

Queen of the Dormitory

ANGELA BRAZIL



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Queen of the Dormitory

And other Stories

By
ANGELA BRAZIL

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by P. B. HICKLING

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List of Illustrations

1. “ ‘Come in, girls!’ Miss Robins said to the guilty twelve.
‘I’m glad you’re so punctual’ ” (Frontispiece)
2. “Miss Farrar’s keen eyes grasped the situation in an instant.
‘Mab!’ she thundered”
3. “Eve seized Kitty bodily in her arms, carried her to the door,
and bundled her out”
4. “Ivy drew back the ‘curtain,’ and disclosed what was really
a very striking scene”

Queen of the Dormitory

“D’you know,” said Meg Chadwick, sitting on Muriel Cameron’s bed, with one arm round the waist of Loie Donaldson and another clasped round the neck of Natalie Robyns. “D’you know, I can’t think what’s come over Daisy Davenport lately. She’s quite changed, isn’t she?”

“*Rather!*” agreed Loie emphatically. “She’s not the same girl. I used to be chums with Daisy last term; but now—it’s altogether off!”

“It’s ever since the holidays,” chimed in Muriel. “She stayed with some cousins in London and came back with her head full of all sorts of highfalutin notions. Thinks she’s a peg above the rest of us, I believe!”

“Cheek!”

“Looks like it, though!”

“I say, if she’s going to try that on with us——”

“Sh-sh! Here’s my lady herself!”

The girl, who at that moment strolled into the dormitory, unmistakably wore the air of one who holds a good opinion of her own capabilities. She walked to the wardrobe, opened a drawer, and then with rather a conscious sigh turned to the trio seated on the bed.

“I really wish you girls would be tidier!” she drawled. “There are half of your things spread over the dressing-table again. I told you about it before. Why can’t you keep them in your own places?”

“Shows how generous we are!” tittered Meg. “We like to share our goods. D’you think I want to keep a clothes-brush and a ribbon-box and a hanky case all to myself? No; I give you the pleasure of having a look at ’em! They’re chubby, and I leave ’em specially for you to revel in!”

“Revel, indeed! They’re not half as topping as mine! There’s no room to put one’s nice things out in this wretched crowded dormitory. I wish to goodness we could have proper cubicles, with our own furniture in each. There’d be some satisfaction in bringing a silver-backed brush to school then!”

“Perhaps you’d like a separate bedroom all to yourself?” chirped Loie facetiously.

“My cousin Gwendolen has one at Hillcrest College,” retorted Daisy, fixing a reproving eye on the cackling Loie. “I don’t think you’ve any notion of what a school ought to be. Of course, when one stays with people who go to really big and famous schools one begins to find out the difference.”

“It’s certainly hard for you!” Meg’s voice was quivering with mock sympathy. “I dare say it does look rather a poor place here, and no doubt we seem a second-rate lot!”

“Oh, I’m not saying anything against you,” patronizingly; “but, of course, those big colleges get a tone of their own. It’s only natural. There’s a style about Gwendolen. You’d know a Hillcrest girl if you met her anywhere.”

“Then may the Muses defend me from ever meeting one! I guess she and I wouldn’t mix, somehow. Thank goodness I go to Seaton House and not to Hillcrest College!”

“You know nothing at all about it!” declared Daisy crushingly, tying her hair-ribbon afresh in front of the mirror and sailing airily out of the room.

There were six beds in No. 4 Dormitory, and up to the present time their occupants had never complained of lack of proper accommodation. They had been a jolly little set, enjoying endless jokes together, and priding themselves upon their bond of union. Since the Christmas holidays, however, all had been altered. Daisy, once the life and soul of the community, was a changed character. She, who erstwhile had been prime mover in practical jokes, now turned up a contemptuous nose at such follies as apple-pie beds, declared booby-traps vulgar, and did not even smile at the witticisms of her companions. Nay, worse than that, she had assumed an easy superiority of manner and an air of patronage that were rightly aggravating to her former chums. She would ask them to perform small services for her as if conferring a favour by so doing; she insisted on having first turn at the bathroom, dawdled over her dressing, and monopolized the mirror.

All these things, though most exasperating, might have been borne if she had not continually insinuated that she was somehow on an entirely different level from her room-mates and, therefore, in a position to dictate to them and to lay down the law on every subject. Queen Daisy of No. 4 Dormitory (so her nickname ran) was a self-constituted monarch, and instead of finding obedient vassals, ready to submit to her wishes, she was raising a state of red-hot rebellion.

Matters came to a crisis one morning. Daisy, who had insisted on being the first to perform her ablutions, happened to be sleepier than usual, and instead of getting up when the bell ceased clanging, she turned comfortably over, and closed her eyes again. Barbara Hurst, scuttling hurriedly into a dressing-gown, took advantage of the delay to tear along the passage and appropriate the bath, so that when Queen Daisy, with many yawns, finally made her exit from the dormitory, she found the bathroom door locked and an ostentatious splashing going on within. She was hugely indignant.

“You know I always have it first!” she shouted through the keyhole.

“Don’t care!” retorted a defiant and slightly spluttering voice. “If you can’t get up and bag it for yourself you can’t expect it to be kept for you! You must take your turn, same as other folks. Stop rattling that handle! It makes me slower instead of quicker. I’m not going to hurry one bit, so I just tell you!”

In high dudgeon Daisy returned to the dormitory and vented her wrath upon the other occupants.

“Cheero!” purred Meg, with aggressive optimism. “We’ll ask Miss Roland to reserve this top floor bathroom specially for the sole and particular use of Your Majesty, and allow us commonalty to share the second-floor one with Nos. 2 and 3. It’ll be a scramble in the mornings, I dare say, but it’s worth it for the Queen to have her own.”

“You think you’re very sarcastic, no doubt!” fluttered Daisy.

“Oh, dear me, no! I’m all sympathy, I assure you. I think your position here isn’t quite understood, and it ought to be settled once and for all. If we don’t mind we shall be losing you. You might take yourself off to Hillcrest College with your cousin Gwendolen—and think what a blow that would be for the school! There’d be nobody left to keep the tone up!”

In private, Meg talked the matter over with her room-mates, and they arrived at the conclusion that something ought to be done.

“Daisy used to be as decent a girl as any in the dormitory. It’s only lately she’s turned bounder. We’ll play a rag on her, and make her see for herself what a grizzly idiot she is,” declared Muriel Cameron.

“What shall we do? She sniffs at apple-pies or stitched-up sleeves.”

“Well, I agree with her they’ve grown rather stale. I’m a scrap fed up with them myself. Fact! No; I’ve a top-hole idea in my mind. Oh, it’s

precious, I assure you. Thought it over in bed last night, and believe it will work out just fine. Listen and I'll whisper!"

The reply to Muriel's low-breathed communication was a yell of delight from her friends.

"You old sport! The very thing! Yes, do it this morning, by all manner of means."

"Oh, it will be a stunt!"

They parted; Barbara, Loie, and Meg to keep an eye on Daisy and see that she was safely occupied, while Muriel descended to the dressing-room, where, with the aid of a pair of scissors and a needle and thread, she did a little juggling among the school hats. She also removed the mirror from the wall and hid it behind a locker. At 12.30 the school assembled to get ready for the short walk which was always taken before dinner-time.

As Daisy sat changing her shoes, Meg strolled casually up.

"Hallo!" she exclaimed, with well-feigned amazement. "Whatever's the matter with your head? It looks uncommonly queer!"

Daisy's hand sought her hair-ribbon, but finding it in place, she returned indignantly:

"There's nothing wrong!"

"But there is!" Barbara assured her. "It's most peculiar. It looks—well—kind of swollen!"

"It's twice its usual size!" declared Loie, with shocked commiseration.

"It's bulgy somehow over the eyes," urged Natalie, "as if you'd had a bad knock at hockey."

"I wonder if it'll turn blue?" added Muriel.

"You're ragging, and it's not at all funny," said Daisy, in her most superior manner. "I wish you'd leave me alone!"

She had finished lacing her shoes, and she now took her hat from its hook. But when she attempted to put it on she did not succeed. It was manifestly many sizes too small for her. She glanced swiftly inside the hat; yes, it was marked in plain letters, "D. Davenport." There could be no mistake about it. For the first time an uneasy expression crossed her face, and she turned to seek the looking-glass. It was missing, however, from its

accustomed place on the wall. She put her hand to her head anxiously. The chums all chimed together:

“It’s a fact!”

“You can believe me!”

“Oh, you do look queer!”

“Swollen up like anything!”

“Big as a balloon!”

“Gives me the spasms to look at you!”

“Brace up! They’ll ’phone for the doctor!”

But Daisy, with a wild yell of terror, had fled from the dressing-room, and, totally against the rules, was rushing to consult the mirror in her own dormitory. Her room-mates collapsed on to the lockers and gave vent to a series of gurgling explosions.

“How did you work it?” spluttered Natalie. “It was absolutely topping!”

“Borrowed one of the kids’ hats, that’s all,” murmured Muriel complacently, “and changed the linings. It didn’t take me long, though it was a little awkward to fit. Flatter myself I made rather a good job of it. Oh, we really did take her in for once! Hold me up! I get a stitch if I laugh too hard!”

It was a rather subdued and sulky Daisy who, after an exchange of hats with a ruffled member of the First Form, joined the school crocodile in its daily promenade along the common; but apparently she took the hint, for she rarely, if ever, again mentioned the advantages of Hillcrest College or the superior tone of her cousin Gwendolen. If she was inclined to lay down the law or claim special privileges, a distended cheek or an eloquent finger describing a circle round a head would remind her sharply that general opinion was against her. The girls were determined to stand no more nonsense, and they rubbed in their joke pretty freely. One against five is an unequal match, so Daisy wisely abandoned her rôle of Queen, and by the end of the term she had sunk back to her ordinary position in the dormitory.

II

THE TACTICS OF DECIMA

“Has he refused again?”

“Yes, refused dead. Sent quite a curt note, I hear.”

“The *brute!*”

“It’s a shame,” grumbled Violet Bennett, gazing out of the schoolroom window at a certain plot of uncultivated land that lay exactly to the back of the houses in Meridew Crescent; “a scandalous, abominable, crying shame. All that lovely piece of ground utterly and absolutely wasted.”

“There’d be room for four tennis courts at least,” declared Sheila Hall, casting a covetous eye over the field in question. “Think of four extra tennis courts, girls! Why, it would be gorgeous! No quarrelling about sets, or hateful waiting for turns.”

“And the end piece would do for croquet and clock golf, and that would give us younger ones a chance,” said Lottie Drew, one of the juniors.

“He doesn’t use it—*ever*. So what good is it to him, I should like to know?”

“None at all; he’s a perfect old dog in the manger. He doesn’t want it himself, and he won’t let anybody else have it.”

“Stingy! Mean! Disgusting!” burst from the annoyed girls.

“I should like to let him know what we think of him!”

“Much he’d care!”

Miss Walton’s school was the second house in Meridew Crescent, next door to that of Professor Drummond Axleford, the eminent archæologist, who lived at the end of the terrace. To the professor his neighbours were a continual thorn in the flesh. He had been extremely irate when, six years ago, the house had been let for a school; he had protested in vain to the landlord, fumed, fussed, and overflowed with indignation, but as it was impossible, without a removal on his own account, to rid himself of the undesirable proximity of thirty bread-and-butter misses, he had settled down to endure the nuisance with grim ill-humour. Many were the passages of arms between himself and Miss Walton. He had written a stiff letter

objecting to the continual practising of scales and five-finger exercises, which he declared so disturbed the current of his thoughts that it seriously interfered with his archæological researches; and though Miss Walton, in compliance with his request, had moved her schoolroom piano to an inner wall, she had retorted by a polite but scathing suggestion that the professor might also change his study. This he had promptly done, but his dining-room was now next to the school, and he ate his meals to an accompaniment of musical gymnastics, irritating, so he considered, to the extent of ruining his digestion.

His housekeeper also had her grievance. She objected to the small heads which perpetually bobbed out of back windows when she shook mats in the yard. She scowled at them sourly, and kept up the feud by refusing to throw back any balls that fell over the wall, turning a deaf ear to the beseeching voices which urged their restoration.

But the chief bone of contention was the plot of land which lay at the rear of the Crescent. Originally it had been a common garden for all the houses in the terrace, but it had somehow fallen into the hands of the owner of No. 1 and was now the sole property of the professor. Every spring Miss Walton sent a politely-worded note, begging to be allowed to rent the patch for tennis courts, and every time her request was met by a firm refusal. It was really too bad, for the plot was quite run wild and uncultivated; in its present condition it was useless to anybody, while it would make a splendid addition to the school premises. It became a veritable Naboth's vineyard to the girls, who would look wistfully at its weed-covered surface, and count up its attractions with sighs of envy. Every year they had hoped against hope that the professor might relent and relinquish his neglected possession, and when this spring he had again kept up his character of dog in the manger, and sent the accustomed reply, the cup of their wrath was full to overflowing.

"He deserves to be hacked to pieces, and buried in his own field," wailed Rhoda Phipps.

"Or made to take a spade and dig up all the weeds. Wouldn't I just like to see him doing it, with a policeman to stand over him and keep him at it."

"Oh, it's too sickening. Decima Carson, *you* ought to be able to do something, he's your cousin."

"Not a *near* one," urged Decima, anxious to disclaim the relationship. "Only a sort of second cousin once removed. I've never even spoken to him, you know."

“I thought he was your godfather,” said Sheila Hall.

“So he is, worse luck. But he didn’t come to my christening. He sent me a spoon and fork, and then forgot all about me. I don’t suppose he remembers I’m his godchild. It’s too bad. Kitty’s and Dolly’s godfathers are absolute trumps—send them birthday presents, and take them to the theatre. I might as well have none.”

“Why did your father and mother choose him?”

“Well, I’m No. 10, you see, and by the time they came to me they’d pretty well used up all their relations and friends, so father said, ‘There’s nothing for it. We shall have to ask the professor.’ I wish they hadn’t.”

“All the same, Decima Carson, you ought to do something,” repeated Linda Jowett. “You’re the only one in the school who has the slightest claim upon him. To be his godchild as well as his cousin, certainly *is* a claim, and you ought to press it.”

“What do you want me to do?” groaned Decima.

“Go and see him yourself, and try and cajole him into letting us have the field.”

“Whew! That’s a large order!”

“No, no, it’s a ripping notion,” exclaimed Violet, Sheila, and Rhoda.

The more the girls talked it over the more taken they were with Linda’s idea. They declared it was Decima’s positive duty to make an effort on behalf of the school. If she refused the task thus thrust upon her she would sink forthwith in their estimation. They even uttered dark hints about sending her to Coventry. Thus goaded to exertion, Decima, though an unwilling leader, took up the crusade somewhat in the spirit of Jeanne d’Arc, and began to plan details.

“It’s no good letting Miss Walton know,” she said; “she’d very likely put some objection in the way. Schoolmistresses are so tiresome and silly and unreasonable. Anything I do ’ll have to be on my own.”

“We’ll back you up, of course,” promised the girls.

“Then I’d better go round to the front door of No. 1, and boldly ask for my godfather. I shall have to take my chance of any of the teachers catching me.”

“You’d be forgiven if you secured the field,” chuckled Rhoda.

During the half-hour before tea, therefore, Decima smuggled her hat and coat downstairs, and, seizing a moment when she was unobserved by mistresses, she slipped outside. With a thumping sensation in her chest she pulled the bell of No. 1. It did not ring, so she tried again, this time giving a vigorous peal that must have resounded through the house. The old servant appeared, with a particularly sour expression on her gaunt visage.

“Can I see Professor Axleford, please?” asked Decima in a rather small, subdued voice.

“No, you can’t. He’s not at home,” was the surly reply, and the door was slammed in her face.

There was nothing for it but to beat a discomfited retreat. Fortunately her allies were waiting to let her in at No. 2, and her short absence had not been remarked by those in authority, so she was able to regain the schoolroom in safety.

“I’m sure it was a horrid story,” said Dessie. “I believe he was at home all the time.”

“Of course he was. Didn’t I tell you I saw his head at one of the windows?”

“It was just a piece of spite on the part of the housekeeper. She can’t bear us,” said Rhoda.

“What are we to do next?” inquired Sheila.

“Don’t know. I’ll have to think,” replied Decima slowly. “I’m not going to be ‘done’ by that nasty old woman. It was too cool of her to say ‘Not at home,’ just because I’m only a little girl. I’ll see the professor somehow, if I have to burgle the house to get in.”

“I believe you will, too. When you say a thing, Dessie, you stick to it,” declared Violet admiringly.

“But how?” persisted Sheila.

“I can’t tell you yet. I must wait till I get a chance.”

For days Decima waited her opportunity, but it did not come. It is no easy matter for a schoolgirl to sneak away and pay an unauthorized visit even to her own godfather next door. The lynx eye of Miss Ferrand, the second mistress, was generally over her pupils, with a vigilance that seldom slackened. Even in recreation time they could never be sure that she was not surveying the playground from behind a curtain or a blind. One particularly

mild spring afternoon, however, the right occasion arrived at last. Little Lottie Drew excitedly squeaked that the professor was sitting in his back garden, and when Decima ran to verify the information by peeping out of the bathroom window, she could see him lounging in a basket chair, smoking a pipe and reading a paper.

