yet. The next minute, a shriek rang through the building which brought a crowd round her at once. She was standing before the big notice-board and when they thronged round her, she pointed to it excitedly.

“Look at that!” she cried.

They looked. After that, she was not the only excited girl there. She was pointing at a notice which had appeared since the night before. It was decorated with paintings of parcels and crossed switches and in the centre ran a notice.

FEAST OF ST. NICHOLAS

St. Nicholas and all his attendants will hold
Court in Hall at the Chalet School
tomorrow night. Be prepared to meet them and to
receive your just deserts for your deeds during
the year just passed

“Gosh! What does it *mean*?” Betsy gasped, staring at it. No one could tell her except some of the Continental girls and they had all been warned the night before to hold their tongues. Three years before, when the finishing branch of the Chalet School had just been established in the Oberland, St. Nicholas had held his court in Die Haus unter die Kiefen, but it had not been repeated since and though it was more than likely that younger sisters had been told about the fun at the time, many of them were at the English branch and so much had happened since then that any who were at the Görnetz Platz now had forgotten about it. The staff, when approached, flatly refused to enlighten anyone. All that was to be got out of *them* was a warning to wear their usual velveteen evening frocks and to be prepared for anything to happen!

“And a lot of use that is!” Ruth Barnes wailed on the evening of the sixth when they were all changing after Kaffee und Kuchen. “We don’t know *what* to expect and it may be all right—or it may be anything but!”

“Oh, nice, I expect,” Hilary laughed. “St. Nicholas is the patron saint of children. Doesn’t he bring presents for them in some of the European countries? And isn’t our Santa Claus just a short for St. Nicholas?”

“You may be right,” Vi said gloomily, “but I don’t like the hint in that last part of the notice one little bit!”

“Don’t you think your deserts may be good?” Mary-Lou called across from her cubicle where she was pinning her collar with her plainest brooch. “What have you been doing, Vi?”

“Anyhow,” Barbara Chester put her oar in, “we’ll know all about it shortly. Buck up, Vi, do! And you, too, Ruth! Don’t be such a pair of Dismal Desmonds!”

“Thanks for the flowers!” Vi suddenly appeared between her cousin’s curtains, her usual dainty self in her velveteen frock, her curls tied back by an even more enormous bow than usual.

Barbara, who was hurriedly putting her little domain in order for the night, looked up and grinned at her. "Couldn't you get any wider ribbon than *that*?"

"If I wear a bow, I wear a *bow*," Vi told her. "Buck up, old fruit! Mary-Lou's standing by the door clock-watching. Here, I'll help you fold that thing, shall I?"

"Thanks a lot—so long as Matey doesn't come along and catch us."

The girls were supposed to see to their own chores, but it was not an unknown thing for one or more of the quicker ones to offer help to the slowcoaches. Barbara was one of those, having come to school only the year before. All her early childhood had been spent at home in her mother's care, for she had been so delicate that no one had expected her to grow up. Everything had been done for her and, as a result, she sometimes found it difficult to get everything done in the stated time. As laziness was no part of her make-up, Matron turned a blind eye to what the rest might do where she was concerned and nowadays, it was frequently not needed. However, tonight, excitement had slowed her up and she was grateful for her cousin's aid.

"Come *on!*" came an impatient call from the dormitory prefect. "Aren't you people ready yet? I never knew such slugs!"

"Quite!" Vi and Barbara joined her at the door. "It's all very well for you, Mary-Lou. You're a regular whirlwind for speed. Give other folk a chance!"

Mary-Lou grinned at her. "I've little use for slugs or mooners! Get cracking, you people! Some of you seem to want half the night to change your frocks and brush your hair!"

This last insult brought most of the others out, protesting loudly against her rudeness. She hushed them with a calm reminder that one never knew where Matron was and if they made all that noise, they might have her in their midst before they knew where they were.

"And goodness knows what she might take it into her head to do," she wound up. "Are you all here now? Good! Lead on, Hilary and Lesley. Straight to Hall and find yourselves seats. Try and bag places for all the Gang while you're about it."

"Who told you all that?" Ruth demanded.

"Betsy. She sent word round at the end of afternoon school. I suppose Matey or someone told her. Anyhow, that's what we've got to do so for pity's sake stop arguing!"

Ruth subsided and they marched off downstairs to join up with the remainder of the Gang who awaited them in Hall.

Hall had been barred to the girls ever since morning Prayers. Now they knew why. The staff must have had a busy day of it. Wreaths of evergreen and painted pine-cones hung round the walls. The side-lights blazed as usual, but the two great centre chandeliers had had their bulbs encased in red paper which imparted a cheerful atmosphere to the place. The forms which usually stood across the room had all been set back against the walls, ready for the girls who were hurrying to claim seats in pairs or groups. Lesley and Hilary had "bagged" a couple near the platform by the simple means of each lying full-length on hers until the rest joined up. The Gang, augmented by Jessica and Clare, who had lately taken the new girl under her wing, fled to take their places, for Hilda Jukes and Jill Ormsby from VA were beginning to argue that they wanted those seats for *their* crowd.

Hilary sat up with a look of relief as Mary-Lou arrived. "For any sake, Mary-Lou, make these two realise that these seats are bagged!" she said.

Mary-Lou grinned at the pair. "Sorry; but it's so," she said as she pushed Hilary's feet on to the floor and sat down. "Come on, Verity! Room for a little one!"

While Verity sat down looking the picture of a model schoolgirl with her golden curls tied up at each side of her charming face with modest blue bows, Hilda and Jill grimaced and retired to find seats further down the room. They knew their Mary-Lou! In any case, the remaining thirteen had been ready to back her up. Lesley had swung her feet to the ground and the two benches were filled with a solid phalanx of Vb girls, all looking round eagerly.

A pair of wide crimson curtains had been hung across the back of the platform, dividing it in half. Against these had been set the Head's chair, draped with another crimson curtain and wreathed with evergreens. On either side, in a semicircle were the small chairs belonging to Form IIIA. Crimson electric lamps had been set along the front of the platform between all the pot plants Peggy Burnett and Nancy Wilmot had been able to beg, borrow or steal. The tall lectern had vanished and the piano had been set on the floor in front. It, too was draped in crimson and decked with branches of fir and long trails of ivy.

"They'll have to be jolly careful if they're all going to sit up there," Hilary observed when she had taken all this in. "Those end seats are awfully near the edge."

"But why is there no one here to tell us what to do?" Jo Scott demanded.

"Ask me another!" This was Vi. "Anyhow, here they are! Listen!"

Everyone listened and sure enough, they heard the solemn marching of feet. The top doors were thrown open and St. Nicholas entered, complete in full canonicals, including a mitre so high he seemed to tower a good two feet above his attendants, a pastoral staff and a perfect bird's nest of a beard. Behind him came a bevy of angels clad in all the colours of the rainbow, with wings soaring above their shoulders and the school's gold and silver haloes of painted buckram on their heads. Behind them again, marched a solemn procession of lithe black figures, each carrying a switch in his right hand and his *tail* over his left arm!

The girls stared in awe-struck silence. Then little rustlings of curiosity began. Who was St. Nicholas? Not the Head, for there she was, taking her seat on his right hand, her long, flowing robes of blue sweeping about her, a golden halo on the brown hair that tumbled over her shoulders. Besides, even with the mitre, she wasn't tall enough for that amazing figure that had seated himself in the big chair while the angels took the smaller ones to form a colourful crescent round him and the black demons crowded together behind him.

They got another shock when he began to speak, for it was a man's deep bass voice that issued from the beard and at first no one could imagine who it could be. As usual it was Mary-Lou who got it first and she had to keep it to herself, for he was speaking and in any case, what he had to say was of such interest, that she set even his personality aside as she listened.

"Welcome, all!" he began. "This night, Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, patron saint of all children, comes to hear how his children of the Chalet School have deserved of him throughout the year. He has rewards for good children; punishments for bad. But rewards or punishments, none shall escape. Behold, a record has been kept. My Recording Angel shall read it and as your name is called and your record made known, join the prefect of your own house and wait for what shall come!" He turned to the Blue Angel who rose to her feet, conspicuously pink in the face—it was all the Head could do to keep from laughing outright—and produced a lengthy scroll from which she read every name, adding one sin after each name.

"Elizabeth" Lucy was accused of acting before she thought. Katharine Gordon sinned in the way of tidiness. Carola Johnstone did not think at all—and Carola, one of whose favourite remarks was, "I didn't think!" went to take her stand as Head of Ste. Thérèse of Lisieux House with scarlet cheeks.

One by one the girls had to leave their seats and take their places in the group of their own Houses. When the last name—that of little Dorothea Young—had been read, along with her besetting sin spilling ink on every possible occasion, the Blue Angel sat down, rolling up her scroll and St. Nicholas rose from his chair again and turned to the Demons.

“You know your duty!” he thundered. “Lead them forth!”

The Demons—Rosalie Dene, Peggy Burnett, Biddy o’Ryan, Ruth Derwent, Joan Bertram and Nancy Wilmot—bounded to the floor, taking the lamps and plants in their leaps, and two each made straight for one of the houses, flourishing their switches.

“March!” St. Nicholas roared. “Off with them to the place of chastisement!”

