



THE
GIRLS-OF
OLD
GRANGE
SCHOOL

MAY
WYNNE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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“Then, all at once, she halted, drawing in her breath with a gasp.”

(Page 213.)

The Girls of Grange Hill School —Frontispiece

THE GIRLS OF OLD GRANGE SCHOOL

BY
MAY WYNNE

Author of "The Best of Chums," "The Girl who
Played the Game," "Peggy's First Term"

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To
THE GIRLS OF
CALLEVA HALL

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCES THE GIRLS

“You can’t resign, Yvette.”

Yvette’s answer to the storm of protest was a very shaky laugh.

“Don’t worry, girls,” she retorted. “I’m not going to leave the Pioneers. It’s only that—well! anyhow, for this term I don’t want to be captain. Sybilla will have to take my place—won’t you, Sybilla? And—there’s a new girl coming to Old Grange. She’ll be here, I suppose, sometime this evening. I—I want—I mean I wish—oh, bother!—anyhow, will you vote her a member of the Club—just to please me?”

It was not a very eloquent request, and the three girls, perched along the bank which ran on one side of a shady dell, stared perplexedly at the speaker.

Then Sybilla wagged her head solemnly.

“Yvette, ducks,” she urged. “What *are* you driving at? Do you want to crack our brains with problems on the very first day of term? To begin with, I hate to be captain when you are such a much better one than I shall ever be. Ten to one on the eve of some great event I shall be found sleeping my beauty sleep. And then, to go on with, you hurl at our devoted heads—a brand-new girl, of whom we don’t even know the name. An unknown quantity who may absolutely wipe out ye merry band of Pioneers.”

Yvette did not laugh. She sat pondering, her small, glowing face grown unnaturally grave and pale. She was evidently weighing over some very serious “pros and cons.” And the three sat patiently waiting for the coming explanation, with a thrill of expectancy.

“It’s like this, girls,” said Yvette at last—and there was a note of desperation in her voice, “but first give the Pioneer promise not to tell *any* one at all.”

“Promise—honour,” came the chorus, and Yvette went on:

“Dad spoke to me last evening,” she said; “he—he told me he had lost ever such a lot of money and would have had to sell our darling old home—Glencourt Castle—which has belonged to our family for hundreds of years—if it had not been for a millionaire named Jonas Darlake, who made his fortune at manufacturing in Yorkshire.

“Mr. Darlake saved my Dad from bankruptcy, so we shall not have to say good-bye to our home. And Dad is frightfully grateful. Well, Jonas Darlake’s daughter is coming this term to Old Grange, and Dad asked me to be very, very kind to her and do all in my power to make her happy. So I’ve got to, though,

can't you guess how I hate it? Just to *have* to be friends with a girl whom one would probably never have had anything to do with if it hadn't been a sort of pay-back. But I promised, and that's why I don't want to be captain, and why I asked you to let Wendy join the Pioneers."

Yvette's listeners did not hesitate for one moment. They knew perfectly well how horribly hard she must have found it to tell the tale, for, though Yvette was a darling, she was terribly proud—just the very last girl in the school for such a job as she described.

Sybilla pushed up her spectacles impatiently.

"You *know* we'll only be too glad to have Wendy," she declared. "And—er—it's a rattling good thing to have a fifth member. Odd men out are so useful. Don't you agree, chums?" Ailsie and Mona Carnock nodded vigorously.

"Ra—ther," they chorused. "We'll give Wendy ever such a good time. And—*what* a good thing you're not leaving your home, Yvette!"

Yvette jumped up. It was a tremendous relief to have made her confession, but she did not want her friends to see the sparkle of a tear in her eyes.

"You are darlings," she declared huskily. "I'm frightfully grateful. And—well! I'll go and see if Wendy has come."

The others let her go without a word. I think they understood.

Yet no one would have supposed that Yvette Glencourt had a care in the world as she ran humming across the playground towards the prettiest old school in the kingdom. It didn't look one bit like a school—in fact, it had only been one for two terms! Miss Caddock, the head mistress, had moved her school of thirty-five girls from Worcestershire up to this lovely glen amongst the Scottish hills in Aberdeenshire, where she had succeeded in buying the romantic and picturesque property known as Old Grange from Sir Alan Arnloch, who, having lost most of his money—like so many landlords since the Great War—had reluctantly sold his beautiful home.

Even now the girls had not ceased exploring that rambling old place with its nooks, its crannies, and its glamour of other days. Yvette was thinking pityingly of the wrench it must have been to the owners of Old Grange to leave as she climbed up the short flight of steep stone steps leading to the school premises. She had spied the local taxi driving away, and guessed the new girl had arrived. She was right too, for she met Miss Prinkton, the head English governess, coming out of the schoolroom with a tall, lanky girl in tow.

Yvette looked hard at the latter. *Never* had she been so anxious before to discover what a new girl was like.

This one was very plainly dressed in blue serge, a small blue velour hat perched like a halo at the back of a mop of short red curls. Her face was round, rosy, and freckled, her nose tip-tilted, her mouth wide, her big, dark-grey eyes brimming with fun.

Yvette's feeling was one of relief. The new girl looked the essence of good nature. Miss Prinkton—staid, grey-haired, severe—was only too glad to hand over her charge.

"Miss Caddock asked me to find you, Yvette," said she. "You had better take Wendy out into the playground till tea-time. After tea, Miss Simmins will help her unpack and show her where to keep her things."

Wendy smiled. She had a nice smile and dozens of dimples.

"Isn't it a jolly-looking school?" she said to Yvette as the two went down the passage. "I *am* glad Dad sent me here instead of to Windsor. It's so old and quaint and not one teeny bit of a school. How many girls are there and what are their names? You will tell me about things, won't you? I've never been to school before. Dad told me perhaps you'd be my friend."

Yvette stiffened. She felt Wendy ought not to have made that last remark. It—it was bad enough to be told what she *had* to do by Dad without being reminded of it within the first five minutes of acquaintance!

"Old Grange never was a school," said she, "till poor Sir Alan Arnloch *had* to sell it to pay his debts. It broke his heart, anyway. He still lives in the Glen House. Some one told me he has one son—very delicate. Old Grange is beautiful. I—er—can't possibly tell you all the girls' names in a breath, but if you come out I'll introduce you to my friends. We—they——"

Wendy's eyes were twinkling. This pretty, dark girl's manner was *stiff*, and her long speech was rattled off like a lesson. Wendy couldn't stand that.

"I want *fun*," she explained, "jolly fun. I've got no brothers—and only one sister, heaps older than myself. It was lovely being at home, but Miss Rayle, my governess, was dull too. Do introduce me to the jolliest girls. Your—your Dad told mine you loved fun."

Yvette blushed—and thawed. There was something very coaxing in Wendy's appeal. After all, the new girl was not a bit like what she had feared. There was no "new-rich" bumptiousness visible in Wendy Darlake. Her clothes were so simple as to be shabby. She pleaded rather than patronized.

"Of course I like fun," she admitted. "That's why Sybilla Grant, the two Carnock girls and I made a little Club. We call it the Pioneers, and we go exploring not only in search of *things* but adventures. That rather fat girl over by the railings with brown hair in pigtails and wearing glasses is Sybilla Grant. She's going to be captain of the Pioneers this term. Her Dad is an author and writes plays. He's very clever. They live in London. Sybilla is the sleepest, sweetest old thing, who is always giving us amazing surprises by suggesting thrilling adventures."

Wendy beamed. "I shall like Sybilla," she said. "And do the two girls she is talking to belong to the Club?"

"Yes," went on Yvette, trying not to be bored. "Those are Mona and Ailsie

Carnock; they have no mother, and no proper home. They go and spend the holidays with friends and relations when their father is away. He is an Arctic explorer and the girls adore adventures.”

“So do I,” agreed Wendy, giving a skip of glee. “You *are* jolly to let me join the Pioneers. Are you going to begin having adventures right away? Do come and talk it over. Is the fair girl over there a Pioneer?”

Yvette laughed. “What, Alison Blundel?” she asked. “Rather not! She’s the head of the school and a great friend of Miss Mallins, the sports mistress. Do you play cricket and hockey?”

“Hockey—but not much cricket,” said Wendy. “I love climbing and swimming. I’d adore to go up in an aeroplane. And I shall be quite happy when I’ve seen a *ghost*. That’s all I can think of at present, excepting that I’ve been looking forward ever so much to school—and sport.”

Sybilla and the other two Pioneers had espied Yvette and her charge now and were making a bee-line for them. For Yvette’s sake the stranger must be welcomed with ready arms. She did not look formidable either and shook hands vigorously.

“I’ve never actually been in Scotland before,” she smiled; “it’s been a dream of mine for ages. We aren’t near the seashore, are we? When I hear the word Geography my head buzzes. Are we allowed out alone without governesses?—and are the govs nice?”

There was a moment’s pause, then the Pioneers burst into merry laughter.

“You’re not going to get *all* those questions answered in one act,” declared Sybilla. “The very thought makes me sleepy. And it’s nearly tea-time now. Let’s sit on the railing like a row of fowls and I’ll point out the celebrities. There’s Mademoiselle—otherwise known as Frou-Frou. She loves you to know she always wears silk petticoats, and if only she discovers you knit silk jumpers you have no peace. Also she adores English history and is quite useful if we go for an excursion. On the whole, if you are sympathetic you can enjoy poor little Frou-Frou. No one likes Miss Prinkton. Something turned her sour in youth and she’s incapable of turning sweet again. She’s ten times more *Chief* than Miss Caddock. The great Lena, as we call her, is a dear and so good-looking. We’re always afraid she’ll end by marrying and giving us over into the clutches of Frou-Frou! She’s tremendously just and her pet pupil is Doreen Menleigh, who is the school encyclopædia—there *she* is with shingled hair and a long nose.”

“And now about ghosts,” asked Wendy, “*is* there one? If so, do let me sleep in the haunted room. Who’s the girl coming towards us?”

Ailsie Carnock chuckled. “Nothing of the ghost about Joan Pinson,” she declared. “She’s the Gusher, the Gurgler—and, if Yvette weren’t here, I’d call her the sneak. She always glues on to new girls, so she’ll glue to you, Wendy.”

But she won't ever be a Pioneer."

Wendy did not answer. Her instinct was to agree with Ailsie. The thin, sharp-featured girl with the delicate skin and flaxen hair had shifty eyes. Wendy disliked her at first sight, though Joan was all beams when she came up to them.

"Miss Simmins will have time to unpack you before tea," she said to Wendy; "if you like, I'll take you to her. Hullo, Mona! So you and Ailsie are back. I hear Gia has brought a small sister to school—Betty, *quite* a pet. Come, Wendy."

And Wendy, most reluctantly, had to obey, though she could not help grimacing in answer to Mona's grin.

"You didn't want to come, did you?" gushed Joan, when the two girls were out of earshot of the others. "I can guess why! Yvette and her chums are never one bit fair to me. It's too bad. I'm sure I've always wanted to be chums with them—at least till I found out how horribly cliquey they are. The other girls have always remarked it—and those four aren't a *bit* popular. Yvette Glencourt seems to think no one ever lived in a castle besides herself. *I* call it horribly snobbish, and she is as poor as a church mouse—or anyhow *mean*, when she hears the word subscription."

Joan had rattled on so fast that the indignant Wendy had not had time to get in a word. Now, however, she quickly checked the speaker.

"You'd better not talk that way about my friends," she said crisply. "They've made me one of their chums, and I won't have any of them run down, especially Yvette."

Joan's nose looked more pinched than ever—as it had a way of doing when she was vexed.

"There's no need to get excited," she drawled. "If you intend to be chums with that lot, *no one* will interfere with you. Perhaps you'd rather go and find Miss Simmins by yourself, or call one of your dearest friends."

Wendy gave an indignant wriggle. It was rather awful to be on the brink of a quarrel before she had been two hours at school—and she was hopelessly at sea in finding her way about.

"I thought Miss Simmins told you to bring me," she replied, "but if you don't want to I'll ask the governess over there."

Joan reddened. "Of course I'll take you," she said, adding spitefully as she led the way upstairs, "but if you want to know the ropes, my dear, you won't go sneaking to gobs with every little——" She broke off abruptly. At the head of the staircase stood a tall, good-looking woman of forty, her bright brown hair worn coronet fashion about her head, her expression kindly and her chin determined. Miss Caddock, head mistress of Old Grange School, was enthusiastic over her work, and, though some people might have told you that

she gave her girls too much licence and depended altogether on the head English governess for the school discipline, this was hardly true. Lena Caddock trusted her girls' honour. If they failed her she never warned more than once. The second time they were asked to leave her school.

She looked rather severe now, having overheard Joan's remark. But it was Wendy she spoke to.

"Come with me, dear," she said. "Miss Simmins is waiting to show you your room and what clothes you may keep there. Your hamper has been taken down to the store-room, as they are not allowed upstairs. The sweets you may have, to divide with your friends, but as a rule sweets are not allowed—only fruit and cake, which is kept by Miss Simmins and given out."

Wendy's face fell slightly, though she managed to smile her thanks for the permission. Joan went slowly downstairs, pouting in vexation. She *adored* sweets and resolved to lose no time in winning her way back to the new girl's favour. Clearly she was one to be cultivated!

Meantime, Yvette and her friends were deciding that Wendy Darlake would certainly not be a "pioneer" on sufferance.

"She's a sport," declared Sybilla, "I feel that in my bones. We must take her at face value. She looks jolly. That's why I'm so sorry my nose does not turn up. A girl with a turned-up nose is bound to live up to it. And living up to it means sport and wit. Hurrah for the new chum! After tea and straightening out we'll take her for a scramble. That's the best of dear old Craigloch—there's always some place to explore. First and foremost the Wizard's Glen. She'll love it."

They *all* loved it, and ran laughing in to tea at sound of the first tinkle of the bell. Some of the homesick lassies would be passing school *tartine* and even first day cake in disgust, and it was because she knew this that kind Miss Caddock had supplied those gorgeous plums—great plates of them, with their red and yellow skins just cracked enough to show ripeness and juiciness. Oh, those plums, how they transformed the drab tea-table and brought a smile to downcast faces!

Sybilla was nudging Yvette. "Where's the recruit?" she asked. "I don't see her, and there's an empty place beside Miss Prinkton. She didn't *look* the kind to go away and indulge in a quiet weep, but she might be doing that, eh? Shall one of us go and explore? I would like a shot, but you are sharing her room, aren't you?"

Yvette hesitated. She had shy fits very often, and to tell the truth, she was not quite sure what her feelings towards the new girl were yet. "Come *with* me, there's a pet," she coaxed. "The Woollies will see that we get our plums, won't you, girls?"

Mona and Ailsie nodded. They were quite proud of their nickname, though

it would have puzzled any one to know how those curly-wigged, hazel-eyed Scotch lassies ever came by so strange a one.

Yvette led the way up to the “Corner” room which this term she had been “doomed” to share with the new girl.

Such a pleasant room with a deep window-seat. The windows were wide open, though there was a tang of autumn in the evening air, and Yvette went to close one casement, since papers and photo frames scattered the floor.

“She’s not here,” she said, and gave quite a jump as a voice answered from beneath.

“Ow! yes, I am,” it said, “outside. Ugh! I climbed down thinking there was a darling owl tangled up in the ivy, and it was *rats*.”

Yvette was already craning out of the window, with Sybilla peering behind.

“Wendy!” they gasped in horror, whilst Yvette added in tragic tones: “You’ll fall and be killed. *Whatever* made you do such a crazy thing?”

It did seem crazy, for there stood the new schoolfellow, flat against the ivy which covered the wall; her two sturdy hands gripped ivy roots above, whilst her feet were evidently steady on roots below; but oh, what a terrible distance it would be to fall, and, lower down, the ivy grew so scantily that she might not find foothold.

“I *was* a duffer,” gasped Wendy, “though it w-would have been—all right if it had been an owl. I love them, but those rats are—are playing ’possum somewhere in—in the ivy below, and I’m scared stiff lest one should run up my leg.”

“I’d better go out and find Sandy, the gardener,” said Sybilla, “and get him to bring a ladder.”

But Wendy shook her head. “A stick would do—or a stone,” she urged; “if only you can send th-those rats scampering I d-don’t mind one bit. I can easily climb.”

Yvette looked back into the room. She had noticed Wendy’s hands, and, though annoyed with her foolishness, could not help admiring her pluck; but she would never hold on till Sandy was found.

“Steady,” she called, “I’m going to empty the water-jug. Not over *you*, but down the wall. It’ll make more noise. Watch, Sybilla, and see if the rats come out.”

Wendy grinned weakly. She would be thanking Yvette later.

“Ugh!” squealed Sybilla, as the cascade of water effected its purpose instantly, “there they go—two monsters; they’re across the yard now—brutes! Take care, Wendy, you’ll break your leg.”

“There’s Sandy coming,” whispered Yvette, drawing in her head. “I only hope he won’t sneak. Well climbed, Wendy! but mind—the wall’s bare just

there, and——”

Both watchers above gasped, for Wendy's foot had slipped, there came a sound of tearing material, and, plump! she had almost fallen into the arms of an indignant and agitated gardener.

“Good,” breathed Sybilla. “She'll have to do her own coaxing—and if Joan has left her any plums it's a marvel. Come along, Yvette—the banisters will serve.”

They reached the dining-hall door just as Wendy, very much the worse for wear, slipped into the passage. She was actually laughing. Even Sybilla felt slightly aggrieved.

“You ought to be apologizing on your bendeds for giving us such a scare,” she said severely. “What did Sandy say? He is sure to report you.”

Wendy shook her head. “I gave him half a crown,” she said, “and promised him there shouldn't be a rat left in the place if I can wangle the gobs to let me have Plato. Now, will anything be said if I come in to tea like this?”

Yvette snorted; she couldn't help it.

“I should rather say it would,” she replied icily. “I—am—well, Miss Prinkton wouldn't be quite as easy to wangle as old Sandy. You're lucky if you even get a cup of tea; but anyhow you'll have to wash first.”

Sybilla was giggling as she and Yvette slipped back to their places, after telling Miss Prinkton that Wendy was coming later.

The Woollies had guarded the plums gallantly, and even saved some of their share for Wendy.

Yvette regarded the latter sacrifice judicially. “It's more than she deserves!” said she.

CHAPTER II

THE WIZARD'S GLEN

"I don't feel quite honest," confessed Wendy.

She and Sybilla had found the mossiest corner of the long bank which ran along the school wood. I ought to try and describe that wood—but I can't, so all I shall say is that it was the loveliest of dingles with woody slopes shelving down towards a busy streamlet. A long bank and quite a severe-looking stone wall enclosed the property, and from where Wendy and Sybilla sat could be seen the playing-fields, a sunken wall, romantic gardens, and the lovely Old Grange.

No wonder the girls were sure theirs was the ideal school, and indeed I've not had time yet to tell half of its charms.

Sybilla slowly uncurled herself. She was known equally well by her chums as "Sleepy" or "Dormouse." She was far too sleepy just now to care whether or no Wendy were a burglar in disguise who might be crying, "Your money or your life!"

"What's the matter?" she yawned.

"Plato," quoth Wendy briskly, and fell to rubbing her nose.

Sybilla grew puzzled.

"Is it a crib?" she asked. "But we don't *do* Plato. He is done, I suppose, like Euclid and Cicero."

Wendy roared. She had seated herself down quite cosily in her niche at school, though in her heart of hearts she did wish Yvette and her new friends would explain the "ropes" rather more clearly.

"He's not a book," she declared, "it's my mongoose. He's ever so tame. But—when I asked Miss Caddock if I might send for him I didn't explain he was a mongoose. I just said could I write for Plato, who would get rid of every rat in a week. She said 'Yes,' but I don't fancy she knew what she was saying."

"I don't even know what a mongoose is like," said Sybilla, "but I think you'd be happier if you explained to the Head first. *She* would like it. Of course you know what I mean."

Wendy jumped up. "I do," she sighed, "that's why I'm fussing. I *meant* to go and see Lena—as the Woollies call her—as soon as I had sent off my wire to tell Warrent to send Plato. Now it's—er—rather too late in the day to explain, as I expect Plato is at the station."

Sybilla considered. She liked this new girl immensely. In fact, these two

seemed far more likely to chum than Yvette and Wendy. Since that first day Yvette had seen very little of her *protégée* excepting at bedtime. Yvette had such a number of irons in the fire! She was keen on sports, keener on lessons, and keenest of all on the affairs of her beloved Pioneers. Just at this beginning of term, however, she had too much other work to do to be able to hold the usual Pioneer meetings, and so Sybilla, the new captain, had taken Wendy under her wing.

“Supposing we go down to the station then *first*,” she suggested, “and fetch Plato. It’s cruel to keep any animal on the line longer than can be helped! Then we’ll bring him straight up and show him to the Head. She can decide what is to be done.”

Wendy beamed. “You *are* a dear,” she said. “I wish——” She did not conclude her sentence, but Sybilla shrewdly guessed she had nearly expressed the wish that Yvette was as kindly a chum.

The girls of Old Grange were allowed to go out walking together, but not alone. Juniors were obliged to take Seniors with them.

It was quite a two-mile walk to the little wayside station over the moors, but neither Sybilla nor Wendy minded that. It was so pleasant amongst the fir-trees, and Wendy loved walking along the bank of the shallow stream which dashed noisily down to the river.

“We are going to picnic in the Wizard’s Glen this afternoon,” said Sybilla contentedly; “it’s the jolliest place, but Yvette will tell you the story of the Wizard when we are there. It’s most thrilling. Look out, Wendy; let’s hide behind these rocks till those girls get past. I don’t mind Gia so much, but we shall get Joan Pinson coming along if she sees you. I won’t be a *cat*, but you can guess pretty well that Joan will stick to you as fast as glue till those French sweets are finished.”

Wendy laughed ruefully as she crept after her comrade.

Poor Wendy! she was so generous and impulsive, loving to lavish gifts of all kinds. And she had brought down that monster box of dainty bon-bons in all the innocence of her heart to share with her special chums. But the eagle eye of Miss Prinkton had espied them and Wendy had been told to share the forbidden luxuries with all present. Joan had been enthusiastic over *the* most delicious sweets she had ever tasted and had haunted Wendy ever since, not only hinting but asking boldly for just one more.

And Wendy did *not* like Joan. She was quite decided on that score. The worst of it being that Joan seemed equally decided that Wendy was to be her friend!

Gia Leston-Green was a stout, commonplace girl of fifteen who wore her drab hair bobbed and was obliged to use spectacles. Wendy had not seen much of her, though Gia’s small sister, Betty, amused her greatly. Gia herself was

amusing, without intending to be so. Her people had become very wealthy during the war; before then they had been small tradespeople, and Gia was always on tenterhooks lest her schoolfellows should discover the fact. She was always most particular that both parts of the new double name should be used, and loved to boast that they lived at Leston Court in Surrey, where—ahem!—they belonged to the county.

Joan, with her habit of fastening upon her richer schoolfellows, was chatting gaily to Gia as they came through the pine-wood. The girls hidden behind the rock cuddled close whilst Sybilla heard Wendy give a low gasp of dismay at hearing her own name.

“Wendy Darlake?” Gia was questioning in her affected way. “Well, I’ve hardly spoken to her. Her people are *very* new rich, I believe. I can imagine her with a great gaudy home in the London suburbs, and parents who murder the King’s English. Dreadful! Thank goodness *we* live far afield in the Midlands. Leston Court.” Joan was yawning. *Once* allow Gia to get on to the subject of Leston Court and she would be bored to death.

“Wendy’s all right,” she said, “at least her sweets are! She’s a little owl herself, getting in with that cranky Yvette and those ridiculous Carnock girls. Sybilla is another I can’t stand. She thinks she’s clever—and witty. I hate those funny folk who never are funny. I *did* mean to make a chum of Wendy and rescue her from the clutches of the crew, but she’s not worth it. Personally, I don’t call her a lady or——”

“Ow!” gasped Gia guiltily, for there stood Wendy on the path, the picture of flaming indignation, with her red curls awry and her cheeks scarlet. “How you made me jump! I believe you’ve been listening. It’s very mean,” and she began to snivel.

But Wendy was looking at Joan. “I didn’t ask you to call me a lady, Joan,” said she, “and I haven’t asked you to call me your friend. I’m not likely to do so! I *hate* sneaks who bite when people’s backs are turned. It’s different with Gia, because she never has asked me to be her friend, so she can leave me to my suburbs and stick to her Leston Court. Good-bye.”

“Listeners never hear good of themselves,” tittered Gia, trying to brazen it out, but Joan had crimsoned to the eyes. She did not attempt to answer, but walked on, her arms swinging, her head bent. Sybilla looked after the retreating figures with a comical grimace of disgust.

“I don’t like that girl—and that’s a fact,” she murmured. “She’s mean. Perhaps *I’m* mean to say so, but she is the sort to be spiteful if she’s snubbed. Don’t forget that, Wendy. She is one young cat. Now come along and rescue Plato from durance vile.”

They did not have their walk in vain. In fact, both the solitary porter and station-master were examining the hamper, through which the mongoose’s

bright eyes could be seen peering.

David Gregory, the station-master, did not disguise his curiosity.

“It’s a strange animal, Misses,” he said; “it’s *mongoose* they call it on the label, but, hechs! it’s me nain sel has never heard of such.”

“If you can help uncord the basket,” laughed Wendy, “I’ll get him out. Poor old Plato! Are you squeaking ‘how d’you do’? Yes, I’ve got a knife. You needn’t be afraid. He’s ever so gentle.”

In spite of this assurance, Gregory and the porter Allan kept at a respectful distance whilst Plato was being freed from prison.

Sybilla was delighted when at last her companion lifted the long, furry creature from its resting-place.

“It’s a darling,” she laughed, “and *what* a cute little face. Plato, Plato, make friends? Are you going to eat rats? Oh, wise Plato! And do you like being stroked and cuddled?”

She was making friends quickly. From the shelter of his mistress’s arms the mongoose sniffed his inquirer, peering and craning about and finally climbing up over Wendy’s shoulder to inspect the station-master, who beat a hasty retreat.

Having explained the nature of a mongoose—the terror of any and every rat—the girls left the station, laughing. It did seem amusing those two big men should be afraid of that little animal just because they had never seen one like it before!

“We shall have to bustle,” said Sybilla, looking at her watch. “I hope the Woollies won’t forget to pack the picnic basket. Cookie’s brother is bringing in some plums. That’s the best of the first part of term: one has more money. Is Plato bothering you, Wendy, or can we run?”

They *did* run, quite a long way, then Wendy slackened.

“Why do you call Mona and Ailsie the ‘Woollies’?” she asked.

Sybilla chuckled.

“Can’t you guess? No one can! They don’t *look* nearly as woolly or dormousy as I do! But it’s after the polar bears they so adore talking of. Their father sent them several yarns about the bears up in the Arctic, and the chums are never tired of describing them. So they are the ‘Woollies.’ Oh, bother! what bad luck! There’s the Head going off with Mrs. Wigton, the minister’s wife. What shall we do with Plato till she comes back? We can’t take him into the kitchen or the maids will have a panic.”

“And he *must* have his bread and milk,” said Wendy decidedly; “he’s starved, and, if we don’t consider his feelings, he will be eating his way through the basket! I’ll take him down into the garden room for the time being. Will you forage for his dinner, Syb? By that time Miss Caddock may be back.”

The garden room was quite deserted, the girls were all making the most of

a whole holiday, and several who lived within motoring distance had gone home. Wendy sat in the depths of a deck chair talking to her pet, who, however, basely deserted her when Sybilla appeared in haste with the bread and milk.

“We shall have to bustle, Wendy,” said the latter. “Ellen is just going to ring the dinner-bell. Veal pies and salad! and blancmanges—a really holiday dinner. Lena is a pet like that. When we have a holiday it is one all through. There, Plato, eat, drink, and be thankful. The Woollies and Yvette have the picnic baskets ready in the lobby, so we simply switch off out of the dining-room, snatch hats, and bolt before we get a dozen other girls joining on.”

The harsh-toned bell was already beginning to clang its summons, and, seeing Plato settled in his “travelling carriage” with his dinner before him, the girls were quite content to close the lid and scamper off.

“He’ll sleep peacefully for hours,” said Wendy; “his manners are perfect, whatever two opinions there may be about his appearance. I wish I had time to show him to the others.” She was too interested, however, in veal pie and blancmange to think anything more of Plato for the present, and the Woollies were bubbling to tell of sundry small thrills over collecting tarts and plums for the picnic. There are always more *tellers* than listeners, and Wendy was quite ready to be excited over the Wizard’s Glen.

The Pioneers were so mysterious about it, declaring that the old legend could only be told in the Glen itself.

“We *must* give you the creeps,” giggled the Woollies. “When we came to school Yvette gave us them. And Michael Scott is a real wizard, he is in history.”

“Danger,” warned Yvette. “Joan is watching us, and I half believe Doreen Menleigh means to ask where we are going. I’ll go first. Woollies, close up behind. Never mind hats in the scamper as long as we grab the bags.”

“Joan’s been talking to Frou-Frou,” murmured Sybilla. “I believe she is going to propose some dull scheme for the afternoon. We’re lost if she does. Quick as lightning, chums.”

Yvette was already in the passage. Although she had insisted on giving up the captaincy of the Pioneers, she was always forgetting Sybilla was the one now to give orders, and good-natured “Sleepy” was the last one to rebel at this. As long as they had fun and were jolly together, Sybilla did not mind if she were the head or tail of the band.

And they escaped, though the Woollies were puffing with exhaustion before they reached the slope of the moor.

Wendy clasped her hands. “I forgot *all* about Plato,” she said; “do you think he will be safe?”

The others looked rather serious for a moment, but Yvette was an optimist.

“Rather,” said she. “None of the girls would be so mean as to hurt a dumb creature. Don’t worry over Plato. I’m only disturbed as to whether there will be spontaneous combustion with the lemonade bottles. Shall we picnic first and explore afterwards?”

“Picnic,” chorused the others.

Sybilla was lolling out her tongue to show her need of something wet, and the thought of that fizzing, bubbling lemonade certainly quickened the footsteps of all till they stood on the outskirts of that mysterious glen which Wendy became convinced from the first moment must be haunted.

Dark, dreary, with the twisted trunks and stems of several blasted trees, the very murmur of falling water sounded mournfully as they tumbled over grey rocks into a deep and shadowed pool. Merlin’s Glen was certainly no spot for laughter-loving lassies or gay-winged fairy-kins.

“Look at those great grey boulders,” said Yvette in a solemn whisper. “They are called Michael’s seat—you see they form a circle—and the great oak close by has been blasted by lightning. No one knows whether the whole circle is supposed to be the seat or whether there was once a still bigger rock in the centre which has disappeared. Isn’t it a silent place too? No birds will ever sing here and hardly any flowers will grow. I’m not awfully superstitious, but I must say I would hate to pass a night in Michael’s Glen.”

“We wouldn’t for £100,” chorused the Woollies, whilst Ailsie added: “I love adventures, real adventures like Dad’s, but nothing mixed up with ghosts.”

“Ghosts,” laughed Wendy, standing up, a breeze ruffling her red curls, whilst she set her arms akimbo in challenging fashion. “Who believes in ghosts? *I* don’t for one.” Then, before her startled companions could warn her against such daring, she sent a merry, mocking shout echoing down the Glen where no one ever spoke much above a whisper:

“Come out, Mr. Michael Scott, and let’s have a look at you,” she sang, and, as if in answer to that insulting challenge, a terrible cry, following a sullen thud, was heard, coming as it seemed from the direction of Michael’s famous seat, where one of the rocks had suddenly fallen slantwise with a dull and grinding crash.

CHAPTER III

THE GHOST OF WIZARD'S GLEN

"The—Ghost!" gasped the Woollies; but even with that conviction strong upon them, they rose to the occasion with true heroism.