“Miss Ferrand’s out, and Miss Walton’s giving a botany lesson, so there won’t be anyone to stop me. Here goes. I’ll do it,” thought Dessie, returning to the playground. “Just boost me a little, girls,” she said. “I’m going over the wall.”

The said wall was high, so it required much effort on the part of her friends before her plump form was successfully heaved to the top. Once there, she wasted no time, but dropped boldly into the next garden. The professor looked up in great surprise at the sound of the heavy thud. When he saw his self-invited visitor he half rose up, as if contemplating a hasty retreat. But Dessie was too quick for him; she dodged between him and the house, and got out the sentence which she had carefully prepared, all in one gasp.

“Please, I don’t suppose you remember me, and I don’t think you’ve even really seen me before, but I’m your goddaughter Decima Carson. Don’t you remember me now? I’m at the school next door.”

“Dear me! dear me!” ejaculated the professor. “Kenneth Carson’s child, of course—young Kenneth Carson!”

The idea of her greyheaded father being called young Kenneth Carson so tickled Dessie that she nearly exploded. Professor Axleford rubbed his chin with a rather knobby forefinger. Some memory was evidently distressing him.

“It was impossible to come to the christening,” he remarked, “because the Rochester Archæological Meeting was on the same afternoon. I trust they did not wait for me?”

“They did for twenty minutes, then father stood proxy,” said Decima, who had the details of her own baptism by heart, and who fully appreciated the humour of an apology twelve years old. “You sent me a spoon and fork,” she added, willing to let him down gently.

“I did. I remember choosing it in Oxford Street. And now you have come——” he asked, evidently seeking a reason for her sudden descent.

“I’ve come to ask you something,” said Decima bluntly.

The professor put his hand in his pocket.

“True. My godfather always tipped me when I was a boy at school. I had forgotten the custom,” he murmured.

“No, no!” shrieked Dessie, blushing scarlet. “I don’t want tipping. Please, *please* don’t think I came to ask you for *that*. It’s something quite different. Oh, Cousin Professor Drummond Axleford, won’t you let our school have your field for a tennis ground?”

The professor frowned as he shook his head.

“Impossible,” he said, rather tartly. “I conveyed my refusal to Miss Walton the other day. I wish I could persuade her to let the matter drop.”

“But we want it so badly,” pleaded Dessie. “If only you knew how inconvenient it is for a whole school only to have one tennis court, I think you’d let us. The balls wouldn’t come over from there, either. We wouldn’t let it annoy you.”

“It’s no use arguing the point. I do not purpose to let the ground. Er— isn’t it time you were going back? I hear a bell.”

So did Decima, and she looked round guiltily.

“My servant will let you through the house,” observed her godfather.

“No, thanks; I’d have to ring our front-door bell, and that would give the show away. I’d rather go back over the wall—that’s to say if I can,” remembering the girls were not there to boost her.

“The step ladder?” suggested the professor.

“The very thing,” agreed Decima.

Professor Axleford behaved as though it were an ordinary and orthodox occurrence for a guest to take her departure across the wall. He called the housekeeper, who brought the steps and held them firmly while Decima mounted. The latter was too agitated to say good-bye. She dropped over into the arms of her friends, and fled into the house just as the second tea bell rang.

“He’s a wretch, and I wouldn’t own him as a godfather,” exclaimed Rhoda, when she heard the account afterwards, whispered in the privacy of the book cupboard.

“I haven’t done with him yet,” said Dessie stubbornly. “Perhaps we’ll get the field after all.”

On the following day a workman appeared, armed with buckets of mortar, and carefully stuck pieces of broken glass all along the wall that separated the two gardens. Dessie watched him with scorn.

“That wouldn’t keep me out if I wanted to go in,” she remarked. “He needn’t be afraid. I don’t play the same game twice. Next time it will be something quite different.”

How to find a “next time” was the question. Decima watched and waited, and waited and watched, but it was a whole month before the fates were propitious. Then a sudden golden opportunity turned up. She was peeping out of the bathroom window when a most unwonted sight met her eyes. Lying on the grass plot in the professor’s garden was a small boy of about eight years old. He had a box of paints by his side, and he was daubing away in a painting-book, his artistic attempts being somewhat marred by a Skye terrier dog which kept making excited bounces and pretending to worry him.

“Hallo!” called Dessie. “Who are you, and what are you doing there?”

The boy jumped up and stared at the friendly face beaming at him from the window. He grinned a reply.

“I’m Cedric Brown, and I’m here for three days on my way to school. He’s my guardian.”

“Who? Not the professor?”

“Yes. Don’t I jolly well wish he wasn’t! He locked Barty up in the cellar. I got him out, though.” And he chuckled.

“Is Barty the dog? I say, where did you get that vase from?”

“Prigged it out of his study. I had to take something to put my paint-water in, and I wasn’t going to ask that old woman. She’s cross.”

“It’ll be smashed in a minute or two, if you let your dog rage around like that.”

“I don’t care,” responded the small boy recklessly.

Decima peered a little farther out of the window. She could not possibly be mistaken. She recognized the vase quite plainly. It was a very rare and beautiful piece of old Dresden, the fellow to which stood in their own drawing-room at home, and was considered an immense treasure. She had been told many times that the pair of vases belonged to her great-

grandmother, and had been left, the one to her father, and the other to his cousin, Professor Drummond Axleford.

“And that boy’s using it for paint-water,” she thought. “The professor would have a fit if he knew. Decima Carson, here’s your chance!”

The boy had flung himself down again on the ground, and was rolling over and over with the dog. Several times they missed the vase by only an inch or two. Dessie almost held her breath.

“Look here,” she called beguilingly, “would you like some chocolates? I’d a box sent me this morning, and I’ll give it to you if you’ll do something for me. It’s half full still.”

“Would I like chocolates? Rather! Hand them out!”

“In a sec. I want you to hand up something first. I’m going to let down a basket by a piece of string, and if you’ll put that vase inside for me to draw up you shall have the chocs.”

“What am I going to do for a paint-pot?”

“I’ll throw you an empty cocoa tin I always use myself.”

Surely no delicate piece of rare old china ever stood a greater risk than the Dresden vase in its passage up to the window. The basket bumped repeatedly against the side of the house, and once nearly tipped over, but Dessie caught it skilfully as she drew it up to the top, and rescued the treasure.

“Mind you don’t say one word about this,” she commanded, as she dropped the chocolate-box in return.

“Not likely. *I* shan’t give myself away,” replied the imp, munching with blissful satisfaction.

“Hard to part with half a box of chocs, but it was worth it,” murmured Decima. “I’ll give my godfather a week to mourn his loss, then—well, I’ll make a bargain with him.”

It was the day but one after that when she saw the boy again. He sauntered into the garden and signalled to her as she peeped from the window.

“I’m just off to school,” he announced. “I say, they’ve been making a jolly row over that rubbishy old vase, I can tell you.”

“You didn’t say where it’s gone?” gasped Dessie.

“Rather not. They think some burglar’s stolen it. Never suspected me, so I just looked innocent and said nothing. Oh, it was fun to hear them telephoning to the police. Here’s my cab, I’ll have to go.”

“Good-bye. Hope you’ll like school. Were the chocolates nice?”

“Scrumptious!” called the boy as he went away.

“Only four days more,” said Decima to herself, “then I verily believe I shall do it.”

Professor Axleford was indeed in sad distress about the theft of his Dresden vase. He was an enthusiast on the subject of old china, and this particular piece was the finest in his collection, besides being an heirloom.

“I’d rather have parted with the Nankin jar or the whole set of Worcester,” he groaned. “Somebody must have taken it who well knew its value. It is strange that the police can find no clue.”

The loss disturbed him, and as he sat at his desk in his study one afternoon, trying to write an archaeological report, his ideas refused to flow in their usual channel. He looked disconsolately at the blank sheet of paper, then hearing a sound behind him he turned round. Decima was standing in the middle of the room, hugging a parcel.

“Who let you in?” he asked, not too politely.

“Nobody,” replied his goddaughter. “I found your front door open, so I walked up to your study. I’ve come about some business. Haven’t you got a Dresden vase like ours?”

“I *had*,” began the professor, “but now——”

“I know,” nodded Dessie. “It’s been stolen. I heard all about that. Yours was a nicer one than ours, too.”

“Kenneth Carson got the piece with the crack and the broken handle, but mine was intact,” said the professor sadly.

“It’s a pity it’s lost. What would you give to get it back?”

“I have offered a reward of five pounds.”

“Oh, my! What a lot of money! But suppose you could have it without paying anything?”

“What do you mean?” asked Professor Axleford sharply.

“I mean this: if I brought you back the vase quite safe, and not the least scrap broken, would you let our school have your ground for tennis courts?”

“You should have a dozen.”

“We don’t want a dozen—only that one particular piece. Please, is it a bargain? If I give you back your vase will you promise faithfully to let us that field, not only this year, but every year?” and Dessie brandished her parcel.

“It’s a bargain,” agreed her godfather.

“And no questions asked? I don’t want Miss Walton to know a word about this, please.”

“All right, you young monkey. I believe you and that boy were at the bottom of it. I might have guessed.”

But Dessie did not stay to listen; she popped the parcel on the desk and fled, judging discretion the better part of valour, and trusting to the professor to keep his word. She did not misjudge him, for that same evening a letter arrived for Miss Walton, stating briefly that he had reconsidered his decision, and was now willing to lease her the plot of land for a period of five years.

“Most extraordinary that he should suddenly have changed his mind,” commented Miss Walton. “I suppose he realized how ungenerous he had been.”

In the back garden Dessie and her chums expressed their triumph with suppressed cheers.

“We’ve got it! We’ve got it at last!” gurgled Rhoda. “Dessie, you’re a witch.”

“He’ll hate us for ever,” laughed Decima, “but who cares?”

“Perhaps, after all, he’s so relieved to get back his vase that he doesn’t much mind,” said Violet sagely.

Three jobbing gardeners were set to work at once to level and returf and roll the plot of ground, and before the summer term was over, the girls had taken complete possession. Miss Walton sent a most graciously-worded note of thanks to her next-door neighbour; but she never knew the *real* story of how her school won its new tennis courts.

III

A MIDNIGHT REVEL

"It's a shame," grumbled Rona Watkins, perched on the top of a desk in the big classroom, and kicking disconsolately at the new varnish on the seat below, "a mean, stingy, horrid, atrocious swindle! I haven't felt so disgusted for ages. *The* match of the season! And just when we'd all worked ourselves up to the last pitch of excitement to be told that everything's off! Oh, it's sickening!"

"Well, surely even *you* wouldn't want to play hockey in such a drizzle as this!" urged Edith Barlow, looking out of the window where rain was falling softly and dismally over the sodden fields. "No one with an ounce of sense would have turned up for a match to-day!"

"Can't see why not," objected Rona. "We've played through showers before and haven't minded getting wet in the least. Those Linstead girls are slackers, in my opinion. To be afraid of a few drops—poor delicate darlings! We'd have taken no harm!"

"The ground would have been a nice miry swamp," volunteered Ella Courtenay.

"Don't be 'soft,' Ella! You, of all people, to want to cry off! No, you needn't snigger! I'd set my heart on this match, and I feel a soured misanthrope."

"It *is* aggravating," sympathized Lottie Anson, "and particularly hard on us boarders, because we've nothing else to do instead. The day girls have heaps of things they can turn to at home to cheer them up, but we poor wretches can only stare out of the window and growl."

Hardwick High School, like other establishments of its kind, existed for the benefit of day pupils, but twelve boarders were received by the head mistress, and lived at the house. As a matter of fact, Miss Robins's excellent arrangements left them no cause for complaints, but it is schoolgirl nature to grumble, and on this particular Wednesday afternoon they considered that there was reasonable excuse for airing their woes. They had long wished to play the Linstead team, and though the day was drizzly, it was not so wet as to have made the match an utter impossibility. A telegram from the Linstead

High School, however, cancelling the programme, settled the matter, and the boarders had perforce to resign themselves to their disappointment.

“If there were anything else we could do to make up,” continued Rona plaintively, “anything interesting, and exciting and out of the common! I’m sick of clumps, and Newmarket, and table tennis. Why don’t some of you make a suggestion? Hallo! Here’s Nan! She’s the one! Nan Stevenson, if you can’t think of something to rouse us up this atrocious wet afternoon you’re not worth your salt!”

“Hail, Caesar!” laughed Nan, uplifting her arm in a Roman salute. “Kindly tell me your imperial orders, and I’ll do my best to serve the state. You look as lively as a funeral, I must say!”

“Then find something to cheer us—something we’ve never done before.”

Nan knitted her dark brows for a moment. She was the recognized purveyor of entertainment among the boarders, and she was seldom at a loss for a suggestion, but to-day the demand taxed her powers to the uttermost.

“I’ve got it!” she exclaimed at last triumphantly. “We’ve had acts and gymkhanas, and fancy dress dances, and all the rest of it, till we’re fed up with them, but there’s one thing we’ve never tried yet (and jolly fun it would be, too!)—a midnight supper.”

“Where? In our dormitories?”

“No, they’re too near to Robin Redbreast. She’d be certain to hear us revelling, and then we’d be done for.”

“Where then?”

“Stop spluttering that pen about in the inkpot, and I’ll expound. This is my programme: At 8.30 we all toddle to bed as per usual, those who have a fancy to sleep are quite welcome to do so, as long as they’re ready to wake up again and join in the spree. At 11.45 everybody gets up and dresses as quietly as possible—and no talking or giggling allowed, mind!—then exactly as the hall clock strikes midnight we creep downstairs like a procession of the hours, and go to the dining-room. There we spread out our feast, and proceed to enjoy ourselves. Doesn’t it strike you as rather frolicsome?”

“Ripping!” was the universal verdict emphatically pronounced.

“But how are we going to get the prog?” inquired Lizzie Woodhouse.

“That shouldn’t be insuperable. We must make a general subscription—write a list of what we want, and then bribe Florence to go out and buy the things for us.”

“Scrumptious! I only bargain for sardines and seed cake, and if any of you want——” but here Lizzie broke off hurriedly and, blushing scarlet, bent down and pretended to be buttoning her shoe.

Her confusion was certainly not without cause. Quite suddenly the inner door of the classroom had opened, and Miss Robins herself had entered from the studio, walked across the room, and with a nod to the girls had passed through the outer door and down the staircase. Utter consternation fell upon the conspirators. They stared at one another with blank faces.

“Well, of all the unspeakable bits of bad luck!” groaned Dorrie Johnstone.

“What was Robin Redbreast doing hopping about in the studio? I hadn’t the shadow of an idea she was there!”

“Did she hear, do you suppose?” quavered Mary Buchanan.

“I hardly think so,” said Nan hastily. “Oh, she couldn’t, surely! We were over here by the window, you know, and we weren’t talking loud.”

“And probably she’d only just that second come into the studio from the corridor,” added Ethelberta Hall. “She didn’t *look* as if she’d heard, either. She gave such a friendly nod, and walked so quickly past.”

“If she’d heard, she’d surely have jumped on us!”

“Rather! And squashed us to smithereens!”

“Then you think it’s safe, Nan?”

“Perfectly. I don’t believe she’s the slightest inkling. We’ll have our fun to-night while Robinette slumbers in her nest, and I’ll undertake she won’t even open one little twinklesome eye!”

The main question of the revel naturally resolved itself into whether or not provisions were obtainable. The girls held a council of war, and amongst them collected a total of four shillings and twopence.

“It’ll go quite a long way, if we map it out carefully,” decided Nan. “I’ll get hold of Florence now, and see if I can’t coax her to buy what we want.”

Florence, being the youngest of the servants, was apparently the most open to bribery and corruption, but though she giggled at Nan’s suggestion,

she at first professed righteous indignation and declined all complicity.

“Don’t you go asking me to do such a thing, Miss!” she declared. “Why, it might be as much as my place is worth, suppose Miss Robins got to hear about it. A pretty silly figure I’d cut if she found me out!”

“But you wouldn’t be found out, Florence! We’d all take the most solemn pledge not to betray you. On our honour we would! Tortures shouldn’t drag the secret from us. Oh, do, *do*! Be a nice, good, dear, kind-hearted girl and run to the shops. It wouldn’t take you five minutes. We’ll give you an orange, and a cheese-cake, and a slice of currant bread, and some sweets for yourself, if you *only* will!”

“I don’t feel somehow as I ought,” murmured Florence more yieldingly.

“Yes, yes! It’s not doing a mite of harm. It’s only a little fun we’re having. We *must* have our jokes sometimes. There! I knew you’d say yes! Here’s the paper with what we want—you can get everything at the bottom of the street. And here’s the money.”

Florence unfolded the list, and scanned it with an expostulatory shake of the head.

1 box of sardines.

1 currant loaf.

13 oranges.

13 cheese-cakes.

½ lb. of Pat-a-cake biscuits.

Sweets with any money that is left.

“How’m I going to get these to your bedrooms?” she inquired.

“We don’t want them in the dormitories. Stick the parcels in the boot cupboard in the hall, under a mackintosh, and we’ll fish them out for ourselves.”

“Well, I’ll do what I can for you, but if you’re caught, don’t throw the blame on me, that’s all!” said Florence, as she put the money in her pocket, and went back to the kitchen regions.