Stunned by the unexpectedness of it all, the girls meekly marched off through the connecting passages to their own Houses where they were assembled in the big room each contained. Then, at a signal from one of the Demons, one of those girls who knew all about it, shrieked for mercy and fled, a Demon after her. The rest quickly picked it up and fled likewise. Up and downstairs they flew; along corridors, into dormitories where the beds were distinctly upset by people scrambling across them and hurling themselves under them; then down to the big room and round it, swinging chairs into the path of the agile demons who seemed to be able to be in half-a-dozen places at once.

Some of the youngest girls began by being frightened; but in this glorious romp all over the place, they forgot their fear and rushed and shrieked with the best.

Vi wriggling under Jo Scott’s bed in an effort to escape the switch of the Demon, collided with Elinor Pennell who had had the same idea, and the pair rolled over and over while the Demon lashed them lightly and then left them to go racing after Mary-Lou, who uttered a squawk, made a leap upwards on to a chair and from there, scrambled on top of a cupboard standing at one end of the corridor. Only the guide-lights were on and in the general melée, Miss Bertram missed her victim and went on after Carola who took the stairs in about three leaps and sought refuge in the linen cupboard. Several people who hoped to escape by the connecting-doors found themselves checkmated, for as the last one had passed through, the Demons had locked them.

It was tremendous fun, for no one got more than a light tap, and the girls enjoyed the rushing about and screaming at the full pitch of their lungs with all their might. Finally, the school bell began to peal and the Demons shouted to their victims to return to Hall forthwith.

It was a dishevelled crew that finally arrived. Everyone was breathless and panting and one of the Demons had lost his tail while another had draped his round his neck when it came off!

When it seemed as if the last girl was there, and everyone was sitting down, getting her breath again, a sudden outcry rose from the forms occupied by the Gang.

“Mary-Lou’s not here!”

Everyone looked round at once. It was an odd thing for Mary-Lou not to have come with the rest, for she was obedient as a rule and, in any case, would not have wanted to miss any of the fun. St. Nicholas called her name promptly, but no Mary-Lou stood forward to answer it. It was quite plain that she was not in Hall. Somehow she must have missed hearing the Demons’ call and been left behind when the rest came back.

“Can I go and look for her?” Jessica cried when this was clear.

The cry was taken up by a good many voices, but St. Nicholas, after an exchange of looks with the Blue Angel, vetoed it promptly.

“Not so! Remain seated!” he ordered. He swung round on the smallest Demon who happened to be standing next him. “Go! Seek her!”

Biddy o’Ryan needed no second telling. Breathless or not, she was over the plants and racing out of the top door with much display of long black stockings and tights. The girls waited eagerly for her to return with their missing member. She came back all right, but she was alone. The Blue Angel turned an anxious look on her; but the Demon came forward and announced her find in tones that reached everyone present.

“Please, St. Nicholas, would you be coming to help me?” she asked. “I’ve found her all right, but she can’t get down and I can’t help her—too small!”

“What on earth—*where* is she?” St. Nicholas demanded.

The Demon gulped before she announced in tones that were shaking with laughter, “Sure, she’s on top of that cupboard in Ste. Thérèse’s where we keep the extra stationery. It’s tilted forward against the corner of the wall—she says it did that when she tried to come down—and I can’t push it straight and she can’t get away in case she brings it right over sideways. There’s not room for her to get down the other side.”

There was an electric pause and then the school broke into peals of laughter. It was a good minute before even St. Nicholas could pull himself together sufficiently to settle his mitre more firmly on his head, gather up his robes and follow the Demon from the room. It was ten minutes before the pair came back, leading a purple-faced Mary-Lou between them. Her face was smeared with dust and so were her hands. Her plait had lost its end bow and come untwisted, and she had ripped her frock across the front of her skirt. But she was obviously unhurt, though highly embarrassed.

The Demon and the Saint released her and she shot across the room and made haste to hide herself among the Gang who welcomed her joyfully. They had not known what had happened to her and it was a relief to see that she was unharmed.

It was a relief to the Blue Angel, too, though she said nothing. St. Nicholas stalked to his place and in a voice deepened by smothered laughter to a growl, told the girls that since chastisement was ended, rewards were now in order. The Angels brought forward great sacks and the girls were called up one by one and invited to dip their hands into each and take one parcel.

Presently the place was filled with exclamations of delight as they opened their parcels. The gifts were mere trifles—a slab of chocolate; a handkerchief, collar and cuffs, string of pretty beads or small brooch; a tiny carved wooden statue of one of the saints—but they came as a delightful surprise.

They were given a few minutes to examine their rewards. Then they were summoned to Abendessen when they discovered that a very extra-special meal awaited them. Sandwiches were followed by creams, jellies, trifle and a fluffy pink dish that was one of Karen’s specialities and appeared only on rare occasions. The finishing touch came when baskets of crackers, gorgeous in green or scarlet and gold, were handed round and the air was filled with the noise of snapping crackers and everyone was soon wearing a gaudy paper hat or crown.

It was at Abendessen that most of them discovered the identity of St. Nicholas. Remarking that you couldn’t be expected to eat decently with a haystack on your face, he had carefully removed his beard to reveal the twinkling eyes and straight features of Jack Maynard! His own daughters shrieked with surprise. Most of the time, he had been so consumed with suppressed laughter, that his voice had dropped two or three tones and the fuzz of beard had been an excellent disguise.

After Abendessen, they went back to Hall and there Miss Annersley, who had now discarded her robes and twisted up her hair, told them some of the stories and legends that have gathered round the Saint before she took Prayers and then dismissed them bedwards.

"It's been a gorgeous evening, hasn't it?" Hilary said as she examined her tiny figure of St. Andrew.

Mary-Lou, who had just removed her frock and discovered the awfulness of the damage she had done in her efforts to escape from the top of the cupboard, agreed. "But just *what* Matey will do about this dress of mine, I wouldn't know," she added. "Oh, well, it's last year's let down, luckily, and it really was getting rather tight for me. Mother said I'd probably have to have a new one for next term, so it isn't as bad as it might have been, thank goodness!"

"Don't worry, *ma chère*," remarked Mdlle.'s voice from the doorway. "I am come to take your dress and I will mend it myself." As a thankful Mary-Lou handed the garment over to her, she continued with a twinkle, "I do not think you are enough of a needlewoman to mend this yourself. But I will show you how I do it that you may know for the future and you may be useful in threading needles and passing them to me. Now, *bonne nuit, mes enfants!*"

With one voice, Cornflower replied, "*Bonne nuit, Mdlle.!*" Mary-Lou ending with, "*et merci bien!* I'd have made an awful mess of it myself, I know!"

Chapter XV

DISOBEDIENCE—AND CATASTROPHE!

Next morning after Frühstück, Mary-Lou was summoned to the study to explain—if she *could!*—why she had chosen to climb up on top of the cupboard.

“Well, it was this way, you see,” she said, looking at Miss Annersley with candid blue eyes. “I was trying to get away from the Demon. I thought she was chasing Vi, but she suddenly turned round and went for *me*. I simply didn’t think. There wasn’t time. I rushed down the corridor and then I remembered that it was a—a cul-de-sac and I hadn’t a hope of getting out! You know what that end’s like. There’s a window with a chair in front of it and the cupboard has to stand in that little recess beyond so that part of it is between the two walls and you can only just get that door open.”

“I know,” the Head replied as the girl paused. “Well? Continue, please.”

Mary-Lou shot an apprehensive glance at her. Certainly the Head had every right to be furious with her, but she seemed really angry. She went on rather uncertainly, “I suppose I’d gone a little mad. Anyhow, it seemed to me that if I could only get on top of the cupboard she’d be bound to miss me. The corridor was darkish with only the guide-lights on and that corner was quite dark. I leapt on to the chair and then—somehow—I got on top of the cupboard.”

“I only wonder you didn’t bring it down altogether, bouncing on it like that!” Miss Annersley exclaimed.

“It did rock a little,” Mary-Lou admitted. “I couldn’t have managed it if the Demon hadn’t stopped to catch Carola one as she tore past out of Harebell. Anyhow, I did and there I was right up and the Demon couldn’t find me. She never thought of looking up at all.”

Miss Annersley reflected that, considering what might have happened if the Demon *had* looked up and caught the girl, she felt deeply thankful that it hadn’t happened.

“Well?” was all she said however.

“Well, she went off after someone else and then I heard the bell ringing and someone shouted that we were all to go back to Hall. I tried to get down, only when I did, I felt the cupboard shift and then it tilted forward. That really *was* frightening! I kept still for a minute or two and then thought I’d see if I could slide down by the side, but when I tried, the cupboard shifted again and I guessed if I did much more, I’d bring the lot over sideways. I knew Miss Dene keeps all the coloured inks there, so I thought better not.”

“Yes; and then?”

“I did give a yell or two, but everyone had gone by that time and they didn’t hear me. I wasn’t afraid, of course. I knew someone would miss me and you’d hunt for me. But I—I didn’t exactly like it,” Mary-Lou confessed.

“I see. Well, we know the rest. And now, Mary-Lou I want you to think that if the cupboard had really gone over, you might have been flung against the wall and broken an arm. Or if you struck your head you would certainly have been stunned if not concussed.” She stopped to let this sink in and Mary-Lou went darkly red.

“I—I didn’t think of all that,” she murmured indistinctly.

“No; so I imagine. Now that sort of thing won’t do. You are fifteen—much too old to behave like a baby! Really, considering how very childish your behaviour has been, I am

greatly tempted to tell you to write out ten times in your best handwriting, 'I must not climb cupboards nor behave in such a babyish way.' ”

This was almost worse than anything. If the Head really did give her such an ignominious punishment, Mary-Lou felt it would be some time before she could hold up her head again.