Down the steep slope they dashed, followed closely by the rest of the Pioneers, who, as they ran, realized more and more fully that ghosts don't topple boulders over or scream out in terror and pain. There had been no second scream, and it was Yvette who passed the pale-faced Woollies and reached the spot where the boulder had fallen slantwise.

"Oh!" she cried, as she crept through the tangle of undergrowth. "What *has* happened? Help, girls, help! It's a boy . . . and a hole . . . he's been . . . exploring and . . . and *it is Donald Arnloch.*"

Sybilla was close on her comrade's heels; for the moment the passage formed by the half-fallen boulders was blocked. Wendy had time to gasp a question to the trembling Woollies.

"Donald Arnloch? Who is he?"

Mona answered in a whisper.

"Sir Alan's son. They live at Glenview—between this and the village. The Old Grange—all the estate—belonged to Sir Alan. He—they—well, people say they hate Miss Caddock for having bought their old home. Probably nonsense! Sir Alan ought to have left the neighbourhood—so lots of folk say!—it's all gossip. He simply worships the whole place. Donald is the only child. His brother is dead. How awful if . . . I say, Yvette, what *has* happened? Shall we fetch a doctor?"

Yvette's answer came very sharply. "Yes. Don't jabber. Run—hard. Let some one in the village know. There's a wedge of stone fastening him down. He's fainted."

Wendy looked round. The Woollies had already scampered off. Farther up, on a ledge or plateau of higher ground, was the dark pool into which the dreary cascade was falling. If the boy had fainted he would need water. Without worrying Sybilla or Yvette with questions, she slipped away, filling her straw hat with the cool, clear water and returning as quickly as she had come. Sybilla was just crawling back. Her face brightened at sight of Wendy's burden.

"Bravo!" she applauded. "Yvette wants it too. She—she's nearly fainting through lifting the rock off Donald's leg. It nipped her hand. She knew it must; she *has* a pluck."

Wendy followed this time, nearly exclaiming aloud at the strange sight

which met her eyes. Yvette leaned back, white as one of the Glen ghosts, against a boulder, nursing her injured hand. A handsome boy of about fifteen, an ugly cut across his chin and one leg bare and roughly bandaged by handkerchiefs, was slowly trying to struggle to a sitting posture. The mysterious space within the circle of stones had evidently been lately dug up, and beside the pile of turf and stones was an open trap-door, rusty and with patches of soil still adhering to it, beyond which gaped a black hole. A spade and fork had been tossed to one side and a boy's grey cap beside them.

Donald Arnloch was very slowly taking in what had happened. His head must be aching violently, and he smiled gratefully to Wendy when she offered him some water. Then he looked from Yvette to Sybilla. Of course it was plain that he *wanted* to understand what had happened! And Sybilla at once answered the mute appeal.

"You'd been digging in the middle of the Wizard's seat and—I suppose you touched some spring which flung up a trap-door and sent a boulder crashing. You got pinned down. We belong to Old Grange School and heard you cry out. Yvette—my chum—pushed the wedge which pinned you down and *would* have slipped and smashed your leg. There was no time for anyone to reach and help her. Now she feels a bit faint. The Woollies have gone for a doctor."

The boy listened, a faint colour creeping to his cheeks. When Sybilla had ended, he managed to reach out and grasp Yvette's cold little hand. "You saved me from being a cripple," said he huskily. "I *wish* I could thank you."

There was suppressed passion in his tones which might have been interpreted, "I wish I hadn't *got* to thank you!"

But Yvette managed a smile. "It's all right," she replied. "I'm better. Don't worry. We do understand. If—if Old Grange had belonged—to me, I'd have felt the same as you and your father."

It was such unexpectedly plain speaking that Donald almost forgot his pain as he reddened to the eyes.

"*Don't*," he entreated. "You are only girls. I wish I—I could tell you all what sports I—think you. And I owe——"

"Never mind the owing," said Sybilla briskly. "I believe I hear our chums coming. They'll bring help. I—er—suppose you'd rather we didn't explore—all this? But—er—if ever we see you again, will you explain about what you were looking for—and what you discovered?"

Donald hesitated. "I'm sure my father will ask you to Glenview to thank you," he replied. "*Do* come if he does. You see, I can't say how he'll feel. He can't bear Old Grange mentioned. But *do* come if you can. Then I'll tell you. No, don't touch the trap. There'd be an accident. No one will come near. I expect"—and for the first time he smiled—"they will all be afraid round here

that I've let out the ghosts!"

"How thrilling!" whispered Sybilla. "We won't touch, though I expect we shall *peep*. Ought we to shut the trap-door?"

But Donald shook his head. "There's a catch and a trick about it," he replied. "I'll have to examine. You'd better leave it alone. *Thanks awfully*. You've been—splendid. You must come to Glenview if you're asked. Then I'll thank you."

Yvette nodded. Donald was looking at her. "Yes," she replied. "We'll understand, anyway. Perhaps one day we'll be friends. We're only girls, but we love adventures. We came to the Glen to find one—and we got what we wanted."

She had no time to say more, for a man was creeping through the "tunnel," and Dr. McRandy's voice was heard inquiring in would-be indignation what Donald meant by breaking himself up in such a place. Evidently the fat little ginger-haired doctor and Donald were old friends, and the former, after a few words of praise to the girls and a glance at Yvette's wrist, which he told her to rub and bandage, paid all his attention to Donald, telling him he was lucky to have his father away at the time. "Or you'd be worrying the poor fellow crazy," he scolded. "What in all the name o' wisdom did ye want to dig up the de'il for? Steady, lad, no fainting. Thank you, young lady."

And he beamed at Wendy, who had been busy tearing some clean handkerchiefs in strips and bringing more water.

It was quite an hour before the doctor and his helpers had finished attending to poor Donald and carrying him off home on the hurdle stretcher brought by four men who evidently were in a *very* great hurry to leave the haunted Glen!

Sybilla and the rest of the Pioneers stood watching the little procession out of sight.

"We shan't be able to explore, now we have promised Donald about Michael's seat," said Yvette. "And I believe we've had adventures enough."

"We've not," retorted Ailsie. "Mona and I just peeped beneath the trap-door. There are *steps* leading down. It looks like a well. A regular ghost-hole. Isn't it gorgeous? Perhaps Donald has let out a whole lot of ghosts into the Glen."

"How blood-curdling!" chuckled Sybilla. "A real freezing adventure for you, Woollies. But you'll have to wait till Donald is better, and even then Sir Alan may not allow him to speak to us. I believe he's a regular crank. Now we must have tea. I'm dying for plums—and cake. Adventures are as thirsty as they are hungry. And if Yvette does not feel up to telling Wendy the story of the Glen, then *I* must. We simply *could* not have more ideal conditions for the tale: the falling twilight, *ahem!* the disturbed trap-door, the broken stone. If

Michael's ghost does haunt the place, he must be getting busy."

"Tea first," said Yvette firmly. "We need to build our courage to sticking point. Plums last, and tea cold, eh, chums?"

The others were ready to agree to anything. They knew Yvette would hate them to sing her praises, but they could not help looking on her as something of a heroine. Had she not saved Donald Arnloch from the fate of a cripple? In their hearts of hearts one and all of our Pioneers were hoping that meant winning a new chum for their band. He was a sport, they were sure—and what *might* not be hid in the centre of those mysterious stones?

Wendy was delighted that Yvette felt up to telling the Legend of the Glen. Though Sybilla was a perfect darling, she was not sure she would treat the subject seriously enough, and, even though Wendy's impudent little nose did not suggest any sort of *seriousness*, it was not quite fair on its owner. Anyhow, even the restless Woollies were quiet enough when Yvette began her tale.

"It was hundreds of years ago when Michael Scott lived," she said. "He didn't live here, of course. Michael's Tower is ever so celebrated, and I ought to remember where it is—only I forget! He was supposed to have made a contract with the devil and sold his soul in exchange for magic power. He is said to have done all sorts of impossible things and to have had the power of changing himself or anyone else into any sort of animal, bird, etc., he liked.

"He came to this part of Scotland on a visit, and when he was here he visited this Glen and fell in love with a beautiful girl called Elsie. She was the daughter of a minister and very good. She spent half her days in the Glen because she loved the birds and animals so much. Michael Scott changed himself into a stag and followed her about. She became very fond of the stag, but when he changed into a man she was terrified. Of course, he made love to her and she was rather fascinated, but, when she found out through some other lover that he was a wizard, she told him he must go away. He asked her to visit the Glen to say good-bye and he changed her into a flower, which he plucked to carry off. But Elsie's true lover Andrew saw what happened and rushed out, holding up a cross and flinging holy water over the flower. Elsie was restored, but *somehow* she was killed. Michael escaped, but he killed Andrew first. Andrew and Elsie were buried in the kirkyard, but the Glen is still haunted by Elsie's ghost and the sound of men fighting, whilst some people say Michael's ghost too sometimes creeps round his 'seat' and whoever sees it has bad luck!"

Wendy shivered. "How horrid," she said, "and just now the Glen looks as if it might be full of ghosts. I suppose—er—as it is Michael's Glen we dare not speak ill of him! That was how it was about the robber who is buried in Montgomery churchyard. We all went there—to Wales, I mean—for a holiday, and we went to see the robber's grave. He was hanged hundreds of years ago for sheep-stealing, but he vowed he was innocent and said, to prove it, no grass

should ever grow on the cross cut over his grave, and if any planted grass seeds in the cross or spoke ill of him as he lay in his coffin they would come to a bad end. It all came true too, and the cross is there with grass growing right round.”

“I don’t like curses and wizardry,” declared Ailsie; “they give me creeps down my back, and now we’ve finished the picnic I believe we ought to go home. I—er—am sure Plato must have woken up by now.”

Although that gallant band of Pioneers would have scouted the very idea that they *could* be afraid, they contrived to keep very close together as they skirted the ridge of the Glen, only casting hasty and nervous glances in the direction of Michael’s seat.

Sybilla was the least superstitious—or the most daring—for she gave a gleeful giggle as she pointed towards the fallen rock.

“*What* a thrill it will be,” she murmured, “if actually we go exploring into the wicked depths of that hole with nice Donald Arnloch—for I am sure he *is* nice, even if he and his father are enemies of Old Grange School.”

“I don’t see why he should be *our* enemy,” retorted Wendy, as she rolled down a bank on to the heathery moors. “*We* didn’t rob him of Old Grange, and Yvette has saved his boy’s life—or at least his leg. It’s quite romantic, and I adore romance. How dark it is getting, and look at that queer tall figure stalking along! Is it a man or a woman?”

“It’s Jamie the shepherd,” said Yvette. “He’s ever so queer. Some people call him Daft Jamie and some just Black Jamie. He lives in a wee hut under a cliff. His boy Tam is rather nice, only none of the village boys will have anything to do with him because he is rough and wild. There’s a sweet little girl Joan, too, only about six years old, and she can’t talk properly—only croon. She’s lame as well, but ever so pretty. Jamie adores her. His wife is dead, and he is very bitter and fierce because of his troubles. I believe Joan could be cured, but it would cost a lot of money and take a lot of time. Here’s the school gate. I suppose if it’s past seven we shall get into hot water.”

Wendy caught the speaker’s hand. “Do come round to the garden room with me,” she begged, “to see if my ducky Plato is all right. I hope no one has disturbed him.”

Yvette hesitated. Though she was supposed to be Wendy’s friend, she still felt resentment against this new girl who expected to buy her friendship without any choice on her—Yvette’s—part.

“I must go up to Miss Simmins,” she replied, “about my wrist. We always have to report. I dare say one of the others will go with you.”

“I will,” replied Sybilla quickly. She had seen Wendy’s hot flush and look of disappointment and knew that Yvette had quite unnecessarily raised another few inches of that foolish barrier of which the foundations had been laid by the

coming of Wendy and the claim Yvette's father had made on his daughter to help repay his debt to Wendy's parents by her friendship to their child.

Yvette herself went off slowly towards the matron's room. She had spoken in haste, repented at leisure, but been too proud to cancel what she had said and run off to the rescue of Plato.

The question was—did Plato need rescuing?

Miss Prinkton was answering that. She met Sybilla and Wendy in the passage, her pale face quite rosy with indignation.

"Girls," she exclaimed, "which of you has brought that horrible animal to the school? I am speaking of the creature found by Gia in the garden room. Mademoiselle heard Gia cry out and went to see what was the matter. I do not know quite what happened, but Mademoiselle has been really ill with a nervous attack. We have had to send for a doctor. As to the animal, it has escaped into the garden, where the men are searching for it to kill it. It is abominable for anyone to have dared——"

But here Wendy interrupted with a cry of dismay.

"Kill Plato? Oh *no*, Miss Prinkton. No one could be so cruel! Why, I sent for him on purpose! The darling. I—I——"

And Wendy, bursting into tears and quite heedless of Miss Prinkton's exhortations, went racing down the passage, leaving Sybilla to explain that Plato was the most gentle mongoose, who only threatened rats and *not* the ankles or legs of distinguished French ladies—or English ones either!

Quite a crowd of girls had collected along the terrace, watching the two gardeners and boy, who, armed with thick sticks, were groping and beating about the shrubbery. It was just light enough to be able to see moving objects, and the girls kept giving little squeals of excitement as they imagined the men had discovered their quarry.

From the garden room Wendy could hear Mademoiselle's sobs and cries, gradually growing fainter, whilst Gia was talking excitedly in the passage about the "awful brute" which must have been sent as a practical joke to some one.

"Ware there," sang out one of the gardeners. "Quick, mate. Give it a crack over the head. Yah!"

Down the path rushed Wendy. She, too, had seen the long, furry body of poor Plato, as the frightened animal dashed out from under a low-growing laurel with the garden boy in close pursuit.

Oh, just in time! J-just in time. As Wendy clutched at her pet, lifting it safely up against her shoulder, young Tom's stick came down with a thwack on her foot, bringing a cry of pain to her lips in spite of herself.

What a commotion there was all round! The men shouting, Tom explaining, the Woollies scolding—for they were here at Wendy's heels now

—whilst the other girls, venturing down the path, began to ask questions.

“What *is* the animal?” demanded one.

“Is it a sort of long rabbit?” asked another.

“Won’t it bite?” cried a third.

“Why did you scream, Wendy?” echoed a fourth.

“That’s Miss Prinkton calling,” sighed the Woollies. “Is your foot better, Wendy? What a day of excitements! Oh, girls, w-what duffers you are! Don’t you know a mongoose when you see it?”

It was Ailsie who demanded the last! As a matter of fact she herself would never have recognized Plato under any sort of classification!

“One might have guessed it was some flare of Wendy’s,” said some one’s voice from the cluster of girls; but it was too dark to see the owner of those sneering tones.

“Slip off and see Lena at once before Prunes and Prisms gets her ear,” whispered Sybilla to Wendy, who, at the moment, was thinking of nothing and caring for nothing but her pet.

And Wendy was only too glad of the suggestion and the chance of escaping from her schoolfellows before reaching the house.

She was afraid—and very *much* afraid—she would lose her temper if those others were to say nasty things about her darling Plato!

CHAPTER IV

WENDY BLUNDERS

The excitement over Plato the mongoose took some time to cool down. A few of the girls—amongst them Joan Pinson and Gia Leston-Green—sympathized loudly with Mademoiselle. The rest considered it all a good joke and entreated Wendy to show them her pet. But Wendy had returned from her interview with Miss Caddock minus her beloved mongoose and her face decidedly red and defiant.

“You *can't* see Plato,” she said shortly; “he—he’s given in charge of one of the gardeners. I wish I hadn’t had him sent! W-what idiots people are! He was much more frightened of you than you could have been of him! I—I only wish he had bitten Mademoiselle’s toe!”

The girls laughed, and only her chums saw that Wendy was on the very verge of tears. As Sybilla remarked, it had indeed been a day of excitements. And there was going to be a thrill for the next day too. Wendy and her companions were trying—or not trying, as the case might be—to construe certain irregular French verbs by order of a pale and severe Frou-Frou when the schoolroom door opened and Miss Caddock came in.

The head mistress was unusually flushed, and her manner was not so serenely placid as it generally was when asking Mademoiselle if she might address certain girls in the class.

More rows? It was odd how the thoughts of the Pioneers flew instantly to some past prank or other as they saw Lena’s glance fasten on them. But, if so, it must have been a very minor offence, for their mistress was smiling whimsically.

“Sir Alan Arnloch is in the drawing-room,” she said quite breathlessly. “He wishes to thank the girls who were in the Wizard’s Glen yesterday, especially the one who saved his son’s life.”

Yvette crimsoned, whilst Sybilla jumped up at once.

“That was Yvette,” she exclaimed. “And *how* nice of Sir Alan to come. *May* we ask him if, when his son is well, he can show us what he found out in the Glen?”

And, actually, Miss Caddock was so excited and confused over the coming of a friendly enemy, that she gave her leave, little dreaming what she was promising.

The rest of Frou-Frou’s class looked jealously at their retreating schoolfellows. The Pioneers had kept their own council about the Wizard’s

Glen, for, as Sybilla wisely remarked, if they wanted to keep their band free from intruders and the curious they must *not* talk too much. A Pioneer secret was quite a solemn affair. And the five girls, having already disappeared with the head governess, could not be questioned at present.

Joan was making rather a sneer over it all to her next-door neighbour Gia. But Gia was dense and took no notice of Joan's sarcastic comments, which finally brought on her the wrath of Mademoiselle.

"My nerves, zey are on edge after ze attack of yesterday," complained poor Frou-Frou bitterly. "And you—none of you have ze least consideration. Joan, ma fille, your lesson has returned to you. In your hour of play you will re-learn it for me."

Joan bit her lip. This was the last straw! Frou-Frou *and* Miss Caddock both made favourites! It was horribly mean—and not a bit fair. And the new girl, Wendy Darlake, was the one to be blamed entirely. That was Joan's decision, for, having failed to receive more than a meagre one or two of those famous French sweets, Joan had thrown up altogether the idea of being Wendy's friend and was making up instead with Gia Leston-Green, who was easily flattered as well as open-handed, with a fixed dislike of Yvette Glencourt, who had once made fun in Gia's hearing of the latter's fine double name, and remarked in high disdain that she *had* thought that form of snobbishness was dying out!

"For I'm sure," Yvette the patrician had added bitinglly, "that Pa Leston-Green either invented a new sort of custard powder or housewife's cleansing soap. Quite *impossible* people."

Gia was not likely to forgive that remark, and Joan had found her an easy prey.

So now Joan sat alone and dismal in the schoolroom, whilst, downstairs, the five Pioneers were undergoing a *most* unusual experience. Adventures so seldom end with praise and congratulations from the grown-ups, and Sir Alan was such a dear.

Of course he was not *jolly*. A man who has gone through so many ordeals cannot find the world a very merry place; but he was a handsome old gentleman, not really so old at all, though there is not so much for sweet fifteen to distinguish between fifty and seventy, and his upright bearing, iron-grey hair and moustache suggested the soldier. He was really more shy than the girls, but Sybilla soon put them all at their ease. She was so anxious to know about the Wizard's Glen, and so eager to learn whether Donald was to be allowed to be a chum. She clapped her hands in glee when Sir Alan informed them that they were to come to tea at Glenview next Saturday. No fear of that invitation being declined. Sir Alan had been somewhat doubtful. He felt the Old Grange School girls as well as their mistress must know of his resentment and dislike, and he really felt quite guilty.

Miss Caddock was so utterly unlike what he had expected, for he had avoided meeting the purchaser of his old home during the sale and had a vague idea Miss Prinkton was the lady in question.

So all was well—after a day of unexpected happenings and a final cheery ending; for Miss Caddock was so interested in the Wizard’s Glen and the rescue of Donald Arnloch that she invited the Pioneers to tea in her own little sanctum—a high honour which it had never fallen to the lot of the school pickles to receive. I am not sure that they altogether enjoyed the idea at all, but it proved so much nicer than they expected! Miss Caddock enforcing rules and insisting on well-learned lessons, was entirely different to pretty, clever Lena Caddock chatting about her own days at Cheltenham, her interest in the hockey, her hopes that as usual her girls would be planning out a Christmas play as well as bazaar. It was a maxim of the head mistress that girls cannot be too busy, though she always insisted that if an “iron” were put in the fire it had to be kept there. That was what made Old Grange undertakings a success.

“Things *are* jolly, aren’t they?” Wendy said to Yvette as the two girls stood brushing their hair that night. “I do hope we are able to go to the Wizard’s Glen again soon. I mean with Donald. You’ll have to make him a Pioneer. Oh, bother, I can’t find those brown stockings of mine, and I promised to take a pair along to Doreen Menleigh. I rather like her, don’t you? Sybilla says her people are awfully poor. Aha, this is the best way.” And over went a whole drawerful of clothes which Miss Simmins certainly could not have inspected lately.

Wendy sat cross-legged amongst blouses, stockings, jumpers, and the rest of the medley, pulling out one article, tossing aside another, haphazard; the stockings were found and put aside; then, with that gay smile of hers, she tossed a pink and fawn silk jumper over to Yvette. “You can have it,” she said in her careless, good-natured way. “It will suit you ever so much better than me, and I have a dozen at least.”

Yvette stared, whilst the vivid colour rose to her cheeks. As a matter of fact, her one and only silk jumper was very much the worse for wear, and she had great doubts of its surviving the term. Only yesterday she had been darning it—a fact Wendy must have noticed. And now—this new girl was actually patronizing *her*! Offering *her*, Yvette Glencourt of Glencourt Castle, a cast-off jumper just as she might have done to a servant!

Poor Yvette! Pride quite blotted out the fact of Wendy’s kindly intention of giving pleasure, and she flung back the jumper with an angry light kindling in her dark eyes.

“It’s very kind of you to offer me your old clothes,” she said in strained tones, “but I prefer not to accept them. I expect Helen the housemaid would be delighted.”

Wendy gasped, utterly taken aback.

“Oh, I say!” she cried. “You’re not offended? It really isn’t *old*, only pink doesn’t suit me. I shouldn’t dream of giving it to a housemaid.”

“And you needn’t dream of giving it to me,” said Yvette icily. “I don’t accept clothes, old or new, from friends or strangers. If you think I’m—I’m an object for charity, you are mistaken. Of course you *can* bribe your way into popularity with some girls by constantly offering gifts—even old stockings—but it is not the Pioneers’ way. Perhaps it—it would have been better for you to get in another set. Joan Pinson’s, for instance.”

When she began to speak, Yvette had not had the least intention of saying such hateful things, but Pride egged her on, exaggerating Wendy’s offence every moment.

She was checked by Wendy’s sudden outburst of tears.

Overwhelmed by dismay at the reception of her luckless gift, the latter broke into sobs. She couldn’t help it. She was—or had been—so sure Yvette was her friend, and had never dreamed of offending her.

With increasing prickles of shame, Yvette watched her companion heap back the contents of the drawer, and, having returned it to its place, take a flying leap into bed, where, pulling the clothes round her curly red hair, she hid her face in the pillow.

Yvette frowned, snapped her lips, took two steps towards the bed, swung round and marched back to her own.

She knew she ought to tell Wendy she was sorry. She hated feeling ashamed, but could not help it. She felt mean—and didn’t see why she should; and finally, whispering to herself that “she wished to goodness Wendy had never come to school here,” she got into bed and tried to go to sleep.

But Wendy’s muffled sobs had a most distracting effect on her. Yet—if she said she was sorry, Wendy would start hugging her and asking her friendship; and Yvette, in spite of, or because of her father’s command, was quite convinced that friendship with Wendy Darlake would be nothing but humbug.

It was disconcerting, though, to have plans upset by Wendy’s sunny smile next morning, and her seeming forgetfulness of last night’s passage of arms.

Yvette got up prepared to be silent and stiff, but it could not be done. Wendy was merry as a cricket, chatting about hockey and the Pioneers in the gayest way. Grudgingly, Yvette had to own she herself would never have shown so forgiving a spirit. In a way, it vexed her, putting her more than ever in the wrong. In fact, Yvette had a bad attack of prickles as she joined her schoolfellows at breakfast.

“What’s making you look so particularly pea-green this morning, pet?” asked the voice of Sybilla in her ear, as she searched later amongst the portfolios in the smaller music-room for her own. “You might have been trying

to digest the ancestors of Gia Leston-Green by your expression; or have you an aching corn?"

Yvette frowned. She had mislaid her music, and the prickles were livelier than ever. "As a matter of fact, I wanted to speak to you, Syb," she retorted. "It's about Wendy. She doesn't belong to our set, and I wish I'd never asked for her to join the Pioneers. She'll spoil everything if she stays. She—she's not a lady—and it will end in jarring horribly. That's a bundle of facts. As you're captain, I suppose you'd better tell Wendy yourself."

Sybilla gave an odd little laugh as she perched on the window-sill. Neither girl noticed that the curtain screening off one part of the room had fluttered just now, certainly they had *not* seen Joan Pinson's mean face peering out from behind it.

"My dearest Queen Yvette," murmured Sybilla in her laziest tones, "you *must* have indigestion. Or have the homely feet of our Wendy been walking over some family tree? Be calm, sweet child, and let who will be catty! As to giving Wen the order of the boot, I *shan't*! She's every bit as much a lady as you or I, and, into the bargain, she's a very good sort. I'm captain—and I don't take orders—like that. Now don't burst bomb-wise at me, saying you'll resign if I don't out Wendy. Don't play a Joan Pinson game, or be mean and little—and a cad. Wendy's a sport. And, if we're going to remain a jolly band of comrades, she will have to remain too. That's that. Now come and plan what we'll do next half-hol."

Yvette stood panting. But something behind Sybilla's lazy drawl and smiling "plain truths" warned her that she meant every word she said. The majority of the girls at Old Grange regarded Sybilla Grant as the laziest and sleepest of soft things, easily pliable in any or every direction. But Yvette knew differently. Sybilla was quite a character, with any amount of determination and definite views beneath that fat, sleek smile of hers.

And Yvette was startled at the other's ultimatum.

To break up the Pioneers and lose her best chums was a very serious step. Was it worth it? Sybilla had said horrid things in most *unaggressive* fashion. Indeed, she had merely stated facts!

"You're making a great mistake," said Yvette hoarsely. "I don't like Wendy Darlake. She'll never be *my* friend, and she *shan't* dare patronize me. If she stays with the Pioneers——"

"If?" mocked Sybilla. "There's no *if* about it. She's going to stay—so are you—and we are going to interview Miss Mallins some time to-day and get her to take us to Hickory Dale for a blackberrying. If we could get cream at Oundler's Farm afterwards, what a feast we should have! Come along, Yvette. Play the game, be a sport, and don't grow maggots in your brain. It's not like you."

And Yvette yielded—with the best grace she could muster, picking up her portfolio and walking off with a would-be jaunty air. Sybilla waited behind, and, when Yvette had gone, marched straight up to the curtain and pulled it aside, pouncing neatly on the girl who was in the very act of escaping. Sybilla was not at all sleepy now, and her eyes were relentless.

“You wretched little sneak,” she said, “I’ve a good mind to march you right off to Miss Caddock and tell her I caught you eavesdropping. And, mark you! if I hear a whisper of your repeating what you heard just now, I’ll teach you a lesson you won’t forget. Now—*go!*”

But Sybilla did *not* like the look in Joan’s eyes as the girl obeyed the last command.

What did it mean?

CHAPTER V

THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

Wendy was standing alone in the garden room, examining her hockey stick. She loved hockey and was wondering whether Alison Blundel would have her in the team. Hockey did not start till next week, and the new stick had only come this morning. A beauty! Wendy was thrilled with delight. What absolute darlings Dad and Mum were! Plato the unfortunate, not even having been allowed to prove his cleverness as a rat-slayer, had had to return home, and the hockey stick had come as a “cheer up” over the disappointment.

“Don’t the pets spoil me horribly,” murmured Wendy to herself. “I *do* hope they’ll come down next week. Yvette couldn’t help liking them, though I’d have to warn them not to give her presents.”

The door opened and Joan Pinson came in. Wendy put down her hockey stick regretfully. She wished she could have made her escape *before* Joan came in. Of all the girls at Old Grange this gushing would-be friend was the one she liked least, though she would have found it difficult to tell the reason. Only—she didn’t trust her.

“Getting ready for hockey,” gurgled Joan. “It’s such a ripping game. Quite one of my favourites. What are you going to do this afternoon, Wendy? I wish you’d come for a walk with me. If you like sport, I can show you plenty.”

Wendy shook her head. “It’s awfully nice of you, Joan,” she replied, “but my chums will be waiting for me. I’m late already.”

Joan’s eyes narrowed, and, for a moment, she hesitated, remembering Sybilla’s warning. But—Wendy was one of those girls who *don’t* gossip or “repeat.” And Joan could be daring when she wanted her own way.

“You mean your Club, or whatever you call it?” she said airily. “What a goose you are, Wendy! *They* don’t want you! At least Yvette doesn’t. Sybilla was talking to her the other day. Yvette said you were not a lady and had joined the wrong set. She wanted to turn you point-blank out of the Pioneers, but Sybilla refused, and said you were all right. Yvette was horribly grumpy. It’s just as well to know who *are* one’s friends. If you don’t believe what I say, you can ask Yvette. Sybilla was quite cross with her. They didn’t know I was in the room, so if you like to make mischief you can.”

Wendy had dropped the hockey stick and stood looking blankly at the speaker. Joan was smiling. She expected there would be a regular scene, but what matter? In the end, Wendy would be convinced and in gratitude would become her sworn friend. And Joan felt she could get far more out of Wendy

than out of the shrewder Gia; besides, the latter was always dangling after that small sister of hers!

But, alas for Joan's chance of stealing another girl's friend!

Instead of arguing, questioning, refusing to believe, or raging over Yvette's cruel speaking, Wendy turned on her heel, and, to the disgust of the discomfited Joan, walked quietly away.

"Where are you going?" asked Joan sharply. "Come along, Wendy. I promise what I said is true. You can ask Yvette. She's as proud as Lucifer. I dislike her intensely. And, if you'll be my friend, we can have the jolliest sort of time. You might as well be grateful for my warning."

But Wendy was not in the least grateful, nor did she wish Joan to guess there was a horrible lump in her throat. There was only one thing to be done. She must go for a walk—a long walk over those dear old Scotch moors, to get the muddle out of her brain . . . and, if possible, the ache out of her heart. For—she did not doubt the truth of what Joan had said. Wendy was far more sensitive than her schoolfellows guessed, and her instinct told her that Yvette had been mortally offended by the offer of that silk jumper. What she did not guess was that Yvette's resentment was not so much against Wendy as against the accusing voice of a conscience which murmured, "Unjust! Unjust!"

Yvette prided herself on her sense of justice, and knew that from the first she had failed in respect of Wendy Darlake.

The moors with their serene beauty held a spell for the eager, enthusiastic lassie who had so wonderful a gift for enjoyment of every kind. And to-day there must have been some witching fairy-kin to tempt the solitary walker and lead her on over those purple wastes and through green fir woods. It was not till Wendy had walked for miles into this unknown country that she remembered Miss Caddock's rule about girls never going beyond bounds alone.

With a comical grimace she looked around. A white mist of fine but drenching rain had begun to fall; she had no idea where she was, it had become quite chilly.

"Duffer!" said Wendy aloud, in scolding tones to herself. "You *prize* duffer, to come tramping into the unknown like this. Serve you right if you *don't* find your way home till morning. Now, *have* I a bump of locality, or have I not?"

After several attempts to discover a familiar-looking path, she decided she had not! But she had five shillings in her pocket! Wendy pulled the half-crowns out and looked at them in great amusement. Was it—could it be because she was *rich* that Yvette looked down on her? Surely she—Yvette—should be the last one to feel this, since it was Dad's loan which had saved Yvette's own people from ruin.