The thought of the fun they were going to have at midnight quite cheered the girls up, and compensated for the disappointment of the afternoon. Ethelberta stopped yawning and found a book, Adah and Lizzie began a game of Halma, and the others pulled out various neglected pieces of fancy work. If anyone’s spirits flagged, the rest had only to whisper

“oranges” or “cheese-cakes” to restore a smile. At tea, as they ate bread and butter and blackberry jam, their thoughts strayed to the currant loaf and sardines which by this time Florence had probably secreted in the boot cupboard, and Rona could not help spelling “feast” on her fingers, for the benefit of Lottie and Mary, who sat opposite.

Miss Robins, at the head of the table, took no notice of their secret signals, though her keen glance was everywhere. She was a most alert, cheerful little lady, with such very rosy cheeks and such bright brown eyes and hair as well to merit the sobriquet of “Robin Redbreast” that her pupils bestowed on her in private. She was highly popular among them, and they only harboured the idea of a surreptitious feast on the ground that “stolen fruit is sweet,” and it was fun to do something for once quite beyond the ordinary, and just a little outrageous and risky and venturesome.

At bedtime everybody decided to keep broad awake till midnight, but just in case of any hitch, Mary Buchanan, who was a light sleeper, set her alarum with one turn, so that it should give the very least tiny warning, sufficient to rouse her if asleep, but not enough for the tirr-tirr-tirr to penetrate to Miss Robins’s bedroom. As it happened, this proved a wise precaution, for at 11.45 she was slumbering peacefully. She sprang up, however, at the alarm, and seizing the clock, buried it in the blankets in case it might exceed its duty, and go on too long.

To judge from the sounds of gentle, regular breathing, nobody had managed to keep awake, and Mary, slipping on her dressing-gown, made a tour among the other beds, shaking the occupants into consciousness, then passed on to the next dormitories.

In various degrees of drowsiness the girls sat up and recovered their scattered wits. One or two would have been glad to drop off to sleep again, but that Mary had foreseen, and armed with a wet sponge was prepared for the emergency.

“You needn’t take such brutal measures!” spluttered the victims.

“There’s no time to waste,” said Mary grimly, “you’ll thank me when you’re downstairs in the dining-room. Get dressed as fast as you can. Never mind prinking.”

The chiming clock in the hall sounded the four quarters, then tolled out twelve strokes, and as the last died quiveringly away the girls began silently and cautiously to creep down the stairs, which certainly creaked in a manner they never did in the daytime. A little oil lamp on the landing was always

left burning at night, and by its glimmer they were just able to see their way round the turn of the staircase and across the hall. Rona gently opened the door of the boot cupboard and groped for their provisions. Florence had been faithful to her word, and to judge from the feel of the various parcels had executed all the commissions. Rona silently handed the oranges to Nan, and the sardines to Lottie, then distributing the other bags between Ella, Edith, Adah, and Ethelberta, brought up the rear herself with the currant loaf.

Down the long, dark passage they tiptoed, out of sight now of the landing lamp, till they reached the door of the dining-hall, where Nan, feeling about with her thumb, switched on the electric light, and stalked into the room. She was so closely followed by the others that they did not hear her gasp of astonishment until they were all inside the door. The spectacle that greeted them was certainly calculated to excite exclamations of surprise. The centre table was spread with a clean cloth, and prettily decorated with ferns and flowers, while on it was a most tempting array of glass dishes containing jelly, trifle, custard, apple snow, together with jugs of lemonade, and other delicacies generally reserved for festive occasions. But that was not the whole. At the head of the table, in a most becoming evening dress, stood Miss Robins, surveying her twelve boarders with—yes! actually a bland smile of welcome.

“Come in, girls!” she said pleasantly. “I’m glad you’re so punctual. This is only a cold supper, because I don’t approve of keeping the servants up late, but no doubt we shall manage to enjoy ourselves. Sit down, all of you!”

If an earthquake could have caused the floor to open and swallow them up, I think the guilty twelve would have been much relieved. They took their seats in a horrible awed silence, trying to conceal the tell-tale parcels of provisions which they had brought with them. Nan, in her confusion, burst the bag of oranges as she popped it under her chair, and one rolled across the floor to the very feet of the head mistress. Miss Robins ignored the incident, however, and chatting easily, began to serve the large dish of trifle. The contrast between her charming evening gown, with its dainty trimmings, and their own careless toilets filled the girls with deep humiliation. Nan’s hair was in curl papers, while their blouses were for the most part unbuttoned. Not one boasted a belt or a tie.

As if she were quite oblivious that anything was deficient in the costumes of her guests, Miss Robins talked on brightly, just as she always did at the ordinary school parties. Hot, red, and most uncomfortable, the twelve conspirators ate the trifle, apple snow, jelly and fruit which were

pressed upon them, each devoutly wishing herself back in her own bed. Lottie was sitting uneasily upon the tin of sardines, and Ethelberta strove to hold a bag of cheese-cakes intact upon her lap. Miss Robins was the only merry one of the company, but she talked for the dozen, and did not appear to be damped by the monosyllabic nature of the replies accorded to her sprightly sallies. Everybody was most deeply and intensely relieved when at length she rose and gave the welcome signal of dismissal.

“We’ve had quite a jolly little supper together,” was her cheery comment. “It reminds me of a Hans Andersen fairy tale for us to be enjoying ourselves in the middle of the night, while everyone else is sleeping. One almost expects the china ornaments to come down and begin to dance. Pleasant dreams to you all! And when you next contemplate a nocturnal festivity, please give me a little longer notice beforehand. Turn up the light in the hall, Ella, as you go.”

The girls scuttled upstairs like conscience-stricken rabbits, but once in the sanctuary of their dormitories they exploded into an expressive series of “Well!” and “Oh!”

“So she heard after all!” exclaimed Rona. “She must have been in the studio longer than we thought!”

“I think she’s an absolute archangel!” declared Nan. “I never felt so ashamed in my life. Look at my absurd knobs of curl papers! Here, what am I to do with the rest of this wretched bag of oranges?”

“I’ve been hugging the cheese-cakes all the time!” giggled Ethelberta.

“Give the whole lot to Florence in the morning, and tell her to eat them, or to bestow them on a tramp,” said Mary. “I couldn’t touch a morsel of them myself, not even a pat-a-cake biscuit.”

“So much as an acid drop would choke me!” agreed Lottie.

“Didn’t that blue voile dress suit Robinette to a T?” said Adah. “She looked sweet.”

“Well, I don’t know how you feel about it, but I think Robin Redbreast turned up trumps. She needn’t be afraid of our wanting another midnight carousal—one’s enough and plenty for me!” declared Rona.

“Hear, hear!” cried the others, as they hopped hastily into bed.

IV

THE TRADITION OF THE SCHOOL

“You can’t!”

“It’s unheard of!”

“A girl of only twelve!”

“And a new girl, too!”

“It’s the limit!”

“What next, I wonder?”

“And why shouldn’t I?” returned a slow, rather stubborn voice in reply to this brisk fire of objections. “I went in yesterday and it was quite all right, and she smiled at me and said to Mother: ‘I’m always at home here to my girls.’ I tell you I want to ask her something.”

The speaker, a slim junior with rather short skirts and bobbed hair, made a move in the direction of an oak-grained door upon which was painted in black letters the word “study,” but Mab Leonard interposed.

“Can’t let you make such an utter idiot of yourself! Why, the snubbing you’d get would be simply awful!”

“You needn’t flatter yourself you’d be *welcomed!*” sneered Renie Hereford.

“But yesterday——”

“Oh, yesterday, when your mother brought you! That’s a totally different thing, my good child, as you’ll soon find out. If any junior, or any senior, or even a *prefect* were to go rapping at that study door when Miss Farrar’s correcting essays she’d get her head snapped off!”

“It’s the truth,” confirmed Hermie Duncan. “That study is the lion’s den, and though you may go in safely with your mother as lion-tamer, you’d better not risk it on your own, that’s all. You’ve a good deal to learn, Meta James!”

The new girl gave way unwillingly and beat a frowning retreat down the passage.

“There was nothing about that in the list of rules,” she grumbled.

“Of course not, you stupid!” Mab enlightened her. “That printed list is only about our clothes, and receiving letters and paying visits, and that kind of thing. But we’ve heaps of unwritten rules as well—old traditions that everybody has to keep because everybody always has kept them at St. Monica’s, you know.”

“I don’t know!”

“Then it’s time you *got* to know, for if you break them won’t you just jolly well find yourself in hot water! Goody! I’d be sorry for you!”

Meta, a new girl at St. Monica’s, certainly found that she had much to learn in respect of the elaborate system of etiquette which prevailed at the school. There were some things permitted only to prefects, others the prerogative of the seniors, and woe betide any luckless junior who had the temerity to usurp the privileges of her elders. Miss Farrar, the Head Mistress, was held in great awe by the girls. She was not very tall, but she made up in dignity for her lack of stature, and one glance from her keen blue eyes could cause the most obstreperous spirits to quail. She was treated at St. Monica’s with the respect yielded to the abbess of a convent or the president of a republic.

“If you happen to meet Miss Farrar in one of the passages,” explained Mab to Meta, “you’ve got to walk along two steps behind her for a little way, just *in case* she might wish to speak to you. Of course you mustn’t speak first.”

“You’re ragging me,” protested Meta.

“Crystal clear, I’m not. Am I, Adrienne?” appealing to a Sixth Form girl who happened to be passing.

The senior paused and nodded in confirmation.

“Ra-ther! I can tell you, if you meet the Head in one of the corridors you’d best get to heel or you’ll hear about it. Miss Farrar doesn’t make any allowance for new girls, either. They’re supposed to know, whether they do or they don’t. So look out for squalls!”

The fact that Meta James seemed to resent the traditions of the school naturally made her companions anxious to pile them on to a greater extent than was really absolutely necessary. They refrained—at much cost to their own appetites—from second helpings of pudding so as to have the satisfaction of telling her it was bad form to eat more than one plateful; when she found a tennis ball among the bushes they insisted upon her restoring it to the Games Monitress, though individually each would have

pocketed it if the luck had been hers. They observed bedroom rules with a sort of punctilious gusto, made her give her hair a hundred brushes while they stood and counted, and supervised the due arrangement of her dressing-table. There is always a certain satisfaction in laying down laws to others even if you have to keep them yourself.

“She’s rather a blighter!” said Mab to her particular circle of chums as they discussed the new girl next evening.

“Blighter! She’s the limit!” sniffed Lenore. “I feel all the time I want to shake her or stick pins into her or do something to wake her up. She just walks about the school with her mouth open and says ‘Indeed!’ when you tell her anything. That’s all I can get out of her.”

“Can’t we play a rag on her somehow?” suggested Renie.

“I wish we could.”

“Stop a minute, girls! I’ve got it!” said Mab. “Guess we’ll do her brown!”

“How?”

“Ah, how? That’s the question. Wait till your Grannie enlightens you, my child! Are you all ready to play up?”

“Rather!”

“To the last ounce?”

“Don’t be an ostrich!”

“Then you may come and help me.”

The conspirators were hatching their plot in the playroom, that for the moment was empty.

It was growing dusk, and both playroom and the corridor outside were in semi-darkness. The time was about half-past five, and punctually at six o’clock Miss Farrar, in the university cap and gown which marked her degree of M.A., would issue in state from the study door and walk down the corridor to the lecture hall to take call-over. But that would not be for half an hour yet, and meanwhile, as Mab happened to know, Miss Farrar was in the fernhouse talking to the gardener and the study was empty. She had peeped in there only a minute ago and had seen the cap and gown hanging on a hook on the wall. It was the Head Mistress’s usual habit to go the round of her greenhouses each evening, returning to the school in time for call-over, and as her tour of inspection was generally accompanied by many directions

to old Willis, the factotum, she might be safely counted upon to be out of the way for at least twenty minutes longer. A great deal can be accomplished in twenty minutes by a girl with brains and resource. Mab's naughty brown eyes were twinkling.

"Come along and have the time of your lives!" she purred.

Mab had rather a reputation at school for her skill at charades. She could dress up almost as easily as a quick-change artist. She bolted upstairs now and purloined a skirt from the bedroom of Daisy Bowes, one of the prefects. She slipped it on and cautiously opened the door of that most sacred and classic precinct—the study.

"Mab! Oh, I say!"

"Mab! You *daren't*!" objected her chums, suddenly divining her intention.

"Daren't I? You see!" chirruped Mab, and darting to the hook, she seized the academic cap and gown and bore them off.

In the privacy of the playroom she completed her toilet. She twisted her pigtail into a knot and secured it with hairpins, perched the mortarboard on the top, donned the gown and looked at herself critically in the glass.

"H'mph! Not half bad!" she remarked. "Think it suits me; so perhaps I'll take my degree, too, some day. The only things wanting to make me look like Miss Farrar are her teeth. Vera, fetch me a piece of paper and some scissors—quick. That's a mascot."

Miss Farrar was the possessor of what the girls sometimes described as "a fine, handsome set of teeth." They were large, and rather prominent and dazzling, and the two front ones showed plainly when she talked. From a stiff piece of paper Mab cut two oblong dice and tucked them inside her upper lip, so that they slightly protruded. The effect was so marvellous that the girls collapsed with laughter.

"Oh, you *are* like her!"

"The very image!"

"And the same twist of fair hair!"

"Those teeth are the limit!"

"Flatter myself I'll pass muster in the dark," chuckled Mab. "Now for our game! One of you has got to fetch Meta on some pretence or other."

“I’ll bring her,” said Renie. “I’ll tell her one of the prefects sent for her to tidy her locker in the playroom.”

“All serene! I’m going back to my study, and I shall come out just when Meta is in the corridor.”

“Oh, Mab! The study! *Suppose* Miss Farrar came back?”

“My good child, don’t teach your Grannie. I tell you Miss Farrar’s going the rounds of the greenhouses. She was in the fernery, and she can’t possibly say good evening to all her beloved plants in less than twenty minutes—it *always* takes her that time to do it—so it gives us nearly ten minutes to spare. Stir your pins and fetch Meta.”

The new girl was sitting in the classroom doing a piece of crochet, and at the news of the bogus summons by a prefect she said “Indeed!” It was her invariable reply when spoken to. She put down her work, however, and came at once. There had been light enough to see to crochet by the window in the classroom, but it was very dark in the passages, and especially in the corridor. Renie allowed her victim to go first, and herself fell discreetly into the rear.

As Meta, in the dim twilight, was about to pass the study the door swung open and a figure, duly robed in academic cap and gown, issued forth into the corridor. She caught for one brief moment an impression of a high colour and dazzling teeth, and never doubted for an instant but that she was in the august presence of the Head Mistress. The school etiquette which had been persistently rubbed into her since her arrival rushed to the fore and she obediently and respectfully began to follow about a yard behind. The figure, instead of proceeding towards the playroom, walked slowly and majestically in the direction of the lecture hall. Half-way there, in a particularly dark spot, it halted to allow the pupil to come up alongside.

“Is that you, Meta James?” asked a condescending and rather toothy voice.

“Yes, Miss Farrar.”

“It’s a week since you came to St. Monica’s, and I’ve been watching you carefully, Meta! Did you know I was watching you?”

“No, Miss Farrar!” Meta’s voice was rather shaky and anxious.

“I find you very much behind the general standard of the school. Don’t you feel that yourself?”

“I—I—I don’t know!”

“Notice other girls, and you’ll find how much you’re lacking. Take some of your companions for a model. Mab Leonard, for instance.”

“Mab Leonard!”

There was genuine amazement in Meta’s voice.

“Yes, Mab Leonard—or perhaps Renie Hereford and Lenore Willard. If you mould yourself on them I hope I may see a great improvement in you. Something a little more sprightly would be desirable. I could wish——”

But what was the ideal of her future conduct Meta never learned, for a quick footstep suddenly sounded in the passage, the electric light was switched on, and Miss Farrar herself stood before them. Her keen eyes grasped the situation in an instant.

“Mab!” she thundered.

But Mab, in that horrible moment of agitation, had swallowed her paper teeth, and was coughing and choking and gasping for breath. The sight of the Head Mistress smacking her double vigorously on the back to restore respiration was decidedly comic. Even Meta James, who was not of a humorous disposition, had to hold back her mirth. Miss Farrar seemed to see nothing funny in it at all, and when Mab had at last regained her breath she grimly disrobed her of cap and gown and told her to follow her into the study.



“Miss Farrar’s keen eyes grasped the situation in an instant.
‘Mab!’ she thundered.”

Mab did not appear at call-over that evening, nor was she at her desk in the classroom on the following morning. Wild rumours flew about the school that she had been expelled, and that a cab had arrived late at night and borne her away with her boxes, never to return to St. Monica’s. But rumour is generally wrong; and, as a matter of fact, the delinquent spent the

night and the following day in the Isolation Room, an attic reserved for emergency cases of measles or influenza. Thirty-six hours of confinement to bed, with only a history book by way of light literature, is a fairly heavy punishment for a lively girl of twelve. When Mab reappeared in school it was with spirits decidedly chastened and with an increased awe and respect for the authority of Miss Farrar. It is not on record that any junior at St. Monica's ever dared again to so much as poke an inquiring nose inside the study, far less commit the sacrilege of touching the Head Mistress's academic cap and gown. As for Meta James, by the end of the term she had gleaned the full tradition of the school, and though she did not exactly take Mab, Renie and Lenore for her models, she improved in respect of sprightliness and became really quite a favourite in her form.