However, Miss Annersley tempered justice with mercy—a common thing with her. “Mdlle. tells me she is going to mend the rent in your dress. In return, you must mend her stockings. You will do it in your free time and you will do it exactly as she wishes. That is all. I'm sorry to have to spoil your memory of what we all hoped would be a very happy evening for you people, but if you *will* behave like a stupid child, you must take the consequences. You may go.”

Mary-Lou fled—as fast as her legs could carry her. She had been squirming inwardly for the last minute or two. Miss Annersley's beautiful voice could take on an edge that left you feeling as if you had been scraped raw! And her punishment was one she disliked intensely. It was only better than the lines would have been. Mdlle. prided herself on doing almost invisible darns and the girl saw herself doomed to losing most of her free time for the rest of the week in mending those stockings!

As it turned out, Mdlle. was merciful. When Mary-Lou came to her for the stockings, she produced a pair which had only two or three small holes, and kept the sinner beside her to show her how to do the beautiful darning for which Frenchwomen are famous. It took Mary-Lou two evenings to finish those stockings to Mdlle.'s satisfaction, but by the time they were done she had mastered the method and henceforth her own stockings were neatly mended, so she gained so much.

The next excitement that took place was the end-of-term examinations. These were always held three weeks or so before the end of term so that the mistresses could go through the questions with the girls while they were still fresh in their memories.

On the whole, the weather remained fine, with only one day on which the school were imprisoned for the whole day. As a rule, they had exams in the morning and spent the afternoons ski-ing or sledging. There was a good slope above the Platz which ran down to the meadow that lay behind the Elstobs' chalet. Here the girls practised their ski-ing and tobogganing. Leila Elstob, slowly but steadily making progress after the severe operation performed on her in the summer, could watch the fun from her windows and everyone looked out for her and waved to her, so she looked forward to seeing the long lines stream on to the meadow.

This was the second winter in the Oberland for most of the girls. They had gained their ski-ing balance during the previous one and continual practice had made many of them quite expert. It was the same with the tobogganing. At first they had found it far from easy to guide the light toboggans the way they wanted to go. Now most of them could manage quite well.

On the Thursday of exam week, they had a heavy fall of snow that lasted all day. At night, it ended, but there was a hard frost so that the ground was in splendid care next day. Miss Annersley announced after Prayers that morning that unless the snow came on again, everyone should spend in the garden; the others might take their toboggans and go on skis to the meadow. Darkness came down about half-past fifteen; but they would have a good hour and a half's fun before they needed to go back.

As usual, the Gang went together. After them, came another bunch of girls, headed by Emerence Hope, one of the naughtiest girls the school had ever suffered, and Margot Maynard.

Margot had been a problem since her birth. She had been terribly delicate as a little child and even when two years in Canada had cured that, there remained her sinful propensities. These, she always blamed on “my devil.” Luckily for her, she had parents who had long since realised that whatever the cost to themselves, if they wanted to help Margot to grow into the fine woman they hoped for, they must never allow anything to pass. An accident during the Easter term in which she and another girl might have been drowned and which might have been avoided altogether if she had not listened to her “devil,” seemed to have been the turning point for her. Since then, she had struggled hard against her besetting sins of pride, temper and the thoughtlessness which led her into all sorts of mischief.

Emerence was quite another problem. She had been brought up by parents who had indulged and spoilt her until she felt she had the right to do and say what she liked. As a result, she had so nearly caused a disastrous fire, that her father’s patience was ended. ^[12]Hearing of the school from a former mistress, he had cabled from his home at Manly near Sydney to the Head and packed his daughter off to the school by the next plane. Her first term had been marked by one wild outbreak after another until she had at last learned that here, at any rate, she must knuckle down to authority. After that, things went more smoothly.

[12] *Shocks for the Chalet School.*

Now although no one knew of it, this last term Emerence had begun to resent the fact that while most people of her own age were in VB with the privileges of Seniors she was still only in Upper IVb. Above all she hated to think that Josette Russell, who was eight months younger than herself, should be there and should, in common with the rest, be allowed to take certain walks and rambles unescorted while she must always be in the charge of a mistress or prefect.

As it happened, on this day, there were no prefects there. They had been given permission to go with some of the girls from St. Mildred’s down to Welsen where Das Haus unter die Kiefern was situated. Three unfortunates who had been at the school proper the term before had been undergoing operations for adenoids and tonsils and had been sent to St. Mildred’s former home to recuperate.

Reflecting that most of the staff would be with the rest and that the Juniors were restricted to the garden, Miss Annersley gave leave. She herself was going down to Interlaken to interview prospective parents all day. Mdlle. de Lachennais and Miss Denny would take charge and there were at least five other mistresses who were old hands at winter sports.

The girls set off at half-past thirteen to make the most of the short winter afternoon. Only the new girls who were still at the floundering stage were not on skis. The rest went skimming off to the meadow in great style.

Arrived there, the staff divided up responsibilities among themselves. Mdlle. de Lachennais, an expert ski-er and a member of the French Alpine Club, undertook to deal with the novices while the rest kept an eye on the others. Biddy o’Ryan volunteered to mount to the top of the hill and start the tobogganists off; while Miss Derwent and Miss Bertram, who had become very friendly since Miss Armitage, formerly science mistress in the school proper had left to be married the preceding term, undertook to wait at the foot in case anyone needed direction or rescuing.

Miss o’Ryan was only halfway up the slope when one of the men from the village went hurrying after her. He caught her up as she reached the halfway mark and they had an earnest colloquy. As a result, the history mistress came speeding back to those who were just

beginning on the ascent to say, “Girls! Just a moment! Herr Koch says that we must not start any higher up than about that pinetree up there!” She pointed with outflung hand. “Another pine came down a little further up the night before last. It’s covered by the snow, of course, and you can’t see it. If your toboggans caught it, you might have a nasty accident. So remember, please; no going beyond that pinetree. I’ll be about up there and if I catch anyone trying to go further, I shall send her straight back to school,” she added, clinching the matter so far as most of her hearers were concerned.

“Oh, bother her!” Emerence grumbled to her boon companion, Margot. “I wanted to go right up to the top of the slope. It’s such a gorgeous feeling when you come flying down all the distance. ’Tisn’t half so much fun just that little way.”

Margot, too, loved the sensation of hurtling through the air. Besides, during her time in Canada she had done a good deal of bob-sleighbing and fancied herself to be a good deal more expert than she really was. However she contented herself with saying, “You won’t get a chance of trying it today, anyhow—not with Miss o’Ryan up there! She’s got eyes all round her head!”

Emerence set her lips and a look of mulish obstinacy came into her face. “We’ll see,” was all she said.

Margot became alarmed. “Oh, Emmy, don’t be an idiot! You heard what she said. We’ll only be sent back to school if she catches us trying to go further up.”

“Oh, you *are* going to stand by me, then? I thought you might try to back out like a good little girl,” Emerence jeered.

Margot flushed. For a moment she had a stinging retort on her lips, but she was really trying now, so she bit it back and the pair went on in silence for the next minute or two. Then she tried again.

“Emmy, lets just go down from the tree as she said. It isn’t worth it. *Don’t* go to the top—*don’t!*”

“Who said I was going to?” was all the satisfaction she got. She gave it up, tugged on her rope and the pair ploughed on upwards, hauling the light sled after them.

Down in the meadow, Len Maynard was swinging along with Prunella Davidson. Despite the difference of three years and more in their ages, a great friendship lay between the pair—all the greater, perhaps, because it had to be pursued out of school hours. She glanced round to see what her sisters were doing. Con was skimming about in front of Leila Elstob’s window, pausing at the end of each turn to wave her hand or blow a kiss to the little invalid. Jo Scott and Josette Russell, a pair of inseparables, were with her. *She* was all right. The eldest of the Maynards, a young person with a big sense of responsibility, heaved a sigh of relief and turned to look for Margot.

“What’s wrong?” Prunella asked.

“I’m just looking to see what Margot’s doing!” Len replied.

“She went off with young Emerence and that luxury sled of hers. There they are—up there with Miss o’Ryan,” replied Prunella who was famed for her long sight. Len heaved another sigh of relief and turned to enjoy herself, unburdened by any anxiety about her sisters.

Meanwhile, Mary-Lou had brought her own toboggan along and she and Vi were settling on it, prepared for the lovely “Whoosh-sh-sh!” of the wind as they tore down over the snowy ground. They waited for Emerence and Margot to get safely away. Then Mary-Lou lifted her heels from the snow into which she had been digging them to hold the toboggan and off they went!

By the time they reached the bottom, the other pair were already on the upward clamber again. Margot waved her hand to them and shouted, "It's a nuisance that we always have to climb up after the gorgeous rush down, isn't it?"

"What else d'you expect?" Vi yelled back to her.

Their clear voices carried on the still, sharp air and two or three people gliding about the meadow, grinned at Vi as she stood up and prepared to shoulder her rope on the upward journey again.

"Margot hates anything like work!" Hilary Bennett said. "I wish I'd brought *my* toboggan, but Hansi stopped me when I went to get it and said one of the ropes was fraying and I ought to have a new one before I took it out again."

"Take mine when Vi and I have had another turn or two," Mary-Lou offered. "We'll just have three more goes and then you and Lesley can have it for a while."

"Oh no, Mary-Lou! That would spoil your fun."

"Not it! I'll have the fun of ski-ing instead. I never really know which I like best. You two be here in about twenty minutes' time and we'll hand it over to you."