“Perhaps *that’s* the milk in the coco-nut,” quoth Wendy to herself; “it hurts her pride to think Glencourts of Glencourt Castle have been helped by just common folk. How ridic! But that’s only one part of Yvette—a silly little part. She’s the girl I want for my friend, anyway. And—bother the money! *I* always thought it was jolly fine stuff before I came to school. Hey diddle diddle, I’ll twirl round three times and then walk straight ahead.”

This new method of finding a track did not appear to be very brilliant, for Wendy soon found herself on the fringe of a wooded hollow which she was perfectly certain she had not seen before, whilst beyond stretched a regular rocky, hilly waste.

“Right about turn,” sang Wendy, when a little cry within the wood arrested her attention.

It was just such a little cry as a frightened bird might give when it falls out of the nest, and Wendy was soon scrambling down to where it came from.

“Oh, poor, poor,” she cried, bending over the tiny form of a cripple child about five or six years of age, who had got her shabby clothes tangled by briars and was unable to free herself. Such a pretty, tear-stained little face looked up into Wendy’s, though in answer to the latter’s inquiries as to whether she were hurt the child only uttered queer little crooning sounds.

“It must be Black Jamie’s little girl,” thought Wendy to herself, and, as she carefully disentangled the briars, she said softly, “Jean, little Jean, Shepherd Jamie’s Jean.”

How quickly the tears ceased; what a sweet little smile parted the quivering lips! Jean was no longer frightened, for she had found a friend. Wendy had that way which so soon wins the love and confidence of children and animals.

Cripple Jean, freed from those cruel brambles, was perfectly willing to allow herself to be kissed and comforted by this ruddy-haired stranger, who took off her own woolly coat to wrap round her. The child’s frock was thin, and she was shivering even in the shelter of the wood.

“Where does Jean live? Can she show Big Wendy?” asked Wendy coaxingly, and the soft blue eyes smiled confidently back again. Yes, Cripple Jean could point a way, though she could not tell it, and, alas, those twisted feet would surely never have been able to walk it either in the rising wind and driving rain.

“Over there,” repeated Wendy, and after much study of the landscape, discovered a black hut huddled like a crouching witch up against a hill-side. “Then over there we go, dilly-dumpling. Don’t cry. We’re going home.”

But home was a much longer way than it looked, and it was *quite* all Wendy could do to stagger along with the child in her arms. Ugh! how cold the mist was, and her hair was dripping; tiny streams of water were running down her back, but Cripple Jean, snug under the thick woolly, kept comparatively

dry!

And at last they reached the queer, straggling hut under the hill. A man was just coming out from it, a sack over his shoulders, his face dark with distress. He did not recognize the bundle in Wendy's arms at first and gave the girl an ugly scowl, not offering shelter or word of greeting, though she was reeling in weariness, and white-cheeked from the strain of carrying such a weight. But Jean herself had been peeping out with the instinct of one who knows when home is near. So now, pushing back the fleecy woolly, she uttered her little cry. And oh! Wendy would never forget how the expression on the grizzled shepherd's face altered. He came straight to Wendy and took the bundle out of her arms.

"Jean! Wee lammie," he cried, "I was greeting for my lost lammie. Where's Tam been to let you stray sae far? I'll teach him his lesson."

He took no further notice of Wendy, but carried the lame child into the hut, leaving the door open so that Wendy could see how tenderly he removed the coat, feeling to see if the little frock and stockings were wet.

Jean's dumb cries must have had some meaning for him too, since presently he came out to where Wendy was already moving away. He looked shy and awkward; but Wendy, with a friendly gesture born of sympathy, held out her hand and he gripped it eagerly.

Wendy did not quite understand all he said, only that he had nothing to give but his "bit" gratitude, and that if he could repay he would, since it was seldom he had a kindness shown.

"I'm too wet to come in and make friends with that darling now," replied Wendy, "but may I come one day? May I come and see Jean and bring her a doll? Do let me!"

And Shepherd Jamie thanked her, telling her she would be "verra weelcome"; and Wendy said good-bye with a real smile of pleasure about her lips, so proud was she to have made friends with this "black shepherd."

She had forgotten all about not knowing her way back, and had reached a hillock, wondering in dismay what she should do, when there came a patter of feet and there stood the shaggiest little pony of a boy ever seen. But, under a thatch of fair hair, the prettiest pair of blue eyes looked up into Wendy's, and a grimy finger pointed over the rain-swept moors.

"Feyther telled me to show you the way, lady," said Tam in sing-song voice. "I'll be Jean's brither, and it's by the grey valley will be quickest to gang."

Wendy gave herself a shake so that the raindrops went flying in every direction, and laughed.

"You nice Tam," she replied, "then by the grey valley we'd better go, for I'm *starved*, and wet too!—and, well, all the moors look grey to me."

Tam pulled the plaid he was wearing over his rags. The mists did not seem to trouble him! And away they went over the heather, Wendy finding it was all she could do to keep up with her guide.

Tam's amaze when he found a shilling in his dirty palm at the end of the walk was quite amusing. At first he did not seem sure whether he ought to take it, but Wendy was quite convincing and stood, heedless of the rain, watching the queer, thin figure of the shepherd boy go scuttling back across the moor.

Mademoiselle happened to be in the passage as Wendy came in and exclaimed in horror at her dripping state.

"But you will be ill in your bed, my child," cried the little Frenchwoman. "What, you bring ze rivaire into ze house! Never did I behold such wetness. It is distressing. You will go to ze Matron at once and demand a glass of hot milk, a bath, dry clothes. But instantly! But instantly!"

And Wendy did not find the prescription at all against her liking.

Only—the worst part was the coming back into the schoolroom and feeling that the chums she had believed to be chums did not want her. Joan's words stung cruelly. It was Yvette who had said she was in the wrong set—Yvette who had said she was not a lady.

Wendy gulped down her tears. She was no longer keen to tell the story of Black Jamie, the shepherd, to her friends. They would have been glad she was away.

"Four farthings for your thoughts—and a bad mark for scrapping the Council," sang the voice of Sybilla in her ear, and Wendy had to laugh at the comical frown of reproof with which she was greeted. She liked Sybilla tremendously;—and Sybilla had not said——

Wendy's lip quivered. "I've been for a walk," she faltered.

"And finished with a swim. Goose! There's something wrong. Got a pain? No! Then out with it. No nonsense. It's the hump you've got—and we mean to cure it. We've got news—but that'll keep. What's the trouble?"

Sybilla's bullying was the kindest business, and Wendy never had been one to keep things to herself. Out came Joan's story, whilst Sybilla relieved her feelings by punching the hard wood of the reclining board.

"Oh, the sneak! The mean little sneak!" she gasped wrathfully. "Don't I wish this board were her head! I'd make jelly of her. And I'm not sure if I wouldn't like to make a jelly of you, Wendona. It's not sporty to listen to tales. It's not cricket. It's not the right and decent thing. Wash it out if you're a true Pioneer. Forget it as easily as you do the *participe passé* of all irregular verbs. Come along and hear the Woollies' latest suggestion. It fairly knocks the wind even out of *my* sails; but it's delicious though needing a nerve tonic or Williams' pink pills for pale people. Now, not a word! I'll give you mine though. *We want you*. And the Pioneers never kow-tow to anyone they don't

want. Long ago they told the gentle Joan there was no room for her in the ranks. Likewise Gia, the double-barrelled. We know what we want and we get it. We've got you. If we didn't want you we'd say 'quit.' Now, be satisfied. I shan't tell Yvette what a prize donkey you've been. Come to the garden room. Yvette is making a fruit salad and the Woollies are burying the empty tin of Californian peaches. I adore fruit salad."

And Wendy, having been talked down utterly and completely, yielded to Sybilla's eloquence. If, afterwards, she wondered why she had not insisted on Sybilla assuring her Yvette had never made those cruel remarks, she felt it would be ungenerous to "rake them up." And Yvette was perfectly friendly in her greeting.

"Just in time, kids," she told Wendy and Sybilla. "The Woollies would have finished the whole salad if you had not come."

"Didn't we deserve it?" asked Ailsie in injured tones. "When Mona has just shied the peach tin over the wall and it alighted on the curate's hat. I don't know which the poor young man found the most trying—our apologies or the peach juice which floated round his hat."

And in the laugh which followed, Wendy for the time forgot her troubles. Besides, Yvette really had news to tell.

"I've had a letter," she announced, "from Donald Arnloch. An invitation for all good little Pioneers to go to tea at Glenview. He—Donald—says he's quite well again, and wants to plan explorations to the Glen. Quite a business-like letter. It made me feel we were going to make history. It's for Friday, too—just gorgeous. Lena, like a pet, is letting us off our dancing class so that we can go—and that leaves Saturday free for the paper-chase."

"Saturday week," corrected Sybilla. "No mistake, pet. Alison just told me. Paper-chase deferred, as she and Brenda Hall will be away, as well as Miss Mallins. All the better. If Donald's fit, we might visit the Glen. Are you going to suggest your thrill to him, Woollies? I'm not sure whether you were joking."

Ailsie and Mona chuckled. "It *will* be a joke," said Ailsie; "but, well, Mona and I were talking it over. What *we* say is this. As Pioneers we've got to earn our name. We've got to explore. Dad says the only way to succeed there is to fix a scheme and carry it through even if you're heading against a blizzard. Well, *we* want to learn the secrets of the Wizard's Glen, don't we? And whether there are *real* ghosts. So if we have a moonlight picnic there on All Hallows' E'en, *the* ghost night, we ought to find out."

"All Hallows' E'en is the one night when ghosts properly walk," added Mona convincingly.

"It would be gorgeous," said Sybilla. "And now you Woollies have put it into my head, it won't go out again. An ordinary plum-and-cake affair at 8 p.m. seems tame now. So—that's settled, chums. And if Donald Arnloch likes

to join up and help defend us against the chilly spooks, all the better.”

Wendy clapped her hands. The Woollies’ moonlight picnic had quite banished the thought of Joan’s spiteful speech—and, besides! don’t we really *know* in our bones when school chums want us? Luckily for Wendy, she was not one of those silly, supersensitive people who are always on the watch to have their feelings hurt, and these Pioneer plans filled her with glee. Hadn’t she come to school on purpose to enjoy herself? Of course she had! And of course she was going to do it too!

Joan was by no means best pleased to see Wendy running downstairs to prayers that evening with Sybilla’s arm round her waist. So, after all, her malice had failed *once*. But she did not intend it to do so altogether.

CHAPTER VI DONALD PLAYS HOST

“It’s jolly, your being able to come,” said Donald Arnloch, half shyly, as he came forward to meet his girl visitors, who thoroughly sympathized with him. What, for instance, would any of their own brothers have felt if called on to entertain five strapping schoolgirls without a backer-up of any kind? But the Pioneers were not the sort of girls to allow anyone to be shy of them, and their joyous greeting went far to make Donald feel that their coming was as jolly as he called it!

“Are we going to the Wizard’s Glen to-day?” asked Sybilla briskly, “or only to draw up plans? I say, what a ripping old garden you have here! May we come out?”

“Yes, do,” urged Donald. “And no—I think we’ll have to leave the Glen to-day, because of tea, and all that; there’s heaps to explain, too. Could you meet me in the Glen to-morrow?”

The Woollies clapped their hands. “*Just* what we wanted,” beamed Yvette, “for next week is the paper-chase. Do tell us everything. I mean why you ever thought of digging in the Wizard’s seat.”

They were all out of doors now. Glenview garden was such a delightful place—no prim flower-beds or respectable shrubbery, but just a tangle of trees, flowers, queer, quaint nooks, and “up-hill-down-dale” plantations.

Donald found a monster oak tree with low spreading branches, and his visitors soon “arranged” themselves.

“Dad has ever such an old manuscript,” said Donald, “telling about the time of Michael Scott, who, of course you know, was supposed to have sold himself to the devil. One of the Arnlochs—Donald—had a quarrel with him—and that is what brought him here. Then—you know the story of Elsie and Andrew. Afterwards, Michael always haunted the place because he was supposed to have buried a box with some of his wizardry under the ‘seat’ in the Glen. That’s why it is haunted. He left a spell or a curse to say whoever looked for the box would meet—some sort of horror—I don’t know what, but the country people say it is true—and that those who visit the Glen and dig in Michael’s seat are never seen again. The Arnlochs never believed that, because soon after Michael’s death one of their ancestors made a marvellous escape from his enemies by hiding in the Glen, but as the whole place was surrounded by the Covenanters, *they* say Alec Arnloch must have had dealings with the Wizard’s ghost who helped him to fly away to safety on a broomstick. It’s

true, you two girls; it's no use laughing."

But the Woollies could not help laughing, it sounded so absurd. Sybilla was the only one who tried to work out the problem.

"If Alec Arnloch hid in the Glen and escaped from it in spite of a cordon of soldiers," she said, "it looks as if Michael Scott had some secret way out of the Glen leading down that hole in the centre of his seat. Of course, your ancestors would allow the country people to keep up the delusion about ghosts and the devil so that no one pried into the secret, and I suppose in time the Arnlochs lost the secret themselves. I call it frightfully interesting, and I *do* hope when we explore we shall find a way out of the Wizard's Glen by a secret passage."

Donald felt inclined to shake hands with the speaker. It was such a sensible speech and "fitted" everything so beautifully.

"We'll go to-morrow," he said, "and I'll take a rope. I don't believe any of you girls would be afraid."

After which praise the Pioneers would rather—er—er—have met Michael Scott himself than refuse to come.

They were all quite glad not to see Donald's father, of whom they stood in awe; and how they enjoyed their ramble over the grounds, the jolly tea and the great plannings in which Donald found himself accepting a place in those merry schoolgirls' band of Pioneers. I think he was quite impressed by hearing the name of the Woollies' father, and asked dozens of questions about him.

"I'd like to be an explorer better than anything in the world," he declared; "it must be a ripping life." He checked a sigh as he spoke; and Wendy, who had very sympathetic ears for such sounds, wondered why.

Yvette had been the only one to show just the teeniest bit of shyness at that tea-party, but I think that was because she knew it was being given in her honour. Donald found his opportunity to thank her just before the girls left, and poor Yvette, crimson with blushes, was glad to escape from such an interview. How she hated to be thanked! Sybilla, however, proved her right to be a captain by the cleverness with which she skated over an awkward moment.

"We are going back up the corkscrew road," she told Donald. "Do tell us who lives in that little grey house on the ledge. It's so quaint."

Donald laughed. "I don't advise you to go and *call* there," he retorted; "it is where Mrs. Gannow lives. She's *the* character of Craigloch. She has a pet cat Flora and a pet dog Mac; they are both fatter than butter—and hideous;—but she adores them. We all think she is a little mad. She hangs bits of fish on the branches of trees and bits of meat on low twigs, in case Flora or Mac are hungry. She seems quite poor and does not keep a servant at all, but the people say she is a miser. That's all I know of Elspeth Gannow. She doesn't like boys and she hates neighbours. I've heard her say that if it were not for Flora and Mac she would live on a desert island where she need not be plagued with

people.”

How the girls laughed! “She doesn’t sound attractive,” said Yvette, “but we’ll have a good look at her house as we go by. She seemed to suit the Wizard’s Glen very well. She might be the Witch.”

“Just what people call her,” nodded Donald, “and she looks like one. Must you really go? Don’t forget to-morrow, 2.30 sharp. I’m going to try and fix a candle in my hat as I saw some miners doing in a spar mine in Wales.”

The girls left their new chum waving good-bye to them from the gate and went up the hill singing. To-morrow’s adventure would be delicious.

“And I love Donald,” said Wendy; “he’s just like a jolly brother, and anyhow *he* doesn’t hate the girls of Old Grange.”

“By the way, Yvette,” said Sybilla suddenly, “are you going in for Mr. Clinton’s special prize for mathematics? I do hope you will. It’s a prize offered by a friend of his, and he won’t say what it is, only that it is a magnificent chance. You ought to try.”

Yvette nodded. “I gave my name in to Miss Prinkton yesterday,” she said. “You have entered too, haven’t you, Wendy?”

“Yes,” said Wendy. “Dad would be pleased if I got a prize, though he won’t care what the prize is. Doreen Menleigh is going in as well. I rather like Doreen, though she is not very lively.”

“That’s right,” replied Sybilla, “Doreen is lumpy. She must know it. But she’s a good sort. Her people are frantically poor and she is only here because a friend pays. I believe the friend rubs in the charity fact too, and no wonder Doreen is anxious to escape. If Yvette doesn’t win Mr. Clinton’s mysterious prize, I hope she does.”

“Anyhow, she is welcome to the prize,” said Wendy. “As a matter of fact, I should be a whole heap more interested if it were hockey. I do want Alison to put me in the hockey team.”

“There’s Mrs. Gannow’s place,” interrupted Yvette. “Doesn’t it look like a squat dwarf perched up there, and I do believe that must be Flora the cat perched on the wall. Come along, we’ll introduce ourselves. I have often wondered who lived there; now we know Donald, we shall get to know Craigloch.”

The very fattest of ginger-coloured cats lay sunning on the wall. Her fur was sleek as satin, but Wendy was quite decided as to her looks.

“I don’t like her,” she said. “She’s cruel. Her green eyes are like glass and look as if she were thinking of eating dicky-birds all day long. You ought to be called Michael instead of Flora, you horrid old thing.”

“She’s wise as wisdom,” said Sybilla. “She doesn’t care for us one bit. How you would love to scratch, old girl. Take care, Wendy, or she will have her claws into your hair. She is attracted by the colour.”

Wendy laughed, but the laugh turned to a squeal when that prophecy came true—or very nearly true. Flora darted out her claws and would have had them tangled in those ruddy curls had not Ailsie given the sleek “tiger” a vigorous push, toppling her off the wall. What a “miaw” of indignation Flora gave, and it was echoed by a scolding voice which cried out in the greatest indignation.

“Who is *daring* to touch my cat?” asked the voice. “Oh, you wicked girl!”

And there, very little taller than the wall, appeared the head and face of Mrs. Gannow herself.

She was a screwed-up ugly little creature, whose face looked as if the dried skin would hardly stretch over the skull, but her eyes were big and black and piercing, with heavily marked brows which gave her the oddest appearance. She wore a grey overall and a blue and grey silk cap. No wonder the villagers called her the Witch!

She scowled at the girls, but the latter stood their ground steadily.

“We were only looking at your cat,” said Yvette, “and admiring her. She was going to put her claws into—er—into my friend’s hair, when Ailsie pushed her off the wall. She can’t be hurt.”

“Not hurt,” scolded Mrs. Gannow, “that’s all *you* know, you saucy lassie. It’s village girls no doubt you are, and in my young day your mothers would have given you a beating for your impudence. But it’s no use speaking in these times. Old and young are bad alike. If I’d my pleasure I’d build a wall half a mile high to shut you all out. Be off with you, hussies!”

How red the girls got! Yvette nearly answered back, but the more peace-loving Sybilla drew her away.

“She pretended she thought we were village girls on purpose,” stormed Yvette; “hateful old cat! I only wish she *could* build a wall a mile high and shut out all the sunshine. As to her cat, it—it’s only fit to be boiled for dog’s-meat.”

Sybilla roared. “Talk about the bubbling of ginger-beer,” she mocked, “don’t get so hot, Yvette. The old witch can’t hurt us, and she adds to all the romance. A witch—a hero—a wizard and a haunted glen. Wendy, ducky, are *you* answerable for all the thrills of this term of terms? I believe you must be the best Pioneer of the lot.”

A remark which made Wendy blush with pleasure. *What* a good thing it was she had not allowed Joan’s poison to sink right down into her heart, to spoil her whole first term at this jolly school. Sybilla and the Woollies already treated her absolutely as one of themselves, and Yvette was ever so nice sometimes. Simple, straightforward Wendy could not understand how her highly strung schoolfellow was just a creature of moods, and far too impulsive. Yvette was generous and high-spirited, but she lacked self-control and was too fond of exaggerating petty molehills into mountains. One day she was quite

ready to be Wendy's sworn chum. The next time her "prickles" might be out and she was all on edge, rebelling against Dad's command that she *must* be Wendy's friend; recalling Wendy's "horrible patronage" in offering her a silk jumper, and telling herself that she was the last person in the world to play up to one of the new rich.

Yet this evening, when Wendy came bounding towards her telling her that Alison Blundel, the head girl, had put her in the hockey team with a special word of praise, Yvette was quite hearty in her congratulations.

"All the Pioneers are in the team now, barring Sybilla," said Yvette. "That's splendid. We shall have to stick to the practices, too, as we are playing the Renton College girls at half-term. It's always a great battle."

"I know," agreed Wendy, "but we can't practise to-morrow because of the Glen. Can't be helped! We shall have all the week till Saturday next. I wonder who will be the hares. Will you run with me, Yvette? Sybilla is not running, and the Woollies are going together. I don't know my way about."

"Very well," agreed Yvette, "we may as well, but I hope we are not hares."

Her tones were listless, and Wendy drew her own conclusion. "She doesn't want *me* to run with her, but she does not like to say so," thought poor Wendy. "Oh dear! Sometimes I do wish I could shake Yvette and ask her whether she wants to be my friend or not."

Yvette, however, was in her very friendliest mood next day when the Pioneers joined Donald in the Glen.

"School has been stodgy of late," explained Mona to their new chum. "We do want a thrill badly. Tell us, honour, *do* you expect to find Michael's box of magic?"

Donald had just managed to get that trapdoor open again and laughed as he looked up at the speaker, who stood, arms akimbo, on the fallen rock.

"I'd sooner find a passage," he replied, "but I shall be content if we discover anything at all. I'm horribly afraid it will only be a hole—a kind of hollow like a well with no outlet."

"Dull," said Sybilla, "too dull to be allowed. We must find something better than a hole after all these preparations. Shall I—er—go first, Donald, because I'm lightest and smallest?"

Donald was speechless with disgust. The idea of that will-o'-the-wisp bundle of impudence thinking *he* would tolerate such a thing. Silently he passed the padded rope under his arms, and then the other end to the girls, who could not help laughing. Donald on his dignity! But that could not last. The situation needed closest comradeship. Donald must have felt this too, for there was no dignity in his voice as he gave a shout from the depths.

"Steady!" they heard him cry, and leaning forward could just see one sunburnt hand gripping the rope about his head. "Steady, girls, there's a

passage in the side of the hole. I'm going to . . . get in . . . and hold the rope. Don't come . . . if you're . . . er . . . nervous. I can't see the end of the passage, but it bears to the right. Are you all coming?"

One half-second of hesitation, then a chorus replied:

"Yes! Yes, of *course!*"

CHAPTER VII

MICHAEL SCOTT'S SECRET

Sybilla and Yvette were looking at each other. Yes! Sybilla was captain of the Pioneers, and she wanted to assert the fact for the first time since Yvette had given her the lead; whilst Yvette herself was also realizing for the first time that she was only second in command! And the knowledge came with a bitter sting.

Sybilla's right was to follow Donald Arnloch—and she took it. Catching hold of the rope, she swung herself down, with the agility of a little cat. She was as nimble as any cat, and surefooted too. Donald caught her hand as she came on a level with him and drew her into the dark opening.

"I thought you were Yvette at first," he laughed. "I suppose she will be next." Sybilla nodded. She was *glad* she had shown Yvette who was "boss." Not that she meant to do so unkindly, but she had a very shrewd conviction that the day would dawn when the Pioneers would be threatened by a breaking of ranks over the subject of Wendy, and she wanted to be sure of her authority. Yvette would not forget that moment of rivalry.

The next moment Yvette had arrived. She was more breathless than Sybilla, and at first she drew back against the rocky wall, panting. Sybilla guessed why, and went up to her.

"Don't you feel thrilled?" she asked in her easy way. "Stare hard down the passage and you may see Michael. I wonder if any of us have matches besides Donald."

Yvette gave an excited little laugh. She had been half inclined to raise a barrier between herself and Captain Sybilla, but she at once gave up the thought.

"I have matches and a candle," she replied. "Ah, here come the Woollies—and Wendy is here, aren't you, Wendy?"

"All aboard the lugger," sang Donald. "Come along, Yvette; you others keep two and two."

Yvette hesitated, but Sybilla gave her a little push.

"Wendy and I will be the ham in the sandwich," said she, "and the Woollies will close the ranks."

But only Sybilla heard Yvette's brief whisper of "You dear."

Donald was not only excited but impatient. He dreaded lest these new chums were going to be hangers-back. No fear! Yvette was already by his side, raising her lighted candle.

“It must be a long passage,” said she, “but how strangely the echoes sound! I wonder why.”

“I noticed the same thing,” replied Donald. “Perhaps we had better go single file. What is that some one said?”

Mona had hurried forward. “Call again,” she cried, “*loud!* Wait a moment.” She dropped to her knees, laying her ear to the ground.

“Coo-ee!” sang Donald, and away rumbled the cry, then stopped—dead.

Mona scrambled up. “Dad took us to a cave like this abroad,” she said, “and taught us to listen. Do—do take care—Donald. I’m sure the path ends—quickly,—I mean somewhere quite near—and the sound travels downwards. There’s a pit or a precipice.”

Donald gave a little grunt, rather like the snorting of a war-horse which wants to rush into the battle, as he moved on; but he did deign to go as far as stretching his arm forward and circling round the light. A good thing too! Not *many* steps did he go before a startled cry breaking from his lips warned the girls to halt. Donald was on his knees.

“You were right, Mona!” he cried, “absolutely right. Keep back, girls—I’ll tell you . . . Yes, Yvette . . . you can see . . . but *don’t* go an inch nearer. It’s a regular trap.”

Yvette, very pale in the candle-light, *was* looking, and this is what she saw. The narrow path had widened out so that two could walk abreast, and there cut—as you might cut a loaf of bread—the path was shorn sheer away in front of them, leaving a gap so deep that the candle-rays would not reach the depths. Yvette groped for a piece of rock and allowed it to drop. Down—down—down it went, bounding from boulder to boulder till with a thud it reached the bottom. Involuntarily the girls shuddered and drew back. Donald peered—fascinated. He could not see if across the gap the passage continued its way, and at the moment he had had a very wet blanket indeed upon his enthusiasm for exploring.

“It’s a trap, all right,” said he—“Michael’s trap. There was an ugly meaning in the warning that those who explored the Wizard’s seat would come to a bad end! I wonder how my ancestor escaped.”

“Can’t we possibly go on?” asked Sybilla. “Hold up your candle and see if there is a way round, Donald.”

Donald obeyed, but it was to no purpose. Rocky walls, oozing moisture, met their view everywhere. Not a foothold for a mouse could be found. Very disappointed, with glowing dreams fading away, the girls retraced their steps. Donald was allowed to go first with the best will in the world now, for he had to climb the rope over the pit, and then help haul up the girls.

Sybilla ought to have been first, for she was the lightest weight. But the captain of the Pioneers must have forgotten her privilege, for she remained

quite in the background.

“What *are* you doing, Syb?” laughed Wendy nervously, as she saw her companion crouching there.

Sybilla slowly raised herself. “It’s down *there*,” she replied. “One day we must explore the very bottom of the ‘well.’ It’s too late now, and I don’t think Donald has thought of it, but I fancy there are more steps below which might meet the lower part of the precipice and lead out on the other side of the ridge. We shall have to try one day.”

“Rather,” chirped Wendy; but, as she watched the dangling rope coming down once more, she felt that she was quite glad *one* day was not to-day!

Donald was very silent on the way back from the Glen. He looked as if he were working out problems, and perhaps that *was* his job.

Sybilla was the one to question when they parted.

“You’re not saying good-bye, are you?” she asked. “You said you’d join the Pioneers. I know it is not one bit of use to ask you to come up to tea at the school, but do let us know when you’ve something special on, and we will tell you if we have.”

Donald nodded. “I’m not going to give up the Wizard,” said he. “I still believe there’s a riddle we have not read. Next time we must go straight down to the bottom of the well or pit.”

“That’s it,” chuckled Sybilla, “I said so to Wendy. There’s sure to be a lower road. Don’t go without us, and oh, wait, girls, shall we tell Donald what we thought of doing *one* day? All Hallows’ E’en, you know. It’s ghost night—and the Wizard’s Glen is full of ghosts. If we plotted a moonlight picnic to see them, would you come?”

How Donald laughed! “You *are* sports,” he said, “but wouldn’t there be a frightful row about it?”

“Not really,” said Sybilla coolly, “and it would be worth a lecture. It’s not mean or actually *wrong*. Of course, Lena wouldn’t give us leave to do it. It would be impos. But it is just the sort of thing she’d love to do herself if she weren’t head mistress! Once—one summer term—we *did* have a moonlight picnic to Allan Braes; it was gorgeous. So—don’t forget. We’ll be there. All details in our next.”

Donald was laughing as he ran off.

If the exploration of the Wizard’s seat had been disappointing, with an unpleasant chill in remembering what so very nearly might have been, the Pioneers did not admit it.

“We can’t expect to drop on to a gold-mine at a first digging,” said Yvette, “and I should not wonder if we found a long passage right in the depths. No chance for us to explore, though, for a week or so. There are too many irons in the fire.”

And, alas! as they might have added, "only one Saturday in the week!" Not that lesson-days were altogether dull. There was far too much enthusiasm at the Old Grange for that. School life was not made up of explorations to haunted glens and hockey matches. Mr. Clinton's mysterious prize was one subject which greatly concerned all girls with a mathematical mind.

Mr. Clinton was one of the most popular of the visiting masters. He lived at Mearns, about two miles distant, and possessed the prettiest wife and twin daughters aged three. It was the delight of the Old Grange girls when Poppy and Pansy came over to tea with Miss Caddock, for very often they would be sent up to the schoolroom afterwards to be "spoilt."

"You are going in for the 'mystery' prize, aren't you?" Doreen asked Wendy one day soon after the exploration. Wendy looked up from her letter.

"Yes," she replied brightly, "Mr. Clinton wanted me to. He's keen as mustard about it. He says the prize will be ever such a surprise to us all, and he should be overwhelmed by competitors if they guessed what it was. It's been offered by a cranky old gentleman living in Mearns. I hope it is a gold watch—or a diamond bangle—or I wouldn't mind a motor-car or aeroplane."

Doreen bit her lip. She was a sallow, dark-haired girl, with a restless manner. Poor Doreen! The country vicarage, which was her home, was one where poverty was only too well known, and she was ambitious, so ambitious to go to College and have a career. Home limits stifled her. The elder sister did all that was needed to help at home and in the tiny parish. Doreen, the youngest, had no niche there. A relative, interested in her cleverness, was giving her her schooling; and Doreen was fighting to launch out into the great world of life, and so escape stagnating within narrow limits.

And—perhaps the mystery prize would help her. She dreamed dreams of it already. But two of her rivals at least were to be feared. Yvette—and Wendy. Yvette was a brilliant and steady worker, but her grounding had not been good. Wendy was a genius at mathematics, and Mr. Clinton had said so in Doreen's hearing. When the latter heard that Wendy was entering for the special prize, her heart had sunk. Did this mean defeat? Was it worth trying?

Wendy's joke about an aeroplane roused her indignation. Winning a grand prize meant nothing to this girl—and it meant *everything* to her! Somehow it did not seem fair that Wendy should compete.

Joan Pinson had made the same remark to her. Joan did not like Wendy. Why? No answer to that!—and Wendy was already chattering on in her gay way, which included all schoolfellows in her friendship.

"Isn't it splendid, Doreen?" she laughed. "Mother and Dad are coming down to-morrow—just to surprise me. I feel as if I wanted to walk on my head all round the schoolroom. I *am* pleased. And we are having our trial hockey match in the afternoon. That will decide Alison about my going in the team. I

hope Mother and Dad will like to watch it. Then we'll go for a motor spin. Hurrah!"

And off danced Wendy to tell the news to her chums.