V

THE REBELLION OF BETTY

"*That* old thing!"

"You don't mean it!"

"It's impossible. Mrs. Leslie can never have chosen *her*."

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely and perfectly, worse luck. I only wish I weren't. I tell you, I saw her myself just three minutes ago. I had to take a book to the library, and she was standing near the fire. Mrs. Leslie turned round and said: 'This is one of your pupils, Miss Jones. Betty, this is your new teacher for IV B.' It gave me quite a shock. I believe I gaped at her in a most idiotic fashion, and gasped out: 'How-d'ye-do?' Then I bolted upstairs as fast as I could."

"What's she like?"

"Well, I'll tell you if you want, but you won't be particularly edified," said Betty, seating herself on her desk, and kicking disconsolately at the back of the opposite form.

The other girls clustered round in a close group, with consternation and dismay written on their faces.

"Go on, Betty," urged Dora Lennox. "We may as well know the worst."

"She's not at all young," began Betty in tragic tones. "Her hair is going grey, and she has little lines round the corners of her eyes. She's as plain as it's possible for anyone to be, and she has a slight limp when she walks. I think she's the most unattractive person I've ever met."

"And Mrs. Leslie *knows* we like a pretty teacher," groaned Olga Weston.

"It's too bad, when there were so many to choose from."

"I call it mean to have picked out the very plainest and most uninteresting of them all. She looks cross, too. I expect we shan't have any nice times in class, as we did with Miss Clare."

"Dear, darling Miss Clare. I wish she hadn't got married," interposed Winnie Hunter sentimentally.

Mrs. Leslie's selection of a governess was certainly a great blow to the girls of IV B, who had returned to Lymme Hall after the holidays full of curiosity to see the new teacher who was to replace their regretted Miss Clare. They had their own standard of qualifications for the post (a very different standard, by the by, from that of Mrs. Leslie). If the choice could have been left in their hands, they would have decided promptly in favour of someone tall, handsome, aristocratic, amusing, and yet dignified; somebody, in fact, on whom they could lavish that wealth of hero-worship which girls of thirteen and fourteen are often ready to bestow upon a mistress who happens to appeal to the romantic side of their dispositions.

Miss Jones, alas, fulfilled not a solitary one of these requirements. Betty had not exaggerated her deficiencies. She was short and hopelessly plain. Her colourless hair, streaked with grey, was not fashionably arranged, her nose was long and thin, she had a nervous habit of twitching the corners of her mouth, her complexion was poor, and though her clear, blue eyes were her one redeeming feature, they were hidden by a pair of round spectacles, and rarely showed their real beauty. Her manner was abrupt and hurried, the manner of an intensely shy person who is making a great effort to overcome her natural reserve, and it lowered her instantly in the estimation of her pupils.

"I believe she's frightened of us," declared Margaret Churchill scornfully at the end of the first day's lessons.

"She's supposed to be fearfully clever," said Esther Barton. "Miss Lawson told me she took first-class honours at Newnham."

"What's the use of taking honours if you can only stand and blink through your spectacles like a scared owl?" replied Betty irreverently. "I think it's a great shame of Mrs. Leslie to have put her to teach IV B. We ought to have had some voice in the matter, and I vote we don't stand it."

"How can we help it?" asked Agnes Parsons.

"We'll strike. That's what people do when they're not satisfied."

"Whew! What would Mrs. Leslie say? I don't know whether I dare."

"What a coward you are!" retorted Betty contemptuously. "The matter is entirely in our own hands. Nobody can *make* us obey if we don't want. Let us rag her all we can, and then Miss Jones will see it's no use trying to teach us; she'll leave at the end of the term, and we shall have a fresh mistress."

"It's a rather good idea," agreed the others. "Why should we be saddled with a teacher whom we all detest?"

Betty Vernon's proposal, therefore, met with the general consent and approval of the rest of the form. She was an extremely popular girl, high-spirited, and always ready to be the ringleader in any piece of mischief. An occasion such as the present suited her admirably. The prospect of war with the new governess seemed fraught with possibilities of much fun; all the fighting instinct rose within her, added to a desire to shine as a heroine and champion in the eyes of her companions. She joyfully headed the campaign, and was only too willing to take the brunt of the affair on to her shoulders. The situation in IV B assumed the aspect of a daily duel. On the one hand, Betty, young, fresh, confident and aggressive; on the other, Miss Jones, jaded by years of teaching, nervous and self-distrustful, and only upheld by her strong sense of duty.

No mistress could have had a more troublesome form. Each order was obeyed as slowly and reluctantly as possible. The girls had decided to show their disapprobation in every way they could, and carried whispering, tittering and wandering attention to the verge of mutiny. It was in vain that the teacher tried to awaken their interest in any subject; they were determined not to learn from her, and would scarcely listen to her explanations of the various lessons. Things dragged on thus for about a fortnight, and every day the position grew more and more strained. It was, of course, in Miss Jones's power to appeal to Mrs. Leslie, but she preferred to fight her own battle as long as she could. One Wednesday morning matters came to a crisis. The second subject was grammar, and Betty, instead of answering sensibly, appeared to be making an effort to turn the lesson into ridicule. Miss Jones, flushed and weary, felt her patience at an end.

"Violet Morris, take your arms off the desk. Now, Betty Vernon, give two examples of gender formed by the use of a separate word."

"Masculine sun, feminine moon; masculine buttercup, feminine daisy," proclaimed Betty, with a glance of triumph round the room. The girls giggled with delight.

"I was only trying to give some fresh examples!" explained Betty, in a tone of injured innocence.

"I don't wish to know what you were trying to give," returned Miss Jones. "You cannot say the lesson, so you will bring your notebook to this table by the window and write out the examples six times. Come at once!"

Now Betty was in an even more than usually naughty mood, and it struck her that here was good opportunity for showing off before the rest of the form. She would measure her strength against that of Miss Jones, and

see which would win. Instead, therefore, of changing her seat as directed, she folded her arms determinedly and sat still in her place. It was a challenge, and the form understood it as such. For a few moments teacher and pupil looked each other full in the face. Miss Jones flushed pink, and then turned very white.

“Betty!” she said, in a voice that was quiet, yet held a slight tremble. “Betty! You will do as you are told immediately, or I shall have to request Mrs. Leslie to come here. Do you understand?”

Betty did not reply, but her face said plainly: “I shan’t.”

“I seldom make threats,” continued Miss Jones, “but when I do, I keep them. Esther Barton, open the door. Now, Betty, if you have not changed your seat before I count twenty, I shall fetch Mrs. Leslie. One—two—three—four——”

There was something so absolutely determined in Miss Jones’s manner that Betty for once felt herself worsted. To allow the head mistress to be fetched upon the scene to quell an act of open rebellion would, she knew, probably result in her expulsion from the school. She was not prepared for that. She had wished to drive Miss Jones away, but certainly she did not desire to go herself. Nevertheless she held out as long as she dared.

“Thirteen—fourteen—fifteen——” counted the teacher.

Every eye in the room was fixed upon Betty. The girls almost held their breath.

“Sixteen—seventeen—eighteen——”

Still Betty sat in her place.

“Nineteen——”

Miss Jones gave a merciful halt, and Betty, with her face aflame, bounced noisily up and carried her books to the table by the window. A glance of meaning passed round the form, and the lesson recommenced. There was no further fidgeting or whispering. The girls sat up straight and gave their answers promptly. All realized that their teacher had gained a decisive triumph, and they were ready to accord her the victory.

“You will stay where you are, Betty,” said Miss Jones, when the lunch bell rang. “I wish you to remain at that table until I say you may go.”

Betty felt like a criminal for the rest of the morning. She was not included in any of the other lessons, and sat writing out the grammar

examples over and over again until half-past twelve. When at last school was released she retired very crestfallen and sulky to the playroom, to discuss the matter.

“I *hate* Miss Jones,” she declared. “She’s absolutely detestable, and I mean to pay her out.”

“How will you do it?” queried Winnie Hunter, eagerly.

“An idea came to me when I was sitting writing at that wretched table. She deserves something nasty, so I shall take the pepper-box from the dining-room sideboard and pepper her pillow. She’ll get an unpleasant surprise when she goes to bed to-night. I’m going to do it at once.”

Thereupon Betty purloined the pepper-box, and finding an opportunity to dart into the mistress’s bedroom, she plentifully besprinkled the pillow.

“There! I feel I’m even with her now,” she confided to Violet Morris.

“You’ll get into a most fearful scrape when it’s found out. She’s sure to guess who’s done it, and tell Mrs. Leslie.”

“I don’t care,” returned Betty.

Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday at Lymme Hall. Betty had received an invitation to have tea with a cousin of her mother’s who lived not far away from the school, and she was looking forward greatly to the treat. Luckily for her Miss Jones did not mention the events of the morning at headquarters, or Mrs. Leslie would probably have put a veto on the outing. At precisely four o’clock, Betty in her best frock rang the bell at Cousin Hilda’s house.

Cousin Hilda was what Betty and her brothers called “a sport.” She was not young, but she was bright and jolly and full of jokes, and she always keenly enjoyed hearing about school topics. Over tea, therefore, Betty found herself telling her story of Miss Jones.

“So you wanted someone more attractive and distinguished for a teacher?” said Cousin Hilda. “There are very few heroines, I’m afraid, in this world. I have only known one in my life, but she was the bravest woman I ever saw.”

“What did she do?” asked Betty.

“I’ll tell you about her. You know I was out in France during the war, on the staff at a big clearing hospital. There were a lot of us V.A.D. nurses, and by far the cleverest and best of these was one whom we called Sister Mary.

She was small and plain and insignificant, nothing at all to look at, but she toiled away with an absolutely untiring devotion and self-sacrifice. She seemed able to do without rest or sleep, and no duty was too disagreeable for her to undertake. One day a squadron of enemy 'planes came over, and bombs were falling everywhere into the town. Our hospital was at one side of a big square, and at the other side there was a big building in which the medical stores were kept. In the thick of the bombardment there came a message from the operating theatre that they had run short of chloroform. Only one who has been an army nurse can realize what that means, or know the fearful agony that results from the lack of the merciful drug. Without a moment's hesitation, Sister Mary dashed across the square to the stores. We who watched expected every instant to see her blown to atoms, but she got there safely. But on her way back she had almost reached safety when a bomb dropped not far away and a fragment of shell caught her leg and flung her to the ground. Torn and bleeding as she was, she managed to crawl the rest of the way as we ran to help her in, and handed her bottle to the doctor just as she dropped fainting on the floor. She was badly hurt, and limps still from the effect of the wound. *We* thought her splendid, but she made no account of the matter at all herself. 'It was nothing but my duty,' she declared. After the war she went quietly back to private life. At present she is a governess in a school."

"Oh!" said Betty. "I wish she taught *us*! I'd adore *her*!"

"Even if she were quite plain, and didn't look at all interesting?"

"She'd never seem plain to me when I remembered her story. I'd be proud to know her. I think she deserves the Victoria Cross."

"But suppose she really came as your teacher, would you be ready to behave properly, and obey orders in class?"

"I would indeed."

"It's funny how blind we often are," said Cousin Hilda. "The mistress of IV B at Lymme Hall is Sister Mary to me, though to you she is Miss Jones!"

Betty wanted to hurry back to school that evening with a haste that would have seemed ungracious and impolite if Cousin Hilda had not understood schoolgirls. Her one anxiety was to find a chance to remove that horrible pepper before bedtime came. Fortunately she was able to dodge upstairs and give the pillow a good beating and shaking without anyone discovering anything about the matter. The account she gave to the girls of the teacher's bravery entirely changed their opinion of Miss Jones.

“You certainly wouldn’t think it to look at her, but oh, she’s a real heroine,” said Betty. “I’d *rejoice* to limp if I’d done what she did! I vote we behave like soldiers in school, and let her see we’re not such a detestable set as she must have thought us. When she comes into class to-morrow morning we’ll all shout out ‘chloroform’ and give three cheers, and then she’ll understand that we *know*!”

VI

THE HALF-TERM HOLIDAY

“Pumped up your tyres, Ruby?” asked Sybil. “Good! Yes, they are as hard as bricks. So are mine; and I’ve rubbed the whole machine up with furniture cream. Don’t you think it looks rather extra-special and top-hole?”

“Swanky,” agreed Ruby, abstractedly, with her attention fixed on her own spokes which she was polishing with shinio. “There’s something wrong with my chain, I believe. I’ll have to get it looked to while we’re in Ringminster.”

“I’ve lost the cap of my oiler!” mourned Stella. “Haven’t any of you seen it?”

“Where’s your bicycle basket, Nora? Here’s mine. Oh, bother! The strap’s off. What a grizzly nuisance!” grumbled Roberta.

“Tie it on with string,” suggested Mary, “and do, for goodness’ sake, be quick or we shall never get off. I saw Miss Welch going to get ready half an hour ago. I never saw such a lot of slow-coaches!”

“All right, chunky; don’t be shrill! We’ll be ready as soon as you are.”

“You luckers!” exclaimed Jess, enviously. “If I hadn’t scraped the skin off my knee yesterday I might have gone too, but my leg’s just as stiff as a wooden one to-day. You’ll have a perfectly gorgeous ride. Here’s Nan ready first, as usual. What’s the matter, Nanno? You’re looking very glum. Lost your stiffening, old sport?”

“I may well look glum,” grunted Nan pessimistically. “It’s enough to make a camel weep. Do you know Ringminster’s all off?”

“Off!”

Six girls dropped pumps and oilers in consternation.

“It’s never off?” they repeated.

Nan nodded gloomily.

“Miss Welch fainted as she was changing her skirt. She’s lying on her bed now, feeling very sick. Miss Dawes says it’s the heat, and she mustn’t attempt to go out.”

“Whew!”

The countenances of all seven expressed sympathy for the luckless Miss Welch, mixed with a profound commiseration for themselves.

“What’s to be done?” inquired Nora blankly.

“Don’t know! Stop here and mouch about the garden, I suppose. Miss Dawes can’t take us. She has visitors coming this afternoon.”

“Oh, but I say! We *can’t* lose our outing. We were promised this jaunt to Ringminster ages ago. Won’t Miss Dawes let us go alone?”

“She says not.”

Those boarders at Granstone College who had not returned home for the half-term holiday, had been promised a day’s excursion to visit the old city of Ringminster and view its cathedral, castle, and other famous sights. They had been looking forward to the expedition whole-heartedly, so at Nan’s fatal news their spirits sank to zero. Each might have sat for a portrait of misery personified. Just when the general mental barometer stood at its lowest Nora suddenly and visibly cheered up. A light as of illumination swept over her freckled face.

“Stop a moment! I’ve got a brain-wave!” she exclaimed. “Wait for me here, will you? I’m going to see Miss Dawes.” And resting her cycle against the shed, she raced away to the house.

The others put their machines back in their stands rather sulkily. They felt ill-used, and, moreover, had little faith in Nora’s mission. All the other teachers except Miss Welch were away. There was certainly nobody to escort the expedition.

“We may as well pull ourselves together and make up our minds to have a set at tennis,” growled Roberta.

But they had underestimated Nora’s power of persuasion. At the end of ten minutes she returned radiant and waving her hand.

“Fixed up a topping day!” she announced. “Ringminster’s still off, of course. Miss Dawes won’t let us go *there* alone, but we may ride to Reedmere Manor. It’s that lovely old farmhouse-hall place I told you about, where my people had rooms last summer. We stayed there six weeks. It’s only eight miles away. Mrs. Broden will remember me, and let us spend the day there. If we take our own packets of food she’ll make our tea and give us milk, I’m sure. We can leave our bikes there if we like to go a walk round

the fields. Miss Dawes says she thinks she may safely let us do that, only we must be back by seven. Well? What do you say to my idea?"

"You mascotte! How absolutely priceless!" rejoiced the others.

After that there was an immediate scramble to be off. Baskets were strapped on to handlebars, and packets of provisions and a few other things stowed away inside them. Sybil fetched her folding butterfly-net, and Roberta her tin botanical case, Ruby and Mary put in books, and Nan and Nora, with many giggles, crammed each a rather bulky parcel among her packages of bread and butter and hard-boiled eggs.

"What have you got there?" demanded Stella.

"Don't ask questions! I suppose I can take a wrap if I want to, can't I?"

"A wrap! Do you expect to feel cold on a broiling day like this?"

For answer, Nan and Nora simply exploded, and stood laughing with their heads sunk on the handles of their bicycles.

"You sillies! Brace up and start!" commanded Ruby tartly. "If we don't get off quickly, Miss Dawes may be changing her mind and saying we'd better not go after all. I know her!"

Such a horrible contingency caused instant activity, and within a few minutes the seven were free-wheeling down the hill, while the luckless Jess waved a wistful good-bye from the gate. It was most delightful for once to have an expedition all on their own, without a teacher in charge; it seemed such a real holiday. Eight miles on a good high road, with only one long hill that needed walking, was not a particularly lengthy or fatiguing ride.

When they arrived at Reedmere Manor it was still only eleven o'clock—indeed the sundial over the gateway pointed its shadow at the figure X, but an hour had to be allowed for summer-time. Nora led her chums proudly. Most of the way she had been expatiating on the joys before them, and she could see by their beaming faces that their first sight of the old hall had not been one of disappointment. It was a large, ancient Tudor house built of grey stone, with battlements and mullioned windows, and diamond-paned casements. A wistaria in full bloom covered one wall—its drooping lavender tassels were a dream of beauty. The garden was gay with peonies, globe-flowers, and forget-me-nots, the clipped yew hedge was shaped into a series of little turrets, and there was a beech tree with an inviting-looking seat round its bole. A row of beehives stood in a sheltered corner beside the lilac bushes.