"Certain you don't mind? Well, thanks a million! That's what I call being a real pal!" In her pleasure, Hilary tempted Providence by dropping the French which was the official language for the day and speaking in English—and in slang at that! She got away with it, Mary Lou merely remarking, "En français, s'il vous plaît!" before she and Vi set off on the stiff trek uphill.

They were by no means the only girls tobogganing. Biddy o'Ryan was kept busy watching them and keeping an eye on any venturesome spirits who might risk being sent home if they were caught mounting higher. She thought she could just make out where the pine had fallen. There seemed to be a slight shadow on the whiteness of the snow, halfway to the top from where she stood. She looked very serious for a moment. She knew what dangers could lie in such a snag. Then she heard a voice and turned to see Blossom Willoughby of VIB, begging her to settle her load of young Middles in place on one of the big family sledges owned by the school.

"I'm just going to give them a run or two," she said cheerfully. "Put them in the right order, will you, Miss o'Ryan?"

Biddy quickly got them into order, warned them to keep their hands and feet well in on the sledge, and let them go. She watched them for a minute or two. Blossom was quite good, but on this occasion, she must have pulled too heavily on her right-hand rope, for the thing looked like slewing over to the side. Forgetful of her post for the moment, she skimmed downhill, shouting to Blossom to pull on the left and get the sledge into the straight again. Miss Derwent at the foot of the hill, was calling up exactly the same advice. Blossom became confused, lost her head and ran the sledge right over the edge of the run into the snow where it turned on its side and deposited its shrieking load on top of each other.

"You get back to your post and I'll see to them!" Miss Derwent called and Biddy described a graceful curve on her skis, ready to skim back. At least, that was the idea. Unfortunately, the tip of one ski caught a hidden snag and over she went. She was not hurt and she was up almost at once; but there had been a little delay—long enough for Emerence to take in the general confusion and all that had happened. She and Margot had reached their boundary, but instead of swinging the toboggan round into place, she trudged on, Margot beside her, frantically pleading with her to give it up.

Emerence said nothing until they had reached the top of the run. That curious look of dumb obstinacy had swept across her face again and her friend knew that she was pleading vainly. When they reached the top, she swung round on her partner.

“You shut up! If you don’t want to come, you needn’t; but *I’m* going!”

“But we’ll get into the most awful row!” Margot persisted, nearly in tears by this time. “Oh, Emmy, don’t do it! Please don’t do it! You might hurt yourself badly—you might even be killed and it isn’t worth it! *Please*, Emmy!”

She might as well have talked to the wind. Emerence pulled the toboggan round into position and sat down on it, keeping it in place by digging her heels into the snow.

“Raspberries to all that!” she said. “Are you coming or not?”

Margot was greatly tempted. She loved the feeling of flying through the air and it wasn’t often they were allowed to make the whole run alone—only when one of the elders was with them. Her “devil” clung round her, telling her that since they would certainly be sent back for their present disobedience, she might as well go just the one stop further.

She might very well have fallen, but at that point Mary-Lou and Vi, who had paused to laugh over the mishap to Blossom and her load, once they had seen that no one was hurt, turned to resume their upward trek and saw the pair exactly where they had all been forbidden to go. She acted at once. Springing forward and nearly jerking Vi off her feet, she shrieked at Emerence agitatedly.

“Emerence! Stop that! Stay where you are! Oh, heavens!” she added to Vi. “If they come down the chances are they’ll be flung right on top of that lot down there! *Emerence!* Stay where you are, I say!”

It turned the scale for Margot. She wriggled off the toboggan on which she had just sat down. “No, Emmy! We mustn’t! Emmy—*don’t!*”

Mary-Lou had dropped her rope and was coming up the slope as hard as she could go. Emerence realised that if she wanted to get off she must go at once. “Funker! Baby!” she shouted at Margot as she lifted her heels.

The toboggan slid off, gathering speed instantly, for the run was sharp and keen. Margot set up a series of wild screams which made people look up. Many of them rushed forward at once; only Mdlle., keeping her head, sped forward at her best pace, shouting, “Ah non! Tenez-vous, tous le monde! Arrêtez-vous!” in such imperative tones, that the girls heeded at once.

Mary-Lou, still flying up the slope, shouted, “Steer to the right—steer to the right!” in a wild attempt to save the upset crew, at any rate, from disaster, whatever might happen to Emerence herself. Suddenly frightened by what she had done, Emerence tugged at first one rope and then the other. As Mary-Lou reached the place where Miss o’Ryan had noted that faint shadow, the toboggan suddenly swung half round and, in that position, struck the snag. It had been coming full tilt down and the force of the blow flung Emerence off it, clear across the narrow margin of the run, straight into the other girl. Mary-Lou took the full weight of her flying body in the chest and was flung in her turn, this time, against the trunk of a lone pine tree.

By the time the horrified Bidy, ski-ing as she had never ski-ed in her life before, had reached the little group of girls, Vi, who had let their own toboggan go and flown uphill, had succeeded in pulling Emerence off her friend. Margot, who had hitherto remained at the top of the run as if frozen there, had come to life and was charging down on them, tears pouring down her cheeks which had lost all their colour.

The mistress knelt down beside Mary-Lou and helped Vi to turn her very cautiously on her back. There seemed to be no sign of life in her. She lay there, still, grey and to all appearance, dead!

Chapter XVI
THE SCHOOL GOES TO BED HAPPILY

Joey Maynard sat by Mary-Lou's bed. It was five days since they had carried the girl to the big Sanatorium at the end of the Görnetz Platz and though she still lived, never once, during those five days, had she shown any signs of rousing. The blow she had received when Emerence's weight flung against her full force had crashed her into the tree-trunk, had set up deep concussion. Just what other injuries she might have sustained was more than the doctors could say yet. The head injury was so bad that they had not dared do more than make a superficial examination. They were afraid of spinal damage, but this they kept to themselves for the present.

Joey had gone to her the same evening when Jack Maynard had brought the news to Freudesheim. Mrs. Carey was in the throes of a severe attack of influenza and was too ill even to be told. Commander Carey had offered to fly out to see his stepdaughter between whom and himself existed a warm friendship, but Jack had refused the offer. He could do no good and Mrs. Carey might begin to wonder and worry if he were away at a time when she herself was so ill.

The two Heads of the school—Miss Annersley and Miss Wilson—came in turns to relieve Joey; but she would not give up her post except for needed rest. "If Doris can't come, then her girl is my responsibility," she had said.

The doctor came in quietly and stood beside his wife. This morning he had noted a little restlessness and he thought the concussion was beginning to pass off. The big question was whether Mary-Lou would wake up her natural self; or would it be fever and babbling delirium? And if they missed that last, how had she been hurt otherwise? Her back was very badly bruised around the spine. The bruises stood out black against her white skin. Had she damaged the spine itself? So far, all he had seen had been a light fluttering of the long lashes which lay so heavily on the waxen cheeks; a tiny shifting of the heavily bandaged head.

Joey looked up at him, apprehension in her face. "What—what have we to look for, Jack?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't quite know. I think she is beginning to come round. Until she rouses fully neither I nor anyone else can tell you anything more." Then he added, "Thank God she's always been a sturdy, healthy specimen! If the brain itself is not affected, we should have a good chance of mending her well. There's nothing to do just now but just wait—and pray."

"Do you think I haven't done that the whole time?" Joey asked as her eyes went again to the deathly white face against the pillow.

They had had to cut away part of her hair to dress the wound at the back of the skull and Jack had insisted that the rest of the long, beautiful locks must go, too. It might make all the difference between fever and sanity later. But nothing was to be seen of that just now. The bandages hid it.

He bent now and took one limp wrist in his hand. "The pulse is stronger," he said when he laid it down. "Ah! She's really beginning to rouse now! Look, Joey! Her eyelids lifted then. Nurse! Call Dr. Graves and Herr Doktor Courvoisier!"

The nurse sped from the room to the house 'phone which was just outside and a few minutes later when the fluttering of the eyelids was becoming marked, they were standing at

the bedside. Joey herself had got up and gone to stand at the foot of the bed so that the first thing Mary-Lou saw when she woke to full consciousness would be the fact of “Aunt Joey” who had been trying to take her mother’s place these past days.

Matron arrived a moment later, warned by the Sanatorium telephonist. There was silence in the room. It was broken by a little gasp as Mary-Lou yawned. At long last the heavy lids lifted and she looked straight at the foot of the bed where Joey was standing, a determined smile on her face. Later, she owned that she had felt as if her facial muscles were made of iron and she never knew how she had achieved any sort of a smile!

But what they had feared was not to happen. Instant recognition flashed into the very blue eyes. The pale lips parted and Mary-Lou said thickly, “Feel—groggy!”

“Basin, Nurse!” Jack said quickly.

Nurse produced the bowl just in time. Mary-Lou was violently sick. When it was over, she spoke again. “What’s up?”

“You had a nasty knock,” Joey said, coming to bend over her. “You’ve been out quite a while. But it’s over now, my darling.”

“Oh, I ’member.” Then the sickness returned and while the other two men, Nurse and Matron attended to her, Jack put an arm round his wife and marched her out of the room. To his way of thinking, she had taken all she could stand.

“Well, that’s so much,” he said when they were out in the corridor. “The brain is unharmed, thank God!”