How interested they were too! Speculating in their heart of hearts whether Wendy would ask any of them out. It was quite a long programme Wendy was making. The dear old Dad and Mum *must* watch the hockey, then—yes, would the Pioneers come out to tea? Dad would ask permission. They could go to Gregory's tea-shop in Mearns and compete in the eating of cream cakes. Afterwards—well, all depended on Dad's plans; but she did hope she would be allowed to stay out late.

Yvette was the only one to stand aloof. Secretly she was quite dismayed at the thought of this outing.

"I'm *sure* Mr. Darlake will say something about the loan," she told herself, "and I shall be rude. Even if not, I hate to be patronized by that sort of person. Wendy's all right, but her people are bound to be impossible. They'll want to load us up with sweets, but *I* don't want their charity."

And the more Yvette talked to herself in that silly fashion, the more she hated the idea of Wendy's parents coming.

Wendy was so ridiculously excited too, and could talk of nothing else all the time the two girls were undressing for bed. It might have been years instead of weeks since she had seen her people. Yvette yawned and got into bed with the air of one who said, "I'm much too tired and bored to talk any more." And Wendy, taking the hint, became silent.

But she was up next morning before Sarah called them, humming and laughing softly to herself, studying the weather and dancing about till Yvette could have screamed.

"They specially want to see you, Yvette," Wendy told her. "I'm sure they would like you to come out with us all the time; but perhaps, as the others will only come for tea, it might be awkward."

"Yes, of course it would," agreed Yvette so hastily that Wendy reddened.

It was directly after breakfast that a big Rolls-Royce car drew up outside the school entrance, and away whirled Wendy in a state of thrills. Of course, as many of the girls as could get near the window without Miss Prinkton seeing them, did so.

Gia and Joan were loud in their comments.

"That must be Mr. Darlake," said Gia. "What a fat little man! He looks more like a beer-barrel than the owner of that lovely car. I hate to see those common fat men puffing at a cigar. I expect *his* father chewed shag."

Joan sniggered. "There's plenty of 'Ma,' " she commented. "Red hair like Wendy, and she looks as if she could pick 'Pa' up and tuck him under her arm. What fine feathers she's wearing too! How killing it is! Oui, Mademoiselle—je

regards——”

But Mademoiselle's orders to leave the window and come and sit down were imperative.

Yvette had listened to all that talk and clenched her hands. She could imagine what the old Darlakes looked like, and it was absolutely hateful to think that her father—a prince amongst men—should be beholden to such people.

“I won't go out with them—I will not,” she told herself, and then remembered the hockey. How unlucky! She simply could not sham headache and then go racing about in the sunshine after a ball. No! she would have to go and eat cream buns and smile politely and even—no! she did *not* see why she should pretend to be enjoying herself when she would be hating it all the time.

“Lucky Wendy,” said Sybilla plaintively, as she attacked a stolid square of suet and treacle, “I do wonder what she is having to eat! Roast partridge and strawberry ice, I expect. Some people have all the plums. But I will say of Wendy, she is every bit as eager to give as to receive. How's yourself, Yvette, pretty strong in the arm, eh? You're playing for school and honour this afternoon under the beneficent gaze of Pa Darlake. Come haste to the hockey, come haste, come haste.”

Yvette made a desperate effort. Sybilla took the Darlakes so cheerily—but then Sybilla's people were not under a hideous debt to Pa Darlake. Yvette still had her father's letter, urging her to be Wendy's friend. She had obeyed too “in the letter and not the spirit.” To tell the honest truth, Yvette would have been delighted to hear Pa Darlake had whirled Wendy off and away for all time from Old Grange.

Hockey players were already assembling in the field when the Rolls-Royce appeared again. And—Yvette was unlucky! She had just come out of the playground door when the car drew up and she heard Wendy calling.

Should she pretend not to hear? But no—she could not do that. Wendy's tones were far too penetrating, and Wendy herself was racing across the gravel towards her.

“Mother and Dad do want to say how d'you do,” she cried. “And we are all going to tea later at such a jolly hotel. I'm having such a happy day.”

Yvette tried to smile and say she was glad to hear it; but she was *not* glad—a bit! She followed her schoolfellow with reluctant feet and felt herself getting scarlet in the face when Mrs. Darlake leaned forward to kiss her. Such a kind kiss it was, and Wendy's mother had such a kind face. Yvette was quite surprised. Mrs. Darlake must have been a beautiful girl, with red hair which she wore in a coronet, and though her face was lined by suffering, it had such a motherly, sweet expression. Not one *bit* what Joan had described! No one could call Mrs. Darlake common, though. Yes! “Pa” was fat and jolly and

“tubby,” with Wendy’s turned-up nose and merry eyes. There was only one word for Pa Darlake, and that was *jolly*. Yvette was terribly afraid *he* meant to kiss her too! and it was almost as bad when he patted her on the shoulder.

“So this is our Wendy’s friend,” he said, “and you’ll have to be our friend too, my dear. I know your father and he’s one of the best. I hope to see him next week and shall tell him about our little visit. Now, young ladies both, what about this ’ockey?”

Yes—he actually dropped an “h.” Yvette was horrified. Of course her father *could* not be a friend to this common little fat man. Wendy had flown off to change her clothes and Yvette longed to follow her. But Mrs. Darlake had her hand, and Pa Darlake was walking on her other side, just as if they had both taken possession of her. Yvette, crimson with vexation, walked slowly with her companions towards the field railing. She could see Joan and Gia standing near, whispering and laughing, and guessed what fun they were making of her.

It hurt Yvette’s pride terribly to think those girls should be accusing her of playing up to people who were rich and vulgar, especially when she knew Gia’s people were far more common than the Darlakes.

How hateful it all was! Yvette longed to go and wash her face, *scrub* it hard, just so that she might feel cleaner *inside*. Do you know what she meant? I think it was because the better part of her nature wanted to clean away all these mean and petty feelings.

It was a relief when Wendy came bounding back. Happy Wendy, who thought her darling Mum and Dad the two most perfect people in the world and wanted to show them what a splendid schoolgirl she was becoming.

The Woollies and Sybilla had to come and be introduced, and Yvette envied their evident enjoyment of Pa Darlake’s jokes. Sybilla chummed with him at once, and the Woollies glued themselves to Wendy’s mother.

Then, presently, out came Miss Caddock, and the game began. Yvette did not feel at all in hockey mood, and missed several balls. Hockey was a bore today; there were such numbers of other things she would have liked to be doing; and yet all the while she knew what she hated was to watch the fat little gentleman in check trousers and black coat clapping and cheering every time his Wendy made a brilliant stroke. And Wendy *was* playing brilliantly. Again and again she swung round her stick and sent the ball skimming towards the goal.

One thing was sure: Wendy would be in the hockey team, and her popularity would grow apace.

Couldn’t money do anything? Yvette asked the question bitterly, and turned to find Joan Pinson beside her—Joan, her mean face wreathed in mocking smiles.

“Jealous of the new school pet, Yvette?” she whispered as she passed on to her place. “My dear, even if you *are*, you need not turn *all* the cream sour.”

And Yvette, as she watched the other take her place near the goal, felt her fingers itch in the longing to shake her. Was it true, though? What *were* her feelings towards Wendy? Not very friendly, I fear, especially later when, before saying good-bye to Miss Caddock and the Old Grange girls, Pa Darlake made a little speech.

“I’ve been telling your good mistress, girls,” he said in his genial way, “that I want you all to have a treat at my expense. But I don’t quite know what to suggest. So Wendy is going to have the money to spend as she likes. She tells me on the Q.T. that she is going to try and coax Miss Caddock to go with you all to Carbrae Fair—or else all a-nutting to Mallington Woods. But that’s Wendy’s affair. You’ll have to thank her and not me. If she likes to toss the money into the river or buy a di’mond ring, it’s up to her to do it. The only condition I make is that at Christmas-time she gives an account of the money. That’s all, though I hope to be over before Christmas to see the play I hear is going to be acted; so I shall have time then for another chat. Come along, Wendy and Co.”

And, tucking laughing Wendy’s arm through his own, off the little man trotted, followed by cheers and clappings.

Yvette would have given a great deal *not* to go too, but it was no use. She could think of no excuse, though once again Joan was maliciously whispering loud enough for her to hear. “What a speech, and what a ‘pa’! I wonder what Old Grange is coming to. But—our Yvette seems quite resigned, eh? The loaves and fishes taste good. I don’t blame her. Poor Yvette!”

It was very much “poor Yvette,” though not in the way the speaker meant!

CHAPTER VIII

THE PAPER-CHASE

And, after all, the majority of the Old Grange girls had been deaf to Pa Darlake's "h's." In fact, his praises were being loudly sung by the Old Grange girls when Wendy and her friends returned from that memorable day out.

"Do tell us what you are going to plan, ducks," coaxed half a dozen of the most eager holiday-lovers as they crowded round her. "Will it be Carbrae Fair? Hurrah! Don't change your mind, Wendy. Carbrae Fair is grand."

Wendy, flushed and excited, sat on the edge of the table.

"What do we do at the fair?" she asked. "Do the people dance a Highland fling? That's what *I* want to see. It must be grand. And bagpipes. Of course, I want to hear the bagpipes playing. But Sybilla says there's much more than all that at a fair—all sorts of games and races and side shows. And Carbrae ruins to see, and the corkscrew steps to climb. Oh, it must be Carbrae for certain, and what fun we will have!"

"Don't leave it too long, Wendy," smiled Alison, "or the weather will spoil everything. October is behaving itself beautifully, but it can't last."

Wendy nodded. "I shall have to ask Miss Caddock," she said, "and leave it to her. It's too lovely for words."

The girls quite agreed there. Some of the more curious wanted to know how much money Mr. Darlake had given; but the question did not reach Wendy's ears, though she made no secret of the amount to Yvette.

"Twenty pounds," she said; "it *does* seem a fortune. In two ten-pound notes. I feel like a millionaire. I suppose I shall have to give it to Miss Caddock to take care of. What glorious times we are having! I'm going to ask for Donald to come with us to Carbrae. Don't you feel very well, Yvette? You don't look it!"

Yvette flushed as she replied that she felt perfectly well, though she nearly added that she did not want to hear any more about Carbrae.

The Pioneers had not had a chance to hold any meetings of late. So much seemed to be happening! There was hockey—and the Pioneers were in force there. Four of them were in the team. Sybilla was the only one who was not, but she took a keen interest in the game all the same. Mr. Clinton's pupils were working hard for the mystery prize; in fact, Wendy was the only one who did not seem to be "wearing her brain out" with mathematical problems. Sybilla, who was competing too, openly scolded the latter.

"Wendy, you're a horror," she declared. "There you sit, smiling serenely,

taking no trouble whatever, yet on the day of the class you can answer about three times as clearly as any of us. *I* believe you've got in league with Michael Scott."

Wendy laughed. "It's in my bones," she said, "nothing to praise me for. I didn't make myself mathematical. To-morrow I'm going to tea with Mr. Clinton to be introduced to Poppy and Pansy."

Doreen, who had been sitting near, looked up as Wendy ran off.

"It's all favouritism," she burst out passionately. "Mr. Clinton has made a favourite of Wendy, and of course she'll win the prize. It's not fair."

Sybilla frowned. "Don't be a duffer, Doreen," she retorted. "Of course it's absolutely fair. If Wendy wins the prize, it will be because she is cleverer than you or I, and not because Mr. Clinton is proud of discovering a genius amongst a pack of dunces!"

Doreen shrugged her shoulders and reopened her book. But—she really hated Wendy Darlake at that moment.

And Wendy, little dreaming that she was evoking such feelings, went singing on her way, thinking what a jolly place school was and how she loved to give her school chums pleasure.

The paper-chase on Saturday, too, was an event in itself. What a business the tearing up of paper was, and what excitement in drawing lots for the hares!

Ailsie and Rachel Owen were the lucky ones, and every one agreed that they would be a pair of tough hares, needing all the patience and energy of the hounds.

"It's sure to be wet, so why worry?" demanded Dulcie Dilwyn, known by the joyous nickname of Dismal Dulcie. "It always *does* rain when we have paper-chases. It's simply waste of time to tear up paper."

But Dulcie proved to be wrong for once, and the day dawned bright, fresh, and just perfect for energetic lassies to climb hills and race across dales. Miss Mallins, the young sports mistress, was "whipper in" of the hounds, and urged the latter not to allow those business-like hares to have the laugh on their side.

Mona was quite depressed at being parted from her sister, but cheered up when Sybilla took her under her wing.

"You and Wen will keep together, I suppose," said the latter to Yvette, who was kneeling to wrestle with her unruly shoe-lace.

"No," jerked Yvette, giving an untimely tug, "I'm running with Jill Wogan. I thought——" But the lace had snapped, giving Yvette all the excuse she wanted.

Sybilla whistled as she strode off. She felt like shaking Yvette at times. Wendy was waiting in the garden room, feeling rather like the old man and the donkey. Being sure the Pioneers would be keeping together, she had refused a number of offers of other girls to run with her, and now felt like being

stranded. Sybilla appeared in the nick of time.

“Form—threes,” she sang, “the best of company if carefully selected. You, I, and Mona will be the victors of a well-fought field. Excelsior! Come on, chums.”

Wendy hesitated. “What about Yvette?” she asked. “We must not leave her out.”

Sybilla grimaced. “Jill Wogan had tacked herself on to her,” she explained, “so all is well. Hurry up, Wendona.”

And Wendy, making a very shrewd guess as to the state of the case, obeyed, but her pleasure had gone.

The more she tried to play loyal chums to Yvette, the farther off she got. Did Yvette really dislike her?

Sybilla could be the most amusing companion when she chose, and she chose now. Mona forgot all about the forsaking of Ailsie and Wendy, *almost* forgot the snubbing of Yvette as she listened to Sybilla’s drolleries. And from drolleries it was not too far a cry to romance.

“We aren’t going to forget October 31st,” declared Sybilla; “exams and prizes, hockey matches and Christmas plays can repeat themselves over and over again, but nevermore may we have such an ideal chance of seeing real live genuine ghosts. All Hallows’ comes but once a year. It’s going to be a—red-letter day—no—not that exactly—a luminous-letter night. If only we could buy lobsters and piccalilli pickle, together with some of the cook’s cold lemon stodge, we should be certain of making a repast which would cause the ears of the Psycy . . . something Society to tingle. Best leg foremost, Mona, or you’ll have that saucy sister of yours crowing over us.”

Mona chuckled. “Don’t talk so much, Syb,” she urged. “You make me laugh and I lose my breath. These hills are bad enough.”

“Round the rugged mountain, the ragged ruffians ran,” teased Sybilla. “Wendy is the best ‘stayer.’ Not a single puff. One tick, Wendy. I really must breathe.”

Wendy laughed. She was a sturdy runner and looked in patronizing amusement at her panting comrades.

“Poor little girls,” she teased, “you are in a bad way. Up you come and down we run. The paper trail is before us, but where the rest of the hounds can be, I don’t know.”

“Or care,” said Sybilla. “Well, kill me if you must. Butchered to make a Roman holiday. One, two, three—off.”

And away raced the three down the winding slope, their speed increasing willy-nilly, till Mona, who was slightly ahead, tripped and fell headlong.

It was as much as the others could do to check themselves from falling over her.

“Hurt?” gasped Wendy—and a moan answered her.

“It’s o-only my w-wretched a-ankle,” wailed Mona, “but it *does* hurt, though it will be b-better soon. Sybilla—you wretch—you’re laughing.”

“No, I’m not,” retorted Sybilla, “at least only an inward grin. I’ve hurt my own poor legs enough already in passing through brambles. Your ankle, my dear child, is one of those things known as a blessing in disguise. I, your friend, will return home with you after Wendy has finished that excellent first aid, and she will go on to gather our laurels and her own.”

In spite of pain, Mona had to smile. She knew quite well that Sybilla was only joking to hide her self-sacrifice, since no one had been keener than she on the paper-chase; and if she had *made* a sacrifice of this return home, Wendy would have insisted on coming herself. As it was, Wendy was quite willing to go ahead, following the track of the paper till the hares were secured.

Sybilla and Mona watched her tall, gawky figure, with its long legs and arms, and head bent slightly forward, till Wendy was out of sight.

Then, stifling a sigh, Sybilla offered her arm to the other girl.

“Come along, chum,” she said. “The lame and maimed go home together to cheer the victors when they arrive.”

And, sure enough, there they were, seated on the wide window-ledge in the schoolroom to shout a welcome to a pair of dilapidated but triumphant hares, who, having doubled on their tracks, reached home in safety to the great indignation of the hounds who came straggling in—some soon, some late—all tired, but mostly smiling and hungry.

“Where’s Wendy?” was the question Sybilla asked, first carelessly, then with growing anxiety.

It was odd that no one should have seen her.

And—still—no Wendy, even after the rest of the hounds had gone readily to their tea.

Sybilla sought out Yvette to question.

“Did you see her?” she asked. “She’s not home yet. I do hope she’s not met with an accident. Didn’t you see her at all?”

Yvette blushed and hesitated. Sybilla’s glance was keenly questioning—almost accusing as she repeated her question.

“Wendy doesn’t know this part half as well as we do,” she added. “*Did* you see her, Yvette, and if so, why on earth didn’t you and Jill call her to join you?”

CHAPTER IX

THE IMPORTANCE OF £20

Wendy walked briskly on. She was no longer enthusiastic about overtaking the hares, and, as she came out on to the moors, the temptation to wander off “on her own” and think over things overcame her. She was so puzzled, poor child, in this business of school life: it seemed so difficult to take things as they came without asking that tormenting *Why?*

The one particular *Why?* with Wendy concerned Yvette. Why was Yvette so changeable? Sometimes she seemed the best of chums, and at others she would avoid Wendy as if she really disliked her. Had Joan been right, and *had* Yvette said she was not a lady—and, moreover, a girl who had chosen the wrong set at school? Wendy was sharp enough to see that there were half a dozen sets even in a comparatively small school like Old Grange, but she was sure she would never have cared to join any but the Pioneers.

“It seems mean to say so,” murmured Wendy to herself, “but I can’t help thinking Joan Pinson is at the bottom of half the mischief. Only—Joan would not actually influence a girl like Yvette, who is so proud and ‘straight.’ I wonder if I dare ask Yvette right out. I believe I will if I get a chance this evening.” And she squared her shoulders in a very determined way.

She had been so busy thinking about her friends—and enemies—that she had hardly noticed which way she was coming, and now halted, laughing in self-mockery. *What* a goose she was to come stumping along without a thought of finding her way.

“Moors look so alike,” she murmured to herself, “I believe I had better turn right round and go back, only—which is *right round?*”

As she frowned and smiled over the question, the sound of a stifled sob caught her ear. Some one crying! That meant some one to be comforted. Finding one’s way home was quite a secondary consideration! Off started Wendy—and did not have far to go. There, face down amongst the heather, lay a ragged little figure. Wendy recognized it at once.

“Tam!” she cried, “Shepherd Jamie’s boy. Why, what is the matter? Are you hurt?”

Tam rolled right over and stared up at his questioner. His face was smudged and stained with tears, his thin hands clenched over his ragged chest.

“It’s father,” he sobbed, “he’s looking for me. He’ll verra likely kill me when he gets me, and—and I couldna help ganging to sleep. I was sae tired. And when I woke two o’ the lammies had strayed over the Falls. One he—he

fetched back. I saw him climbing ower the rocks, but the other was drowned. He didna see me hiding, but when he does, he'll be killing me."

Wendy's own eyes filled with tears of sympathy.

"That is bad," she said. "Poor little lamb! But indeed I am sure you could not help going to sleep. And surely your own father would know that. Shall I come home with you and help explain? I can't bring back the lamb, but I could pay for it. I've got enough money."

How Tam's face brightened. "Hechs!" was all he said, but after stepping ahead a few paces he looked back to be sure Wendy was following. And she was quite close.

"I promise to come," she said; "it is horrid going to have a scolding all alone, and some people won't wait to have things explained." She was thinking of Miss Prinkton!

"Father's been drinking the whusky spirit again," said Tam; "it's because o' wee Jean. The doctors have been seeing her and there's a young mon frae Edinburgh who said he'd tak' her away to Edinbro' town and put her in a fine hospital and cure her. It wad cost twenty pounds though, and—and father has never the money. It fretted him sae that he took the whusky spirit, and that's why I dread the stick."

Wendy felt the colour come hotly to her cheeks and then die down. It was rather dreadful to be going to a lonely hut on the moors to interview a Black Jamie who had been drinking whiskey. But—that was not the only reason why Wendy flushed up.

Twenty pounds! *She* had twenty pounds—in two ten-pound notes. Twenty pounds to buy popularity for herself with the girls of Old Grange.

Wendy could call a spade a spade, and she guessed perfectly well why she had been petted and fussed over lately by girls who had taken no notice of her at all before her father's visit. And—was Wendy the first to wish for popularity—even if it were bought? She liked being asked about Carbrae Fair and told what a darling her Dad was. She looked forward to a splendid day's holiday of which she would be queen.

But—twenty pounds would cure a little suffering child and make her strong and happy, able to run about and talk like other bairns. Twenty pounds.

And Dad had said she *might* do what she liked with the money, never guessing the shrewd old man had made a test of that gift with which to try his girl.

"I'll come and—and talk to your father," she said, "and see what can be done. It isn't far, is it? I seem to remember those hills, but then, all hills are alike in Scotland."

Tam pointed, and there, sure enough, was the queer, squat hut which was Black Jamie's home.

Wendy stopped short, giving a gasp of dismay.

Sure enough that was the shepherd himself striding towards them, his face black with anger, his right hand raised, his fist clenched round a thick stick.

It was rather an awful moment. Even Tam could not move, but crept near to Wendy, muttering an incoherent petition. He trusted to her to save him from an undeserved thrashing, and Wendy's courage rose. She stood—defensive and protective—facing the angry man, who was shouting to her to be gone.

"No, Jamie," she cried back, quite as plainly. "I'm not going to go. You gave me your promise, and I believe you keep your word. When I brought wee Jean back you said you'd gladly—ever so gladly—do anything you could to please me. And now I want you to give up beating Tam. He went to sleep and the lamb was drowned. Oh, he told me that, and I'll pay for the lamb, Jamie. I will, truly. I'm sorry for it, poor little thing, and so is Tam. Will you forgive him and shake hands with me? Then I want to come in and see wee Jean."

Shepherd Jamie hesitated. He would have liked to reply that he did not understand, but the lie would not come. He liked Wendy. He had thought of the kindly-spoken English girl who had brought wee Jean home. He could not refuse her pleading. So down came the stick—on the heather, instead of on Tam's back, whilst he grunted an acceptance of the request.

Tam should go without beating—or supper, but, as for wee Jean, she was asleep, and the leddie would not wish to wake her.

"I'll tiptoe," promised Wendy. "I do want to see her. She's a darling."

Jamie did not reply. His mood was still bitter—indeed, he hardly dared think of wee Jean who must suffer all her life because he would never, never earn twenty pounds to pay for her healing. Wendy had reached the hut. She had a particular purpose in going in. Once let her see Cripple Jean—and she would not care *how* many treats the girls of Old Grange lost.

But the lame child was not asleep; she was sitting up amongst a jumble of dirty blankets, playing with a kitten. She recognized Wendy at once and crooned to her, holding out her arms.

Wendy felt a lump come in her throat. She went across and down beside that grubby bed, taking lame Jean in her arms. The little darling! How dared she have hesitated for a moment! Oh, the pet! with her tumbled curls and patient blue eyes. It was dreadful to *see* the patience in those eyes!

"Little petling," whispered Wendy, "you shall be able to run and sing and shout, God willing. I—I'd never forgive myself if I spent the money any other way."

Jean was quite ready to cuddle down back amongst the shawls and coats, whilst Wendy went across to where Shepherd Jamie sat on a stool, the picture of despair. He had not been drinking to-night, but for that very reason his mood was grimmer.

“Jamie,” said Wendy, in her impulsive way, “Tam says Jean can be cured.”

Oh, the look he gave her! There was torture in it, despair, savagery.

“Fine she could,” he muttered, “if I were baillie o’ Craigloch or King o’ England. But how’s a poor shepherd mon to find twenty pounds in a life’s saving? It’s the de’il gets me to think of it.”

Wendy gave a little laugh. “I’ve got twenty pounds,” said she, “and to-morrow will come and put it in your hands. Two money notes. Twenty pounds. It is mine, and I am giving it to you so that wee Jean shall sing and talk and run over the braes. Now, remember, you will see me come over the moors to-morrow, and then Jean will go.”

Black Jamie had kicked back the stool and stood facing the speaker, blazing-eyed. “Havers, lass,” he shouted, “is it my two hands will fling you out on to the heather wi’ your black mocks. Ye’re but a bit lass and tak’ no tent o’ what a father’s heartbreak means, but ye’ll ken something o’ Black Jamie’s de’il mood if ye dinna gang.”

Wendy stood very straight and quiet. When Jamie stopped to gather up the vials of his wrath for another raging, she stepped forward.

“It’s no mock and no he, Jamie,” she said. “I have twenty pounds. My father gave them to me to go pleasuring with school friends, but I am going to give them to you instead. It is a secret—our secret. I shall bring you the money to-morrow and put it in your two hands and say, ‘This is to cure dear wee Jean, with Wendy Darlake’s love—and prayers.’ Now do you believe?”

Her voice shook, and she was half-crying, half-laughing as she saw belief dawn in poor Jamie’s eyes.

Such a wonderful look—a father’s joy to think his little ewe lamb was to be saved from her pitiful sufferings. He could not speak at first, and, when he did, Wendy could not understand all the torrent of words. He was asking her if it *were* true—praying her to tell him the truth, whilst before she had time to reply he was blessing her for her goodness, snatching her two hands and kissing them, crying to God to bless such an angel who had been sent to show him his own wickedness and defiance.

Wendy was quite crying, too, so that presently wee Jean herself awoke, pushing back the shawls and beginning to whimper. It was Tam who stole out to comfort her, and Tam whose thin face broadened into a beam of content when his father patted his shoulder. All was well now in Black Jamie’s hut, and Wendy guessed that the shepherd would not be looking to the “whusky spirit” to drown his troubles for a time. He insisted on seeing this ministering angel on her way home, leaving Tam to watch over Jean. Wendy had quite forgotten her spoiled day’s paper-chase by the time she reached the school, where to her dismay she found she was hopelessly late and that Miss Caddock had been on the point of ’phoning to the police at Mearns.

“Where have you been, dear?” asked the head mistress. “Did you lose your way on the moors? How did it happen? I said all the girls were to go in pairs to the paper-chase.”

Wendy blushed. “Mona and Sybilla were with me,” she explained, “and Mona hurt her ankle. It was quite my own fault for wandering on to the moors. I am very, very sorry.”

Miss Caddock looked anxiously at the speaker.

“You must not go off alone like that again, dear,” she said. “Even the old girls are not allowed to do it, and in case of a new one there is far more danger. Another time, when you want to go for a ramble, you must take one or two comrades. I am sure *you* have no difficulty in finding friends, Wendy child.”

Wendy smiled. “Oh no,” she replied, “I like all the girls, or nearly all, and have lots of friends. I’ll try not to forget about going off alone. I was ever so stupid.”

And seeing the frank smile, meeting the honest eyes of her new and popular pupil, Miss Caddock was satisfied that nothing lay behind the simple explanation, whilst Wendy, glad to escape, ran off to her room. She had missed tea—and supper, and Yvette was already combing her hair when her friend entered. Yvette had heard of Wendy’s arrival and was inclined to mock her own conscience pricks. Wendy had evidently been enjoying herself whilst other people worried about her. And yet—Wendy didn’t look as if she had been having a very gay time! Her eyes were tired, her face betrayed the fact that she had been crying, she had not her usual bright smile.

Again Yvette’s conscience pricked her and she greeted Wendy with a smile of sympathy.

“I *am* sorry—really sorry—you got lost, Wendy,” she said. “I feel it was my fault. I ought to have paired with you. I wish I had.”

It was Wendy’s chance, and she took it.

“It wasn’t anyone’s fault,” she said. “Sybilla was kind as could be. She always is. But, Yvette, you know I want *you* for my friend. You *must* know it. Why won’t you be my friend?”

Yvette’s cheeks grew hot. Wendy’s straightforward demand swept aside all those many little arguments she had had with herself. She had to answer, and to speak the truth. Yet what could she say?

Never had Yvette felt more ashamed of herself.

“I ought to ask myself that, Wendy,” she said at last. “We—we ought to be friends. We must be friends. If you will let me, we *will* be—real chums. I’ve been mean about it. If you don’t mind, I would rather not explain. Only I made up my mind not to like you before you came. It was horrid of me. Will you shake hands, and we’ll be different after to-night? We could be friends—and we will.”

The puzzling faded out of Wendy's eyes. She was not one to wish to go into the depths of reasons and questionings. If Yvette said she would be friends now, she was ready to take her at her word, and with a beaming smile she held out her hand.

"It's what I've wanted ever since I came here," said she. "And—it's jolly of you."

But Yvette was less certain that she deserved such praise!

CHAPTER X

MORE PRICKLES FOR YVETTE

“Not going to Carbrae Fair!” exclaimed Joan Pinson in quite unnecessarily loud tones. “Why, Wendy, I thought it was all arranged! Your father said so. He told us he’d given you the money. Where are we going instead?”

Wendy was very pale. She had certainly not wished Joan to be the first to hear her decision, but the latter had asked so point-blank a question about the treat that there had been no help for it. Now, poor Wendy knew she must face her ordeal. There were about fifteen girls in the schoolroom—the Woollies, Sybilla and Yvette amongst them. Wendy had planned to tell her chums that very afternoon there was to be no treat. Now her hand was forced.

“No, we are not going to Carbrae, Joan,” she replied, noting how the girls were looking in her direction and listening for her reply. “You are quite right about Dad having given me the money, and he said I might try and arrange to go to Carbrae or any place I liked, *or* spend the money as I like. And—I’ve spent it.”

A murmur of dismay and disappointment rose from the listeners. Joan’s eyes narrowed and she gave a very questioning sniff.

“I didn’t understand your father meant it that way,” she said, “and anyhow, I don’t see how you *could* have spent such a lot of money in a week or so. You’ll probably tell me to mind my own business, but—it’s awfully disappointing after such a fuss has been made about your treating the school, and I call it very mean.”

“Wendy’s only having a joke with you,” laughed Laura Peel. “You don’t really mean there’s to be no treat at all, do you, Wendy? It would be too disappointing.”

Wendy stiffened. “That is just what I do mean, though, Laura,” she replied. “I’m very, very sorry. I’d been looking forward to Carbrae too, but I *can’t* help it, and there it is. I’ve spent the money, and we can’t go.”

The murmur rose louder. Laura Peel tossed her head. “I must say I agree with Joan, then,” she retorted; “it is very mean of you.”

“Disgusting,” echoed another.

“I don’t see how you possibly can have spent the money,” argued Joan aggressively.

Sybilla slipped forward, confronting the last speaker.

“My dear Joan,” she purred, in her silkiest tones, “there is surely no mystery too deep for *your* unravelling. But, after all, supposing there is no

mystery? Supposing Wendy *has* chosen to buy herself a gold watch or a new bike or something she has been wanting for ages, she has a perfect right to do so. I'm sure if I were given a nice little sum of money I would much rather buy a wrist-watch than treat *you* to Carbrae Fair. Come along, Wendy, you're wanted in the hockey field."

"I never heard anything so selfish in my life," cried Joan spitefully; "it's all very well, Sybilla, but all the girls will agree with me."

"No, they won't," chorused the Woollies; "we don't, anyway. Mind your own business, Joan."