“Did I exaggerate?” asked Nora airily.

“It’s top-hole!” decided the others.

Mrs. Broden was certainly surprised to see seven schoolgirls with bicycles arriving at her front door, but she smiled a welcome nevertheless.

“I’ve got visitors in both sitting-rooms,” she explained; “in fact, the house is as full as it will hold, but I’ll tell you what I can do. You leave your bikes in the yard, and go for a walk now, have your lunch in the fields—I’ll give you a can of milk to take with you—and then you can come back here about four for your tea. I’ll put a table for you in the garden, and have all ready. I’ll have time to bake you some buttermilk scones, I dare say, and I’ve a jar of honey left you shall have. I’ve not forgotten how fond you are of honey, Miss Nora! Dear me, you’ve grown since last summer, ever so much!”

Mrs. Broden’s suggestion was received with approval by the seven. They stacked their machines in the shade, took their parcels and the can of milk, and sallied forth into the fields. Their way led first alongside the moat, a reed-grown tract of water that almost encircled the old hall.

It was a delightful spot, with a “Mariana-in-the-Moated-Grange” air about it, highly suggestive of mediæval romance and faithless cavaliers and jilted maidens.

“You could imagine him riding away on his white charger while she watched from the window and wept!” commented Roberta, who adored historical novels.

“This morn is merry June, I trow,
The rose is budding fain,
But it shall bloom in winter snow
Ere we two meet again!”

quoted Sybil sentimentally.

“It will indeed, old sport, if you try to trip me up with that butterfly-net,” protested the indignant Stella. “You nearly sent me a cropper into the moat, and I’d have been drowned as dead as Ophelia amongst all those water weeds!”

“Not a bit of it; we’d have practised life-saving on you,” Nora reassured her. “It would have been a grand opportunity.”

“Don’t want to make your opportunity, thanks! Oh, I say, there’s a fritillary; Sybil, where’s your net?”

Sybil was already in hot pursuit, and after a long and most exciting chase, succeeded in capturing the treasure and transferring it uninjured to the cyanide bottle which Ruby was carrying. She fizzled over with satisfaction, for she had only just begun to collect, and every fresh specimen was valuable. Roberta, anxious to fill her botanical case, was grubbing about the edge of the moat and gathering blue spikes of bugle, purple ground ivy, and even a plant or two of lungwort. She rejoiced particularly over the latter, with its pink and blue flowers and beautiful spotted leaves.

“It’s exactly like what grows on the rockery; Miss Welch will be *so* interested,” she triumphed.

“Don’t believe it’s a genuine native,” sniffed Sybil.

“Well, it’s given in the botany book, at any rate!”

“But it’s probably only a garden escape!”

“My flowers are as genuine as your old butterflies, anyhow! How do you know your precious fritillary isn’t a foreign specimen hatched out here and let loose by some collector?”

“Perhaps it’s got ‘Made in Germany’ stamped on it somewhere!” sniggered Stella.

“If that fritillary isn’t genuine, no more am I!”

“Oh, look here, come along, you slackers! Don’t stand bickering all the morning!” urged Nora, leading the way across a hurdle into the pasture.

It was a glorious summer day, and the country was looking its best. The hawthorns were in their prime, every hedge was a mass of white blossom, the air was heavy with the fragrant scent. The meadows growing tall for hay were so ablaze with buttercups that they were veritable fields-of-the-cloth-of-gold. Nora, who knew the neighbourhood, acted as guide. She piloted her party across several stiles and along a leafy lane till they reached the river. Down among the willows was a landing-place and a boat-house. The latter was shut and padlocked. Nora looked at it with disappointment.

“It was open every day last August,” she said, “and one could hire boats. There was a restaurant, too, where they sold chocolates and ginger-pop. It’s an awful swindle to find it closed!”

“Probably whoever owns it has gone to a football match,” suggested Nan.

“But he was *ever* such an old man. His granddaughter used to take people out rowing.”

“Then he’s perhaps dead and she’s probably married,” ventured Stella. “Never mind the old restaurant. Let’s have our grub now. I’m getting ravenous.”

“So am I!”

“And I!” clamoured the others.

“It’s only twelve yet!”

“Never mind!”

By favour of a large majority the picnic was held at once, sitting on the little wooden landing-place. It was a beautiful spot. Above them was a weir, and the race was turning the wheel of a picturesque old red-roofed mill that lay on the opposite side of the water. Great trees bordered the river, and hawthorn bushes and beds of bulrushes and reeds. There was an island where willow herb was beginning to grow high. Lunch was finished to the last crumb, and the milk-can emptied.

“I wish the restaurant had been open,” lamented Sybil, thirstily. “Don’t drink river water, Mary! You don’t know where it comes from, and you might get typhoid.”

“Or drink frogs’ eggs and have tadpoles hopping round inside you!” suggested Roberta cheerfully.

“How disgusting you are! Tadpoles don’t hop either, they swim!” retorted Mary.

It was then that Nan and Nora sprung their surprise on the others. Producing the parcels they had been carrying they untied them and unfolded each a blue bathing costume.

“We’re going to bathe!” they announced.

“Bathe! Here? In the river?”

“Yes, of course! Always did it last summer. A whole party of us used to come every day. We had a tent just over there. It was simply ripping, I can tell you.”

“Is it safe, though?” asked Sybil doubtfully.

“Oh, perfectly! There’s a ford, you know, and I’ve often seen carts come across, so it’s not deep. Why, my little brother used to go in, and he’s only

nine!”

“Did you ask Miss Dawes if you might bring your costumes?”

“You bet we didn’t; we just smuggled them off!”

“I don’t think you ought to bathe, old sport, really!” said Sybil. “The current looks pretty strong, and you see there’s nobody about, and no boat or anything. It was different when there was a whole party of you.”

For answer, Nora pulled an eloquent face.

“Oh, don’t be tiresome, Sib,” broke in Nan. “Why on earth shouldn’t we? It’s safe enough. We don’t want any jaw-wag to-day!”

“If you must bathe, go up there into that little stream instead of the river!” persisted Sybil.

“For goodness’ sake don’t preach!”

“Well, don’t get so baity! Surely I can say what I like?”

“You’re jealous because you haven’t brought your own bathing dress with you!”

“Oh, how mean! I’m not! Do as you like, then. It’s no affair of mine!”

Nora and Nan knew perfectly well that if Miss Dawes had been asked she would certainly not have given them permission to bathe without any teacher or responsible older person being in charge. As it was, nobody at all was about, and the girls undressed among the willows behind the boat-house. They came running back jubilantly in their costumes, and plunged from the landing-place into the water. Their five chums watched them wistfully, and pulling off shoes and stockings sat on the edge of the jetty paddling their feet in the river, which seemed next best to bathing. Nora and Nan swam most successfully, conscious that they were performing to an admiring audience. Now, Nora knew the river and her chum did not, and though the former had mentioned “Don’t go beyond the island,” Nan had not really taken in the warning. Instead of following in Nora’s wake, she struck off on her own. Just by the ford, indeed, the water was shallow and warmed by the sun, but farther along it was very cold and the current was strong. Nan, whose previous experience had been in the sea, and who had hardly ever been really out of her depth before, got into difficulties directly. She screamed and sank. Nora, a long way higher up, turned and tried to go and help her, but she, too, was caught in the current, and it was all she could manage to keep her own head above water.

At Nan's shriek, Sybil sprang to her feet on the jetty. She hastily unfastened her skirt and pulled off her hat, then jumping into the river, swam with strong strokes towards Nan, who had risen to the surface.

"Float till I come!" she shouted.

The girls on the bank sat paralysed, with white faces. Nan had the sense and self-command to obey. She lay on her back, and somehow—nobody knew exactly how—Sybil pulled her into smoother waters. They made for the bank, with Nora, who had also struggled out of the current, close behind them. Eight anxious hands dragged them on to the jetty. Sybil was, of course, drenched, Nora very scared, and Nan in a state of half-collapse. A rueful little party made its appearance at Reedmere Manor, turning up just when Mrs. Broden was dishing up lunch for the two parlours. The visitors proved trumps, however, lent Sybil garments while her own dried at the kitchen fire, and comforted the agitated feelings of the others. The afternoon was spent safely in a wood, gathering bluebells. After tea and a good rest the adventurous seven once more mounted their bicycles.

"It's been a ripping day, in spite of everything," said Stella, ringing her bell as they neared the cross-roads in order to warn possible motors round the corner—a precaution she would have scorned before that morning's adventure.

"Top-hole!" agreed the others, Nan included.

"Look here," said Sybil, "we don't want to get Nora and Nan into a scrape. I vote we don't tell Miss Dawes. She'd be in such a fearful state of mind over it."

"But what about your part of the business?"

"My skirt and hat weren't wet, you know. I'd taken them off. And Mrs. Broden ironed the rest of my things—bless her! She's a mascotte of a woman."

"All serene!"

"Next time Nan bathes we'll tie a rope to her," declared Nora.

"Thanks immensely! I thought I was drowned quite dead! But it's been a topping half-term holiday all the same!" returned Nan.

VII

THE FOURTH FORM STRIKE

“Have you heard the news?” exploded Kitty Harden, tramping noisily into the Fourth Form room one Wednesday morning and banging down her dispatch-box with such energy that the corner burst. “We’re actually going to have prefects!”

“Of course we’ve heard, you old blue-bottle!” grunted Alice Drummond rather sulkily. “You needn’t look as if you thought you were giving us such a surprise. Why, it’s all over the school by this time!”

“Quite a chestnut!” yawned Monica Ward.

“I knew about it last night from Betty,” chirruped Marie Parkes. “Miss Boddington told the Sixth yesterday.”

“Well, I’ve only just heard,” retorted Kitty, “and I must say it gives me spasms. What in the name of all creation is Miss Boddington thinking about?”

“That’s what we’re all asking,” interposed the injured voice of Hilda Johnstone. “If she’d done it when we opened in September or had waited till after Christmas it would have seemed more decent. I’d have forgiven her if she’d even fixed it up at half-term, but to spring it on us suddenly like this for no particular reason, and in the middle of the week, too! Well, I call it a grizzly swindle!”

“Who wants prefects?” groaned Elizabeth Holmes. “The school’s done very well without them for all these years, and I can’t see why they should be fastened on us now!”

“Who’s to be our special constable?” snapped Sylvie Norburn.

“Eve Harrison’s told off to police us, I believe,” volunteered Marie. “Betty said so, at any rate, and she ought to know.”

Marie, who had a sister in the Sixth, might be regarded as a trustworthy fount of information.

The girls looked glum.

“Eve Harrison! She’s the very limit!” burst out Hilda. “If it had been Marjorie James now, or even Ruth Rivers, I wouldn’t have minded so much,

but to have to knuckle under to Eve Harrison is pitching it rather too strong.”

“Suppose we’ve got to grin and bear it!” grunted Monica bitterly.

“Why should we grin and bear it?” demanded Kitty fiercely. “If people are content to sit down and be trampled upon I suppose they’ll get trampled upon, but if they’ve any spirit in them they’ll show fight. Why should all the traditions of the school be upset at a moment’s notice, I should like to know?”

“Ask Miss Boddington!”

“Shades of Minerva! Why not? I *will* ask her!”

“You won’t! Kitcat, even *you* haven’t the cheek for that!”

“Haven’t I, indeed? You wait and see! This child’s no slacker. She’s ready for the fray any day, I beg to tell you.”

“Then go now!”

Kitty glanced at the clock.

“It’s a little late,” she began hurriedly.

“Not at all,” half a dozen voices assured her. “You’ve heaps of time. You’ll just find Bodkins in her study, perfectly ready, no doubt, to listen to all reasonable complaints.”

“She’ll be busy——”

“Who’s ostriching?” whinnied Sylvie aggressively.

“I’m not! Don’t alarm yourself! I’m going at once!”

“Would you like a bullet-proof jacket?” inquired Marie tenderly.

“No, thanks! Quite superfluous!” And Kitty stamped away with an airy assurance calculated to impress her giggling comrades.

Outside in the passage, however, her feathers began to fall. It is not an altogether everyday matter to beard a head mistress in her den. If it had not been for the absolute certainty that scouts would be sent after her to watch whether she really ventured into the study or not, I believe Kitty would have ignominiously turned tail. As it was she knocked at the portal and entered. The Principal looked up in her most professional manner.

“Have you been ordered to report yourself?” she inquired briskly.

“No, Miss Boddington,” gasped Kitty, whose courage was oozing fast. “I—I only came to ask if—if—if it’s really true we’re going to have prefects?”

“Yes.”

Miss Boddington had no time to waste, and her mouth wore its not-to-be-trifled-with expression. Kitty’s courage collapsed like a pricked balloon.

“I—only wanted to know!” she faltered lamely.

“Well, you know now, and you can tell the others you have my authority for it. Please shut the door after you!” returned Miss Boddington, with her eye on the clock and her hand searching automatically for her fountain pen.

Kitty was outside in the passage before she realized the failure of her mission. She had the satisfaction, however, of catching a glimpse of Hilda and Alice scouting round the corner, and knowing they would report that she had really kept her word and visited the study.

“Suffering from nerve shock?” inquired Marie, as she entered the room.

“Cheero!” added Sylvie.

“Don’t alarm yourselves! I got on swimmingly, thanks!”

“Persuaded the great Panjandrum to repentance?”

“Well, not exactly.”

“I suppose she’s still keen to try the experiment?”

“Let her try, then,” burst out Kitty. “I really don’t see why we’re bound to submit. I can stand a teacher, but to have Eve Harrison thrust down one’s throat is the limit. I vote we strike!”

“A jolly good idea, too! Bodkins is always jawing on about ‘the advantages of co-operation,’ and ‘the liberty of the subject,’ and all the rest of it. Let’s put her ideas into practice for once. We’ll refuse to obey Eve.”

“Thunder! What a joke!”

The bell for call-over put a sudden stop to the discussion, but the form was in a ferment. The girls resented the innovation of prefects, and Kitty’s suggestion was like the match that sets the heather on fire. One and all they breathed defiance. When Eve arrived at ten o’clock to marshal them downstairs to the French class they tramped as aggressively as they could along the passage, and whispered on the stairs in direct opposition to the silence rule. It was in vain that their prefect, zealous for the credit of her new position, rapped out her orders and endeavoured to keep them in line.

Instead of a well-disciplined little regiment, a disorderly rabble marched into the French class.

“Oh, so they’re going to take it that way, are they?” said Eve to herself as she retired thoughtfully to her Latin lesson. “I knew I’d got the worst form in the school! Well, I’m not going to be done. I’ll tackle them somehow, and on my own too. Catch me appealing to Miss Boddington! I won’t be stumped by those kids, whatever tussle I have!”

So far Eve Harrison had been regarded as rather a nonentity in the school. She was a quiet, studious girl, and had never yet taken the trouble to assert herself. There was, however, a firm set about her lips and a steadiness in her eyes that perhaps helped the Principal’s decision when she chose her for a prefect. Miss Boddington prided herself upon being a good judge of character, and in this instance she was not mistaken.

The trouble in the Fourth Form continued that very afternoon. According to the new regime the prefect was to be responsible for keeping order during the first half-hour of preparation, that she might release Miss Edwards, the form mistress, to give special coaching to some girls who were studying for the Senior Oxford. Immediately after call-over, therefore, Eve assumed her new post of authority. She was aware at once that there was an undercurrent of disaffection running through the room. At first the girls did not openly break the rules, but they went as near the boundary as they dared. Monica Ward was coughing obtrusively. Elizabeth Holmes shuffled her feet. Marie Parkes lifted her desk lid and allowed it to fall with a bang. Alice Drummond counted ostentatiously upon her fingers, while Sylvie Norburn administered a surreptitious kick to Hilda Johnstone under the desk. Eve looked round with a warning glance.

“I must remind you of the silence rule,” she remarked. “Anybody breaking it knows the consequences.”

Twelve pairs of defiant eyes stared into hers for an instant and then bent again over exercise books. There was a revived shuffling of feet, an aggressive outburst of coughing, and even a faint whisper from a seat in the vicinity of the door. Presently a subdued titter began to circulate round the form. It seemed to concentrate in the neighbourhood of a desk on the right-hand side near the window, and Eve, rising suddenly, caught a glimpse of Kitty Harden blowing up a toy balloon pig, to the rapture of her comrades.

“Kitty!”

The delinquent removed her lips from the nozzle, with the result that a droning squeak as of bagpipes filled the air. The titter developed to a general roar.

“Kitty, come here instantly, and give me that toy!”

Kitty stuffed her treasure in her pocket, glared at the new prefect and stayed where she was.

“Kitty, do you hear me?”

No answer.

“Leave the room this moment!”

Kitty folded her arms, but did not budge an inch.

“I give you one more chance. I shall count ten, and if you aren’t gone by then I’ll make you!”

It was an exciting period for the form during the counting.

All eyes were fixed on Kitty. It was felt that the matter marked a supreme crisis. If their comrade triumphed, then the new prefect was a mere figurehead whose orders might be disobeyed with impunity, and whose presence at the teacher’s desk need be no restraint.