Joey swayed. She had been under a heavy strain and he was anxious about her. “*You* are going straight to bed now, my lady,” he said firmly. “Oh yes, you are! Matron has a room all ready and waiting for you. You’d have been there before, only I knew you’d never leave the kid until she came round. Now you can just come along and park yourself in bed. No arguments, please! You have other folk to consider besides yourself and I’m not going to have you ill.”

Joey was too worn out to argue. She let him take her to the still white room awaiting her. A little probationer who had been hovering around, followed after them, and he left his wife in her charge while he hurried back to Mary-Lou.

Dr. Graves looked up as he entered and nodded slightly. A look of relief filled Jack Maynard’s face. He came to look at the patient. Mary-Lou was still very white, but she looked more natural than she had done since the accident. As he stooped over her, she opened her eyes again and a tiny smile curved her lips.

“Hello!” she whispered.

“Hello yourself! Well, now you can go to sleep and perhaps I’ll let Aunt Joey come and see you when you wake up again.”

“Back,” she murmured. “Hurts! Head—hurts!”

Again that look of relief flashed round among those about her. This meant that no serious harm had been done to the spine either. The one thing they had dreaded as much as the fever was that she would rouse up and feel no pain. Clearly this was to be avoided, too.

“Nurse will give you something to ease the pain,” Jack said gently. “You’re very bruised, you know. It’s bound to hurt. But we can help you until the worst is over.”

She gave him another smile and then Nurse brought the injection. When it had been given and Mary-Lou seemed drowsy, the men left the room with Matron, leaving Nurse in charge. Matron led them to a little sitting-room, gay with pot-plants and lights and an open fire, and waved to them to sit down.

“What happened while I was away?” Jack asked imperatively. “I must let Joey know.”

“She tried to turn and she did move her legs,” Dr. Graves replied. “She threw out one arm, too. The spine is all right.”

“Thank God for that! Did you say anything more?”

“No; she had a sip or two of water and then you came in. No one can say definitely yet, as no one knows better than you; but I’m inclined to think that the concussion has been the worst of it. It’s been quite bad enough, but she’s coming out of it very nicely. I was thankful when she was so sick. She’ll be properly round soon.”

The Swiss doctor who had recently joined the Sanatorium staff, nodded. “I was afraid for the spine itself when I saw the depth and extent of the bruising, but I think we may say that no major injury has been done there, though she will certainly have pain to endure for some time.”

Jack nodded. “An outsize in headaches, as well as the stiffness of the bruises. And, of course, we must watch the spine for inflammation setting up. Still it is much better than we even expected. It may take a long time, but we shall have our Mary-Lou on her feet again some time. Well, now I must go and tell Joey—if she is still awake. She’s all in. This has been a big strain for her and it’s come at a bad time, too, unfortunately.”

He went off and Dr. Graves returned to Mary-Lou, but when he came out, it was to report that she was sleeping naturally and the pulse had steadied amazingly.

Joey was still awake when Jack saw her. She listened quietly to what he had to say. Then the tears brimmed over and she began to cry from sheer relief. For a few minutes he left her to it. When he saw that the tears showed signs of getting out of control, he checked her sharply.

“Now that’s quite enough of that! You don’t want to go into hysterics, I hope. Take a pull on yourself, girl! Nurse will bring you a nice glass of hot milk and when you’ve drunk it, you can lie down and have a nap. You’ll feel better after that.”

“N-not after hot m-milk, I won’t!” she choked. “You know h-how I h-hate it!” Then, mopping her eyes on the handkerchief he had given her, “When can I see her again? How is she now?”

“You can see her after that nap I mentioned—not a minute before. As for how she is, she was settling off to sleep and looking much more like herself. You have no need to worry now. She’s herself so far as the brain goes and I don’t mind telling you that it’s the brain I’ve been dreading all along. That’s a very nasty knock. We hope the spine is only bruised. It certainly hasn’t sustained any major damage. She can move her arms and legs. But I’m afraid she’s in for a lot of pain, poor kid. Still, Mary-Lou’s always been a soldier. She’ll come through all right. Now here’s the milk,” as the little nurse entered with it. “Thanks, Nurse; just what the doctor ordered! Here you are, Joey! Down with it and then you can lie down and you’ll be asleep before you know where you are.”

Joey looked at him suspiciously as she gave her eyes a final rub and stretched out her hand for the glass. “I suppose *that* means that you’ve made sure of it?” She sipped it gingerly.

“What do *you* think? I don’t want you ill on my hands to complicate matters. Drink it down, there’s a good girl! You really can go to sleep with a free heart now.”

“Thank God for that! When I *have* had time to think these last three days, I’ve been thinking of what I might have to write to Doris. Arthur Carey has made up a lot to her, I know; and she’s very fond of Verity-Anne. But to have to tell her that she had lost her only child after losing her mother-in-law whom she loved dearly *and* Mary-Lou’s father—oh, Jack, my heart simply stood still at the thought!”

He sat down on the bed and put an arm round her. "It hasn't come to that, dear. Thank God for it, too. Accidents apart, Mary-Lou should be herself again before many months are out. Luckily for everyone concerned, she's a steady youngster and she's been trained to obedience. Those two things will go a long way to helping her to recover. Also, she has any amount of pluck and she'll stand up to whatever pain she may have to bear with all the bravery you want. Finished? That's my girl! Now lie down and I'll tuck you in. Then I'll go along for another dekkko and after that, I must be off to the school and tell them that they may hope all will be well."

Even as he spoke, he saw that what he had slipped into the milk was beginning to take hold of her. She smiled up at him drowsily as he packed her in. The black lashes fell over her eyes. She opened them to give him a drowsy smile, but it was an effort. Five minutes later when he left the room, she was sleeping and he felt fairly certain that she was unlikely to rouse up for a good six or seven hours.

In the little private ward at the other end of the corridor, Mary-Lou was also sleeping. Her lips were faintly pink and the waxen hue of her face was turning more normal. Nurse was sitting beside her, watchful for the slightest change in her condition. This afternoon's rousing had given them good hope, but they knew that the next forty-eight hours would be critical ones. Everything at present depended on the nursing. He gave Nurse a few brief instructions and after a last look at the patient, left the Sanatorium in his car, headed for the school.

Fresh snow had fallen the day before, but he had chains on and the men had been out as soon as the fall ceased, beating the snow on the road firm. The sun was shining and Jack put on his coloured goggles. He had no wish for a dose of snow-blindness. As he neared the Elstobs' house, Mrs. Elstob, who had evidently been on the look-out for him, came down the path and waved to him to stop.

"What is the news?" she asked anxiously. "Leila is fretting to know. Mary-Lou has been very kind to her, sending her post-cards and story-books. Can you come in and tell her yourself, Doctor?"

He shook his head. "I'll be along later, but now I must get on to the school. It's their right to have the full news first. But you may tell Leila that we all hope and believe that Mary-Lou will be all right before so very long."

She removed her hand reluctantly from the door. "I wish you'd come for just a moment and tell her yourself, Doctor."

"Oh, no. Leila is growing stronger every day now, and it's time she tried to deny herself a little for other folk. Tell her I said so. It's good for no one to have every wish fulfilled. You don't want her to grow up a young monster of selfishness, do you?"

"Oh, no; but it's very hard not to give in to her when—when I so nearly lost her such a short time ago. But I'll tell her what you say."

He drove on, slowing a little at St. Mildred's; but the girls were hard at work and no one appeared so he speeded up again and drove straight to Freudesheim where he garaged the car before going across to the school on foot.

It was halfway through the afternoon by this time and all lights were on. Most of the girls were in their formrooms. There were two exceptions to this as he knew—his own Margot and Emerence Hope. Margot was in bed, having cried herself sick over Mary-Lou. Emerence was in san having done the same thing in addition to having a broken collarbone and a badly sprained ankle. No one had said much to her as yet about her disobedience. That must wait until she was better. But Emerence needed no one to tell her that what had happened was the

direct consequence of her own wilful disobedience and she had cried herself into a high fever over it.

Jack Maynard looked in at the study. Finding no one there, he next visited the office, but that was vacant, too. He went upstairs and sought Matron, but her room was also innocent of any occupant. Finally, he found both her and Miss Annersley in the san with Emerence.

As he entered, the girl forgot her injuries and started upright, smothering a cry of pain as she cried, "Oh, Dr. Jack! What—what—oh, what is the news?"

He nodded at the Head and she rose from her chair, an example followed by Matron.

"She has roused, then?" Miss Annersley said in the fluent French Emerence still found hard to follow. "It's all right? Good! We'll leave you to tell Emerence. Come along, Matey! We must let the entire school know."

They went out and he was left alone with the sinner. He surveyed her thoughtfully as she sat against her pillows, her arm in a sling and a cage under the bedclothes over the injured foot. A more pathetic sight it would have been hard to find. She had cried until her eyes were so swollen she could scarcely see out of them and her nose was twice its usual size. Her short fair hair stood on end and her pyjama jacket looked as if it had been rough-dried. The handkerchief by her hand was sopping wet. Her temperature had gone down now, but it had left her looking very white and wan. On the whole, he thought, even Mary-Lou herself looked no worse than the object before him.

"I think," he said thoughtfully, "that the first thing is to give you a good wash. What an awful little sight you do look to be sure!"

She caught at his coat with her uninjured hand. "But Mary-Lou? Oh, tell me—"

"Mary-Lou? She is definitely better. She has come round and is herself again—more or less. Now don't cry *again*, Emerence. You've done more than enough of that this past three days. You'll only make matters worse for everyone if you cry yourself into a regular illness. Stop it, I say, and don't be so selfish!"