Wendy was looking across the room. Since the evening of the paper-chase Yvette had been far more friendly, and the Pioneers had been making great plans for their All Hallows' E'en expedition. But now Yvette did not raise her eyes from a letter she was reading. Perhaps she had not heard the discussion going on around her, for certainly her attention seemed wholly given to those closely written pages.

"Come on, Pioneers," sang Sybilla. "Yvette, coming?"

Yvette barely looked up. "No," she answered shortly.

So she had heard, and she had *not* stood loyally on her friend's side. Wendy bit her lip to keep back the tears. Oh, it *was* hard, horribly hard; she didn't mind one pin about the others, but she *had* expected Yvette to be loyal.

And—what was the matter with Yvette? Scarcely had those four chums left the room than she too had risen and slipped quietly away in a different direction. Joan noticed, and nudged Gia, who was standing by. Neither of the two made any remark, but Joan's smile was significant. There was *some* breach in that camp! and Joan for one was delighted. *Why* she had taken such a dislike to Wendy she could hardly have explained herself. Her whole nature was mean and petty and she had been furious when Wendy, rich, generous, and "unplaced" in this world of girls—had deliberately refused her friendship. She meant to pay her back for that slight, and she had found the purpose frustrated till it became a regular passion with her. Yet, she did not want to act openly. It was the last thing in the world she wished to do to make herself unpopular. For one thing she wanted Gia to be her friend. Gia was rich too, and if her parents dropped "h's" wholesale, it did not trouble her.

And meantime, Yvette, little knowing how sharp eyes had watched and nimble brains commented, had gone to the woods which lay to the right of the playing-grounds. She wanted to be alone, to re-read that long letter of her mother's. There was one part—one sentence—which seemed to be burning into her brain.

"After all, dear," wrote Mrs. Glencourt, "your father will probably sell the Castle. I know it will be sad news for you, but it is quite impossible for him to bear the increasing burden of keeping up a large property. And we have had a

most generous offer from your schoolfriend's father, Mr. Darlake. We feel if the old home has to be sold, we would far rather he had it than anyone else, so you must try to be brave and think of the relief it will all be to us."

So, after all, Glencourt would be sold. And Wendy—the girl who had succeeded in making her feel so ungenerous—and she resented because she—Wendy—had shown such loyal love and forgiveness in return to unfriendly actions—who would now call Glencourt home! Oh, it was unbearable, unthinkable! Yvette felt as if her heart would break. Just now she told herself *she* would rather *anyone* took the Castle than those horrible Darlakes!

"And I *won't* be Wendy's friend," moaned Yvette; "I will not be her friend. She shall never patronize me, and if her father does take the Castle, I will never go near it again. Oh, I am the unhappiest girl in the world! I hate Wendy."

She was quivering as she spoke, clenching her hands and beating them against her knees. Yes, she hated Wendy—just because Wendy's father was buying her old home, thus saving her father's life, restoring peace and comfort to her mother, and doing all in his power to help those whom he pitied and admired.

Lying there, Yvette heard her school chums calling, but did not answer. She would have pleaded headache and gone to her room—only, if she did, that tiresome Wendy would be bringing her eau-de-Cologne, and sympathy, and the rest!

Did Wendy know about Glencourt Castle? But no, in her mother's letter there was a P.S. saying Wendy did not know. *That* was a comfort, if it were true.

When Yvette did at last meet her four chums rushing headlong down the passage towards the dining-room, she was quite calm again, and if Wendy at once noticed those traces of tears, the others could not have done so.

And Sybilla and the Woollies already had Yvette by the arms.

"You *slug*," scolded Sybilla, "not to have come with us. We've met Donald, and he's as keen as mustard about All Hallows' E'en. It's on Thursday. We shall have to make a great adventure of it, and contrive to reach the garden room after prayers instead of going upstairs. There, we'll lie low till all is quiet. Then, away we skedaddle. Donald is going to meet us at the bridge. He is bringing the picnic things; we took him the contributions. It's grand. Aren't you excited, Yvette, or have you a pain in your big toe? Donald was frightfully disappointed you were not with us."

Yvette tried to laugh, but it was a very shaky affair.

"We'll have a great time," she replied, "and of course the garden room is best, though knotted sheets sound more the proper thing. Don't forget it is the hockey match this afternoon."

“And Dad sent me some crystallized fruits by the last post, Yvette,” added Wendy, half shyly. “One box was for you. I’ve put it on your chest of drawers. They are scrumptious.”

Yvette felt her colour burning.

“Awfully kind of your father,” she replied briefly, “but—I’m sorry I can’t take them. I told you before that I did not care for—presents.”

The Woollies had run on out of hearing, and Sybilla, her head bent low, was humming as she too walked on; but Sybilla had heard the cruel snub and felt her “bristles rising.” What on earth could Yvette mean by treating a jolly fine girl like Wendy in such a fashion? There and then Sybilla decided to pick a first opportunity to have it out with Yvette. Wendy had not answered that biting speech. Tears were too near. She had been absolutely startled by Yvette’s words. Involuntarily she asked herself what she had done. But Yvette, having delivered her “bomb,” had strolled on after the Woollies, telling herself she had done a very clever thing. Now Wendy understood that her overtures of friendly bribery were in vain. She *might* possess the common sense to ask to be moved into another room.

And yet, all the while, foolish Yvette could not be rid of the sense of her own meanness, though she would not fight against it. If she did so, it would mean accepting Wendy as a friend. She would *not* do that—never!—never!

It was an obstinate resolve, too, which threatened to hurt Yvette far more than Wendy herself, for—was Wendy horribly thick-skinned, or superlatively long-suffering? The crystallized fruits were removed from that chest of drawers, but Wendy showed no sign of sulking or resentment. She was quite ready to chatter about All Hallows’ E’en ghosts and Donald’s eagerness to re-explore the Wizard’s seat.

“He’s the jolliest boy, isn’t he?” added Wendy, ignoring Yvette’s monosyllables. “At least, jolly is not quite the word. I suppose it should be *interesting*. He’s awfully interesting, and so grateful to you. He sent a message to say that you simply must be there on Thursday.”

“Of course I shall,” replied Yvette irritably. “I shall post him my picnic contribution. I can’t think why Syb didn’t ask me for it.”

It annoyed her more than anything when the chums, knowing the limitations of her pocket-money, tried to save her expense. She was not a pauper!

Wendy had had some big bunches of late roses and Michaelmas daisies sent her, and not only had she made a regular bower of their little room, but carried an apronful downstairs for the governesses.

“Of course, Wendy is a favourite,” murmured Joan in Yvette’s ear as the two stood apart from the admiring cluster round the table. “She buys her friends. Sickening, I call it. Or is it just vulgar? Oh, pardon, Yvette, I forgot

you were her friend.” And Joan looked the other girl fully in the face.

Yvette frowned. “I don’t wish to discuss Wendy Darlake with you at all,” she replied coldly as she moved away.

At least, she did not intend to exchange comradeship from a Wendy to a Joan!

But Yvette was to be taught that it is a hopeless thing to stand with a foot in one camp and the other in an opposite one. Sybilla spoke—as only Sybilla could speak—on the subject.

“If you weren’t so much on your high horse, Yvette,” said she, “I should call you an idiot, and give you a shaking. Is it the green-eyed monster or some other bogey which is demoralizing Yvette of the Pioneers? No use to growl. I heard you snub poor old Wen unmercifully about those sweets. It was fairly beastly of you, and I expect you are ashamed of yourself. That’s that. Having got it off my chest, we’ll shake hands and be our own jolly selves again. Tomorrow night must see the ranks drawn close. That sounds all right, eh? There’s a tang of cold in the air which makes me feel quite frisky. Don’t be a kill-joy; we are Pi-Pioneers.”

And Sybilla had a way with her. Yvette recognized that, and saw her road clear. If she didn’t want to be flung back on a set she disliked and despised, she must not brood over what could not be helped. At any rate, till after the 31st they must be “comrades all” in a grand ghost-quest—and fun. *Some* people would have been amused at the bracketing of the two; but, then, “*some people*” would not have included a jolly band of comrades.

So, instead of flaming and flaring at the outspoken Sybilla, Yvette laughed and promised that she would be at her best and brightest for the morrow. Wendy was one of the easiest people to help bridge a gap; from her manner Yvette could never have guessed what some of those smiles had cost the brave little lass who was doing her best to win a real and coveted friend.

And Sybilla, firmly resolved, too, that that Hallowe’en fun should be real fun, worked hard to oil the wheels of her band. It was up to a captain to do so—so Sybilla the shrewd thought, and she did not forget to look Joan’s way when Yvette and Wendy came into the schoolroom on the Thursday morning, laughing together over some joke they had in common.

It was a perfect October day, even though it lay on the borders of November, and those Pioneers very nearly gave themselves away half a dozen times by unwary whispers. It did not require very much discernment on the part of some one particularly interested in those Pioneers to guess that they were sharing a secret.

Joan watched and puzzled. She was giving herself a very great deal of extra trouble about something. I wonder what? And I wonder, too, when Gia excused herself from going for a walk with her, *why* Joan chose “stodgy”

Doreen Menleigh?

"I wish we *could* tell Miss Caddock what we were going to do," sighed Wendy once. "She is such a sport, but, of course, she would have to forbid us. Do you know, girls, I saw the eighth wonder of the world to-day. Lena and Sir Alan Arnloch walking up the hill together! They were talking in quite a friendly way too. I nearly fell on my back. You all said it was a case of cat and dog."

"So it was," agreed Sybilla, "but Sir Alan did call at the school, you know, after Yvette saved Donald. So if we have healed that breach, we ought all to have putty medals. Now, don't forget the signal, and be sure you pop your goloshes down with your other things behind the box in the garden room."

There were several visits paid that day to the garden room, first by one then the other of the Pioneers; but Sybilla suggested their big coats had better be tucked snugly away under some of the trees in the shrubbery, since otherwise Miss Prinkton or Frou-Frou would certainly be discovering them.

"Colder it grows," whispered Sybilla to the giggling Woollies, "and colder fears come o'er my troubled mind; 'tis many a ghost, white-ribbed and bare, in Wizard's Glen we'll find."

"Wretch," retorted Ailsie, "but we aren't afraid. Excelsior! We could eat a Banbury cake and study the spooks all at once—eh, Mona? Avaunt, ye coward fears—and don't forget Alison has a birthday and Lena is providing special cake all round because she is head girl."

"All the better," said Sybilla; "it will build us up. We shall need it."

And really those Pioneers felt the words to be prophetic as they stole out and away on that great adventure.

Yvette and Wendy were the first to reach the shelter of the garden room, and Yvette had certainly forgotten her bitter mood of resentment as she squeezed Wendy's hand and hid with her behind the door. Sybilla was the next, trying hard to rustle herself about into an imitation of Frou-Frou. The Woollies came headlong with a tale of warning.

"Joan is a *cat*," said Ailsie breathlessly. "I'm sure she is on the prowl, and she's sniggling up to Miss Prinkton too. Come along, girls, or we shall be tracked down. Doreen Menleigh looks rather as if she were sitting on pins. I've noticed Doreen has been sitting on the edge of Joan's pocket of late, which may account for pricks; but it's no use meeting trouble half-way."

No need for further warning, though!

One by one the five Pioneers crept out on to the terrace, closing the garden-room door softly behind them. It had already been locked up for the night, so no one would be going in there again!

Would they not, though? Certainly, not five minutes after the five girls had reached the shrubbery, the inner door was softly opened and Joan Pinson

entered. She looked carefully round, then stole to the opposite door. Unlocked! *And*, the key gone! But there were two strong bolts, top and bottom. Joan laughed to herself, as, tiptoeing, she drew that top bolt forward.

The Pioneers would be finding an unexpected adventure awaiting them on their return home presently.

CHAPTER XI

ALL HALLOW'S E'EN

“Halt!”

How the Pioneers squealed, jumped, and did everything that well-trained adventurers ought not to have done!

And it was only Donald, after all. How he laughed! In spite of vexation at their own panic, they had to laugh too.

“You deserve to be made to shiver before the night is over,” declared Sybilla wrathfully. “And where—oh, broken reed—is the picnic hamper?”

“Take care,” warned Donald, “or the broken reed will go off on his own and devour those pies. I got old Kirstie to make some of her own special. Pork! That *ought* to do it. Pork-pies and shortbread eaten at moonrise on All Hallows' E'en make a certainty of ghost-seeing. So be prepared. Let me know in good time, though, when any of you are thinking of collapsing, and I'll go home.”

“What a knight-errant!” scoffed Ailsie. “You forget we are five to one. How humble you will be before we've finished with you! To begin with, a race to the top of the ridge.”

They raced, and Donald won—by a few paces only; but he made the most of it, balancing on the top of a boulder and crowing like a cock.

“Of course, you *would* be proud, winning by the skin of your teeth,” said Yvette scornfully. “And do you think it is treating the Wizard with proper respect to go crowing over his domains?”

“No worse than eating pork-pies whilst he takes his moonlight constitutional,” teased Donald. “Now—all in a row, so that no one can complain of not getting an equally good view of Mr. Michael. Isn't this jolly? We'll eat first and then tell ghost yarns to bring us to the right freezing pitch. Here's the hamper.”

What a big one it was, too! And Donald had not overrated the delicious pork-pies.

“They melt in your mouth,” sighed Sybilla as she took a second. “If your ghost stories are half as good, Donald, we shall have a perfect time even without the Wizard.”

“I'm not sure if it won't be *better* without him,” added Wendy. “I'm quite calm and peaceful at the moment. Are those ginger snaps, Donald? I've no room left at all, but I can't refuse. But I'm absolutely sure none of us can think of a ghost story at all, unless it be Sybilla. Shall we have a spelling-bee or a

sing-song instead?”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself for even suggesting such a thing,” said Sybilla in horror. “Just start working yourselves up as if you’d swallowed yeast. Look down into the inky depths of the Glen and imagine you see a shadow steal out into that patch of light near the blasted ash-tree. A ghost-tree—killed by magic spell. Hark! Was that a wail stealing down from the ridge, a sobbing wail of anguish—a death-cry, chilling the icy air? Hush! . . . Listen! Do not stir, for *eyes* are watching you from near the blasted tree. A man, sinister and evil-eyed, wrapped in his long black cloak. Michael Scott himself, waiting, watching for the issue of some dark spell. Another cry . . . then silence. Ghosts flit up the Glen—one by——”

Yvette clutched the speaker’s knee. “*Don’t*, Syb,” she urged; “it’s worse than any ghost story. I absolutely have the creeps. You’re a wretch.”

“And . . . it’s true,” breathed Wendy, “I *did* see a shadow. I believe Donald saw it too, for I felt him start. *Did* you, Donald,—down over there, higher up than the Wizard’s seat?”

Donald gave his nose a vicious rub. “Yes,” he replied; “it sounds bosh, but it is perfectly true. I think I’ll have to go and investigate. I saw two shadows—one was the figure of a man in a cloak, the other in shepherd’s dress. I’m not romancing. The taller one went first, the other followed close behind. They—er—can’t have been ghosts, but they were queer.”

“Can’t be ghosts, indeed!” replied Sybilla scornfully. “Of course they were ghosts. Who else could they be? The peasants would never come this way alone, and they would warn any strangers. Besides, they weren’t real a bit. They were shadows. I felt cold all over when I saw them. And you’re *not* going down, Donald. Sit still and tell us a ghost story—a cheerful one in which the ghost turns out to be some one’s old white cow looking over the churchyard wall, or something equally comforting.”

“Pooh!” said Donald, “look at Yvette. She pretends to have the creeps, and now there she goes creeping off and having the crow over us!”

The other Pioneers were on the move. Donald’s presence was in itself an inspiration. They must show him that girls had plenty of stiffening in their backbones!

Very silent, very still lay the Glen; only now and again a scared rabbit went dashing off in a panic, whilst the autumn wind moaned and skirled amongst the forest trees.

It was cold—dismally cold and unpleasant. The hamper was empty, the pork-pies already were exercising a depressing influence. Donald had overtaken Yvette and the two were clambering quite briskly down over brambles and boulders. They were not very close to Michael’s seat, though they could see the outline of the great rocks.

An owl hooted dismally, and some wood snapped.

“Ghosts don’t break up sticks,” whispered Sybilla, who with the Woollies had tracked the others down; “but—surely no one else would be here—at night?”

“Now’s the time for the ghost story,” hinted Mona. “Fire away, Donald.”

Donald sighed. He would have preferred ghost-stalking to ghost-talking, but was too courteous to say so. Donald was not just the ordinary rough-and-ready schoolboy. Perhaps the glamour of native glens and romance of wild moors had loaned him the gift of old-world chivalry.

“There is a ghost at Banfyne Cross,” said he, “but rather a curious sort of one, for it is the ghost of a collie dog belonging to a shepherd who lived in 1745 and carried secret messages for Bonnie Prince Charlie. For a long time he carried his messages and no one suspected him; but there was a carrier called Gay Jamie whose route lay across Winnington Moor, and he at last smelt a rat. He found there would be a big reward for denouncing old Colin, especially if he could get hold of one of the packets. And Gay Jamie was ready to do anything for gold, so that he might spend it in drink. So he waylaid Colin at the old Cross and murdered him. He had to kill Colin’s most faithful friend too—Laird, the collie—and he buried both close by. But Laird, the collie, had his revenge, for he haunted Gay Jamie ever after. Wherever the carrier went, be sure there would be the patter of following feet or the whine of a dog, and there was Laird—his teeth drawn back—his eyes fierce. Of course, it made Gay Jamie drink more and more. He was always at the bottle,—always trying to drown his senses for fear of Laird. At last he became so bad that he used to run screaming through the streets and across the moors saying ‘*’tw*a green eyes’ were ‘*’ahint*’ him, or he would be heard babbling and beseeching Laird to ‘*gang* awa.’ But Laird did not gang awa, and at last one winter’s night he drove his enemy out over the moors as far as Banfyne Cross, and there next morning Gay Jamie was found dead. The folk dug down all round the spot and found the poor shepherd’s body and that of Laird too. They were all buried in the churchyard—but . . . some people say Laird still haunts the old cross-roads, though I’ve never been able to discover anyone who has actually seen him.”

The girls had been listening breathlessly, and gave a shiver of delight at the close of the tale.

“I love the creeps,” said Sybilla, “and that story gives them one properly. Fancy being followed by a ghost-dog! I’d far rather have a commonplace thing like a headless woman or a vampire. But—Donald—jokes apart! I believe something or some one *is* moving down there. All sit or squat quite still and keep your eyes glued to the centre of the Glen. Are my eyes playing tricks, or are those Donald’s two men creeping through the bracken not far from the stream?”

It was something new to hear Sybilla's high-pitched tones dropped to a whisper, and the little band was ready enough to obey the demand.

And, yes! There was something—a shadow—the shadow of a man—followed by another and still another—stealing, single file, down amongst the trees close to the stream.

Neither Donald nor the girls spoke till at last those flitting shadows had vanished.

Then, without a word, Donald rose, making one mute gesture of command as he slipped away.

Of course he meant to stalk them, and of course those eager, only half-scared girls would have liked to follow; but, though Ailsie did make a movement forward, Yvette checked her at once.

“No,” she said very softly, “it wouldn't be the game. We should only spoil Donald's job if they are men up to no good; and I'm sure Donald is too big a sport not to understand, and call us if we *can* help. If they are ghosts, he won't see much more than we've seen,—and we can come again. It's beastly having to wait—I believe it takes more grit too,—but we're going to show we know the game.”

That was quite enough. The Pioneers knew the meaning of *esprit de corps* from A to Z, and they just glued themselves down to wait the return of their scout. It was a dismal wait. They were all on edge—even Wendy!—and longing for news, whilst the Glen seemed to grow gloomier and more gloomy.

Once, the cry of a night-hawk rang skirling down from the moors, and a stronger gust of wind set old branches creaking mournfully. Something kept up a mysterious tapping which brought the watchers closer together; and, if confession had been honest, there would have been a tale told of longings for bed.

“It must be past midnight,” whispered Mona. “Oh, how our poor heads will ache to-morrow!”

“Supposing Donald does not come back,” hinted Ailsie. “What shall we do?”

“Cheerio, my ducks,” sang Sybilla softly, “here he is. A young man in a hurry too. How he is puffing! Well, Scout?”

“They weren't *ghosts*,” said Donald decidedly; “they were men. Two were strangers, and I'm pretty sure, from the way they crept about, they were town men. The third was the shepherd who lives over on the moors—Black Jamie. I recognized him as he came out into the open by Mrs. Gannow's house. *That* was where they all stopped to hang around, and it is my belief that is just where they wanted to inspect. They might have been after Mrs. Gannow's cats, or her chickens, or they may be real burglars; anyhow, Scotsie, her dog, flew out and they bolted—fairly melted away. I never saw chaps slip away so

silently and quickly. Then I came back. I saw Mrs. Gannow's lights go up, and her chickens are safe enough for to-night. I shall tell her gardener to-morrow. She's too grumpy for me to interfere with, but I would hate not to warn her if I thought she was going to be robbed."

"Well," said Sybilla with the air of a philosopher, "it really was obliging of the ghost-burglars to pass this way on this particular night, as it has given just the flip and the thrill we wanted. I'm sorry Elsie and Andrew wouldn't put in an appearance, and of course the Wizard would have been the cream of all; but we've not done badly. When's the next ghost-night, Donald?"

"New Year's Eve," he replied. "And you will all have gone then, worse luck! I never expected to miss *girls!*"

How they laughed! He said it so naïvely, without the least intention of being rude, and they knew what he meant too, shaking hands vigorously as they parted at the gates of the Old Grange.

"If we can't look for ghosts again at midnight, we can explore the Wizard's seat at midday," remarked Yvette. "We shall have to plan it."

"No time like the present," added Sybilla, "or rather to-morrow—after school; we'll be sitting in a row along the lower wall. Don't forget to come, Donald, or we *might* go in search of the Wizard on our own. Tra-la-lee! What fun there's still to be! That Glen is a perfect gold-mine. I wish I could buy it and build a tower at the head of it."

"And become a witch yourself," teased Donald. "*Wouldn't* I help to roast you! Bye-bye."

"It's been a real success," said Wendy, as they tramped up the drive, "and now it is over I feel I shan't rest till we have had another adventure. I wonder when that will be!"

Alas! Wendy did not have to wait long. Yvette was the first to reach the door of the garden room, and very softly turn the handle. At first she hardly felt a tinge of uneasiness.

"Stuck," she explained, and tried again.

But the door did not move. Too plainly now they could see the reason why. Locked out!

The tragedy of the moment! To make matters still more cheerful, it had begun to rain. Little rivulets of water were trickling down the backs of those daring but sleepy Pioneers. What were they to do?

"Are you sure?" asked Sybilla. "I can hardly believe it. Hannah had locked up long before we went out, and I'm sure she never goes back again to do her work twice."

"It's Joan," chorused the Woollies, whilst Mona added: "I'm sure it's Joan. Absolutely! She was tippeting and prying about right up till the time we came to the garden room. She's locked us out."

“That’s it,” agreed Yvette; “if Hannah had done it, she would have turned the key. As it is, only the bolts have been shot. But—the point is, what are we to do?”

“Ring the front-door bell and say we’ve been studying the occult,” suggested Sybilla the irrepressible; but Mona interrupted with a little cry of amaze. Wendy was already climbing up the ivy towards a window which the faint moonlight showed them to be a quarter open.

The girls stood petrified. Wendy had often boasted about her climbing in a joking manner, but this feat was the most daring she had ever attempted, for in part the ivy trailed so thinly that it seemed impossible for anyone to find foothold.

“Come *down*, Wendy,” whispered Yvette breathlessly.

But Sybilla gave a skip and gurgle of glee.

“Priceless Wendona,” she sang, “we shall triumph brilliantly. It’s great. And *if* Joan has locked us out, she’ll have the shock of her life to-morrow and lose her beauty sleep listening to hear us pleading for admittance!”

“But if Wendy falls—and is killed,” moaned Ailsie. “She ne-nearly——”

“But n-n-not quite! Cheers for our little wonder. She’s grabbed the casement. Open softly . . . open sweetly,” joked Sybilla. “One . . . two . . . three . . . you can close your eyes, Woollies . . . or stand ‘alert’ to catch a falling star. No need. She’s wriggling in. What a wriggle! Exit, Wendona—to reappear radiantly to the rescue.”

They had to laugh, though Yvette’s teeth were chattering and Sybilla’s face was blue with cold. It did seem a long time before Wendy’s face appeared at the door which she had already unbolted.

“Drip, drip, drip,” giggled Mona, “in anxiety, terror and dirt. If I were my own father’s son, I’d say I was wet to the shirt.”

“Come,” urged Yvette. “Wendy, you climbed splendidly. Now, girls, each for herself. *Sauve qui peut*. Come, Wen.”

Wendy smiled. It was some time since Yvette had spoken in such a friendly way. Oh, how nice it would be if she were going to be always like that, and never raise that perplexing barrier again between them!

“I wonder if Joan really meant us to stay out there all night,” she said. “I can’t quite believe she *could*; but, if she did, how beautifully we have scored her off.”

“Yes,” agreed Yvette as the two tiptoed up the back staircase to their room, “but . . . it’s not quite fair to jump at conclusions. No one has proved Joan shot those bolts. I mean to ask her, of course, and I think—yes, I do think she will have to tell the truth. After all, Wendy, we have no quarrel with Joan; she may be far nicer than we think.”

But for once Wendy was uncharitable.

“I don’t trust Joan,” was all she said.

CHAPTER XII

THE BARRIER RISES

“Yes,” said Joan calmly, “I *did* slip those bolts—just for a joke. You need not look altogether like a tragedy queen, Yvette. After all, I didn’t commit a crime. It was a joke. I heard you rattling the handle, for I was hiding in the garden room. I knew you were going to have a spree, and I was properly mad because you would not ask me. I was just going to unbolt the door when I heard you talking about Wendy. Then I skipped back to bed.”

Yvette leaned back against the class-room wall, frowning. Joan’s confession was disarming. There was no attempt to deceive, the girl’s manner was innocence itself. And the trick—as Joan put it—seemed natural enough.

“You must have known we should get the wind up dreadfully,” she said. “And it was raining. Sybilla is in for a horrible cold. I hate practical jokes.”

Joan shrugged her shoulders. “When one is bored, any sort of joke is good enough,” she replied; “but I would like to know *why* you won’t have me in the Pioneers.”

Yvette did not mince her words.

“Because you don’t play our game,” she answered.

Joan reddened. “You don’t know till you try,” she retorted, “and you would find I played quite as straight a game as Wendy. What did she do with all that money her father gave her for Carbrae? I heard her tell Alison yesterday she could only give five shillings to Miss Caddock’s birthday present fund because she was short of money. And she *loves* to go sneaking off by herself. I met her on the moors the other day, and she would not tell me where she had been. I don’t care how you may scowl, Yvette; but girls like Wendy, who are not real ladies by birth and *don’t* know the meaning of *noblesse oblige*, are not to be trusted. You’ll find out what a big mistake you have made—one day.”

“You forget Wendy is my friend,” said Yvette coldly. “I don’t wish to hear another word about her. I—I’ll explain to the others about the locked door.”

Joan looked after her schoolfellow as she walked away.

“I don’t believe Yvette is Wendy’s friend,” she whispered to herself, “and she won’t forget what I’ve said. That’s a good thing. Wendy will be sorry before the end of term that she was so nasty to me, and by then she’ll be glad enough to have me for a friend. Gia is hopeless.”

And Joan smiled to herself. She loved plotting and crooked ways, and actually prided herself on her cleverness in getting what she wanted. She hated Wendy, yet was determined to have her friendship. Wendy was rich and

generous—the ideal chum for Joan, whose people were poor, and who hungered after every sort of luxury and pleasure. If only she could get an invitation from Wendy for the holidays, she would be completely satisfied. And, to do this, she must secretly rob Wendy of the friends whom she preferred. Left alone, avoided by her comrades, Wendy would be grateful enough to have a Joan Pinson for chum. So thought Joan, and gloried in her treacherous task. Dishonourable herself, she traded on the honour of others.

And Yvette, never dreaming how Joan had planned to twist her round her cunning little fingers, went slowly in search of her companions.

Joan had spoken quite frankly. And there was a lot of truth in what she said. Yvette frowned. She knew she had had no right to listen to those hints against her friend, but then—was Wendy her friend?

“There’s going to be snow,” sang Sybilla. “Atisho! I hate a cold. I simply must cure it before there’s a chance of tobogganing. Winter has charms of its own.”

“And chilblains,” added Mona.

“Snowballs,” said Sybilla.

“Fogs, and frozen water in your jugs,” groaned Mona.

The coming of Yvette broke the argument.

Yvette gave Joan’s confession and then yawned. “No more to be said, eh?” she remarked. “Where are Wendy and Ailsie?”

“Playing hockey. Wendy is hockey mad at present. It’s a brow game. I wonder how Donald is. By the way, Yvette, Alison wanted to see you about the Christmas entertainment. Wendy’s father has promised to send some fancy dresses for the play, and they will be school property.”

Yvette nodded. “I hope he will send them to Miss Caddock,” she replied. “We don’t want them to melt into thin air like the Carbrae Fair entertainment.”

Sybilla’s laugh had a forced note, and Yvette, turning, saw Wendy standing behind her.

Poor Wendy, she looked ready to cry, and Yvette felt quite guilty; but the guilty feeling had a mixture of annoyance too. Now was Wendy’s chance of an explanation, yet she did not take it, but picking up a book, left the room.

“Awkward,” quoth Sybilla dryly.

“I don’t see why,” retorted Yvette. “Wendy should not have been so secret about that affair. Her father gave her the money for the treat, and she never accounted for it. I don’t call it quite—honest.”

“Bother!” snapped Sybilla. “What *has* made you rake up Carbrae? It’s not like you, Yvette, and Wendy is our pal. Besides, her father made it quite plain that she might do as she liked with the money.”

Yvette did not reply. To argue with Sybilla was always a rash proceeding, and she knew in the present case she was in the wrong. But, just or unjust, it

quickened that sense of irritation against Wendy, and when Alison Blundel called her into the recreation room next day to see the splendid gift of costumes sent by Mr. Darlake, she hardly had a word of admiration to give.

“We are going to act ‘Rosalind of the Forest’—a little French Revolution play,” said Alison. “We want you to be Rosalind, Yvette, and Wendy will be the unsuccessful lover—a Revolutionary. I shall take the part of the hero. We shall start rehearsals at once.”

“Very well,” said Yvette; “it’s very nice of you to choose me, Alison, but remember I don’t mind being shunted if you find a better Rosalind.”

Alison looked keenly at the speaker. Yvette was generally an enthusiast over everything; this indifference was most unlike her.

“Aren’t you well?” she asked.

Yvette coloured hotly. “Perfectly,” she replied; “it’s—er—only I have rather a lot of home worries at present. I won’t forget the rehearsals.”

That was Yvette’s way. She hated sympathy.

Yet she was feeling that she needed it when the evening post brought her a letter from her father, telling her that Mr. Darlake had practically bought the Castle and was anxious to move in before Christmas, though the matter was not yet decided.

Before Christmas. That meant never seeing the old home again whilst it was their home. Oh, it was too cruel—too cruel. And *Wendy* would be romping and racing through those dear old passages and rooms. *Wendy* would be helping to hang the holly and mistletoe around the walls. It was unbearable. Yvette sat by the window in her bedroom, her head on her arms, sobbing drearily. She heard the door open and made frantic haste to dry her eyes. But she was too late. It was *Wendy* herself who came hastily up to her and rested one hand on her shoulder.

“Yvette,” cried *Wendy*, in very real concern: “Dear Yvette, what is the matter? Are you ill?”

Yvette dragged herself up, pushing the hair back from her brow.

“No,” she answered hoarsely, “I’m quite well. I only want to be left alone. Can’t you even do *that*?”