“Six—seven—eight—nine—*ten!*”

Kitty stood her ground, and her grey eyes flashed a challenge. Eve walked across the room slowly and calmly, with lips compressed and a dangerous little gleam in eyes that were grey as Kitty’s own.

She paused opposite the desk.

“As you won’t go when I tell you I shall be obliged to take you,” she said quietly, then with a quick movement seized Kitty bodily in her arms, carried her to the door, and bundled her out. The form gasped. Eve was small for her age, and hitherto had not shone in athletics, while Kitty was the champion hockey player of the junior school, nearly as tall as the prefect and decidedly the stouter of the two.

Eve’s action was so sudden that her victim was too surprised even to struggle. The whole episode was over in three seconds.

With a red spot on each cheek the prefect resumed her seat. For the rest of the half-hour’s preparation, eleven heads bent quietly over eleven desks and not a jarring sound disturbed the absolute tranquillity of the room. A

decidedly crestfallen Kitty came creeping into the drawing class at three o'clock.

Her chums attempted to cheer her up, but she received their advances in so huffy a spirit that they left her to herself.



"Eve seized Kitty bodily in her arms, carried her to the door, and bundled her out."

“I hear each prefect has promised to play for the form she’s looking after,” volunteered Elizabeth Holmes, “so we shall have Eve in our team next Wednesday at hockey.”

“Oh, *good!*” said Hilda. “D’y’know, I think she’s just a sport! On the whole Bodkins is right, and if it were put to the school, I declare I’d vote for prefects!”

VIII

MARGARET'S ROOM-MATE

"I say, who's the foreigner?" asked Margaret Thistlethwaite, coming into the boarders' sitting-room at Leicester House on the first evening of her return after the Christmas holidays, and pushing her way to the fire. "Isn't it atrociously cold? I'm half frozen. You might shunt a little, some of you, and give me at least a peep of the blaze!"

The group of girls crowded closely round the fender moved rather reluctantly.

"You'll get chilblains if you hold your hands too near," said Rhoda Peterson. "No; it's no use trying to poke it any more. Lena has been bothering with it for the last five minutes, and I think she's made it worse. For goodness' sake, Margaret, let it alone! You'll put it out altogether if you don't mind."

"There ought to have been a roaring fire to welcome us when we've only just got here from our journeys," grumbled Desda Melland. "Nobody has a chance of getting warm at this. It's too bad. The one in the juniors' room is half-way up the chimney. I peeped in as I passed the door."

"So did I," said Margaret, "and that's where I saw the foreigner. I want to know who she is?"

"She's French, I believe. Somebody said her name's Elordie Montreuillon, if that's the way to pronounce it."

"What has she come here for?"

"To learn English, I suppose."

"Can't she speak English?"

"Oh, yes, a little; but in a very extraordinary, Frenchy kind of way. She seems a queer little article!"

"She looks it. I can't see what we want with foreigners at our school. Why don't they stay in their own countries, and be content with their own languages? I'm sure I don't want to learn theirs!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to, my dear, to a certain extent. Mademoiselle will see to that!" chirped Lucy Borland.

“Oh, well, I suppose everybody does grammar and exercises, but talking—that’s quite a different affair!”

“You’ll have a splendid opportunity to cultivate the French tongue this term, at any rate,” said Lena Herbert teasingly, “if you’re to be bottled up with a real French girl.”

“Bottled up! What do you mean? I shan’t speak to her.”

“Not when she’s in your bedroom?”

“In my bedroom! Lena Herbert, don’t try to be funny, for you can’t do it.”

“But she really *is* in your bedroom, Margaret. Do you mean to say you didn’t know? Why, she’s to be your room-mate this term!” exclaimed Rhoda Peterson.

Margaret’s face was a study in lightning changes of doubt, conviction and disgust.

“That little French frog my room-mate!” she exploded indignantly. “What is Miss Parsons thinking about? Is Gertie going to be turned out?”

“Yes; Gertie isn’t coming back until to-morrow, and she’s bringing a cousin with her who’s been sent over from South Africa. They’re to have the end bedroom on the top floor. Her mother wrote and asked for them to be put together.”

“Then it’s extremely mean and nasty of Mrs. Wainwright. The cousin could have chummed with somebody else. I’m sure Gertie would far rather have stayed in No. 4 with me. It will be hateful without her. As for being saddled with that French infant, it’s monstrous!”

Miss Parsons had been kept so extremely busy that she had not yet had time to speak to Margaret on the subject of her room-mate. When tea was over, however, she sent for her to the library.

“I am putting little Elordie Montreuillon in your room, Margaret,” she said, “because I think I can count upon you to be kind and befriend her. She naturally feels very strange and homesick here just at first, but I hope she will soon settle down among us.”

Margaret did not reply. She was in a state of hot revolt at having such an uncongenial companion thrust upon her, and she did not intend to make any promises.

“Elordie comes from such a clever family that I am sure you will find her interesting,” continued Miss Parsons. “She seems to me a most attractive and unusual child.”

“I’m not fond of children,” returned Margaret bluntly.

“No? But I shall count upon you to do your best to make this little foreign girl feel at home, and also to set her a good example. Remember, she is so much younger than you that she will be sure to copy everything you do. If she is to learn English manners, let them be nice ones; and, above all, don’t teach her to talk slang. She is in the junior room now with Mademoiselle, if you like to go and make her acquaintance.”

Margaret shut the library door in an outraged frame of mind.

“Why should I have to set myself up as a model of behaviour?” she thought. “Miss Parsons was making a shot at me about manners and slang! I’m not going to turn nursemaid to this child! It’s absurd to ask it from a fifth form girl. Miss Frenchy will have to muddle along by herself and settle down as best she can. I shan’t run the show for her—that’s certain!”

Margaret Thistlethwaite was a very ordinary type of English schoolgirl, and numbered among her prejudices the settled idea that everything foreign was necessarily on a lower standing than, and altogether inferior to, the corresponding British article, be it speech, manners, food, clothing, or general attainments. She had a poor opinion of Mademoiselle, the only French person she knew, and therefore she placed the whole nation in the same category. She had no wish to strike up a friendship with Elordie, so instead of taking Miss Parsons’ hint she gave the juniors’ room a wide berth, and even dodged Mademoiselle, whom she saw looking for her on the landing.

“I’m not going to be coerced by anybody into acting bear-leader to that kid!” she assured her friends.

“I wouldn’t begin it if I were you!” they replied unanimously.

At eight o’clock Margaret went upstairs to No. 4, not because it was bedtime, but because she had brought an india-rubber hot-water bottle back to school with her, and she wished to take it to the housemaid to ask her to fill it. There was an arctic spell of weather, and the bedroom resembled an ice-house. Little Elordie was in process of undressing, shaking and shivering violently as she took off her clothes, her small French face absolutely grey with the cold.

“Why don’t you pull the curtains of your cubicle before you begin to go to bed?” asked Margaret severely. “And you mustn’t put your things on this chair—it’s in my part of the room.”

“Pardon, mademoiselle! I not yet know,” replied Elordie.

“Don’t call me mademoiselle; I’m not a French governess!” interrupted Margaret. “My name’s Margaret Thistlethwaite.”

“See-sell-svaite! Ah! I can nevaire say that!”

“I didn’t ask you to. You can call me Margaret. Look here, if this muslin arrangement is all you’ve got with you in the way of a nightdress, you’ll be frozen in bed. Haven’t you brought a woollen one?”

Elordie, who was struggling into a dainty creation trimmed with lace and baby ribbon, shook her head. Her teeth were chattering almost too much for speech.

“Do you always wear such a flimsy thing in winter?”

“Yes, mademoiselle. Ah, pardon! Je voudrais dire Marguerite. But in Paris the bedrooms they are all heated with hot air, and it is warm, very warm in them.”

“Very unhealthy!” snorted Margaret. “I don’t like steam-heated houses myself, they’re always stuffy.”

She took up her hot-water bag and looked at it doubtfully. Should she offer it to Elordie until she came to bed herself? It could as easily be filled now as an hour later, and it would do it no harm to lend it.

“I’m not going to begin by pampering her,” she decided. “Miss Parsons oughtn’t to have put her here at all,” and without even a “good night” she turned and left the room.

All the same, the remembrance of the small, pinched face and shivering shoulders haunted her as she sat by the warm fire downstairs. It certainly was a bitter night, the thermometer some degrees below freezing-point, and there was a strong north wind, with sleet in it. Even Margaret, who prided herself upon being hardy, was glad to put on a knitted coat over her blouse.

“It’s ridiculous to send anyone to a climate like this with such thin things! She was actually wearing silk stockings,” she muttered to herself.

“What’s that about silk stockings?” asked Rhoda.

“Oh, nothing; only I much prefer woollen ones in winter.”

“So would anybody in this weather, I should think!”

When Margaret went upstairs at nine o'clock she found the curtain which divided the bedroom carefully drawn, and all Elordie's belongings had been removed to her own particular half. As there was dead silence Margaret concluded her unwelcome companion must be asleep, but as she did not wish to open a conversation she did not peep round the curtain to ascertain. She went to bed herself with all possible speed. The hot-water bottle was deliciously hot. It certainly was the greatest comfort on such an arctic night. Even with its aid she was only just warm enough, and somehow she could not drop off to sleep. There were sounds from the other bed—little turnings and rustlings, and occasionally something that might almost be a suppressed sob, very subdued and stifled, but all the same just enough to be disturbing.

Margaret determined to take no notice, and drew the eiderdown over her head, but she nevertheless kept wide awake. She heard Miss Parsons go past the door to put out the light on the landing, and knew it must be long after ten o'clock, but while that faint whimpering continued it was impossible to slip into dreamland. At last she could stand it no longer.

“Elordie, is that you? Why don't you go to sleep?” she demanded.

“I have so great cold!” wailed poor Elordie.

“Haven't you been to sleep at all since you went to bed?”

“Pas du tout!”

Margaret groaned.

“I've been rather a beast,” she said to herself. Then, she added aloud: “Would you care to come and creep in here with me? I've got a hot bottle.”

“Ah! mademoiselle, but you have the good heart.”

“For goodness' sake, *don't* call me mademoiselle! If you want to come—*come!* Gracious, child, you're like a small iceberg.”

With the little shivering French girl cuddled up in her arms, Margaret in course of time dropped into the land of Nod, and Elordie, warm at last, also slumbered peacefully.

“You'd better go straight to Miss Parsons and ask her to buy you some decent winter clothes and a hot-water bag of your own,” said Margaret next morning. She was rather ashamed of her weakness of the night before, and very blunt and brusque in consequence. She cut short Elordie's prettily

expressed gratitude with an abrupt, "There, that'll do! I don't want to hear another word about it," and declined to answer when her room-mate offered a general remark upon the severity of the weather.

"I'm not going to be cajoled into making friends with her," she thought. "Why can't Miss Parsons put her with Mademoiselle? Then they'd both be French together."

If Elordie's clothing was of too thin a description to be suited to the English climate, she certainly presented a very dainty figure as she came downstairs. She was a pretty little creature, with a pale creamy skin, big dark eyes, and the silkiest of rich brown curls. Her toilet was beyond reproach from her spotless finger-tips to the toes of her pointed bronze shoes.

"She looks so utterly different, somehow, from the other kids!" said Desda Melland, watching as the small olive face took its place among the apple-cheeks of the sturdy young Anglo-Saxons at the juniors' breakfast table.

"Yes; I don't think they appreciate the difference!" said Lucy Borland. "I hear they've christened her 'the French frog.' "

No creatures under the sun are so utterly and so entirely conservative as schoolgirls. Because Elordie was out of the common in appearance, and unlike anything that had hitherto come within their ken, they regarded her as outlandish and a subject for contumely. She was almost ostracised by her own form; her class-mates considered her an alien, and either teased "Froggie," as she was nicknamed, or ran away from her. Margaret, after that first night, left her to her own devices, though she satisfied herself that Miss Parsons had taken the hint about the warm clothing. The frosty weather, however, did not last long, and by February thrushes were singing and snowdrops coming up in the school garden.

It was quite fine enough weather to play tennis on the hard courts, and one half-holiday afternoon Margaret went out for an hour's practice with Gertie. As she crossed the playground, swinging her racket, she noticed Elordie hanging forlornly about near the see-saw.

"Hallo! Why aren't you skipping with the others?" she asked.

"I not know how to skip."

"Then go and learn!"

"They not teach me. They say they not want to play with a French frog," replied Elordie, shaking her head dismally (her English had improved

marvellously in three weeks). "I go to amuse myself by to throw a ball."

"Mind you don't send it through a window, or there'll be squalls," said Margaret, and she walked on to the tennis court. Then her heart smote her. "Poor little lonely thing!" she thought. "It's wretched for her to be boycotted like this. Those kids are really too bad."

"Are you ready?" asked Gertie. "I've brought the balls."

"I'm ready, but I've changed my mind. Could you get Rhoda to play a set with you instead?"

"I dare say I could if you don't want to."

"I've another scheme on hand. Here, take my racket, then Rhoda needn't run indoors to fetch hers."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Gertie curiously.

"I shan't tell you!" retorted Margaret as she turned away.

What she really intended to do was rather compromising to the dignity of a Fifth Form girl, and she had no intention of confessing it beforehand. She marched back to the playground and hailed Elordie.

"Hallo!" she cried. "You come along with me! I want to see if I've forgotten how to skip."

The row of small girls playing "Follow my leader" over the rope seemed decidedly astonished when Margaret Thistlethwaite announced her intention of joining their ranks, but it was a novelty to have their game patronized by a member of the upper school, and they gave her a flattering welcome. Her long legs performed prodigies in the way of hops and leaps, and drew most eulogistic comments from the interested spectators.

"There—I'm tired out!" she declared at last. "Give me the rope and I'll turn for awhile. Elordie may take my place."

"But she can't skip."

"Then it's high time you taught her. Lily Hudson, you do it slowly first, just to show her how. Now, Elordie, you must try."

When Margaret undertook anything she always carried it through, and she was determined not to leave the playground till she saw the little French girl on better terms with her comrades. For a full half-hour she turned the skipping-rope, and when that amusement began to pall she suggested "Stag," choosing her protégée for one of the hunters, and went on to "Hide-

and-Seek,” “Nuts in May,” and “Oranges and Lemons.” Elordie was quick, and caught up the English games directly; in the excitement of “Tigi Touchwood,” or “I spy,” the others forgot she was an alien, and she was soon racing hand in hand with Lily Hudson and Mary Holt, while Jessie Barker (most prejudiced of Anglo-Saxons!) was actually seen stroking the dark curls with a half-curious, half-admiring hand.

“That will do!” thought Margaret. “They’ve taken to her now. She’s really rather a fascinating little atom when she laughs. She’s as lively as a kitten, and sharp as a needle.”

From that day forth Elordie was Margaret’s shadow, attaching herself with the tenacity of a limpet, and begging to be allowed to perform small services, run errands, or only remain in the vicinity of her protector. The devotion was sometimes a little inconvenient, and Margaret was British enough to dislike any great outward demonstration of affection, but all the same she began to have a very soft feeling for her small room-mate. When none of the other girls were there to smile or sneer, she would submit to be hugged tightly, or to be kissed passionately on both cheeks. Indeed, sometimes she thought she rather liked it.

“Me, I shall call you my Margot!” said Elordie; “and you, will you have the bounty to call me your ‘petite Didi,’ as do my parents in France?”

“Didi’s a silly name!” remarked Margaret, but she tucked the child up warmly in bed, and gave her a peck on the forehead for good night, which was quite a concession on her part.

One morning, Margaret, reading home letters in the privacy of her bedroom, found Elordie’s big black eyes fixed upon her with intense and almost embarrassing scrutiny.

“You have news? Yes, it is I who know! I see it in the face, my Margot! Without doubt you have the news very important.”

“Well, there is certainly something rather interesting in this letter,” admitted Margaret. “My brother Jack (the one whose photo is on my dressing-table) is going to study in Paris, and he’s coming here to say good-bye to me before he starts.”

“Ah! what happiness! I also—I would like much to see the big brother Jacques who goes to study in France.”

Margaret’s one special idol was her elder brother; on him she lavished the bulk of her affection, and for him she would have made any sacrifice. On the afternoon of his visit she was allowed to have the sole use of the small

studio, and she bore him off joyfully there for the luxury of a private chat. They had just settled themselves cosily by the fire to discuss home news, when the door opened, and Elordie's small, interested, vivacious face made its appearance at about the level of the handle.

"I may present myself to regard the big brother? Yes?" she asked beguilingly.

Margaret's first impulse was to tell her sharply to go away, but something in the intense pathetic wistfulness of the dark eyes stopped her.

"Poor little soul! I expect it's made her frightfully homesick to see me have a visitor," she thought, adding aloud: "Do you mind her coming in, Jack? She's only a French baby! She'll sit quite quiet, and we can talk just the same."

Elordie did not wait for a more ceremonious invitation. She skipped to the fireside and installed herself on the hearthrug with a sigh of utter content, her head leaning against Margaret's knee and her gaze fixed full upon the fascinating stranger. The brother and sister went on with their conversation and almost forgot she was there.

"You'll enjoy the science part of the course," said Margaret. "You always said you'd like to do some laboratory work in Paris."