The sharp words brought her up short. Scrubbing her eyes with the useless handkerchief, she sobbed, "Oh, I'm so *glad*! I thought I'd k-killed her—"

"Emerence! Did you hear me tell you to stop that? I won't have any more of this useless crying! Now stop it! I'm going to see what I can do with your face for really, you're enough to scare a horse from its oats as you are!"

He found a basin and filled it with first hot and then cold water, sponging her face thoroughly until both eyes and nose were reduced to something like their usual proportions. She was pitifully submissive, considering it was Emerence. She let him do as he would and tried to choke back her sobs. Then he took the bowl away, found her hairbrush and gave her head a good brushing until it tingled all over. That done, he proceeded to make hay in Matron's neat drawers in search of a clean pyjama jacket which he handed to her and told her to look sharp and change. While she was busy, he went down to the kitchen and begged a bowl of hot soup from Karen.

Emerence had managed to get one arm into the jacket and pull it round her shoulders. More, she could not do. He calmly found Matron's scissors and slit up the other sleeve, safety-pinning it over the injured arm and shoulder. Then he sat down on the bed with his bowl and spoon fed her as if she had been his baby-girl Felicity. Not a word more did he speak, but there was something about the monumental calm he had assumed that helped to soothe the overwrought girl and by the time the soup was finished, she was much more like herself. He set the bowl and spoon to one side and came to sit at the foot of the bed.

“Want to tell me the whole yarn?” he asked.

“Yes, please!” And Emerence fell headlong into the story. She was careful to stick to the facts and she made sure that he knew that Margot had tried to stop her. She even confessed how she had coaxed and jeered to make the younger girl join her.

“Only she wouldn’t,” she wound up. Then looking at him with tears in her eyes, “Oh, Dr. Jack, what shall I do? Will they ever forgive me? It was all my fault and if Mary-Lou had—had died—” Her voice failed her and she scrubbed her poor eyes with the clean handkerchief he had found for her.

“Now I’ve already told you twice you’ve done enough crying,” he said calmly. “I’m very glad you’ve been so unhappy about it, Emerence. It shows that you have a chance to make good some time. But you’ve a long way to go before you get anywhere near it. You can’t afford to waste a moment. You can begin right now by trying to control those tears. Mary-Lou is better, but she isn’t out of the wood yet and for the next day or two we shall still be very anxious about her. If you add to our anxiety by making yourself ill again with crying, you’re being selfish and I shan’t think much of your sorrow. What you have to do is to try to get well again. That’s the first step. And here’s something you can do for her. You can pray for her and that, let me tell you, will be far more useful than howling yourself into a fever. If you do those two things now, you’ll have taken your first step along the way that’s going to give us a much nicer Emerence Hope than the one we’ve known so far. What about it?”

“I—I’ll try,” came a muffled voice from the pillow in which she had buried her face.

“Good!” he said heartily. “Then sit up and lets see you begin. As for forgiving you, suppose I send for the Head and let her talk to you?”

She had sat round and now she looked up at him with drenched eyes and said, “Yes, please.”

“Then I’ll go and tell Margot the news and you can talk to the Head yourself. I’m glad, by the way, to know that Margot did stand out against you. You won’t play *that* trick again, will you?”

“No; never again!” Emerence said with sudden vehemence. “Dr. Jack, Mummy and Daddy are so far away and they can’t come to me. Wo-won’t you say *you* forgive me and k-kiss me for them?”

It was a child’s request. It showed how right the authorities had been in not making her a Senior. She was anything but ready for that! Jack laughed as he kissed her forehead. “Now set to work at once,” he said. “I’ll let you have the latest news before bedtime so that you can go to sleep and get on with that getting-well business as fast as you can.”

He went off to find the Head and send her to her penitent after which he sought his own Margot in her cubicle. Like Emerence, she had cried herself ill. She was very highly-strung and the shock had upset her badly. Emerence had contrived to tell both the Head and Matron that it had not been Margot’s fault and they had both been very kind to the child, but she wanted her parents desperately badly and they had been too much occupied with Mary-Lou to come. Now, when she saw her father, she reverted to baby ways and held out her arms to him.

“Oh, Papa, Papa! I have so wanted you and Mamma!”

“We were both with Mary-Lou,” he said lifting her up and wrapping her in a blanket, for even in the heated dormitories, it was none too warm. “However, Mary-Lou is better today, so I’ve come and Mamma will probably be along tomorrow.” He sat down with her on his knee and, big girl of twelve as she was, she snuggled up to him.

“I’m glad! I have so missed you both. And it was so *dreadful* about Mary-Lou! I saw Emmy hit her and she fell and I rushed down to them and—and—oh, it’s been simply awful!”

“I know. But it’s over now, sugarpie! Mary-Lou woke up a short while ago and we all think she’s going to be all right. So try not to think of it any more. Margot, Emerence has just told me something that makes me very proud of you.”

Margot sat up with a bang. “Goodness! Whatever was that?”

“She told me that though she did her best to persuade you, you wouldn’t go with her on the toboggan and that you did try to make her give up going herself.”

“Well, I nearly did,” Margot confessed, “but I heard Mary-Lou yelling at us and I knew that if I went I’d be listening to my devil and I promised Mamma after I fell into Lucerne that I’d try not to. So I didn’t.”

Margot and her devil! Her father nearly laughed out, but he managed to keep a straight face as he replied, “Then that’s all right. And every time you beat him, it makes it easier next time, you know.”

“Papa, do you think I ought to stop being so pally with Emmy?”

“Good heavens, no! What on earth put that into your head?”

“Well she did ask me to join her and I knew it was wrong. I wondered.”

“Certainly not! Listen to me, Margot. Sorry as I am for Mary-Lou with all the days of pain she has before her, and you with all your distress over this affair, I’m sorriest of all for Emerence. She has been and still is the unhappiest of anyone. If you are real friends, now’s the time for you to show it. I don’t think much of anyone who deserts a pal when she’s in trouble, I can tell you! Besides, you can’t go through life avoiding everyone and everything that is likely to tempt you to do wrong. Don’t you think it, my child! A nice, jellyfish sort of woman you’d grow into! No, Margot; you be *more* Emerence’s friend than ever. And remember this. No one can *make* you commit sin. It’s up to you to refuse or agree. Now kiss me goodbye, for I *must* go.”

Margot hugged him. “You’re the nicest father I’ve ever known!” she said. “And Mamma’s the nicest, too. I think all our crowd are jolly lucky to have you both.”

He laughed as he went to hunt up the Head and give her all details before he returned to the Sanatorium to find Mary-Lou and Joey both sleeping soundly and both looking more like themselves with every hour. At twenty o’clock, he kept his word and rang up the school to tell them that so far, Mary-Lou was making steady progress, though she was by no means out of danger yet. But every hour was a distinct gain and he and everyone else thought that she would be sitting up and able to have visitors soon. So the school went to bed happily for the first time since the accident.

Chapter XVII

“HOW LIKE MARY-LOU!”

The news continued to be good. By the time the forty-eight hours were up, not even the most cautious doctor would have been afraid to say that Mary-Lou was definitely on the mend. Early in the next week, when most people in her case would have been lying back languidly on their pillows, sipping milk and chicken-broth, she was sitting up in bed and demanding something to eat.

“And I mean ‘*eat*!’” she proclaimed firmly.

“Well, take this chicken-broth now and you shall have something really solid tomorrow,” Nurse responded brightly.

Mary-Lou’s reactions when the “something really solid” proved to be tripe stewed in milk, were worth hearing and seeing! Joey was with her at the time and the story she rushed over to tell the two Heads that evening lost nothing in the telling.

“Nurse brought the tray in,” she said, waving her hands dramatically, “and set it down on the bedtable. Then she lifted the cover and gave Mary-Lou a—*a hopeful* look. But if she thought she was going to get any thanks, that’s where her toes turned in! Mary-Lou just stared at it and from her expression, you’d have thought she’d been served with a plateful of slugs and black beetles!”

“Really, Jo!” Miss Annersley exclaimed as well as she could for laughing.

“She couldn’t have looked more disgusted. Then she turned to Nurse. ‘Do you call that decent food?’ says she. ‘I wouldn’t offer it to a dog I was fond of! Take it away and bury it daintily and bring me something to *eat*!’.”

“What did Nurse have to say?” Bill queried.

“Oh, she had the upper hand, of course. I *will* say she looked rather squashed; but she recovered. Oh, yes! Mary-Lou was promptly flattened! She said in her most stolid way, ‘That’s what the doctor said you might have and it’s all there is for you in the way of solids just now. You can either eat it or have a bowl of consommé. But make up your mind. I haven’t time to stand here doing nothing!’.”

“What was the result?” ‘Bill’ demanded with a giggle.

“What you might expect. Mary-Lou made the most awful grimaces over every mouthful, but she got it all down. When she had finished and Nurse came to change the plates and present her with a dish of custard and bottled raspberries, she said, ‘I’ve eaten it, Nurse. But if I’m sick this afternoon, you’ve only yourself to thank!’.”

“But she wasn’t, of course!” It was a statement. Miss Annersley had not taught Mary-Lou for five years without getting to know that young lady thoroughly.

“Not she! Besides, she told me that she had no use for invalidism and was going to get well as fast as she could. Anyhow, Nurse told me privately that tomorrow she is to have a boiled egg for Frühstück and steamed chicken for Mittagessen. Mary-Lou won’t come to any harm. Though I must admit I had every sympathy with her. I loathe tripe myself, whether boiled or fried. Nasty chewy stuff! I always avoid it if I can. I *have* had to eat it on occasion, of course, and it *is* really light solid food. They quite often do shove it at you in hospitals.”