Dusk was gathering, but it was not too dark for *Wendy* to see the other’s face, as well as the letter lying on the window-ledge. Ah, she had guessed now! She had guessed. She caught a quick breath.

“Yvette,” she whispered, “are you angry with me because Dad is buying Glencourt Castle?”

Silence. Yvette could not trust herself to speak. *Wendy* waited for a few minutes, then went on:

“But *why*?” she asked. “Your father had to sell the place. Dad gave him the full price. Your father is so—pleased. Everything, so Dad says, has been so

friendly, so happy. Your mother wrote my mother the nicest letter, saying how glad she would be later to visit the old home. We—we know how hard it must be—and my Dad has the kindest heart; he's done all he could. And yet, you hate me because—we shall have your home. I thought you were so just, Yvette—so proud of being just.”

Yvette's conscience was stabbing her hard—very hard indeed. Yes, she *did* pride herself on that, and she knew she was failing. Wendy was stating plain facts. She—Yvette—had every reason to be grateful to her and to her people. And instead, she was telling herself she could not bear to speak to the girl who would have her home.

“I wish you would go away,” she said desperately. “You must know how—unhappy I am. *And before Christmas!* It's—dreadful. Go away, Wendy. I will try to be just, but—but——”

Wendy turned away with a heavy sigh. She wanted Yvette's love and trust, and it hurt her terribly to see how this other girl resented her better fortune. Wendy had come this evening to bring her friend an invitation to spend Christmas with them whilst her parents went abroad, but she dared not give it. Yvette had this time raised a barrier which threatened to remain.

And Wendy was not the girl to try and break that barrier down by persistent force. There was an element of shyness and self-distrust in her nature which often held her back. Yet it hurt her cruelly to hear Yvette crying herself to sleep that night and know how any comfort would be scorned.

“You see,” quoth Sybilla next morning, when the girls were assembling for breakfast, “I was right. It is snowing, it has snowed, and it will snow. Atisho! My cold has gone. I am going to toboggan. To-morrow the snow may have melted, so there can be no delay. Who will petition Prunes and Prisms for a holiday?”

No one seemed very eager to volunteer, though, as Sybilla afterwards remarked, Miss Prinkton might just as well have let them off their history class, since no one excepting Wendy and Doreen were paying any attention. Wendy had won favour lately with the grave and severe Miss Prinkton, for she was studying hard, especially for Mr. Clinton's mysterious prize. Doreen was a close rival, but Doreen was making the fatal mistake of working too hard. She had given up hockey and other games and spent much of her playtime working out problems. The result was—the work of a fagged brain. Poor Doreen, she could often have cried to see Wendy, after spending half the day romping, doing better and more brilliant work than she.

“Don't you call it *rather* mean of Wendy to go in for that prize at all?” Joan said to Gia Leston-Green in Yvette's hearing as the girls lingered after school to put up their books. “Her people are rich and she can't need any sort of prize or help. It means everything to a girl like Doreen. I call it grasping.

But, of course, her father is only a vulgar profiteer.”

Gia blushed to the roots of her hair. Joan had forgotten in trying to blacken Wendy that Gia’s own father was just what she had described Mr. Darlake as being.

“Of course,” retorted Gia, plucking up courage, “we can’t all be Vere de Vere. And *I* don’t believe Vere de Veres are any less sneaky. Anyhow, if *I* had a real true friend, I wouldn’t keep quiet and hear her run down without standing up for her.” And she looked at Yvette, who was just leaving the room.

Joan laughed mockingly. “That was a nasty one, Gia; you’re getting on,” she teased. “Bye-bye; I’m going tobogganing.”

Gia did not reply. She had been seeing too much—and too little—of Joan lately, and had her own reasons for not caring to continue a very *expensive* friendship!

But there was no tobogganing that day for any of the young enthusiasts. Snow was falling so fast that Miss Caddock decided it was unfit for any of her pupils to go out, and sent them down to the gymnasium instead. No use grumbling, though! Better luck next day. And better luck it was, too. The sun shone on a frozen snow-white world as the merry girls went trooping out to find any sport that they fancied in this wonderful fairyland.

Wendy had had to go and speak to Miss Caddock after school, but made desperate haste to slip on woollies and snow-boots afterwards. Yvette had gone, but she would be sure to find the Pioneers waiting for her at the rendezvous. Yvette knew she was coming. But, alas! on arrival it was only to find that her comrades had already started, leaving her behind.

How disappointing! And she could not follow—unless some one told her the way to Pinloch Ridge.

Wendy looked round. The girls had scattered far and wide, but some one was coming towards her.

Joan! Wendy hesitated. Joan was making straight for her. She might have a message. So Wendy waited.

Joan’s smile was a trifle pitying, but not without mockery too.

“So they’ve given you the slip, Wen,” she drawled. “I knew Yvette meant to if she could. I should have thought you would have had more pride than to go where you were not wanted.”

CHAPTER XIII

A LOVELY ADVENTURE

Was it true? Wendy turned away. She did not intend to let Joan see how that speech had hurt her. But, oh! how deeply the words had stabbed!

If it *were* true, what was the use of remaining an unwanted member of that once merry band? Wendy clenched her hands as she went wandering off. She didn't want to join any of those other parties of gay snowballers, or tobogganers; they, too, would probably give her the cold shoulder.

Ever since she had failed them over the treat to Carbrae Fair, Wendy had felt she had become unpopular at Old Grange School. How hard it seemed! How angry Dad would be if he knew! Not angry with *her*. Wendy was fully aware that her kind-hearted Dad would be proud of her conduct over that twenty pounds; and what a help that was!

"I must go and hear how wee Jean is getting on," she told herself, "but there won't be time to-day. I'll go to-morrow. I do hope she will be cured. Then I shall be *quite* happy."

And the smile broke round her lips as she thought of poor Black Jamie and his devotion to the little invalid.

Jean's life's happiness meant so much more than a *treat*!

Unconsciously Wendy found that she had been walking in the direction of the Wizard's Glen. She had purposely taken an opposite way to the ridge. If the girls did *not* want her, she would not bother them. And it would be rather nice to see how the Wizard's Glen looked in its robes of snow.

Wendy's nature was too sunny to allow her to brood for long over trials or injustices, real or imaginary, though she could not help wishing she had a comrade with her during that delightful scramble down amongst snowy pine-trees and tangling shrubs towards the pile of giant stones which had already proved so attractive.

The Wizard's seat was altogether associated with Donald Arnloch, and Wendy gave a cheer of delight at sight of Donald tramping along down the Glen, his great-coat buttoned close up to his ears.

"Well met!" cried Donald. "I was wishing you girls were here. Where are the others?"

"Gone to the ridge for tobogganing. They thought you would be there."

"So I should. But my toboggan wants repairing and I've not got the right wood. Old Gregory is bringing it for me to-morrow. How is it you are on your own?"

Wendy pretended not to hear.

“Look,” said she, “the snow is not lying inside the Wizard’s seat. The stones and trees protect it. Shall we have a peep?”

“Yes, happy thought. I had had an idea about going, but I’d promised not to go on my own. You’ll have to stand proxy for your Pioneers. We left the rope under the trapdoor.”

The two were soon busy, each as well pleased with the meeting as the other.

“Right down, eh?” said Donald. “I shan’t ask if you’re nervous, because I know you’re not.”

“I’d rather go first,” hinted Wendy. “Do you mind? The rope will be fixed to that bar, won’t it?”

“Yes. All right, you go first. This *is* sport. Wait for me.”

“I should think so!” Wendy was laughing. “I don’t want to meet Michael all on my own.”

“He must have been a rum old beggar, anyway,” said Donald. “Steady. You’ve got a long way to go.”

Wendy clutched firmly. This adventure was just the tonic she needed. Far better than tobogganing. It was not *exactly* pleasant at the bottom of the pit, and Wendy had a creepy feeling that toads would be squatting in fat ugliness in the ooze and mud. It was too dark to see anything, but Donald, of course, had his unfailing electric torch.

Coming! Coming! Lower! Lower! She could see how his figure blotted out the light above. Then, crack! and Donald was not only beside, but almost on the top of her.

“Ow!” gasped Wendy, rubbing her shoulder as she lay back against the wall. “W-what happened?”

“Rope broke,” jerked Donald.

A moment’s pause. “Then—I suppose we can’t get out,” whispered Wendy weakly.

Donald straightened himself. He had had a nasty jar and his left arm was scraped badly, but it was no use to whine.

“We’ve got to get out,” he replied, “that’s it. We can’t go back on the rope, so we must—er—do what that ancestor of mine did, and find a way out of the Glen by some secret way. One moment and I’ll get out my torch. We should be in a nasty hole without that.”

“While there’s light there’s hope,” chuckled Wendy; but she was decidedly uncomfortable.

The electric torch, however, brought hope without fail. Donald’s guess had been correct. The upper passage in the side of this well-like cavity led over a precipitous gap down to a lower passage, the opening of which they saw

before them. Not a very imposing opening, and only about three feet high.

They would have to crawl through the mud, steeling their nerves against fear of reptiles.

Wendy bit her lip. She would not disgrace the Pioneers by bewailing the situation, but—ugh!—she would surely never, never feel clean again!

Slish, slosh, slush, and oh, the heat!

No touch of outer chill reached down here. But Donald was calling back a hopeful message.

“All ri-ight! Passage getting higher. Here we are!”

They had reached the cleft where rocky walls stretched up to the higher path.

“There’s still a passage here,” said Donald. “We’re on the right track. Dad will be frightfully interested. I suppose the last person to use this passage was that ancestor of mine. I wonder who told him of it.”

“I h-hope the other end isn’t b-blocked,” shivered Wendy.

She was not cold, but the excitement made her quiver like a leaf. She hoped Donald would not notice. If he did he said the very kindest and wisest thing he could have done.

“What a splendid pluck you have!” he admired. “Any number of boys would be showing the white feather. I don’t say that in a swanky way. It’s quite up to us both to screw our courage to the sticking point. I might even funk it myself, only you would put me to shame. The Pioneers will be proud of you.”

After that Wendy quite ceased to wish she were tobogganing. And the worst of the adventure was over. The passage beyond the gap was high enough for them to walk upright, and it was quite dry too.

“I wonder how many miles long it is,” said Wendy. “I think it is awfully odd that it is not stuffier.”

“Sure sign that the outer entrance is *not* blocked,” replied Donald. “And look—can you see? Light! We’re at the journey’s end, old girl, and you’ve been a regular heroine. Once or twice I began to get the wind up for fear you’d faint.”

“I’m tough,” laughed Wendy. “Hurrah for the light! Guess where we shall come out, Donald.”

“It must be beyond the Glen. Somewhere amongst the pines fringeing the moors. Not a great way from the ridge. We’ll go round and tell the girls. I *am* glad we’ve made the discovery. It’s a regular riddle read.”

Wendy was pleased and proud too. After all, she had had the best of it and ought to be very grateful to Joan.

Donald led the way out from the passage—and he certainly had the *worst* of it there! The passage itself dwindled and narrowed at the end, and was so

low that the explorers were forced to crawl, or wriggle, along the last few yards. And to add to the trouble, a clump of gorse bushes—monstrous old bushes—blocked the entrance.

“Shut your eyes and put your dress over your head if you can,” was Donald’s order, and Wendy was glad she obeyed. Even as it was, the “prickles” seemed to be sticking all over her.

“But it was a lovely adventure,” she told Donald, who was busy studying the spot and making “marks” for future explorations. “I have enjoyed it.”

How he laughed as he patted her back!

“You’re the right sort,” he applauded. “None of that schoolgirl bosh about clothes and looks and complexion. Why can’t *all* girls be jolly chums like you and your Pioneers? You’ll roar when you see yourself in the glass! Just mud all over everywhere. Never mind! We’ve got a tale to tell. My Dad will be as keen as mustard. Do you know, since he went to see your head mistress he seems quite to have got over his—er—feeling about Old Grange. He’s going up again to meet a common friend—a Professor some one—at dinner. It’s jolly, eh? Now—off we go! I’ve no idea as to the time, but it must be getting late.”

Not so late as Donald imagined, for they met the ridge party returning from their tobogganing. It had *not* been a great success.

“The snow was far too soft,” said Sybilla, who looked as if she had been trying to make herself into a snowball. “And it *sticks*. If only we had a good hard frost now, it would be all right. But, you two, whatever have you been up to? Yvette, hey-la! come here. Here are Donald and Wendy. They’ve been having a side-show to themselves.”

Yvette and the Woollies came up, panting. Yvette smiled at Donald in the friendliest way, but she did not seem to see Wendy. It was Donald who told his story, addressing Yvette chiefly; for, though he had become fond of all the Pioneers, it was Yvette whom he liked the best, and whom he regarded as his special chum. But to-day Yvette puzzled him. She didn’t appear one bit proud of Wendy’s heroism, and spoke quite reproachfully to Donald about not waiting for all of them.

“But we can all go again,” he urged, “any time you like.”

Yvette shook her head. “It won’t be the same,” she retorted; “it’s like reading a book a second time. However exciting it is, if you know the end you can’t get a thrill up.”

“I always look at the end when I begin,” laughed Sybilla, “and we must go along the mysterious passage. Donald and Wendy can’t have discovered everything, Yvette. We may locate the ghost, or something equally scrumptious. And we have had plenty of fun, too, even though the snow did stick.”

“Anyhow, it’s too cold to stand here arguing,” added Yvette. “Good-bye, Donald. I expect we shall see you again soon, and then we’ll arrange about going down the passage. Come on, girls.”

“I’m awfully sorry you’re vexed,” said Donald. “Wendy and I would never have gone if we’d imagined you would think it mean.”

“I’m not the least vexed,” fibbed Yvette. “Ugh! how cold it is! Woollies, I’ll race you to the road.”

And, without waiting for any response, Yvette set off at a run.

Sybilla hesitated, then—waited. Wendy could have hugged her.

Donald looked from one to the other of the two girls.

“I do wish Yvette didn’t feel like that,” he worried.

Wendy’s laugh was more like a sob.

“And it isn’t you—it’s me,” she added. “Yvette is vexed with me. It’s nothing to do with the passage. Good-bye.”

Sybilla grimaced, winked at Donald and followed her chum, leaving Donald to tell himself that he had never known his friends of the Old Grange act so exactly like he had always imagined girls to act.

“Only I wish it hadn’t been the two nicest who have quarrelled,” he murmured to himself; “but never mind. I shouldn’t think they would be likely to sulk. Next time it will be . . . all right!”

CHAPTER XIV

A NEW FRIEND FOR WENDY

Did Yvette sulk? She would have been horrified if anyone had accused her of doing so! And yet she hardly spoke to Wendy during the rest of that day, or the next. Wendy could have cried in distress. But she did not attempt again to break down that barrier. She felt Yvette was being hopelessly unjust, and very naturally resented the other girls' attitude about Glencourt Castle.

Wendy was intensely loyal to her home folk, and was up in arms at the mere idea that her Dad should be looked down upon or disliked for behaving so generously. She guessed Yvette's own people would be very angry too, if they knew how she was behaving; but she said no word about it when she wrote home. It was not in Wendy to play a mean trick, but she was really hurt and vexed that Yvette should so deliberately try to withdraw her friendship and spoil her term.

The other Pioneers were obviously worried. If Wendy joined them, Yvette made some excuse to disappear. This sort of thing could not go on, and Sybilla, for one, was thinking of speaking plainly to Yvette; but Wendy would not allow it. It chanced that Yvette had shown her feelings towards the latter too clearly to be allowed to pass unnoticed, and Sybilla spoke out.

"What have you and Yvette quarrelled about?" she asked Wendy, and Wendy explained. Sybilla snorted with indignation. "I shall talk to Yvette," she said. "She must be ill, or—well! it's *not* the game. It's really mean. I shall tell her so."

"Please—no," pleaded Wendy. "I'll just drop out for a week or so and see what happens. Honour, Syb, it will be the best way. Yvette is frightfully sad at not going home to see her old home for Christmas. It—it's quite natural, she hates to picture me there. Seeing me keeps reminding her of things. So I'll keep away. I'd rather."

"You're a good little soul, Wendy," said Sybilla, "and Yvette ought to be ashamed of herself. It seems to me that if her home *has* to be sold it is much nicer for friends to buy it than strangers. The sooner Yvette sees that the better. But, of course, she's always been captain of our Pioneers, and if you *don't* mind, just for a week or so, will you do as you suggest?"

"I don't mind a bit," declared Wendy, trying to speak cheerily. "Don't you fuss! I shall work all the better for the mysterious prize, and there are several other things I want to do quite particularly. Perhaps before the end of term Yvette will be friends again."

"It's horrid," said Sybilla, "but we must grin and bear it. Yvette will be the first to see how idiotic she has been when she comes to her senses."

And that was how, the very next day after this chat, Wendy came to be tramping the moors alone, even though the frost overnight had made tobogganing the finest sport going.

Joan had managed to include herself in the ridge party, and took every opportunity of coming to Yvette's assistance.

"So Wendy is not with you," she said, as the two girls climbed the hill together. "I thought you would all have enough of her soon! I saw her creeping away over the moors alone, though she must know the rule that we have to go out in twos and threes. One day Miss Caddock will have an eye-opener. Wendy is as deceitful as she is high. I'm not a tell-tale and I shan't say more, but I hate to see jolly girls so taken in. What did she do with that twenty pounds? And *I* call it mean to be working so hard for the prize Mr. Clinton has offered. She knows it means everything to a girl like Doreen."

Yvette's laugh was curt. "I'm trying for Mr. Clinton's prize myself," she retorted; "so are Sybilla and a host of girls. I don't see why *that* is mean. And it is stupid to talk as if Wendy were a sort of burglar and had stolen her own money. Her father gave her the money for Carbrae, or to do as she liked with."

Joan was not easily snubbed, and she knew Yvette would be thinking over all these things later.

"*To do as she liked with,*" she added significantly. "But what was that? How could Wendy spend all that money at school and have nothing to show for it? *I* don't care, I am sure——"

But a frantic squeal from the Woollies broke into the conversation, and Yvette, glad to escape from this "whisperer" of mean insinuations, rushed off to the rescue of those hapless Pioneers who had arrived at the bottom of the hill with the toboggan on the top of them!

Meantime, Wendy was taking her solitary walk, entirely forgetful that Miss Caddock's rule demanded a companion. She was trying hard not to think of those jolly tobogganers and all the fun this first winter's snow might have brought her, but she did hope if Donald joined her former chums that no one would speak unkindly of her. Donald was such a friend, and Wendy valued his good opinion.

To-day she was off to hear how wee Jean's cure was getting on. She did hope the poor little mite would get well. The very thought of such a possibility repaid her for any unpleasantness caused by her failure to "treat" those school comrades.

Black Jamie would no doubt be over the hills after his sheep, but Wendy half hoped she might see Jean or Tam, or at any rate the kind woman who came in at times to set things straight in a comfortless home. Kirstie would tell

her the news.

“I believe I’ve actually come right,” laughed Wendy to herself, as she stood looking around the white wilderness and noting the smoke stealing from the open doorway of Jamie’s hut.

“I shall have to scamper if I am to be home for tea. I hope Frou-Frou’s *migraine* will be better to-morrow. She was cross this morning.”

As she neared the hut a man came out and began walking away in an opposite direction. He had not seen her, but Wendy recognized Black Jamie. He was carrying his shepherd’s staff, his plaid flung over one shoulder, his head bent. Wendy gave a quick sigh. Jamie did not look as if he were feeling very happy.

Quickening her steps to a run, she came up to him at the foot of the next hill. How gloomy he looked! His face did not brighten one bit at sight of her, though he halted.

Wendy felt a lump come in her throat, for there was such suffering in the shepherd’s eyes. And, in addition, he seemed to have been drinking!

“How is Jean?” asked Wendy anxiously.

Jamie clutched very tightly at his staff.

“She’s awa in hospital,” he replied in choked tones. “The first operation was no succesful, so they’re having anither. My sister’s lassie, wha lives in the toon, wrote. She said Jean looks like a wee white lily wi’ its stalk bruised an’ crushed. Maybe she’ll dee with t’next operation. Gin she does, I’ll—I’ll ——” He dared not tell this sympathizing lassie all the hard, rebellious thoughts in his mind. He had told himself that “na power” would stop him “ganging his ain gait to the de’il” if his little Jean died in the big hospital away from home. Yesterday he had even been blaming Wendy for making it possible for Jean to go away, but he did not blame her now.

Tears were brimming in Wendy’s eyes, her hands were clasped. “Oh, pray God she gets well,” she cried. “Pray God she gets quite well. If only I could tell you how sorry I am for what you are going through! I’ll be praying to God all the time; I’ll be praying *hard*, Jamie, that Jean gets well.”

The defiance and rebellion began to fade from Jamie’s face; he even took the girl’s outstretched hand. “Ye’ll na forget?” he asked. “Ye’ll gang doon on your knees and pray for my Jean?”

“Yes, yes, not only once, but twice—lots of times, every day. I do pray . . . and I’ll pray more. I wish I could cure her. I love her.”

Black Jamie’s eyes were quite friendly now. The strong drink which had fuddled his brain mercifully began to lose its effect. He seemed satisfied, banishing despair as untimely in its coming.

“Ye love my wee Jean,” he repeated, “and it’s truth. There’s that same on your bonnie face. Ye lo’e Jean and she lo’es ye. I’ll be thinking o’ that when

the de'il comes by wi' his whispers. Havers! It was the guid Lord sent ye to-day, and I'll na forget it. I'll be looking for graidly news of Jean."

And though Wendy feared that he was looking on her too much as some sort of "lucky mascot," she was glad to have cheered the poor fellow up. It had been well worth while to take that long tramp over the moors, and Wendy, tactfully refusing Jamie's offer of a "guid cup of tea," set off back again, screwing up her face laughingly as the big flakes of snow came drifting down the wind.

"I wish I could tell the girls about Jean," thought Wendy; "but perhaps it is better not, especially as every one calls her father Black Jamie,—and I don't want them to know about the twenty pounds. Oh dear! I promised Miss Caddock to bring another girl along when I came beyond bounds. I quite forgot."

There would have to be a confession made when she got in, but Miss Caddock was always trustful over her girls' confessions, and had a wonderful sympathy, too, for forgetful memories.

There was going to be more snow—piles of it; and to-morrow—well! she might hint to Alison Blundel that as there could be no hockey they might inaugurate some jolly winter sports. Having "coined" this new idea, Wendy fell a-planning it, hardly noticing where she was going and coming to a sudden halt as she heard a piercing cry for help.

Whatever could have happened? Wendy stood stock-still, then gave a shout. "Which way? What's happened? Where are . . . you?" she cried. The answer came in a piteous wail of fear.

"Here! . . . to the right! It's Betty . . . a drift . . . I can't get her out."

Wendy came plunging through the snow, which lay thickly in parts, whilst in hollows and valleys the drifts were deep. She had recognized Gia's voice. Poor Gia!—who adored her small roly-poly sister, to whom she had given most of her playtime this term. Gia was not a chum of Wendy's. The latter had no patience with affectations, and Gia was full of them. She was pretty and vain, *very* anxious to be thought aristocratic, and—her chief crime in Wendy's eyes—hopelessly ashamed of her parents, who were rich and vulgar. But just now Gia was in trouble, and Wendy made as much haste in going to her help as if she had been her chief friend. Yes, there she was, lying flat on the still half-frozen snow, her arms around the terrified child, whom she had not strength to lift out of the drift which lay under the shadow of a rocky cairn.

"Quick!" gasped Gia. "You . . . you'll have to wriggle . . . it's—frightfully deep. You'll sink down yourself . . . if you're not careful. Oh, what shall I do? Betty darling, *don't* cry."

A pitiful whimper sounded drearily from the hole. Wendy saw the need of precaution. If only there had been time she would have run back for Jamie's

help, but there was not. The situation was perilous. If Gia sunk into the drift, a rescue would be almost impossible.

“I’ll wriggle from the opposite side,” whispered Wendy. “Hold on, Gia. See, there’s no drift here, it’s rock. Yes . . . and *this* is rock too.” She was advancing cautiously. Gia could hardly raise her head to look; the burden in her arms seemed to be dragging her down to the depths.

But Wendy’s voice rang hopefully. “I wish I had a stick, but I can sit down on the rock and find how far it stretches. Yes . . . it’s still rock . . . rather lower, but . . . I’m standing on rock now . . . and now. Ah, this is the edge. This is where the drift begins. Don’t cry, Betty pet. We’re going to lift you out and run home to nice tea and cosy fire.”

“I . . . I . . . don’t yike snow,” sobbed Betty.

Gia moaned. “It’s so cold . . . and . . . we’ve been here ages. I was terrified. Wendy . . . if you can *only* save her . . . I’ll never be grateful enough.”

Wendy was kneeling on the edge of snow-covered rock. Very carefully she leaned towards that horrible hole. Gia never stirred. The elder sister’s devotion to the little one was pathetic.

“I’ve got her,” gasped Wendy, as she just managed to reach as far as that red-coated little figure. “Leave go, quick, Gia, and wriggle back—or . . . you’ll be in yourself . . . and I couldn’t lift you. Quick!”

“You’re *sure* you’ve got Betty.” Gia could hardly bear to loosen her grasp.

“Quite sure, but you *must* let go, or we’ll both be in.”

Gia obeyed. Wendy swayed. Betty weighed heavier than she expected, and it was terribly difficult to keep her balance, kneeling as she was on that stone. But Wendy’s muscles were excellent, and her will-power—that gallant tenacity of purpose—helped her to win, just when it seemed impossible to save herself from plunging down into those snowy depths.

Betty clung fast. She had ceased to whimper.

Wendy had both arms round her precious burden and rose unsteadily to her feet.

“Here we go up, up, up, Betty,” she panted. “Keep still, pet, till I’ve g-got my breath. Now, back we go to Gia.”

“Back us goes a-Gia,” echoed Betty, laying her curly head on Wendy’s shoulder. And Wendy was smiling as she stepped back, back over the hidden rocks, trying *not* to think faithlessly of what might happen if her foot went down again into some treacherous drift.

Gia had waited, in spite of warnings, to see Wendy back on terra firma; now she began wriggling along towards the distant track.

Wendy stood watching. Once or twice it seemed as if the frozen surface of the snow, thawed in places, would not bear the weight of that writhing body, but—it did! and a few moments later the two girls were seated together on a

grey boulder from which Wendy had brushed the snow. Both were shaken and exhausted, but Gia soon stretched out her arms and Wendy laid Betty in them. The child had become drowsy, but roused at the exchange of nurses.

“I want my tea,” she said. “I want my velly nice tea.”

How Gia hugged the speaker, smothering the small wet face with passionate kisses! “So you shall, my darling, so you shall,” she promised. “Can Betty walk, or——”

“A sedan-chair,” suggested Wendy gaily; “that’s the quickest. We can’t carry such a roly-poly any other way. One arm round Gia’s neck, and one arm round mine, then home to bread-and-milk and strawberry jam.”

Betty blinked as she cuddled her arms round her bearers’ necks.

“Mine nice little Gia,” she crooned; “but it was good Wendy who pulled me out of the big snow. What’ll we give Wendy for pulling me out, Gia? *I’ll* give her kisses an’ kisses.”

Gia’s eyes were swimming in tears as she looked across at her companion.

“I just don’t know *what* to give Wendy,” she whispered, “only my love, and gratitude, and thanks; but . . . they don’t seem even to begin to pay the debt. If only I could . . . if only I *could* say thank you, dear, brave Wendy.”

“So you have,” replied Wendy. “You’ve said it just as I like best. I couldn’t have any sort of reward I like half so much. And Betty’s kisses will more than finish paying what I just loved doing. Please don’t say one other word, Gia.”

But later, after Betty had proved her own assurance that she was “velly well, thank you,” by eating an enormous tea, Gia sought out that kind-hearted rescuer.

“Wendy,” she said wistfully, “you’ve so many friends that I don’t suppose you’d care to have another; but if ever you did, I’d do all I could to prove I am your friend—always grateful beyond words.”

Wendy bent forward and kissed the speaker. “I’ve not at all many friends, Gia,” she replied, “and I’d love to have you and Betty for two. So that’s settled, and——”

“And—and there is *one* other thing,” said Gia, still more nervously, as she looked round the empty class-room, “I hope you won’t think it mean of me to say it, but I feel I ought to. I—I want to put you on your guard against Joan Pinson.”

CHAPTER XV

TROUBLE FOR WENDY

“Joan Pinson,” echoed Wendy. “Yes, I *do* know Joan dislikes me. I’ve always known it. But—why?”

“Because she wanted you for her friend, and you wouldn’t be,” replied Gia. “Oh, she thinks I don’t see things, and don’t understand, but I do. I understand *her*. She’s mean and a sneak. She wants rich friends so that she can get things out of them. I used to give her heaps of things, but I got tired of it at last. Then she set horrid tales going about my people and made fun of me. She told my secrets, too, to other girls. She wanted you for a friend because you are so generous and have such a lovely home. Because you snubbed her she won’t rest till she has paid you out. She’s clever too, and she hates you. You’re too good-natured, Wendy. I saw you offering her chocolates last evening. She took them and then jeered. She won’t get anything more out of me. I suppose you think I’m spiteful, but if you keep your eyes open you’ll soon see it’s absolutely true.”

Wendy sighed. “It does seem horrid,” she said, “so unclean, somehow. I do like people to be honest. Then it’s easy. But—thank you ever so much, Gia. I know you’re telling me about Joan for friendliness, and I will be on my guard. Only I’d much rather she turned sorry for being a little cat, so that we could all be happy together. There’s such lots of fun at school, and there might easily be more.”

“Girls like Joan spoil school,” retorted Gia. “When you gave Miss Prinkton some of your flowers from home, she told Doreen you were trying to bribe her. Doreen’s a muff to listen; she’s not such a bad sort herself, but she’s crazy over Mr. Clinton’s prize. I hope *you* win it, Wendy; I do indeed.”

“I don’t want the prize,” said Wendy, “only the honour of it. My people would be so pleased. Doreen can have the prize if she likes. I could retire if she is second. What conceit! I’m talking as if the prize were mine altogether, and I expect I am miles off it.”

“Oh no, you’re not,” replied Gia. “I heard Frou-Frou talking to Miss Caddock about what Mr. Clinton said. He told Miss Caddock you were a genius. So Doreen is in the depths. I must go and see if Betty is asleep now. And remember, Wendy, you *did* say I might be a friend.”

“Of course,” agreed Wendy. “Give Betty a kiss from me. We’ll have to go snowballing in the garden when she is quite sure she likes it again.”

Joan was coming across the room to where the two girls were standing.

She looked curiously from one to the other. These were the girls who could have made life so much more enjoyable to her, but they had refused to give her friendship. Even Gia, whom she had despised and patronized, had turned against her.

“Miss Caddock wants you, Wendy,” she said smoothly. “You are to go to her at once.”

Wendy nodded. She did not feel friendly towards Joan Pinson, and did not easily disguise her feelings, though she was never purposely unkind. And what did Miss Caddock want her for? Ah, anyhow, she must remember to tell her of her walk.

Miss Caddock, however, did not give her her chance.

“Wendy,” was her greeting, “you have disobeyed me again. Where were you going—alone—so far across the moors on such a day? Apart from the disobedience of going, it was very wrong of you to run the risk of being overtaken by a snow-storm, and I feel that such a walk must have had a purpose. What was it?”

Wendy hesitated. She had gone hoping to see little Jean, and of her friendship with Black Jamie and his family she had said nothing at school. The shepherd had a “bad name,” and Wendy in her youthful self-sufficiency was quite sure that bad name was undeserved. She felt certain Jamie would “turn good,” as she expressed it, if Jean were cured and people were kind. Wendy longed to champion the black sheep because she had the fixed and quite mistaken idea that all black sheep were ready to become white if sympathizers were kind! And what should she do if she were forbidden to go and see Jean or ask after her? Yet she could not tell a lie.