"Rather! If only I could get into Tichon's lab.! But, of course, I haven't a ghost of a chance for that!"

"Why not?"

"Why? Because he's the cleverest scientist in France; he's only room for a few students, and naturally he picks them carefully. He knows nothing of me, so it would be useless to apply."

"Is it that I understand well?" exclaimed Elordie, springing up suddenly, her pale face aglow with eagerness, and her eyes shining like black stars. "Monsieur Jacques, he wish to introduce himself to study in the laboratoire of Monsieur Tichon? Oh, lā lā! That is very easy, a thing altogether simple!"

"Do you know this Monsieur Tichon, then?" asked Margaret.

"He is my gran'père!" replied Elordie, proudly conscious of the dramatic effect of her communication. "He refuses nothing to his petite Didi! I shall write to him—yes, to-day—and ask him to give the place at his side to the brother of my Margot."

Elordie was as good as her word, and she evidently had not over-estimated her influence with her grandfather, for when Jack Thistlethwaite arrived in Paris he received an intimation that a vacancy in Monsieur Tichon's famous laboratory had been reserved for him.

"You're an absolute little trump! I can't tell you how set-up Jack is about it!" declared Margaret to the child.

"Bien! But I have again news. To-day I receive a letter from maman. She tell me she is full of a strong desire to behold the demoiselle who is so sympathetic to me, and she request that your parents are so amiable as to permit you to accompany me for a visit to Paris during the holidays of Easter. Tell me, my Margot, you will give us this happiness?"

Such a cordial invitation was not to be refused, and, her parents consenting, Margaret spent a delightful three weeks in Paris as the guest of Monsieur and Madame Montreuillon.

"You do not now think that all that is French is bad?" said Elordie triumphantly to her room-mate on their return to school.

"Why, of course, I prefer our own manners and customs, but I'm ready to allow there's much to be said for yours," admitted Margaret. "I like your mother simply immensely; she's as nice as any English woman or nicer."

"The *entente cordiale*!" murmured Mademoiselle, who had been a deeply interested spectator of the whole episode.

"I knew I could depend upon Margaret Thistlethwaite," said Miss Parsons.

IX

AN ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

It was “boarders’ day” at Miss Desmond’s school—that is to say, it was the afternoon before the reopening for the autumn term. The day girls were not due to appear until next morning at 9 a.m., and for the present the premises were given up to the twenty elect damsels who, in their own opinion at any rate, made up the most important part of the establishment. In an upper classroom whose windows commanded a view of both the front door and the playground at the side of the house, a group of three stood watching the arrival of those who had come by later trains.

“There’s Nell Drummond,” commented Elsie Palmer. “She’s got a new box and handbag, I see. Susie Lucian’s with her, so they must have travelled together from Devonshire. I wonder they haven’t got here earlier.”

“Missed the connexion probably at Dwale Junction,” said Meta Warren.

“Trust Susie to miss a train!”

“I nearly missed my own,” put in Phyllis Rayner. “I went along the platform to get some chocolates out of the automatic machine, and I should have been left behind if the porter hadn’t run after me, and hustled me into the nearest carriage. I’d put the penny in the slot, but I hadn’t time to take out the chocs! Wasn’t it a swindle?”

“The Automatic Sweets Company will be a penny to the good,” laughed Elsie.

“Never mind, Meta!”

“Oh, it’s easy to tell me not to mind! I wish I’d that penny back! I’d rather the porter had had it than that it should be wasted. Hallo! Here’s Phoebe Parlane. In a cab all to herself, too.”

“I like ‘boarders’ day,” said Elsie. “We feel as if we’ve got the school to ourselves. By the by, who’s taking Jessie Lynn’s place in our dormitory? Good old Jess! How we shall miss her!”

“Miss Desmond promised it to Vera Crouchley, but I believe Vera wants to change into No. 3, so we shall probably get Marjorie Williams.”

“Oh, well, Marjorie’s all right. She’s rather a joke sometimes.”

“I say, girls!” called out Phyllis, who had wandered across the room to the farther window, “who’s this promenading the playground? A new girl, by the look of her! If she’s a boarder, why isn’t she arriving by the front door?”

Elsie and Meta at once abandoned their point of vantage over the carriage sweep, and went to verify Phyllis’s information for themselves. In the playground below stood a stranger about twelve years of age, a dark, shy-looking girl in spectacles. Apparently she was not previously acquainted with the premises, for she walked hesitatingly to the side door, which was shut, looked in vain for the bell, and seemed to decide that she had probably come to the wrong entrance. She was retracing her steps towards the small gate in the palings when she happened to lift her eyes, and noticed three faces peeping out of an upper window.

“Hallo!” shouted Phyllis, making a speaking trumpet out of her hands. “Who are you? And what are you doing down there?”

“My name’s Barbara Hammond,” came the reply.

“Day girl or boarder?”

“Day girl.”

“Then what are you doing here this afternoon? Day girls don’t turn up till to-morrow.”

“I’ve come to take an exam.”

“An exam.! What for?”

“For the scholarship.”

“The entrance scholarship! Why, don’t you know——”

But at this moment Elsie, with a whispered “Shut up a sec.,” pushed Phyllis away and took her place at the window.

“Have you come to take the entrance scholarship exam.?”

“Yes; can you tell me, please, which is the right door?”

The voice sounded anxious and forlorn.

“If you’ll wait where you are for a minute or two, I’ll come and fetch you!”

“Oh! thanks so much!”

“But, Elsie,” objected Meta, “the scholarship exam. is to-morrow, not to-day.”

“I know that, my sagacious child, as well as you, but my superior intelligence sees the occasion for a little sport. This silly novice of a day girl has turned up too soon. Now it seems a pity, when she’s come for an exam., that she should be disappointed.”

“Serve her right for her stupidity.”

“She looks a stupid owl in those round spectacles,” commented Phyllis.

“On the contrary,” continued Elsie, “I believe she’s clever. She wouldn’t be trying for the entrance scholarship if she weren’t. If she wants an exam., let her have an exam.”

“How can she, when there isn’t one?”

“We’ll be the philanthropists, and provide it.”

“What *do* you mean?”

“Why, just this. Let’s rag her a little. It will be prime fun. Here’s my programme. Meta goes down at once, and escorts her to the Third Form room (not a soul’s likely to be there this afternoon!), tells her things will be ready shortly, and leaves her to agonize while we make our preparations. Then Phyllis and I rig ourselves out as mistresses, and go down and solemnly conduct her examination. I’ll undertake we give her something stiff.”

“Prime!” agreed Phyllis. “Oh, it will be no end of a joke! Look here, we mustn’t leave her standing in the playground, or someone else may see her and undeceive her. Meta, run down quick, and bear her off. Tell her you’ve been ordered to get the room ready for her.”

Nothing loth to have her share of the fun, and considering that “ragging” new girls, and especially day girls, was the privilege of the old-established boarders, Meta played her part with skill and caution. She decoyed the stranger into the house, showed her where to leave her hat and coat, and escorted her to the Third Form room. Here she hastily made a few necessary arrangements. Opening the mistress’s desk, she purloined some sheets of foolscap and a piece of blotting-paper, and placed them with penholder and ink at a seat near the window.

“Am I the only one?” asked Barbara nervously, viewing the preparations with interest.

“There are seven candidates altogether,” replied Meta unblushingly, “but Miss Desmond has decided to let each be examined separately. It’s to go more on *viva voce* work than papers this time, you see. There’ll be a mistress coming to you directly—probably two”—remembering that Phyllis would be sure to want her share of the comedy. “I’m the monitress,” she added, thinking it necessary to account for her own presence.

“Oh! I shall fail if there’s any *viva voce*! I know I shall! Is the exam. very difficult?” groaned the victim.

“Horribly! Miss Desmond makes it hard on purpose. Only extremely clever girls ever pass it,” was the discouraging reply. “You’d better sit down while you wait. They won’t be long.”

Privately Meta was fuming with impatience, and thinking that Elsie and Phyllis had appropriated the best parts.

“Are they going to be an hour dressing?” she said to herself. “I hope they’ll act up, and not give the show away.”

Barbara Hammond had apparently resigned herself to her fate. She sat contemplating the blank sheets of foolscap in gloomy despondency.

“I’ll give you a tip,” said Meta guilefully. “Miss Page thinks simply everything of foreign languages. She’s sure to address you in French, or German, or Italian, or Spanish, or Bulgarian, or something, so you’d better be prepared.”

“But I don’t know a word of Italian or Spanish and certainly not Bulgarian!” protested Barbara.

“Never mind! Pretend to understand, and I dare say you’ll get on. Say ‘Ecco!’ if she talks Italian, and ‘Si, senora’ if it’s Spanish, and ‘Zech’ if it’s Bulgarian.”

“How am I to know which is which?”

“Oh, well!” (Meta was rather nonplussed). “Spanish is always spoken in a much deeper tone of voice than Italian, and Bulgarian is full of gutturals. You couldn’t mistake it. Miss Johnson’s hobby is arithmetic. She certainly gives rather nasty problems. If you can tackle them, you’ll be all right, but if you can’t I advise you to fall back on geometry.”

“On geometry? How will that help?”

“Oh, you’ll find out! I’m only giving you the tip, you know.”

“Awfully kind of you,” murmured the candidate.

"I must leave you a moment," said Meta. "I'd perhaps better tell the mistresses you're waiting."

"I've got to prime those two on what their rôle is," she laughed to herself as she ran upstairs. "Elsie will have to play up no end in modern languages. I hope to goodness they're ready. What an age they've been, titivating themselves!"

Five minutes later two severe-looking individuals walked into the Third Form room. They both were short of stature, but their rather sweeping skirts gave them an appearance of dignity. The fair one wore a pair of pince-nez, which, far from aiding her sight, appeared decidedly to incommode it, for she was obliged to look either over or under them. The dark one knitted her brows in a forbidding scowl, and carried a formidable pile of books in her hand.

"Ah! Barbara Hammond, I believe. I'm Miss Page," began the fair one. "This is my assistant, Miss Johnson, who takes the mathematics. I suppose you know this examination is conducted mainly on the basis of modern languages?"

"I thought it was general," replied the candidate nervously. "Miss Desmond only mentioned French and Latin, and said there'd be English history down to the Commonwealth, and the geography of Europe."

"I am surprised she didn't mention Bulgarian! We make such a point of it at the school! Are you entirely ignorant of it? Tanzweisen scheelinski naprartnivitch rachmaninoff?"

"Zech," answered the victim, desperately.

"'Zech' is hardly a polite answer to give to such a question," returned Miss Page, frowning. "We do not allow impertinence at The Limes."

"I beg your pardon!" murmured unlucky Barbara, blushing furiously, and wondering what she had inadvertently said.

"We cultivate French, Spanish and Italian here," continued Miss Page. "Avez-vous passo il tempo jamais in Spagna?"

"Oui, mademoiselle,—ecco—I mean, si, senora! I'm afraid I don't quite understand," blundered the candidate.

"Ah, I thought not! It's unfortunate you're not better acquainted with the Romance languages—very unfortunate! I'm afraid it will interfere seriously with your chance of a scholarship, unless you can make up a little by your arithmetic. Miss Johnson, will you kindly dictate a problem?"

Barbara seized pen and paper more hopefully. An arithmetical problem might be within her compass. She wrote it carefully down.

“If 100 territorials set out from a point A to march to a point B, starting at 6 a.m., and 600 marines set out from a point C to march to D, starting at 7 a.m., calculating the pace of both at $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles an hour, with an impediment of 50 seconds to the hour per man for baggage, at what point upon the road will they meet, and at what hour?”

Just for a moment it seemed possible, but as she conned it over and over again, she grew more and more utterly confused, and turned even more red and nervous than before.

“I’m afraid I can’t do it,” she said at last, pushing the paper away. “There’s—there’s—nothing to go upon!”

“You’ve never been taught to work such problems by geometry, then?” asked Miss Johnson, with a cold inquiry in her eyes.

“No, never!”

“Ah! We *always* use applied geometry for arithmetic at The Limes. I’m afraid you would scarcely be able to keep up with us in general mathematics. What is your opinion, Miss Page?”

Miss Page shook her head sadly and solemnly.

“A candidate who has no acquaintance with Bulgarian or applied geometry is hopeless,” she replied.

“I’ve got up my English history down to Oliver Cromwell, and all the geography of Europe,” ventured Barbara desperately.

“If the other and more essential subjects are lacking, it will be little use examining you in these,” returned Miss Page. “I’m sorry—very sorry indeed—but I’m afraid you don’t reach the standard required for the scholarship.”

“Have I failed?” choked Barbara.

“You have been unable to satisfy the examiners.”

“Then I’d best go home.”

“Perhaps by another year, if you have made a special study of Bulgarian and applied geometry, we might consider your application afresh,” put in Miss Johnson.

But the candidate appeared too crushed to derive consolation from her suggestion, and with a forlorn “Good afternoon,” left the room.

A few minutes afterwards, as Dorothy Lindsay, one of the monitresses, chanced to be walking down the corridor, she noticed a small spectacled stranger pursuing her way towards the side door, and weeping bitterly.

“Hallo! Whom have we got here?” she exclaimed. “Who are you, kiddie? And what’s the matter with you?”

“I came for the scholarship exam.,” sobbed Barbara.

“Then you came a day too soon, for it’s not until to-morrow. Cheer up! It’s better than coming a day too late!”

“But I’ve just had it, and I’ve failed.”

“What?”

“I didn’t know I was expected to speak Bulgarian. It didn’t say anything about it in the papers Miss Desmond sent.”

“Bulgarian? What’s the child talking about? Who’s been examining you?”

“Two mistresses—Miss Page and Miss Johnson.”

“We haven’t any teachers of those names.”

“Well, they examined me, and they said I’d failed. Why,” noticing Meta hovering about in the distance, “there’s the girl who took me to the exam. room!”

“O-ho! I begin to see daylight!” exclaimed Dorothy. “Meta Warren, come here this instant! Is this one of your abominable practical jokes? I expect Elsie and Phyllis were in it. You three are always up to mischief.”

“We were only ragging her a little,” protested Meta. “She was so awfully innocent, and she swallowed everything whole. I was just running after her now to explain. We weren’t going to let her go home without telling her.”

“You’re three little *brutes*—that’s the only name strong enough for you. You deserve reporting.”

“Haven’t I *really* failed, then?” gasped Barbara.

“Certainly not. You’ve been shamefully ragged. Come to school to-morrow, and you’ll take the proper exam.”

“Without Bulgarian and applied geometry,” giggled Meta. “I say—I’ve brought some chocolates to make up. They’re from all us three. Elsie and Phyllis rigged themselves up pretty well, didn’t they?”

“Meta Warren, go to your bedroom!” thundered Dorothy. “I shall have something to say to Elsie and Phyllis afterwards.” Then, as Meta fled, she turned to Barbara. “It was an atrocious shame of them, but you really were rather a little silly to be so easily taken in. Don’t trust a word they say to you in future. They always rag new girls.”

“I don’t mind if I’ve another chance. Mother’d have been so fearfully disappointed if I’d failed,” said Barbara, readjusting her spectacles.

The entrance scholarship examination was conducted with due ceremony on the following day under the auspices of Miss Desmond herself, and Barbara found the subjects so well within her powers, that she scribbled away for a couple of hours without intermission.

“Some of the best papers we have ever had at the school,” said Miss Desmond as she corrected Barbara’s many sheets of foolscap afterwards.

“Have you won the scholarship?” asked Elsie, Meta and Phyllis, catching Barbara as she walked from the study, whither she had been specially summoned by the Principal.

“Zech! Ecco! Si, senora!” answered Barbara, with a radiant face. “I’m to be specially trained to teach Bulgarian and applied geometry. If you only stay long enough at the school you’ll probably become my pupils!”

“You’ll do!” laughed Elsie. “I like a girl who can stand a joke decently. Come out and have a go at tennis with us three.”

X

THE NEW GIRL

It was the most terrible affair—the worst scrape I ever got into at Oakleigh School; and the only wonder is that several of us were not expelled. Miss Gordon said we certainly *deserved* to be. This is how it happened.

It was a dull, damp afternoon towards the end of February, and we were expecting a new boarder who was to come for the mid-term. We had heard a great deal about Patricia Carrington. Her two elder sisters had been educated at Oakleigh. Miss Gordon always quoted them to us as examples of what girls ought to be, and though she had not yet seen Patricia, we knew she was anticipating a pattern pupil.

I am afraid it made us a little prejudiced against the new arrival, and that we were not prepared to welcome her with the enthusiasm that she merited.

On this particular Wednesday afternoon we had just come in from hockey practice; the day girls had gone home, and I happened to be sitting alone in the dressing-room changing my shoes. As I looked down towards the French window at the end, I suddenly became aware of a nose pressed flat against the glass, and a pair of eyes looking intently in my direction.

I sprang to my feet with a shriek. It must be a burglar, I thought, and my first idea was to run, wildly calling for help. Then something in the twinkle of the blue eyes, and the general outline of the grinning face under the scarlet school cap struck me as familiar.

It was Jack—my brother Jack, who is at Dr. Pemberton's school, only a mile away! He is two years younger than I am, and the jolliest, most mischievous young scamp in the world. With a shout of joy I flew to the window.

"Jack! You dear boy!" I cried, dragging him into the room. "How did you manage to get here?"