Having set herself to getting well as fast as she could, Mary-Lou did it by such leaps and bounds as amazed everyone at the Sanatorium—except Jack Maynard who observed that it

was no more than he had expected. His own wife excepted, Mary-Lou was the most wholesale creature he had ever known!

The bruises on her back had faded to blue and green and yellow a good two days before they were due to do so. When they dressed the wound at the back of her head, they found that the healing processes had already begun. Mary-Lou was exceptionally healthy and the healing was clean.

But she *was* horrified when she found that not only had she lost her gorgeous pigtail, but also they had shaved her head! Jack Maynard had to listen to a furious diatribe on the subject when next he saw her.

"It had to be done," he said when at last she paused to take breath. "It might have meant all the difference between life and death where you were concerned."

"And will you kindly tell me what I'm going to do next term about going about looking like a skinned rabbit?" Mary-Lou snapped back at him. "Am I to have a wig?"

"Most certainly not! Besides, you've nothing to complain about. The new hair is coming already. By the time you're able to be back at school again your head will be covered by a fine down. Your hair has always produced strong growth. Shaving will probably have stimulated it—like pruning rosebushes really hard makes them produce more and finer roses. And anyhow, you couldn't look like a *rabbit*! You haven't a rabbit mouth!"

"Huh!" Mary-Lou grunted with incredulity in her tone. But she said no more after that. Instead, she took to studying hair tonic advertisements in the magazines she was allowed to have!

The school was to break up on the Thursday before Christmas Day. On the Monday of that week, the doctors said the patient might begin seeing visitors from the school so long as they did not excite her nor stay too long. Her stepfather had already paid her a flying visit—"flying," in every sense of the word—and had brought Verity with him. Mrs. Carey was well enough to be told the barest outlines of what had happened and had been eager for him to fly to Switzerland and see for himself how her girl was. Verity returned to the school with the information that though Mary-Lou was pale and her head swathed in bandages, she was still very much the Mary-Lou they had always known.

"Who would you like to see this time?" Miss Annersley asked on the Sunday afternoon when she was visiting the patient—she and Miss Wilson had never counted as proper visitors, and one or other of them had been to see her every day.

Mary-Lou considered. "I've seen Verity. I'd like Vi, of course; and if I have Vi, I'd better have Barbara. Miss Wilson, did you know Dr. Jem thinks Mother needs a proper change and Dad's bringing her out to Das Haus unter die Kiefern at the end of Christmas week and they'll probably be there till Easter. Verity's going to Aunt Joey's for Christmas as it wouldn't be worth her while to go home for such a short time. She'll be able to come and see me whenever she likes, once term's over. Aunt Joey did say she hoped they'd let me out to be at Freudesheim for Christmas Day, but no one will say definitely yet if it can come off. I hope so! You want to be at home for Christmas!" Mary-Lou suddenly looked wistful. Then she cheered up again. "Well, I can see Verity all I want next week. And Jo Scott's going to Lucerne, of course, so she'll probably be up once or twice during the hols. I think I'd like to have Betsy and Katharine."

"Very well, then. Betsy and Katharine have enough sense to be quiet visitors and I shall warn the other two. It won't do for you to get excited, you know, even though you *are* so much better."

“I don’t mean to be excited. I want to get *well*. I’m having to miss the end of this term and the fun of the Christmas party and the Carol Concert and I’m not going to be out of the panto next term on top of all that—not if I can help it, anyhow!”

Mary-Lou looked expectantly at the Head, but all that lady would say was, “We’ll see about that nearer the time. It doesn’t come off till the middle of February, so you still have plenty of time—six or seven weeks at least—to get really well. But I’m making no promises I might not be able to keep. If you go on as you’re doing, I can’t see any reason why you shouldn’t be in it; but it will largely depend on yourself.”

“Yes; I know that. Uncle Jack rubbed it well in only yesterday morning.” Mary-Lou dismissed the subject and went back to the question of visitors. “Miss Annersley, do you think the rest would understand if I asked for Jessica? You see, I sort of took hold of her and I think she’ll be all right now. But she’s going home, of course, and she’s told me bits about how bad things used to be there. It’ll be difficult for her at first, perhaps, and I’d like to have a word with her before she goes.”

“Four will be enough for one day,” Miss Annersley said, getting up to go. “But I promise you that Jessica shall come to see you before the end of term.”

Mary-Lou gave her an impish look. “She’ll have to hurry up, then,” she said. “There’s only three days before Thursday and tomorrow the other four are coming and you said it was enough.”

“Oh, no, Mary-Lou! You don’t catch me out that way! Jessica shall come; but not tomorrow!” And with that, Mary-Lou had to be satisfied.

Jack Maynard called with the car to take the four to the Sanatorium next afternoon. The rest of the school were hard at work rehearsing the carols for the concert and a good many people looked enviously at them when the horn sounded and they rose to be excused and left Hall. Jack packed them all in, raced them along the Platz and decanted them at the door of the Sanatorium where Matron Graves was awaiting them.

“Here they are, Matron. They’ve all given me their word of honour that they’ll say and do nothing to cause your patient a relapse. Each pair may have ten minutes—no more. After that, Mary-Lou had better lie down and take a nap. I’ll be along later to see how she’s stood it.”

Matron was an understanding person and she seated the two prefects in her own pretty sittingroom while she took Vi and Barbara along to the ward where Mary-Lou, attired in a new pink bedjacket, the work of Mdlle.’s clever fingers, was looking, except for her bandages and the fact that her usual healthy colour was not quite so bright as usual, her old self.

The two visitors came to the bedside where Nurse had left chairs ready, looking rather awed. But the invalid’s first words put a stop to that.

“Hello!” she said. “Jolly glad to see you both! I say, Vi, what on earth became of my toboggan? I know I let go and I don’t suppose *you* stuck to it any more than I did when you saw what was happening. Did anyone rescue it later?”

“Yes; Hilary did,” Vi replied, sitting down with a sigh of relief that it was still Mary-Lou and not some stranger. “It slithered over the edge into those bushes below—you know where—and Hilary went after it and brought it home. It wasn’t even scratched.”

Mary-Lou heaved a sigh of relief in her turn. “Well, thank goodness for that! I never thought of it till this morning and then it suddenly came over me what had happened to it? I didn’t want to lose it—it was new this term. By the way, I know there’s not been much time since, but I hope you’ve used it when you wanted it.”

Vi flushed. “None of us have much liked tobogganing since—since that day,” she said. “Oh, we’ve been out as usual, of course; but we’ve stuck to our skis.”

“Greater idiots you, then!” her friend retorted. “The next time you go out, you take the thing and have a jolly good time with it or I’ll have something to say to you when next I see you—which won’t be till next term, I suppose.”

“Shall you be back next term?” Barbara asked eagerly.

“What do you expect? Think I’m going to be done out of the panto when I’ve missed so much of the fun of this? If you do, that’s where your toes turn in! Besides, Uncle Jack said only this morning that I’m making such splendid progress that tomorrow I can get up and sit in a chair for an hour or so. I quite expect that by the time Mother and Dad come to Unter die Kiefern I’ll be up most of the day. And when *that* happens, it won’t be long before I join them,” she wound up radiantly.

Vi giggled. “It wouldn’t be you if you didn’t go headlong at it. I should think the folks here just don’t know what to make of you, not being accustomed to your habit of doing everything on the run.”

“Nurse says I’m a most rewarding patient,” Mary-Lou said complacently. “My back’s practically all right now—a bit stiff and it hurts if I jerk, but that’s all. And my head is healing and I’ve got rid of that ghastly headache, too, thank goodness!” Her eyes darkened as she remembered that truly awful headache. It was the first time in all her sturdy young life that she had known what bad pain could really be. Then she pushed the memory to the back of her mind and demanded to be told any news there might be about the rest of the Gang.

“I don’t think there’s anything very much,” Barbara said. “We’ve been through all the exam. questions and know where we’ve made asses of ourselves. Otherwise, we’ve just had carol practices and gone ski-ing as Vi told you. Oh, by the way, as Jessica Wayne can’t sing for toffee, she’s got the job of handing out programmes at the door to the visitors. She’s awfully bucked about it.”

“Good for her! How’s that Christmas song Plato was so crazy about going now?”

They talked concert solidly after that and then, just before Nurse arrived to dismiss the visitors, Mary-Lou said abruptly, “How’s young Emerence?”

“Better now,” Vi said, looking suddenly serious. “She damaged herself quite a little, you know. Nothing like as badly as you, of course, but she has one arm in a sling and her foot’s all strapped up in plaster and she says the itching’s enough to drive one dotty!”

“She has my deepest sympathy. I know what it was like when I damaged *my* ankle ages ago when we were at Carnbach.”

Barbara looked at her. “You’ve a lot more need to pity Emerence than anyone has to pity you,” she said abruptly. “The kid knows your accident was all her fault and she’s cried herself sick over it and been most awfully miserable. She’s better now, but she still is utterly subdued.”

Vi nodded. “It really is weird to see Emerence going about all day like a good little girl.”

Mary-Lou had been lying back against her pillows. Now she sat up with a bang. “But look here!—*Oh!* I forget I still have to move carefully or it hurts like sin!—Look here, you two, you can’t let that sort of thing go on—Oh, *Nurse!* It surely isn’t time yet?”