“I—I should have been tobogganing,” she faltered, “if—if it hadn’t been that—well! the others didn’t want me. So I went for a walk.”

“A walk? Did you go to anyone’s house or cottage, Wendy, or to *any* place where you know you ought not to have gone?”

Again Wendy hesitated. She could answer “no” without exactly telling an untruth, for she had met Jamie on the moor; but she knew that “no” would be a direct prevarication. How often Mother had warned her against the sinfulness of half a lie. Yet, oh! she could not give up poor Black Jamie and darling wee Jean.

With pale cheeks and beseeching eyes she looked at her governess.

“Please, Miss Caddock,” she entreated, “*don’t* ask me that question. I didn’t exactly go into anyone’s house, but I might have if I had not met them outside, and oh, I can’t answer any more. If Mother knew she would understand and—and be glad I did it. Will you *not* ask me?”

Poor Miss Caddock looked equally distressed. She had her theories about trusting girls, and a great faith in her reading of character. Her opinion of

Wendy was very high. Absolutely loyal and straightforward she had once described her in speaking to a friend, and the eyes turned so appealingly to her now were as honest as the day.

But, sympathetic as the head mistress was, she was also aware of the value of discipline, and Wendy's reply placed her in rebel ranks. What was to be done? Lena Caddock could not find the answer, though she placed her hand kindly on Wendy's shoulder.

"I must think it over, child," she replied; "that is all I shall say at present. I *may* repeat my question and insist on an answer, or I may accept your petition and trust you not to repeat the offence. You must quite clearly understand this, Wendy. You are not on any pretext to go beyond bounds again alone. You must take two friends with you, and it is also against rules to visit any house or cottage or make any sort of acquaintance without leave. You can go now. I am still uncertain whether I am acting wisely, but up till now your school record has been excellent. Your governesses speak well of you, and, though you love fun—and mischief, my dear—I have no cause for complaint or suspicion that you betray my trust. Now run away and be—what I believe you are, Wendy—my loyal pupil."

Tears sprang into the girl's eyes, and impulsively catching her governess's hand, she kissed it eagerly.

"I will—I want to be," she whispered, and then slipped away, leaving Miss Caddock smiling as she told herself she had made a wise decision.

Had any third person chosen to notice Joan Pinson when Wendy came back presently into the schoolroom with a little half-smile on her face, she would have wondered what made the former frown and stare in such evident perplexity. Joan had prided herself on her clever diplomacy in letting Miss Caddock hear about Wendy's solitary walk without incurring the brand of "sneaking." Joan was far too wide awake to have allowed her head mistress to realize that her object had been to get Wendy into trouble, but she herself was bitterly disappointed to find that the latter had evidently been able to give a satisfactory account of herself.

"I expect she has fibbed *hard*," thought Joan, who would not have scrupled to take this easy way out of a difficulty herself!

So, on the whole, Joan was not prospering in her wish to make useful friends and pay back scores on the unfriendly ones. Gia most decisively, and without any mincing of words, told her quondam chum that she did not want to have anything more to do with her. Joan smiled and hinted that a cousin of hers lived close to where Gia's parents originally resided and where some "h"-less grandparents still lived. But, to her amaze, the covert threat was unheeded.

"You can talk of anyone and anything you like," said Gia, "but if you're not careful I shall complain to Miss Caddock."

This was fighting the foe with her own tools, and Joan said not another word. But she spent her evening talking to Doreen. Poor, anxious Doreen, who thought of nothing, dreamt of nothing but Mr. Clinton's prize.

"I heard Beth Wilton say she had heard a rumour that a rich friend of Mr. Clinton's is going to pay the expenses of the winner for two years at a College," said Doreen, "that is if she is poor. If she's rich the gift will be different. Of course Wendy is *sure* to get the prize, and she will not want any College expenses paid."

"I call it disgusting of Wendy," said Joan, "but never mind, Doreen. Miss Caddock sent for Wendy one evening lately and gave her an awful lecture about something. Quite likely she will be disqualified and not able to compete. Any girl with black marks against her character is not allowed to have the prize, whatever it is."

Somehow Doreen wished Joan had not made that remark, for it haunted her. Doreen knew all about the Pioneers and the hot water they often got into with their adventures. But she was not ashamed to find herself actually hoping Wendy would break some important rule and not be able to rival her, after all.

But Wendy apparently had no wish to break rules at present. She was working hard, and Doreen, who watched her with increasing interest, noticed how seldom she now joined those merry Pioneers.

"It's because she has made up her mind to win," thought Doreen, "and she *will*. I feel in my bones that she is far more clever than I am. She seems to grasp a lesson in a moment."

Mr. Clinton himself drew attention to this fact at the very next lesson.

"If you young ladies," said the master, "would throw your whole hearts *and* attention into the lesson as Miss Darlake does, I should have a class of brilliant pupils. You must *use* your brains. Even you, Miss Menleigh, painstaking as you are, do not allow yourself freedom of thought. I want you to use your brains as well as learning a few lessons in a book parrot fashion."

Wendy and Doreen both blushed, and Gia softly clapped her hands under the table. Ever since Wendy had rescued Betty, Gia's championship of the other had been almost *too* aggressive. More than once Wendy had wished Gia would not be quite so ready to stand up in her cause, for—the Pioneers did not like it. Till now, at any rate, Sybilla and the Woollies had been quite friendly, though they did not invite Wendy to join their sports and fun—for the time.

The first winter snows had melted, excepting amongst the hills, and the chief topic of conversation at Old Grange became the big hockey match to be played on the 18th of November.

Miss Mallins, the sports mistress, urged the girls to practise hard.

"This is the first time St. Bride's College has challenged us," she said, "and we shall be a very proud community if Old Grange wins the match. I believe

you have a fine chance with such a captain as Alison and such a splendid back as Wendy Darlake. In fact, you are all above the average.”

“We’ll do our best,” said Alison, and the team echoed her words.

Miss Caddock was quite as interested and keen on her girls’ sports as on their work. She had been a hockey player herself, and this match was to be made a great event, coming as it did at the dullest part of the Christmas term.

Would it be fine, the girls kept asking, on the 18th? Was the snow going to spoil everything again?

Weather prophets spoke of blizzards and snowstorms to come, but—hurrah! the clerk of the weather delayed such disturbances till after the 18th, which dawned bright, sunny and fine—a regular gem of a day in wintry setting.

Yvette had spoken very little to her roommate during the last week or so. She had been quite polite—and most unfriendly. At times Wendy could have shaken her in sheer annoyance and asked her either to quarrel outright or else be—a chum. But, alas! to have Yvette as a chum seemed now almost beyond hope.

It was no use to think of it. And yet, *how* Yvette’s conscience pricked her! She knew Wendy was playing a generous game. Not *one* word had the other written home about strained relations. Yvette’s parents quite believed the two girls to be the best of friends.

Mr. Darlake’s purchase of the Castle was almost complete, but owing to the illness of one of Mr. Glencourt’s younger children, it seemed unlikely the purchaser would be able to move in before Christmas.

“Mr. Darlake has been the most courteous of business men and the kindest of friends—a true gentleman,” wrote Yvette’s mother. “I am truly glad you and Wendy are such friends. Tell me more about her in your letters, dear. She must be a sweet girl.”

Yvette did not read that letter twice. It made her—ashamed! But it did not, as it ought to have done, help her to extend the olive branch to her schoolfellow. She was so afraid Wendy would think she had some purpose in making friends again. Foolish and unreasoning pride held her back and made the breach more difficult.

Sybilla tried again to argue.

“When are we going to have Wendy back in the Pioneers?” she asked Yvette. “She looks such a fish out of water. And Donald was inquiring for her last time we met him. You say you may be going to your old home for Christmas. Quite likely you may never leave it. Don’t be so cranky, old girl. Look pleasant, and tell Wendy we are all going to have a lark in celebration of a glorious victory if Old Grange wins the match.”

“Wait till it’s won,” was all Yvette replied, “then it will be time to plan

about Wendy. To tell the truth, I'm sick of the subject."

Sybilla shrugged her shoulders.

"I think it must be your liver," she said in disgust as she walked off.

There was a big surprise for the Pioneers as well as the rest of the school when, amongst the many visitors gathered on the 18th to see the great match, appeared Sir Alan Arnloch and his son Donald. The latter sought out Yvette at once. With the exception of Sybilla, all the Pioneers were in the team, and very smart and business-like they looked too!

"Swank!" quoth Donald, looking approvingly at the blue and white sweaters, blue skirts and blue and white caps. "You look professional. I do hope you win. I shall be shouting. By the way, those Wizard's Glen ghosts are on the prowl again—at least I saw two of them last night. I spoke to Dad. He thinks they're just poachers, and that it's all my imagination about them watching Mrs. Gannow's house. Are you off? I say, whom am I to talk to? I didn't bargain that you were all going to be performers."

Heartless laughter mocked his panic.

"But it's all right," concluded Yvette, taking pity on him, "there's Sybilla on the railing. You'll be able to keep each other company beautifully."

Donald brightened at once. He always enjoyed Sybilla, who welcomed him with a seraphic grin.

"First row of stalls," said she, "but it has the advantage of the gallery, for you can yell as loudly as you like. I'm sure Old Grange is going to win. Look, there are Lena and Sir Alan. He's quite forgiven us for having Old Grange, hasn't he? They are talking about the house. I think he's telling her about its history. It amuses me—though, how shocked you'll be, Donald—it strikes me as rather pathetic to get so wildly excited over bricks and mortar. My Dad has a jolly flat, but if the landlord turned us out to-morrow we should go gaily to find a still jollier one. Now, Yvette is another who clings to the bricks of her ancestors. Poor Yvette! that tenderness has been the undoing of the Pioneers."

"Tell me," urged Donald, forgetting hockey for the moment, "what *is* wrong? Wendy and Yvette don't seem to be quite chums. Has there been a rumpus?"

Sybilla explained. "And," she wound up with, "though Yvette is my biggest chum in the school, she *is* to blame absolutely and altogether in this. I've told her so a dozen times and she's told herself so. But the ancestral bricks lie too heavy on her chest to be shaken off. It's frightfully hard luck on Wendy, who is a darling—an absolute duck, and as straight as a die. There she goes with her long stride and her chin in the air. Good old Wendy, she's a real Pioneer! I hope she makes hockey history this afternoon."

"So do I," agreed Donald. "I'm in the same boat as you. Yvette's my favourite, but I like Wendy. I suppose it wouldn't do for me to put in my little

oar.”

“’Fraid not. Yvette would absolutely curl up. Look, she’s at it—well hit, Yvette! Hurrah for Old Grange!”

And, in the excitement of a brilliant opening of the match, the trials of Wendy were forgotten.

From the first, indeed, Old Grange took the lead in that historic hockey fight. St. Bride’s girls had come with that faint and supercilious smile of patronage which all but said aloud, “We’ve come, deigning to let you do your best before we annihilate you.”

“They’ve absolutely got the shock of their lives,” chuckled Sybilla to the amused Donald. “Look at their mouths. Like fishes—all agape with amaze. Their poor captain looks like the man who wept over the ruins of Carthage. Hurrah, Old Grange! But I mustn’t crow too soon. Wait a bit till the moment of victory.”

And—they waited. The match had to be fought out before tea owing to the light, and, towards the end, the battle waged furiously.

But—it was not Wendy’s great day. Indeed, to Alison’s disgust, she lost one goal by really weak play. But where Wendy failed Yvette succeeded. Never before had the latter played so brilliantly. One stroke after another did its work, and it was Yvette whose last gallant attack and flying sweep of that curved stick sent home the ball to its goal.

And by that one goal Old Grange had won.

Oh, the excitement, the cheers, the enthusiasm! Sybilla toppled off the rail and had to be hauled up by laughing Donald before they set off to offer congrats.

Yvette was being carried shoulder high round the field by triumphant comrades. How pleased she looked, her handsome face flushed, her eyes sparkling! Sir Alan himself shook hands and offered his applause. Yvette was the heroine of the moment.

Donald was standing near a group of relatives of girls when Wendy came up to her quondam friend.

“I want to tell you how pleased I am, Yvette,” she said shyly. “You *did* play magnificently.”

Yvette flushed as she turned away. “Thanks very much,” Donald heard her say carelessly; “of course it’s nice for Old Grange to have won. I must go and find Ailsie.”

Wendy drew back, tears in her eyes. It was Yvette’s manner, not the words, which conveyed the snub. And Donald frowned. He would dearly have liked to tell Yvette to play the game, little guessing that Yvette was thoroughly ashamed of her own injustice.

And yet, obstinate pride held back a more generous impulse. Yvette had

vowed that nothing would induce her to be friends with the girl who would be calling the dear, dear old home—her own.

Miss Caddock had prepared a special supper for her girls that evening, and even Yvette—why! even Alison herself, was not above the delights of meringues and jellies. Beaming faces gathered round the long dining-hall, and loud were the cheers given for Yvette, Alison, Old Grange—and Miss Caddock.

“A gorgeous day,” sang the Woollies as they waltzed past Wendy on their way to the recreation room, where some of the girls were going to dance. “Meet us by moonlight alone! And it *is* a moonlight night too. Perfect for ghosts—and cold as a bag. Pity we aren’t in the Glen; after those jellies——”

Wendy did not hear the conclusion of the speech. She herself did not feel like romping or dancing. Her head ached and she was tired.

As she crossed the deserted class-room, something prompted her to draw back the blind and look out.

Ailsie had been right. It was a perfect moonlight night, but, as Wendy looked out, she was startled to see a shabby little figure slip out from amongst the shadows and raise its arm as if beckoning to her.

Wendy, half scared by the sight of the apparition, would have dropped the blind had not something familiar in the figure made her hesitate.

It was surely young Tam—Black Jamie the shepherd’s son—and wee Jean’s brother!

CHAPTER XVI A CALL FOR WENDY

“Tam!”

Wendy whispered the word to herself with a thrill of surprise, whilst she drew the blind still farther back, watching the boy who, seeing her, crept nearer, signing so energetically to her to open the window that Wendy found herself obeying without hesitation.

Behind her, the little class-room was in darkness and the draught from the window caused the door to slam.

“Is it really you, Tam?” asked Wendy breathlessly. “But why are you here? Is Jean home? What is the matter?”

Tam was shivering. Poor boy! in the moonlight his face looked ghastly.

“It’s father,” he whispered, “and the letter. It came two hours sin syne. We thocht wee Jean wad be dead before morning, and father—hey, lady, he were mad—mad. He had been drinking for muckle time—not that he wanted it, ye ken, but fear for Jean awa in the toon. When he heart the big doctors had na cured her he went wi’ bad freens. They ha’ been robbing down in the villag. Mistress Gannow’s house wad be burgled this nicht and father ain o’ those to join them. Then this nicht the letter came saying Jean was cured. She’s weel and singing wi’ joy. She can talk plain as me nainsel and run like any ither bairn. When father read the letter and the hospital meenistaire’s worts about the answer the guid Lord gied to prayers, he broke down wi’ his tears an’ groans. Noo, he’s over there i’ the Glen—for he’d planned on oath to gang wi the toon thieves to burgle Mistress Gannow’s. But the Lord will na let him gang, seein’ how Jean’s cured. So there he lies, graining and saying he’s never failed a freen yet, and hees mates may be waiting for him. It’s not kenning what to do he is and cried that he wad like your word on it.”

What a tale! Wendy grasped it at once.

Black Jamie, distrustful and rebellious because Jean’s cure had not been instantaneous, had taken to drink and had become the prey of criminal vagabonds. But, on the very eve of a crime which Wendy remembered that Donald had suspected, he had heard of his child’s recovery, and in gratitude to God and shame at his want of faith wished to draw back from a wicked bargain. Only—the fear of failing those who relied on him, held him in doubt.

“If ye dinna come, father will gang wi’ they black snakes,” sobbed Tam. “Wha he’d ne’er hae lookit on hadna the drink been in him. He’ll listen to you, little leddie. It’s you gied the big money to make Jean better. He’d do onny

thing for you. Oh, leddie, ye'll come."

"Yes," said Wendy, quite out loud in her excitement, "I'll come." She didn't wait—this impulsive Wendy—to go and find warm coat or hat, but luckily she was still wearing her hockey clothes and the blue and white sweater was warm. She needed something warm too, for the wind was bitterly cold as she hurried with grateful Tam down the long shrubby walk, over the wall, down the lane and across the strip of moorland to where the Wizard's Glen lay black and gloomy before them.

"There's father," murmured Tam. "Look! he'll be ganging down the wee path to the village. It's doon there ahint the old wall where they black snakes be waiting."

Wendy's heart beat suffocatingly, but she went forward without waiting even to think over what to say. The quaint figure of the shepherd was to be seen standing there against the sky-line. Jamie had halted as if listening; slowly he turned his haggard face and saw Wendy. She ran up to him, not thinking of herself at all, but only how she was to rescue this foolish man from the bad friends who would destroy him.

"Jamie," she whispered, and caught at his hand. "Oh, Jamie, thank God for hearing our prayers! Thank God for making Jean well! Oh, you *will* thank Him, won't you? You—you're going to make Jean happy *now*—and proud of her dear father. Jamie, you're going home with Tam *now*. You won't go down to the village with bad men who—who——"

The shepherd groaned. "Hechs!" he muttered, "what will I be going? It's the Lord hae given me back my Jean. She'll be comin' haim, and . . . there's a chance o' sunny days . . . there's a chance o' good days and nae black shadows before us. Only . . . will na I gang first, lassie, and tell yon men I'll not be comin'. Will na I gang."

"No," urged Wendy, "no, no, no. You *can't* go. You must not go. It would be wicked. God has answered your prayers, Jamie. You wouldn't go straight to grieve Him now? Oh, you couldn't."

"It's not the auld leddie's money I'd take," repeated Jamie. "It's joost to tell me freens I'm not ganging. I'll be back, lassie. I'll be back."

"No," said Wendy, "you must not go. *I'll* go if you like. I'll warn them. I believe some one is watching for them. We saw them in this Glen. Yes, it's true. We saw them, and very likely they'll be caught. Jamie, what if you were in prison when Jean came out?"

She was shivering with excitement.

The shepherd looked at her.

"Ye've no plaidie," he muttered. "Ye're cauld—cauld as ice. Whaur brought ye in such claithing, lassie?"

"You," she sobbed. "I wanted to save you from misery and heartbreak—I

wanted wee Jean to come home to happiness. I wanted you to really thank God for helping you. If *only* you'll do what's right, Jamie, you'll be getting a good home—and happiness. Do listen. You must not go down there. Those friends, why, you'd have been just their tool—just their tool—and they'd have laughed and escaped, leaving you to pay the price. Jamie, if you feel you owe me anything for what I've done, you won't go down to rob that poor old woman who lies sick in bed. Donald told me she's ill—very ill. Jamie, you'll go home.”

He nodded. “I will,” he muttered. “Maybe ye're richt. Those two—they didna give the signal or I'd hae heard it up here. They're town thieves wha gave me the whusky—and na reel freens. You're richt, lassie. I maun gang haim.”

He gripped her two hands, shaking them slowly and solemnly, whilst Wendy could hear Tam's stifled sobs of relief. She had won!

“Ye'll coom and see wee Jean,” said Jamie. “She'll be looking for ye.”

Wendy nodded.

“I'll bring a friend too,” she replied. “I—I mayn't come alone. But I'll come with her. Give Jean my love. I'm *glad* I came, Jamie.”

“Ye'll no wrappit my bit plaidie about ye?” he asked. “Ye'll be cauld across t'moor.”

She shook her head. No, she would not be cold, she said. She meant to run.

And, having seen the shepherd and his happy little lad out of sight amongst the trees, Wendy turned to take her own road. It never occurred to her to think Jamie would deceive her. With all his failings there was something about the poor black sheep which rang true.

And Wendy was wiping away a tear of pity as she threaded her way between scattered boulders. Then, all at once, she halted, drawing in her breath with a gasp.

From the direction of the village—yes! and from the direction of Elspeth Gannow's house had come the sound of a pistol-shot, followed quickly by another and another in rapid succession.

What could have happened?

CHAPTER XVII

DONALD IS INJURED!

“Wendy!”

Wendy had closed the door of the little class-room behind her. She was panting and shivering, whilst shoes and skirt were covered by betraying rime of frost.

After hearing those alarming pistol-shots she had taken to her heels and raced home to Old Grange, knowing that whatever was happening down in the village she could give no assistance.

The class-room window was still open; evidently no one had opened the door since she had left! Nor had she been gone so very long. In fact, the girls were still dancing in the recreation room, though, a few minutes earlier, Miss Caddock had said it was time for bed!

What an evening of dissipation it had been for those merry lassies! Yvette had thoroughly enjoyed herself as heroine of the hour.

Now, it was she who had been running up the passage on her way to fetch a glass of water before going upstairs, when she met—Wendy.

There was a lamp burning on a bracket near, and Yvette had a full view of the other girl. No wonder, she exclaimed in astonishment.

Wendy leaned back against the wall. She had hoped to escape unseen to her room and was startled by the encounter.

The class-room window had been difficult to shut; something was stiff and she had bruised her thumb over the task. Every little hindrance seemed exaggerated to the poor child to-night. She was thoroughly worn out by the drama in which she had played a leading part.

“You’ve been out of doors,” exclaimed Yvette in horror. “Your skirt is soaking and you look frozen. Whatever *have* you been doing?”

There was an imperious note in the question which brought the hot colour to Wendy’s cheeks.

“That’s my business,” she answered curtly; “anyhow, I am going to bed now. Good night, Yvette, unless you’re coming up now.”

Never had Yvette heard her schoolfellow speak so decisively, and she frowned in puzzlement.

“I am coming up,” she replied, “but I’ll have to go back to the recreation room to speak to the girls and say good night to Miss Caddock. You’ll have to say good night too.”

“I can’t,” replied Wendy wearily. “You might say I’ve gone to bed. My

head aches. It is perfectly true.”

“It’s perfectly true you’ll have an awful cold if you don’t have a hot drink and a bath first,” retorted Yvette. “You look frozen. Go to Miss Simmins and—tell her you’ve been—out.”

Wendy looked steadily at the speaker.

“No,” she replied, “I can’t do that, for—I don’t want anyone to know I *have* been out.”

Yvette stamped softly on the floor. “*What* did you go out for?” she repeated.

“I’m not going to tell,” said Wendy. “I would not even tell a friend, so . . . it is no use *your* asking me.”

Yvette flushed. Here was her chance. She could tell Wendy she was her friend. She could say that was her wish, and it was because she was afraid she would be ill she wanted her to do as she asked. But it would not be quite true; it would not ring true. Yvette herself could not decide about her own feelings, and so she kept silence, freezing into exaggerated stiffness because she knew she was acting wrongly and unkindly.

“Do as you like,” she said abruptly; “it’s not my business.”

She did not see the tears rolling down Wendy’s pale cheeks or she would have repented then and there and have flung her arms round the other girl’s neck; but Wendy, too, had turned away, going slowly upstairs.

Joan Pinson rose from a crouching position near the stairs when the others were out of sight. She could make *quite* sure now of Wendy and Yvette never being friends again; in fact, it seemed almost certain that by to-morrow Wendy would be alone, with the whole school against her.

Then it would be the sympathetic Joan who would be offering her friendship and good faith.

But . . . it is a very old story about the tangled web deceivers weave; and when Joan started that whisper about Wendy having been out in the grounds after dark on the night before, she had not heard the news which Hannah the maid was bringing up to the schoolroom from the gardener who had told the tale.

Lessons were in full swing again—or supposed to be! though I am afraid those pupils were working rather listlessly after the great day of festivities and fame. Yvette and Wendy specially looked heavy-eyed and tired; Wendy was sneezing too, and seemed only too probably in for a richly deserved cold.

Joan had not reached the waiting geography class yet. She was having a quiet chat with Nellie, one of the younger servants, who would presently be bringing Wendy’s still wet hockey skirt and stockings to the matron with a plausible tale of having seen Miss Darlake climbing in last night through the class-room window. Joan had often found Nellie a useful ally before, and she

made unscrupulous use of the girl's greed for a tip and her readiness to fib!

Miss Prinkton was just annihilating the Woollies for having declared Spitzbergen to be at the North Pole, when Joan slipped into place, and Hannah, opening the door, made her announcement.

"If you please, Miss Prinkton . . . if you please, is Miss Caddock here? I— I thought she would wish to know, Miss, that Mrs. Gannow's house was all but burgled of everything last night, only Mr. Donald Arnloch happened to catch them. Robin Neale, the policeman, heard the firin' of a pistol and come up. The thieves got off and Master Donald was shot in the leg, but nothing was stolen. The burglars didn't even get in, but they say the news has given Mrs. Gannow a ter'ble shock, and if she had any relatives she wished to see they would have been sent for, only she had not!"

Hannah's lengthy speech, punctuated by gasps for breath, successfully drove any thought of lessons from the heads of those limp pupils. Down went books, round twirled the now eager girls. Sybilla herself was too thrilled to be able to find amusement in Hannah's quaint grammar and description.

A burglary! And Donald—one of their own band of Pioneers—injured.

The Woollies were squealing for further particulars and led a general clamour. Yvette had turned very white and was looking hard at Wendy, whose cheeks had flushed crimson and who purposely dropped a pen under the table to avoid notice.

A burglary—at Mrs. Gannow's.

Had Wendy had any share *with* Donald in the adventure?

Miss Prinkton's bell was ringing imperiously. The English governess was insisting on the class being resumed. Hannah had gone to find her mistress. But, oh! the weariness of that lesson—the trial which poor Miss Prinkton underwent. Of course it ended in the lesson being returned and school dismissed. Yvette was watching for Wendy and slipped after her into the music-room.

"Wendy," she said, "were you out with Donald last night? If so, you *might* have let us know. You are still a Pioneer. You must tell us—what happened. Were you with Donald when he got hurt?"

Wendy shook her head. "No," she replied, "I did not see Donald. I did not know he was there, though I guessed he *might* be. He—does not know I was out—at all."

"You guessed he might be? *Wendy*, what do you mean? You might almost be saying you guessed there would be a burglary! You must tell me; I've a right to know. Had your going out *anything* to do with the burglary at Mrs. Gannow's?"

Wendy stood very straight. "I am *not* going to answer you," she replied. "I do not see that you *have* a right to know. You are not my friend."

Yvette gave an angry exclamation.

“No, I am *not!*” she answered hotly, “and I’m very glad too. I certainly don’t want to be the friend of a girl who is so deceitful . . . and has such friends. If I did what I ought to do, I should take the whole tale to Miss Caddock.”

Wendy did not answer, but Yvette, seeing the look the other girl gave her, suddenly felt ashamed.

Instinctively she knew that, whatever secret Wendy was hiding, she had *not* acted either treacherously or dishonourably.

Yet, what did it all mean?

Yvette went out into the playing-ground, her nerves on edge. She could not play hockey. She did not wish to join the group of chattering comrades. She was trying to puzzle things out. She had always looked on Wendy as absolutely straight, even in spite of Joan Pinson’s hints. Was she honestly questioning the fact that Wendy was not straight now? Sybilla and the Woollies always spoke as if she were the most loyal comrade. Only yesterday Sybilla and she had quarrelled on the subject. Yvette could be very obstinate, and Sybilla’s very plain speaking had only made her cling more tenaciously to her resolve not to be Wendy’s friend.

The Pioneers must choose between them. Up till the present they had chosen her, but there had been signs of flagging loyalty. It was impossible to indulge in real fun when such a cloud hung over everything.

Sybilla and the Woollies themselves interrupted her meditations. They, *of course*, had been seeking for information about the burglary at every fountain-head they could discover. The result of inquiries seemed to be agitating all three exceedingly. They pounced upon Yvette, carrying her off to one of their many retreats before they would say a word.

“What is the excitement?” asked Yvette, quite irritably. “We’ve heard Donald’s leg is hurt—and we can go and inquire; we might contribute and buy him some flowers if there are any to be had—or sweets—bramble drops I know he likes. I don’t suppose for a moment the burglars are caught, or ever will be. I was just going to do some reading. The exam, for Mr. Clinton’s prize is next week.”

“Never mind Mr. Clinton’s prize,” retorted Sybilla. “I am captain of the Pioneers, and I have summoned a council extraordinary—or you might call it a Cabinet-council if you like. Joan Pinson came to ask me if it were true that Wendy is in terrible disgrace. She went out—beyond bounds—last night after the hockey supper. Nellie found her skirt and stockings bundled away this morning and still soaking wet. Miss Caddock sent for her, but, though Wendy said it was quite true she had gone out, she will not say where she went to. Miss Caddock has sent her up to the little sick-room, and she says—so Joan

declares—if Wendy won't make a full confession within twenty-four hours she will be expelled. Joan was quite upset—at least she seemed to be—and asked us if we could not persuade Wendy. Then we saw you and came to discuss.”

Yvette did not reply at once. Was she glad Wendy had been discovered? Should she tell her friends about last night's meeting? There was no reason now against that.

“It is true Wendy was out. I met her coming out of the class-room last night only just before we all came to bed,” she said at last. “Wendy would not tell me where she had been. She seemed upset—and frightened. When you came up I was wondering whether we ought to turn her out of the Pioneers. But there's no need, if she is going to be expelled.”

“She *won't* be expelled,” retorted Sybilla, “if I can help it. Pooh, bah! What rot it is! Talking as if our only Wendy were a burglar in masquerade. She's innocent, I'm sure. Probably she is trying to do some superlatively chivalrous act. It would be Wendyish if she were taking blame off Joan's shoulders; but that won't wash. Joan's too cute to commit burglaries of anything but characters. Yes, I'm a cat, and I feel like scratching. I could scratch you, Yvette, for two pins. You've got a most uncharitable knife between Wendy's ribs, and it's not fair. It's—yes! you'll hate me—but it's mean. Of course, it's a sort of attack in which you're not accountable for your actions. Good luck for me that I've no ancestors in particular. As to Joan, she's got her game. I'm going to play Sherlock Holmes over her too. Woollies, don't look so depressed. Excelsior! This mystery is going to be exposed. Doesn't that sound like a ‘thrill from the Picshurs’? But if any of you care to look the length of your noses, you will see Doreen Menleigh in the uttermost depths of distress, disguised under the sort of expression we wear over toothache. Doreen's got moral toothache and she is watching Joan like a cat does a mouse. Ta-ta, I'm off to start ye campaign. Wendy will *not* be expelled within four-and-twenty hours. In fact, as sure as I'm my father's daughter, we shall find her at the top of the pole far above our heads.”

And, without inviting anyone to join her, Sybilla whisked herself away in haste.

The Woollies looked dolefully at Yvette, who longed to shake them.

“I suppose you'll serve under Sybilla's banner,” she remarked icily. Ailsie looked at her sister, and Yvette noticed they were squeezing hands.

“We don't know what to do,” said Mona, “but we want to be true Pioneers and stick to our chums, only——”

Yvette's laugh was not mirthful.

“Only the chums are in different camps, eh?” she retorted. “There's only one thing to do, Woollies. Toss, and let ‘heads’ stay with me and ‘tails’ go over to Wendy and Sybilla.”

“And Donald?” added Ailsie. “Wendy and Donald are great friends, but you and Donald are too. The best thing, Yvette, is for *all* the Pioneers to join up in one and you will be captain again. Don’t you agree?”

“Certainly *not*,” quoth tempest-tossed Yvette, half crying with vexation and conscience-pricks.

But she was fibbing—hard!

CHAPTER XVIII

WHERE WAS WENDY?

Yvette did not sleep well that night. She did not deserve to! That empty bed opposite was mutely reproaching her all the while. How vexed her parents would be if they knew the part she had been playing towards Wendy Darlake! And Wendy might have told tales which would easily have reached them.