“More than time. They’ve had a full quarter of an hour and there are two other visitors for you yet. Come along, you two. Dr. Graves is going to Freudesheim to see Mrs. Maynard, so he’ll take you along with him. Quick, now! Mary-Lou, you lie back and rest until your other visitors arrive.”

They dared not disobey. Nurse hustled them out of the room and then came back to make sure that her patient was not overtired. Mary-Lou was as bright as a button, however, so the prefects were ushered in and there was nothing in their chatter to excite anyone. They kept to general topics and Mary-Lou responded amiably. But she had not forgotten Vi's last remark. When they rose in their turn to go, she detained Betsy for a minute.

"Betsy, be a pet and ask the Head if Emerence Hope can come and see me tomorrow," she coaxed.

Betsy looked at her thoughtfully. "Do you really want to see her?"

"Positive certain! Go on, Betsy! Say you will!"

"O.K., then. I'll do what I can. I simply *must* go now, Mary-Lou. Nurse is looking like the original Gorgon at me! Goodbye! Mind you're all right for next term!"

"What do you expect?" Mary-Lou demanded. "Don't you worry! You'll have *me* on your back all right next term! Hope you both have decent hols!"

When they got back to school, Betsy went straight to the study to proffer Mary-Lou's request. The Head heard her in silence.

"Did Mary-Lou ask that off her own bat or did one of you put her up to it?"

"She sprang it on me just as we were leaving. I think she really does want to see her, Miss Annersley."

"I see. Very well; I'll send Emerence along tomorrow. Some of St. Mildred's are going—your sister, Julie, and Bride Bettany and one or two others. She can go with them. Thank you, dear."

Betsy went off on her lawful occasions and Miss Annersley, after sitting thinking for a minute or two, got up and went to the office where she found Miss Wilson and her own secretary, Rosalie Dene, in conference. She broke into their talk ruthlessly to lay before them Mary-Lou's wish.

"Are you going to let her go?" 'Bill' asked.

"Yes; I think it may solve the problem. Mary-Lou's very sane and she has an extraordinary gift for *feeling* people—almost like Joey's. I've been very worried about Emerence this last day or two. She tries hard, but she hasn't been able to shake things off."

"Isn't that rather a good thing?" Rosalie Dene asked. "Before this, nothing seems to have made much impression on her."

"Not if it's going to injure her health. However, I'm hoping that Mary-Lou will produce a cure."

Emerence was not told about it until Bride Bettany called for her next day. The St. Mildred girls were ski-ing to the Sanatorium and they had borrowed a sledge-chair and into this, Emerence was packed. Matron bundled her up thoroughly, for though the sun was shining there was no warmth in it and the air was bitterly cold.

The girl had tried to keep her promise to the doctor, but she looked very wan and unlike herself. However, the brisk run through the fresh cold brought a little colour to her cheeks and when Bride Bettany and Julie Lucy had made a queen's chair and carried her into Mary-Lou's room, she looked better.

Mary-Lou's greeting was typical of her. "Hello, Emmy! I thought you'd like to see me before the hols and make sure that I was still in one piece! How's yourself?"

Emerence stared at her, wide-eyed. "I—I'm all right," she said falteringly.

"Good! Why's your arm in a sling? Did you break it when you described that lovely arc into my chest?" This was Mary-Lou at her breeziest and Emerence did not know how to take

it. She had been warned that she must do nothing to upset the other girl, so she choked back her tears which were very near the surface just then.

“Not my arm—my collar-bone,” she said curtly.

“And you’ve dished your ankle too, Vi told me. You’ve been pretty wholesale all round, haven’t you?” Mary-Lou said cheerfully. “Well, you can see for yourself that *I’m* not killed. I’m coming along beautifully and I was up for a little this morning and I’m getting up for a longer time tomorrow. I’ll soon be on my feet again. So take that lugubrious expression off your face, my dear! It doesn’t suit your peculiar style of beauty!”

Emerence sat silent, her mind in turmoil. What she had expected from Mary-Lou she could not have said, but it certainly was not this brisk, half-chaffing manner! Mary-Lou eyed her closely.

“Look here,” she said abruptly, “I know you’ve been having a sticky time over all this. Anyone would! But it’s over now. *You’re* getting well and *I’m* getting well. Lets call it a day and finish. Only, and I do mean this, for the future, suppose you dig in and try to get up to us. If you do that, you’ll jolly well have no time to go off at tangents and you’ll be saved a lot of fuss. What about it?”

“I’d like that,” Emerence said. “And—and I’m most awfully sorry—” She got no further.

“I *told* you we’d finished. We’ll take all that as read. You can forget it. What you’ve got to do is to pull up your socks and get rated as a Senior. I’ll speak to the Head about it next term,” Mary-Lou said with stunning calm.

“Thanks!” Emerence stammered. “I—I’ll go now. Julie and Bride and some of the others were waiting to see you. Happy Christmas, Mary-Lou!”

She struggled to her feet, using the stick she had to help her. Mary-Lou held out her hand. Emerence put her own into it. The next moment, she was pulled down and a hasty kiss brushed one cheek.

“Kiss of peace!” Mary-Lou said with a grin and a red face. “Off you pop! I’ll be seeing you next term!”

How the stunned Emerence got herself from the room, she never quite knew. But that brief interview had healed a very sore place in her soul and put the finishing touch to her resolve to try to make good in future.

The concert took place on the Wednesday afternoon as the girls were going home on Thursday morning, so Jessica made her appearance at the Sanatorium in the morning after Break. The Head brought her along in the car and after greeting Mary-Lou who had fulfilled her word and was sitting up in a big armchair, clad in her dressing-gown and with the fresh colour back in her face once more, she left the pair together.

Mary-Lou had lost her breezy manner. She felt instinctively that it would not do on this occasion. Instead, she greeted Jessica with a friendly smile.

“Do you know,” the latter said as she looked at the girl who had helped her so much, “when I get home, I’m going to tell Mother just what you’ve done for me. I’m going to say I’m sorry I’ve been such a pig to Rosamund, too. And one more thing, I’m going to try to be really decent to Rosamund.”

“I’m glad,” Mary-Lou said quietly. “You know, Jess, when I first woke up, I knew they were afraid I’d hurt my back badly and I wondered how I should bear it if I could never walk again. Of course, I didn’t have to worry about that long, and in any case, I was doing a lot of sleeping just then. But it was pretty awful when I was awake. I didn’t say anything to anyone, of course. I knew they were just as scared as I was. Only you will ever know about it; but I did

feel for two days just how ghastly it would be. I'm awfully glad you're doing all you can to make up for it to Rosamund. For you see, I did know there was a chance I'd get better, but you told me that there isn't a hope for her."

Jessica nodded. "They've tried everything, I think. Anyhow, during the hols, at least, I'll do all I can." She suddenly reddened as she went on, "I—I've been writing to her this last few weeks. I thought it might be better than nothing and it would show Mother and everyone that I was truly sorry for being so awful."

Mary-Lou's eyes lit up. "Oh, good for you! Then you won't have anything to bother about when you get home again!"

And, to anticipate a little, Jessica was able to write to her after Christmas and tell her that it really *was* all right. Those letters had helped her a great deal and she had been welcomed by the three at home with open arms, so all was well.

"So *that's* all right!" Mary-Lou said to Joey with whom she was staying for the present and to whom she had read the letter.

The last visit that term came from the two Heads on Friday. Both were off to England on the Saturday. They were flying and Miss Annersley was going to stay with cousins in Gloucester while "Bill" spent the fortnight or so which was all they could take with the Russells in their new home in the mountains. She promised to take as many snaps as she could and send them to Mary-Lou; also to write a long letter describing everything.

"But I expect Sybil and Josette will do all that," she said.

"Josette may, but Sybil won't," Mary-Lou replied. "She hates writing letters."

"Well, I'll do my best," 'Bill' promised.

She looked at the girl thoughtfully. Mary-Lou had coaxed Nurse into dressing her and she was in the beautifully-mended velveteen which was certainly not too tight now, though it was on the short side. Mary-Lou had shot up during her illness and she had lost a good deal of weight. She looked older, too. That frightening thought that she had kept from everyone during those first days had taken the last of her childhood. The Mary-Lou who would return to the Chalet School after Christmas would be very fit to take her place in VA to which she was to be promoted, having topped every list in both form and examwork that term. With her, would go Vi, Hilary and Lesley who had also done exceptionally well. These three had also grown up during the days when they went in such fear for their friend. The Gang could hardly go on in its present form when its members were so scattered now.

"But that," said Miss Annersley, as she and "Bill" ski-ed back to school, "will be all to the good. It has served them well while they were children. Now they are growing up, I think they will find they have outgrown it to a great extent."

"Bill" was not really listening. As they neared the school gates, she turned to her friend with dancing eyes. "Hilda, what do you think was the last thing Mary-Lou said to me before I left?"

"I've no idea. I was called to the 'phone, you may remember, so I had to leave you to it. What was it?"

"Bill's" laughter pealed out as she replied, "She looked at me solemnly and said, 'Do you know, Nurse says that when my hair has grown in properly again, it will be *curly*! I've always yearned for curls! And think of all the money I'll be saved, not having to have perms!'. "

Miss Annersley's laughter chimed in with "Bill's" as they sprung in the gates and skimmed over the snow to the school. "How like Mary-Lou!" she exclaimed.

[The end of *Mary Lou at the Chalet School* by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]