But Wendy had been loyal, generous, and kind. The *only* fault Yvette could honestly find against her had been that when she first came she had been too lavish with her gifts, and actually insulted Miss Glencourt of Glencourt Castle by offering her a cast-off jumper. Afterwards . . . Well, well, Yvette defied anyone to know *how* hard it had seemed to her that her darling home should go to these common “new rich” people. Wendy would have gone on with her patronage after hearing that news if Yvette had given her an inch. She had *had* to be on her—dignity.

Now, Wendy was in disgrace, and—yes! it was a positive relief to think she had been found out and would be expelled. If only the expulsion could prevent the Darlakes buying the Castle, it would be more than delicious. How Yvette was sympathizing to-night with Donald and *his* father! No wonder Sir Alan had hated the buyer of Old Grange just as she hated the buyer of Glencourt. She would have liked to shake hands over it with Donald’s father, though, alas, she could not help recalling what fun the Old Grange girls had made of Sir Alan’s churlishness, and how she had agreed about him being a mannerless old grumbler who wanted to eat his cake and have it.

Towards morning, however, Yvette fell asleep, and so sound were her slumbers that she returned a *very* sleepy answer to Hannah’s rousing knock.

Oh dear! What a nice place bed was at 6.30 a.m. and how horrid getting up could be! Yvette tried calling herself a slug and scolding her own laziness; but she really was tired, and the prayer-bell had already gone when she crept yawning downstairs.

Too late to go in. That meant a lost mark, but it would give her time to read that fat letter from home which lay there on the long slab. What news would Mums have? Probably Alister was well again and old Darlake would be wanting to hustle them away.

“I’m almost afraid to open home letters these days,” murmured Yvette to herself as she broke the seal.

And then, perched in the hall window-seat, she began to read. What a long letter it was! And what an interesting one, judging by her flushing face!

Yvette's hands began to tremble, her eyes to sparkle. Going back to the first page, she started to read over again—yes! and *yet* again before the wonderful, wonderful news *really* got into her head.

It was true! Mother wrote it. Dad had added a piece at the end. True! True! True! Yvette could not read it again, for tears were running down her cheeks—tears of joy and delight, tears of happiness and self-reproach.

For . . . this was the news. The great, wonderful news which transformed the world again for Yvette Glencourt and scattered every grey and ugly cloud, letting the sunshine come pouring down. *Every . . . grey . . . and ugly . . . cloud?* But no, though, stop! It *might* have been so, but for her own wickedness.

They were *not* going to leave or lose Glencourt Castle. They were going to live in the dear old home—as long—well, as long as those fairy-tale descriptions where every one lives happy ever after!

And the reason was because Dad's brother, who had gone out to America, had invented a "patent" for some machinery and made an enormous fortune. And—and thinking of the old home, the old name—and the brother with whom he had played and quarrelled in the long ago—had settled so large a sum of money on him that the owner of Glencourt Castle could afford to live there without worry or anxiety.

But—Glencourt Castle had been sold to Mr. Darlake.

Certainly! And Mr. Darlake could, and with every right *might*, have kept Mr. Glencourt to the bargain. But he had not done so.

"Always generous from the first," wrote Yvette's mother, "this last act of generosity eclipses all. Mr. Darlake told your father he should never be happy in a home from which he had turned out those to whom it meant heart-break to leave.

"He spoke specially of your friendship with his idolized Wendy and said that alone would prevent him from extorting (as he put it) 'his pound of flesh'; so, to conclude the matter, he went straight away to make an offer for Hilyford Chase—which is close to the Castle and a really beautiful property. So, my Yvette, you see how God has more than answered our prayers and given us our heart's desire. I feel sure, too, your little friend Wendy will be just as overjoyed as we, for her mother tells me she has been grieving terribly over the idea of usurping your home. Give her my love and tell her how I am looking forward to seeing her here. For we hope both the Darlakes and ourselves will celebrate Christmas at the Castle, as we have asked them to stay here whilst arranging things for removal to the Chase."

So, after all, they would not be leaving the Castle, thanks greatly to the generosity of Wendy's parents, and, in scarcely a less degree, to Wendy herself.

Yvette's joy was being swiftly overshadowed by that self-made cloud which was growing bigger—bigger—darker—darker. Wendy had said she was *not* her friend. *She* had told Wendy she was glad of it!

What would their parents say to that?

What would they think of the reason that had provoked those speeches?

To say Yvette was ashamed of her conduct is saying too little. With tears brimming in her eyes, she rocked to and fro.

"I'd give *anything* to undo the past. *Anything*," she whispered. "Why didn't I take Syb's advice? Why didn't I play the game? I—I——Oh! I've been meaner than ever Joan has been. I've been a wretch, an obstinate little mule. A horror. Will Wendy forgive me? *I* wouldn't if I were she. I—I'm not nearly so generous. I do hope—I do trust Wendy will forgive. I do hope she will let me be her friend. I must go and ask Miss Caddock now to let me go up and see her. I'm sure she never went out that evening for anything wrong. She's splendid. And all the while I was being hateful she was telling her people how she dreaded going to my home."

Prayers were over. Yvette could hear the girls passing down the passage towards the dining-room. Would Miss Caddock let her go and see Wendy now? She would try and find her—and ask.

Her face flushed and tear-stained, her eyes shining, Yvette ran down the passage, across the recreation room, where prayers were held, and on to the farther passage.

Two girls—Sybilla, and Doreen Menleigh—were standing in a small alcove near. Doreen was crying in a hopeless kind of way, whilst Sybilla stood with one hand on the younger girl's shoulder, the other pulling viciously at one of her own pigtails whilst her plump moon-face was puckered with an expression of comical distress and indignation.

She beckoned vigorously to Yvette.

"You're not going in to breakfast," she declared. "You've got to come and listen to Doreen's story. I say, though, you were late for prayers, weren't you? So, of course, you've not heard yet about Wendy."

Yvette felt her heart contract.

"About Wendy?" she echoed. "I *do* hope she's back in the schoolroom. I must see her at once. I want to ask her—to make friends. But——"

"Exactly," agreed Sybilla, and there was a sarcastic note in her favourite drawl; "there happens to be a very big *but*, for poor old Wendy, finding Old Grange and cats too much for her, ran away early this morning before anyone was up excepting Peggy, the milk-girl."

Yvette's cry of distress was genuine enough.

"Ran away? Sybilla! Not really. But she can't have run far. She'll soon be back. Syb, I must help to find her too. Just when I wanted to be friends."

"Often the way," jerked Sybilla; "but we can't all go running about peeping behind bushes and up trees for Wendy. We've plenty of other things to see to as well. Doreen, I'm just awfully sorry for you. It was—er—rotten to act as you did, but I might quite likely have done the same in your shoes. Anyhow, I'll tell Miss Caddock. You go up to the sick-room and ask Miss Simmins to give you a cure for your headache."

Doreen murmured something unintelligible and scurried away, evidently in deadly fear of being cross-examined by Yvette!

"What do you mean?" asked Yvette. "Does Doreen know why Wendy went out on the hockey night?"

"N-no," replied Sybilla, sticking a pin viciously into the soft wood of the sill and then jerking it out. "No, she was only telling me about that Joan Pinson. I wish this wood were her arm and I'd stick the pin in a dozen times. Don't look shocked, Yvette; or are you only worried? You look green, anyway. Yes. Wendy's run away,—but she's got to be found. She's straight, whatever all you people say."

"I'm sure she is," replied Yvette with a sob; "it's I who have not been straight. You were right in calling me mean, Syb; it just describes me."

"Does it? Then, my dear, coin a new word for Joan. She's a double-dyed sneak. What do you think? Doreen heard her bribing Nellie with five shillings to go and discover Wendy's wet clothes. Joan must have been near when you and Wendy were talking in the passage. So she had her game—she told Nellie exactly what to say—and Nellie obeyed. If it had not been for Joan, no one would have known Wendy went out. Joan hates Wendy, or wants her in her power somehow. *I* never heard anything so mean in my life. I'm going to play tit for tat, though. You can come along if you like. I'm going to tell Miss Caddock right now at breakfast before the girls. If Joan has any shame in her, she'll crumple up. Coming?"

"No," said Yvette. "I should feel like crying out: 'If Joan is mean, I'm ten times meaner. I let every one think Wendy was my friend, and I was glad to have an excuse to desert her. I'm ashamed.' You can say that to the girls if you wish. I'm ashamed. I don't know *what* to do or say, now Wendy has run away, but—I must see Miss Caddock."

"So you shall. It's no use getting agitated, my dear old thing. Miss Caddock will speak to you after I have spoken to her. Then we shall begin to get into line. Wait here, or I shall be too late for my little say."

Yvette waited. She could not have gone in to face all those girls. Bitter though her regrets were, she had no definite confession to make. Yet—to herself it seemed her guilt was black and inexcusable. Presently Sybilla came back. She looked very grave.

"I never thought Miss Caddock would have been so cut up or I would not

have done it," she declared. "As for Joan, she brazened it out till I could have joyed in pouring the contents of the teapot over her. She didn't even wince when Lena told her she ought to be ashamed of her treachery; actually she had the audacity to say, 'After all, no one was explaining why Wendy *did* go out!' Well, well! I think we can leave Joan to the Woollies, who I left glaring at her as if they wanted to devour her bodily. By the way, Yvette, Miss Caddock is in her room now if you want to go to her. Some one just brought her a note from the village. I believe it was from Sir Alan, or Donald, so you may hear news. I'll wait here. Even Miss Prinkton would look the other way to-day if she saw me standing idle."

Yvette went off by herself. She did not want Sybilla to be present at that interview, but oh, how glad she was that Miss Caddock was the sympathizing friend whom her girls could go to with such confidences!

Yvette had been long enough at Old Grange to know that, however busy her head mistress might be, she always found time for talks like these. Just half an hour—a half-hour which Lena Caddock could have filled again and again with important business, but none of those other waiting tasks seemed half so important to her as that of comforting and advising this repentant lassie, whose pride was laid so low in the dust.

And even after Yvette had been kissed and dismissed, Miss Caddock had patience to smile at sight of her pupil's hasty return.

"Need I go up to the schoolroom, Miss Caddock?" pleaded Yvette. "I don't feel like lessons. Might Sybilla and I go down to the village and see Donald?"

"My dear! just the very task for you. I had forgotten! His father wrote and asked whether one or two of you might go down. Donald is much better; the wound in his leg is only a flesh one, but he will be a prisoner for three or four days. You can go as soon as you like, and I will tell Miss Prinkton."

Yvette ran off, immensely relieved. Sybilla was still waiting, and received the news of a visit to Donald with delight.

"I don't believe Lena could have looked out of the window," she chuckled; "it's *black* over the moors—the sky, I mean. More snow, or a real blizzard-like storm! We must scuttle, Yvette, and reach Donald's quickly. If we're storm-bound down there, all the better. Come and get your coat and cap on quickly."

No need to tell Yvette to hurry. She was in a fever to be off. There was so much news to tell Donald, and still more to hear. Overhead, as the girls ran on their way down the long lane, the sky was growing darker, a wind was rising, frozen rain fell in large pellets of ice. "We shan't get back . . . in a hurry," sang Sybilla, when suddenly a figure rose from behind a bush on their left and stood barring the way.

With a low exclamation of alarm the girls drew back.

It was Black Jamie, the shepherd, who stood before them.

CHAPTER XIX

BLACK JAMIE REPAYS

“It’s the other little leddie frae the school I’m wanting,” said Black Jamie anxiously. “She’ll want to ken that my Jean’s home. Jean—wha can sing like a birdie noo and rin too. *She* wants to see the leddie . . . and it’s my nainsel does as weel. For, I’ve gotten a better job wi’ Farmer Rinloch and a bonnie cot to live in ’stead of a sty. But it’s the leddie I’m awa to thank.”

He was so brimming over with his grand news, poor fellow, that he did not even notice the way those other “leddies” drew back from him. But, before the speech was half made, Sybilla’s plump face was wreathed in smiles.

“It’s Wendy, he means,” she told Yvette—“*Wendy*. She did once speak of him. Listen, Shepherd, has your ‘leddie’ got red hair—curls?—yes! . . . all over curls, tall . . . big . . . blue eyes—smile: . . . often . . . wearing a long green coat? Do you know her name?”

Jamie was listening attentively, and when all Sybilla’s questions were asked, he dived into his plaid and brought out a little letter. Just a short note Wendy had written to Jean in hospital. Oh, how *pleased* Jean had been with that letter! She had only lent it her father now to read!

Sybilla and Yvette looked at it together. There was the name—Wendy Darlake. So they had found Wendy’s mysterious friends?

Yvette launched her news. Wendy was lost, she explained. It was no use trying to tell this ignorant shepherd that his little friend had run away! Poor fellow, what if he knew it had been his fault Wendy had suffered so!

Black Jamie was distressed enough to hear his leddie was lost. Hechs! but he would take no rest till she was found. Where had she been? Was she alone? When had she gone?

Sybilla floundered, and answered question by question.

“Have you known the leddie long? Where did you meet her?”

And Black Jamie, who was going to be Black Jamie no longer, told the story just as he had told it to Farmer Rinloch, whose daughter had been the nurse who had had the case of Jean in hospital and fairly fallen in love with her.

Sybilla and Yvette listened. They were used to the Scotch dialect used round about, and followed Jamie’s speech quite easily.

And what a tale it was! The shepherd sobbed hoarsely as he told of his despair, his Jean’s suffering, and the coming of “ain of the Lord’s white angels.” He told of Wendy’s trust in him, her belief in him, her giving of all

those twenty pounds which opened to wee Jean the door of health and happiness.

Here then was the explanation why the Old Grange girls had lost their treat. Yes, lost a day's pleasure because Wendy believed it better to let *one* child gain years, and a lifetime maybe, of health and happiness.

"If *only* she had told us," was Yvette's moan; and Sybilla echoed it, even though she had always championed this commonplace heroine.

But Jamie, being "wound up," was not going to be content with a half-story. He told of the going of Jean and the failure of a first operation; he told of his own despair and rebellion, and then of that fateful night when in defiance of all "guid" he had planned to go and rob Elspeth Gannow, the miser of Craigloch. He was working himself up at this juncture till his voice boomed out through the woods on either side of the lane.

It was the White Angel of their happiness who had again come to the rescue. Jamie became eloquent over it all! painting the picture in lurid colours. Wendy had come . . . out in the cold and rain, to entreat him to go back from crime. She had begged as piteously as if she had been his own daughter—and she had won.

Jamie had lived to learn how those comrades of a week or two's black misery had meant to use him as tool and scapegoat. They had lied to him, and must have laughed at him too; but, thanks to Wendy, he had escaped their toils.

He was a man with a new white road before him, kind friends ready to help, his little lassie bonnie and happy, and his own black despair changed to a heart of praise and thanksgiving.

Sybilla and Yvette were crying as they listened, but it was Yvette whose conscience hurt her till she felt she could not bear the pain.

For this loyal, self-sacrificing Wendy, who had hidden away her good deeds even when she found them labelled as bad ones, was the girl she had made so unhappy, the girl she had despised.

Yvette's pride had melted altogether away. She felt humble and penitent indeed as she stood there listening to the poor shepherd's excited talk.

Sybilla the practical, interposed.

"There's going to be a big storm," she remarked, "and we ought to get down to the village to Donald. Come, Yvette. Afterwards . . . perhaps Jamie will come to the school and we will tell Miss Caddock the story."

"But *Wendy*," moaned Yvette. "Wendy is out in all this awful cold . . . with the storm coming on when maybe she is out . . . on the moors. What shall we do?"

"Donald *may* have a suggestion," said Sybilla. "Come to him first, anyhow, and then we shall be able to plan with Lena and all of them. The police have been told about Wendy. Heaps of people will be searching."

Yvette yielded reluctantly, shaking hands with Black Jamie before they left.

“Perhaps Wendy has gone to your cottage,” she said. “I *do* wish she has. Will you go and find out, and meet us just here in an hour’s time? Then we’ll go to the school all together.”

For Yvette felt she was not going to rest till *all* at the Grange knew the shepherd’s story.

Donald greeted the girls with the most eager inquiries. He had heard a rumour about one of the Old Grange young ladies being lost!

Sybilla told him, for she could see Yvette’s self-control would not quite stand the strain!

Donald listened to every word; when Sybilla finished, he gave a deep sigh. “I always was sure Wendy must be an out-and-out sport,” he declared; “her eyes are so honest, and she never swanks.”

“Sybilla hasn’t told you *all* Wendy had to put up with,” said Yvette impetuously. “She . . . and . . . and the Woollies were her loyal chums. But I wasn’t. I—I behaved like a mean wretch to her. I—oh, Donald, I should be ashamed to tell you how horrid I was to her all the time, and she did so want to be my friend; she was always ready to forgive me . . . and I kept on being horrid.”

Donald looked distressed. Yvette was his special comrade, and he hated to hear her say such things of herself. Then a bright idea struck him, and he beamed as he held out his hand.

“But you are going to be friends *now*,” he said. “Wendy will be found, everything will be right, and we shall all have the jolliest Christmas that ever was.”

“I believe *you* are bottling up some news of your own,” put in Sybilla suspiciously—anxious to give Yvette time to wink away those tears. “Do tell us what it is! Is it an awfully jolly feeling to be shot in the leg and made a hero of? You look as if you were thoroughly enjoying it!”

Donald laughed and blushed.

“It was a very easy way of being made a hero,” he replied. “Raggett and I were just around Mrs. Gannow’s place because, as you know, it was in my bones that there were people about after her belongings—only I thought it was only chickens! When we saw the men creeping round by the window, Raggett skipped off for help and I stalked them. I suppose I didn’t do it very well, but anyhow, one of the men turned round and saw me. He called his mate and they came after me. I led them a fine dance and got round back to the house to raise the alarm: the man who shot me would have been caught if I’d had time to reach the garden door and lock it. As it was . . . they got away, but nothing was stolen. The thrill of it is—have you heard? Well! quite likely it never will be,

but Mrs. Gannow is very ill, and she sent for Dad and me . . . and said how grateful she was, etc., and . . . she said . . . she was alone in the world, you know, and had heaps of money. She said she should leave it all to me on condition that . . . I bought back Old Grange, as she . . . she hated it being a girls' school. She was funny. She said she hated schoolgirls too. I nearly had to stand up for you then, but I didn't! I just said how awfully good it was of her, and . . . that of course to have Old Grange again would be splendid—only it belonged to some one else. She got tired then . . . and told us to go. But—well!—it's rather nice to be made an heir—even though I don't want Mrs. Gannow to die for years and years."

"By then Miss Caddock may have got tired of keeping a school too," laughed Sybilla, "and all will be well. How nicely we *are* arranging things!"

"Only," added Yvette restlessly, as she rose, "we must find Wendy. I know there will be a blizzard . . . and, oh! we must go and see what is happening."

"You'll let me know at once," pleaded Donald; "it's horrid being chained by the leg. Don't forget—that sitting still when anyone is lost is the worst job of all. And I shall feel like crawling up to Old Grange to inquire."

"I hope you won't find us there then," retorted Yvette. "What I long for is for Miss Caddock to let us help in the search, and I don't believe she will, for . . . you see, it looks rather like snowing."

"What can Wendy's plan have been?" said Donald. "Poor old Wen! I rather doubt her going home. It's much more likely that she will have gone to the shepherd's hut to hide till the search was over. Then she would be slipping away home to her people. I expect she was afraid of being made to speak and getting Jamie the shepherd into trouble."

"I wonder," said Sybilla. "Talking of hiding gives me an idea. Quite likely Wendy *is* hiding. She would not have gone tramping over the moors, knowing there would be a search for her. But would she hide in the house of the person she wanted to screen? I don't think so at all! Where *could* she hide?"

"The Wizard's Glen," suggested Yvette. "I do believe she might have gone down there. Sybilla—darling, if . . . if we meet Jamie . . . do let me go on with him to the Glen whilst you go back to school and tell Lena. Sybilla, *pet*, do do it?"

Sybilla screwed up her face into a comical grimace. She would have liked to go to the Glen as well! But—she was too kindly to insist.

"I suppose Lena's nerves ought to be considered," she regretted, "so I'll go. If a blizzard arrives we will come and rescue you. Bye-bye, Donald. Having been a hero, you have to take a back seat for a time. It's Yvette's turn."

"No, it *isn't*," declared Yvette. "I'm the last thing removed from a heroine. But—I'm going to the Glen."

And fortune seemed to favour her resolve, for there was Jamie waiting for

them on their return. He shook his head in answer to inquiries.

Wendy had not reached the hut under the hill.

Sybilla parted regretfully from the pair of comrades. "Make haste—that's all," was her command. But Yvette did not mean to hurry too much. It was colder than when she had left Old Grange, and the northerly blast cut and stung cruelly. The Wizard's Glen looked gloomier than she had ever seen it. Those might so easily be ghost cries which went skirling down the narrow pathway. The shadows lay thickly.

"It's guid that the sheep are awa i' the fold," said Jamie. "It will be a storm the noo."

"The wind seems determined to smash the trees," shivered Yvette, as a stronger blast set every branch creaking.

There was danger enough under those tall-stemmed firs, and they knew it. But . . . they did not linger.

Michael's seat stood grim and gaunt in outline of great grey boulders. But Yvette was not thinking of ghosts or wizards just now.

"Wendy!" she called, as presently she and the shepherd stood there, close to the half-fallen stone. "Wendy! Wendy!"

Crack! A tree fell across the path behind. Outside across the moors the blizzard was sweeping down from the hills.

"Wen—dy!" cried Yvette. "Darling . . . Wendy . . ."

She had crept under the tunnel-like arch and stood beside the closed trap. Something stirred amongst the shadows where a darker shadow swayed and moved.

"The little leddie! Jean's leddie!" cried Black Jamie joyously, and the next moment the stray lammie was in his arms.

Worn out by weariness and distress, Wendy had actually fallen asleep within the charmed circle of the Wizard's seat.

When she had left the Old Grange she had determined to hide till the moors had been searched, and then reach the nearest station towards evening. She had been afraid to stay at the school—afraid lest it should be insisted on for her to tell her story. Too tired to argue or think clearly, distressed and overwhelmed by all the muddle of strange happenings, Wendy had planned to run away home to those dear ones who *always* understood and straightened matters out.

But tired Nature had made her claim, and Wendy had dropped into a heavy slumber almost as soon as she reached her hiding-place.

Now . . . the first thing she clearly realized was that Yvette's two arms were circling her, and Yvette's kisses fell fast and eager on her face.

Why was Yvette crying and calling her her darling Wendy? Yvette hated

her!

How cold it was—and dark. The tired girl shivered.

“What has happened?” she asked. “Oh, do let me go, Yvette. I—I’m going home. I must go home. Mother will understand. I can tell Mother.”

“*Every one* understands, darling Wendy,” cried Yvette. “We all love you and think you are the most splendid girl in all the school. We know about Jean, and Black Jamie, and Joan, and everything. Now . . . you’re coming back to Old Grange, where every one is waiting for you. Oh, Wendy, I don’t deserve for you to be my friend . . . but if only you would let me . . . how proud I should be!”

Wendy gave a long sigh.

“Your friend, Yvette,” she said in a dazed way. “Why, that is what I have always wanted, more than anything in the wide world.”

It was Black Jamie who interrupted that wonderful talk which had been whispered within that haunted circle of Michael Scott’s seat. Jamie had been climbing the side of the Glen and came back with his news.

“Ye’ll need to coom, lassies,” said he. “Ye’ll need to coom awa. It’s a blizzard will be sweeping the moors in less than monny minutes.”

Yvette helped Wendy to her feet. How stiff she was, but . . . she was laughing—in the happiest, shakiest way.

“*What* a breakfast-dinner you’ll have to have!” said Yvette. “There, that’s splendid! Jamie shall have one arm and I the other. Your friends have got fast hold of you now, Wendy.”

“It’s Jean will be looking for ye too, leddie,” beamed Jamie, who, not understanding all those twa lassies had been saying, was quite content to read Wendy’s happy smile.

Then—oh! it was a race across that strip of moorland.

“It’s . . . like being . . . chased . . . by a pack of wolves,” panted Yvette, as the mighty storm-blast came howling like a live thing across the darkened moors, and the driving snow-flakes beat and stung them like whips.

Once or twice the girls feared that terrible foe *would* be gripping them too in its fierce grasp, but Black Jamie had a lifetime of experience against such threats, and, half carrying Wendy in his strong arms, he hurried both girls across the hollow, making them shelter along the school wall till they reached the door. It seemed to Yvette impossible to advance a single step against such fury; but Jamie was dragging, staggering, helping the dazed companions who to his shepherd’s instinct were no more than lost lammies strayed from a safe fold.

But even Jamie himself was glad enough to come reeling in through the wide-open door about which, in defiance of rules, or commands, clustered a number of excited lassies as well as governesses and servants.

As those three figures emerged out of the whirling whiteness of the storm, the girls of Old Grange had set up a wild cheer of welcome, and eager hands had been outstretched to drag in the snow-caked, swaying forms.

The Woollies and Sybilla were foremost—as Pioneers ever should be—and, regardless of icy chill and snow, were fairly hugging those two comrades.

Home! Home! Hurrah for a safe return! Hurrah for Wendy Darlake—the girl who, instead of being expelled and disgraced was to be the heroine of Old Grange school and the happiest lassie . . . in all the world.

That was the song of the Pioneers as they carried off those two comrades, though Sybilla had waited first to ask Miss Prinkton an eager question.

“*May* I ’phone to Donald Arnloch,” she petitioned, “and say Wendy is found?”

And Miss Prinkton gave a beaming—actually a beaming consent!

CHAPTER XX

WHEN ALL WAS WELL

“Have you seen my wig?”

“Where *is* the rouge?”

“How do I wear a sword?”

“Help, girls, I’ve forgotten what I had to say.”

“My dears, there is Lena calling. She wants you, Alison. Yes—it’s Miss Caddock calling.”

Alison Blundel gasped. “But I’m only half dressed,” she urged. “And Yvette is fastening a button on my waistcoat. Here, lend me your dressing-gown, Wendy. I’ll fly.”

And, with the folds of a silk Japanese wrapper billowing around her, Alison hurried away.

There was *such* a lot of important business to be seen to to-day, for it was the day of the school theatricals, just two days before the breaking up for Christmas holidays.

“Crowds” of relatives as well as local people would be entertained by Miss Caddock and her girls this afternoon, and the latter were already getting panicky over their part of the proceedings.

The “Gipsy” element was as pretty as it was novel in a French Revolutionary playlet, and the girls were delighted with the task before them. Yvette was heroine to Alison’s hero, but there were plenty of lesser parts.

Gia and wee Betty were gipsy maids, Wendy was a French waitress, and Sybilla a gloomy Revolutionary, whilst the Woollies as “hags” of the market were a scream.

Those Woollies were executing a side dance in their scanty costumes when Alison returned.

“Mr. Clinton and his ‘patron’ have arrived,” said she. “The name of the winner of the mysterious prize and the description of the prize will be given at the close of the performance. Won’t that be lovely? I expect Wendy is winner. She has been doing some splendid work. Yvette, have you finished my waistcoat? and *would* you have time to make my hair look like a wig?”

Yvette was very much in demand that afternoon. She had the cleverest fingers and exquisite taste. Her “finishing touches” to the Woollies sent the pair off howling in glee to show themselves to the “public.” Sybilla, priceless as an old fortune-teller, waddled after them.

“The visitors have begun to arrive!” announced Gia as she joined her

friends. For—yes! Gia had many friends now, and the Pioneers had her under consideration as a member for next term. Now Joan had gone, Gia was quite blossoming out. Yes, Joan had gone. She had left a week after that memorable blizzard. Miss Caddock had told her parents that she felt it impossible to keep so untrustworthy a girl. The mere fact of Joan having bribed Nellie to lie was quite reason enough for her to be sent away. And Joan had gone, declaring herself *delighted* to escape from such a “hole.”

The girls left behind in the “hole” only laughed, and I *think* the remark might have been heard concerning good riddance to bad rubbish.

But—the visitors were arriving, and Old Grange girls were bustling, whilst Miss Caddock, seated in her own sanctum, was smiling over a note just brought to her from Sir Alan Arnloch.

It was an answer to one she had written telling the baronet that she had already had thoughts of giving up her school and retiring, and that in any case, if he wished to return to Old Grange, she would be ready to sell.

Why Sir Alan’s answer brought smiles and blushes to Lena Caddock’s still burning cheeks, I leave to your imagination; for you will be in a hurry to follow her into the big recreation room where for the next hour she will be receiving her guests.

There were three very strange guests, too, amongst the gay throng. You would soon be guessing their names, though! Quite right! Black Jamie with Jean and Tam were all there, a trifle shy, but all agog to see the acting of “their leddie.”

And there was their leddie’s own father coming with Miss Caddock to shake hands with them.

Mr. Darlake had come with Mr. Glencourt to see the famous acting, as the mothers were too busy with those Christmas preparations.

It was Mr. Darlake who had insisted on supplying the grand supper to follow the entertainment!

And—how splendidly those girls came up to the “scratch” at the last moment. Stage-fright and mental collapse were forgotten, and the audience cheered again and again as it watched those enthusiastic young actresses who thoroughly enjoyed their encores and who looked as if they wanted to clap themselves as they stood laughing and bowing in acknowledgment of the applause.

Donald—only *very* slightly lame—had come with a chum, as his father was away on business, and those two boys must have shouted themselves hoarse in their delight. I think *they* had a special cheer for a plump old gipsy lady and two tousled and ferocious “fish hags” from the Parisian “ballet” who did no end of scrambling and squealing in between times.

The Woollies undoubtedly enjoyed their own acting!

And then—when in turn the actresses had become audience—*what* a thrill ran through the ranks of girls whose gaze was fixed on the two gentlemen who had taken their places upon the stage.

Mr. Clinton introduced his friend and patron, Sir Erskine Ardleigh, and then went on to explain that the latter was paying the College fees of the winner of his special prize. The fees to include all that lucky pupil's College expenses for two years.

Sir Erskine then made *his* speech (whilst all the girls quivered on tenterhooks for a final announcement), declaring that amongst several brilliant, *quite* brilliant papers submitted by the pupils of Old Grange, he had selected two which almost equally claimed the reward he offered.

Finally, since only a single paper could be pronounced the winning one, he had made his selection, and Miss Wendy Darlake was the name of the young lady who had written a clever and in his opinion brilliant paper on the chosen subject. But—here Sir Erskine smilingly raised his hand—he understood that, though Miss Darlake was delighted to wear his laurel crown, she had resigned the prize to the schoolfellow who had trodden the path of fame so closely at her heels, and he *now* had the pleasure of actually bestowing the prize he offered on Miss Doreen Menleigh, whom he congratulated no less than Miss Darlake.

Sir Erskine hardly had time to reach his concluding sentence before the answering cheer rang out, led by the Woollies, of *course*, who seemed momentarily to forget they were *not* what their present costumes suggested!

But I think Sir Erskine, learned and grey-headed as he was, had no objection to enthusiasm, and those long and hearty cheers gave poor Doreen the chance to wipe—well! *scrub* away the tears which overwhelmed her.

To thank Wendy was impossible. So Doreen felt . . . though—though it was not quite so difficult to respond to Yvette Glencourt's demand as she sprang up to face schoolfellows and audience.

“Three cheers for Wendy Darlake,” cried Yvette, “the jolliest—I mean the finest girl in Old Grange School. Hurrah!”

The curtain should, I think, be rung down, whilst those girls—and Donald—are still cheering though, if you listen long enough, you will leave three people cheering still, after the rest are silent.

They are Black Jamie, Tam and wee Jean.

And they are cheering their “leddie.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Girls of Old Grange School* by May Wynne [Mabel Winifred Knowles]]