"Climbed your old nunnery wall at the bottom of the lawn," he replied; "managed to dodge the gardener under the laurels, and made straight for the nearest likely-looking window. It was luck to catch you alone, Madge! I say, this is a queer place! I've never been in a ladies' school before."

"I should think you haven't!" I laughed. "I don't know what would happen if Miss Gordon were to find you. How did you *dare* to come?"

"I cut bounds," said Jack. "I shall get into a scrape with the Doctor afterwards. Hullo! Someone's here! I'm off."

But he hadn't time, because the rest of the boarders came running in from the playground with their hockey sticks. They stopped short with a kind of gurgling gasp when they saw the utterly unexpected sight of a wolf in the sheepfold.

"Girls," I cried, "this is my brother Jack. He's come to see me. Promise on your honour you won't tell."

"Trust us! We're no tell-tales!" they declared, and they giggled a little, and crowded round Jack as if he were a dancing bear, or a fresh specimen from the Zoo.

I introduced him to my best friends, and we had quite a nice time. Jack enjoys being a lion, and he was looking at our cricket bats, and generally trying to make himself agreeable, when we heard the first bell ringing for tea.

I groaned. I didn't want Jack to go when he'd only just come. I had a wild idea of missing tea, and staying to talk with him in the dressing-room, but I never dreamt of what really happened. It was Letty Osborne who suggested it. She always has the quickest wits, and thinks of things nobody else would dare to propose.

"Madge," she said, "why don't you make your brother put on one of our dresses, and bring him in to tea?"

I clapped my hands with delight at the idea. "But what about Miss Gordon?" asked Elaine Shaw, who has a little more prudence than the rest of us.

"She's out," declared Letty. "I heard her say she wouldn't be home until seven. Miss Barlow is out too, so there'll be only Fraulein at tea, and she's so short-sighted I don't believe she'll ever notice, and if she does, she'll take him for the new girl."

"Grand! We *must* do it!" I exclaimed, and I flew as if in seven-leagued boots to my bedroom, returning in a few moments with my best cashmere frock.

"Oh, I say! Are you going to rig me out as a girl?" chuckled our visitor.

Jack is only eleven, and three inches shorter than I am. The dress fitted him quite nicely. He looked so funny with his naughty, mischievous face, that we nearly choked with laughter.

"I wish Miss Gordon could see you!" I cried. "Suppose she took you for Patricia! *You* don't look a model of manners and conduct, and likely to set a good example to the school. It would be the loveliest joke!"

"It might prove an awkward joke for us," said Elaine. "Luckily, I don't think there's the slightest chance of his being found out. Fraulein is so very short-sighted, and we'll sit at the far end of the table. But he must go away the moment the tea is over. Come along, quick! There's the second bell. We'll smuggle him safely into the dining-room before Fraulein suspects anything is going on."

There was a regular scramble for who should sit next to Jack at tea. Of course, I took one side, and Letty managed to get the other. We put ourselves in front of him as much as possible, to hide him from Fraulein, and I don't believe she ever noticed he was there.

You can't think what a glorious time we had. It seemed almost too big a treat to be true that Jack should actually be sitting in school next to me, and I had to keep pinching myself to make sure I was awake. The girls made such a fuss of him that I wonder he was not completely spoilt. He had the offer of every pot of jam on the table, and he insisted upon trying a little out of each, so that he had the queerest mixture of strawberry, raspberry, marmalade, quince, plum and apricot, all together on his plate at once. It looked horrid, but he said it was delicious, and that he hadn't enjoyed anything so much since he left home.

After tea we always have half an hour's recreation before evening preparation. Now, as Elaine suggested, Jack ought to have gone back at once to Dr. Pemberton's. Fraulein was in the teachers' room, the servants had not yet come to remove the tea things, and if he had only taken the opportunity to make his escape then, it is probable our trick would never have been found out.

But I was very loth to part with him. I dragged him into the schoolroom, and we all sat down in a circle to chat round the high fireguard.

"Just for ten minutes or so," said Letty. "Fraulein won't turn up till the half-hour, and we'll keep an eye on the clock."

The minutes passed very quickly, because Jack began to give us an account of a scrape he had got into at Dr. Pemberton's.

It was so interesting that we never remembered to look at the time. Suddenly a most fearful thing happened. The door opened quickly and quietly, and who should appear but Miss Gordon! Yes, Miss Gordon herself, come home at least an hour sooner than we had anticipated, and sailing into the room with her usual majestic calm.

I think the blood almost froze in our veins. No set of Guy Fawkes conspirators putting barrels of gunpowder under the Houses of Parliament could have felt more caught than we did. Miss Gordon's sharp eyes discovered Jack at once, and she came forward and shook hands with him enthusiastically.

"Patricia Carrington! My dear child, I did not expect to find you here already!" she exclaimed, in an amazed tone of voice. "There must have been a mistake about the train. Miss Barlow has gone to the station to meet you."

Jack turned very red, and murmured something unintelligible. Miss Gordon evidently thought the new girl was shy, and tried to be reassuring.

"I am sorry I was not here to receive you," she said, "but I am glad to see your schoolfellows have made you welcome. Have you had tea?"

"Yes, thank you," stammered poor Jack.

"I cannot understand how the mistake arose about your arrival," continued Miss Gordon. "Girls, go to your desks and begin preparation. Stay here, Patricia! I wish to learn something more about your journey."

We settled to our places, and taking out our books made a great show of industry, though in reality not a line was learnt or a figure set down. Every eye was turned cautiously towards that pair at the fire-place, and every ear was strained to catch each word of the enthralling conversation. You might literally have heard a pin drop in the room. Letty declared afterwards she could hear her heart beat, and as for me, I felt my breath coming and going in great gasps, and my hands trembled so that I could not hold my pen.

It was indeed a dreadful situation. Jack cast an appealing look at me, but I dare not interfere to help him. I simply had to let matters take their course.

Miss Gordon seemed puzzled and rather disconcerted, as well she might, for surely no pupil could have proved more entirely different from her expectations than the one who now stood before her. I noticed that she glanced at his cropped head and his boyish hands, and her face seemed to say: "Is this the charming, well-mannered girl whose influence is to prove so beneficial for the rest of the school?"

“I hope your sisters are well,” she began.

“Yes, thanks,” gasped Jack, who was growing more and more dismayed.

“I should not have known you by your likeness to them. You do not resemble either Rose or Beatrice,” continued Miss Gordon, gazing at him with evident disappointment. Jack shuffled his feet awkwardly, and said nothing. How long could this go on? I wondered. Sooner or later the horrible truth must come out. I suppose Miss Gordon noticed his feet, for she said:

“You have not changed your boots yet, my dear. You had better come upstairs with me, and I will superintend the unpacking of your box.”

She rose, and I knew the crisis had come. Would Jack be able to make his escape as they went down the passage? I held my breath in suspense. At that very moment a noise and a bustle were heard outside in the hall. The door opened, and Miss Barlow appeared, ushering in a fair, trim-looking girl of about thirteen.

“Here we are, Miss Gordon!” she announced. “I met Patricia quite safely, though her train was a little late.”

“Patricia!” exclaimed Miss Gordon, gazing at the fresh arrival in utter bewilderment. “*You* are not Patricia Carrington!”

“Of course I am,” replied the new-comer, with equal astonishment.

“But Patricia is here already!” faltered the Head Mistress in much agitation.

“Indeed, I am Patricia Carrington!” protested the girl, her face working, and her eyes filling with tears. “My name is on my boxes, and it’s marked on my linen and pocket-handkerchiefs. I’ve come all the way from Ipswich. I suppose you *are* Miss Gordon and this *is* Oakleigh? I’ve got a letter from mother for you in my pocket. Here it is, and if you don’t believe me, I should like to go home again!” and she burst out crying.

“Then who—oh!—who is this?” demanded Miss Gordon tragically, turning to Jack, who stood so taken aback by this unexpected entrance that his wits seemed to have deserted him.

He started, and gave a desperate glance round the room, then, without a word of explanation, made a sudden dash for the door. Miss Barlow, with great promptitude, darted to intercept him. He dodged her round a desk, and in less time than it takes to tell it, he was out in the hall, and had made his escape into the garden before anyone could stop him.

What followed is an extremely painful remembrance. Miss Gordon was determined to sift the matter to the bottom. She cross-questioned and catechized us until she had drawn out the story from beginning to end. Naturally there was trouble. I thought I should have been expelled, and Letty too, because she had suggested the idea of dressing Jack up. After a tremendous scolding, however, we were forgiven, though we lost our play-time for a whole fortnight as a punishment.

My best dress was found next morning hanging over a basket chair in the summer-house. Jack must have left it there before he climbed the garden wall.

He got into a great scrape at his own school. Of course, he was late for call-over, and had to have an interview with the Head Master in the study, and explain where he had been. Dr. Pemberton caned him, and made him write a letter of apology to Miss Gordon.

We like Patricia very much indeed now she is here. I suppose she really has a good influence over us, though she is so nice and pleasant that somehow we don't resent it. All the same, the girls agreed that there never was such a thoroughly jolly, amusing, and absurd kind of a schoolgirl at Oakleigh as my brother Jack!

XI

A HARD TERM

"The very thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Lancaster, triumphantly waving a letter that had arrived by the evening post. "So kind of Cousin Ottilia Turner to think of it. It will suit Jessie to a T. Let me see; we can lengthen her blue skirt, and I'll lend her my cabin trunk, and she can borrow Jock's suit case. I believe we could pack her off by Tuesday at latest. She might be there for years!"

"Mother! What do you mean? Where are you going to pack me off to?" gasped Jessie, in much agitation at these hasty plans for her future. "Is it to stay with Cousin Ottilia?"

"Not exactly, though you'd be quite near, for the address is Green Kettering," replied Mrs. Lancaster, referring to the letter. "Cousin Ottilia says:

"My dear old friends, the Misses Pridwell, who keep that nice old-fashioned Ladies' School near the church, are in a sad dilemma. Their governess has been taken ill, and had to be removed to the hospital. Naturally they are greatly upset about the matter, especially as they are left without any assistant teacher. I suggested Jessie to fill up the gap, and they jumped at the idea, and said they would take her on my recommendation, for they hate advertising or applying to scholastic agencies. Of course, Jessie is young for the post, but no doubt she could manage to teach juniors. The sooner she can go the better. I am starting for the Continent to-morrow, so please write direct to Miss Pridwell, Gowan Lea, Green Kettering, and arrange the matter.' "

The little group seated round the dining-room table doing home lessons dropped pens and books to discuss the thrilling situation.

"Jessie a teacher!" roared Basil. "Well, of all queer starts that takes the cake! Is Cousin Ottilia in her senses?"

"Does she really mean *me*?" quavered Jessie. "You're *sure* it's not 'Tessie'? Her writing's hard to make out."

"No, it's certainly a J. You can look at it for yourself if you like. Besides, Cousin Ottilia knows Tessie has gone to Hurst College, and she mentions that you're young for the post."

“Seventeen to-morrow! I may have my birthday at home, at least?” implored Jessie. “Oh, mother, what will Miss Black say at my leaving the High School? Shan’t I forfeit my fees?”

“Miss Black will quite understand, and I think I can persuade her to take Dilys instead of you. Then Alwyn can go to Miss Carr’s instead of Dilys.”

“A regular swop all round,” murmured Basil.

“I wish it meant moving *me* on somewhere. I shouldn’t object to a change,” declared thirteen-year-old Mamie.

“You’re booked for a school-marm, Jess,” teased Allister. “Just oblige us by getting up and showing how you’d quell a class of obstreperous juniors with the power of your eye.”

“I suppose I’ve got to go?” queried Jessie dolefully.

“Most certainly; it’s an opportunity that mustn’t be missed on any account,” replied her mother. “It will be splendid if you can begin to earn your own living. I can send Babs and Lulu to school. We’ll write to-night and clinch the bargain.”

Jessie acquiesced without further remonstrance. The idea was startlingly sudden, but in the straitened circumstances of the Lancaster family each member realized the stern necessity of lightening the general burden as speedily as possible. An impecunious widow with three sons and seven daughters cannot afford to allow her children to be fastidious; the sooner each was packed out into the world the better, for it meant so much more chance for the younger ones. Tessie, the eldest, had already made a start, and gone as governess to Hurst College, and Jock, the second, was in an office. Now it was undoubtedly Jessie’s turn, and if she was rather juvenile for a teacher—well, that was the look-out of the Misses Pridwell, and Cousin Ottilia had taken the responsibility of recommending her.

Jessie’s school outfit was soon completed—an extra skirt and jumper, a mackintosh, and a new pair of gloves were all her mother’s purse could run to at present; but the younger ones were generous in lending any articles they possessed which might be of use. So amongst the family Jessie collected a best nightdress case, a blotter, a fountain pen, an olive-wood serviette ring marked “Jerusalem,” a work-box, a brush and comb bag, and a morocco-bound edition of “Hymns Ancient and Modern.”

“Do I look any older?” asked Jessie anxiously the next day, taking a view of herself in the glass, and wishing she were taller.

“Um—well—not much. Still, perhaps you’ll seem quite grown up and elderly to the kids.”

“And she’s growing up fast,” added Mrs. Lancaster. “Fortunately youth is a drawback that time very soon remedies.”

“You’ll be Miss Lancaster now, Madam Jess; all ‘prunes and prisms,’ ” guffawed Allister.

“Oh, don’t; it’s horrible!” groaned poor Jessie.

“Humph! Hope they won’t be *too* disappointed with her,” murmured Basil.

Late on Tuesday afternoon Jessie, very sober and nervous, and rather red-eyed, arrived alone at the small country town of Green Kettering, in North Yorkshire, and leaving her box to be brought by the out-porter, started with the gladstone bag in her hand to find Gowan Lea. It was near the church, she knew, so taking the spire for a landmark, she walked along the sleepy High Street and turned round the corner by the bank. A very few inquiries brought her to the house, a prim, old-fashioned place, in Queen Anne style of architecture, built right on the roadside, with only a high railing in front, and with a brass plate on the door bearing the inscription, “Seminary for Young Ladies.”

“Not very promising,” thought Jessie, with a sinking of the heart. “‘Seminary’ sounds like the days of Jane Austen. Still, perhaps it may be better inside,” and she rang the bell.

The sitting-room into which she was ushered was unlike any which in her limited experience she had ever seen before. It was full of solid Early Victorian furniture—chiffoniers and whatnots, and chairs with hand-embroidered velvet cushions; there was a round walnut-wood table, on which sat a “Book of Beauty,” and there was a case full of stuffed humming-birds and some wax flowers under a glass shade. In the corner of the room there was even a harp.

“Jane Austen,” thought Jessie again, “or the pictures in our Dickens.”

But she had no time to draw further comparisons, for the door opened and two sweet, quaint, frail little old ladies entered together. They were very small and neat and trim, and erect of figure, with thin, delicate cheeks, and sad lines round their mouths, and innumerable little criss-cross wrinkles round their pathetic eyes. They were dressed exactly alike, and there would have seemed, to strangers, no difference at all between them, only Miss Lydia’s hair was quite white and Miss Hannah’s was steely grey. They both

gave the same identical little gasp and pause when they saw Jessie. Miss Lydia looked at Miss Hannah, and Miss Hannah looked at Miss Lydia; then it was Miss Lydia who spoke.

“Miss Lancaster, I presume?” she said in a gentle, rather tremulous voice. “We are glad you have arrived safely, but”—here she gave an agitated glance at Miss Hannah—“I fear you are very young for the post—very young indeed.”

“You look hardly your age, my dear,” quavered Miss Hannah. “Our friend, Miss Turner, mentioned that you were twenty.”

“Then Cousin Ottilia *did* mean Tessie after all,” thought Jessie, but aloud she said, “I was seventeen last Friday.”

“It must surely have been a mistake,” continued Miss Hannah. “We certainly thought our friend said twenty, and even that seemed young. Only just seventeen, Lydia!”

Miss Lydia shook her head gravely and pursed up her little prim mouth.

“Exactly one year older than Marjorie Canning, and Marjorie is tall for her age,” she remarked, with her eye on the rather squat figure of the new governess.

“Would you like me to go home?” suggested Jessie. “I’m afraid there’s been a mistake.”

She was longing to explain the matter properly, but her shyness made her brusque.

“What do you think, Hannah? Could the child possibly manage?” said Miss Lydia nervously.

“I think we might let her try,” ventured Miss Hannah. “Perhaps Ottilia Turner would be offended if we didn’t give her a trial. Besides, it’s most inconvenient without anybody, and it would take at least a week to get a governess through an agency. We should have to write for her references.”

“So we should, and I should be sorry to offend Ottilia,” agreed Miss Lydia. Then, turning to Jessie with a little kind, wan smile: “We don’t want to send you home if we can help it, my dear. We need not tell the girls your age. It may be rather difficult for you, but I am sure you will try to manage.”

“I’ll do my best,” replied Jessie.

“I’m quite sure you will,” chimed in Miss Hannah bravely.

“They’re dears—absolute old dears,” decided Jessie when she went to bed. “I don’t know which is nicer. They’re like withered roses that still smell quite sweet. But oh, how hopelessly antiquated and old-fashioned and funny! I feel as if I’d gone back a hundred years. Why, it’s like ‘Cranford,’ or Miss Pinkerton’s Establishment in ‘Vanity Fair.’ I wonder if they call the girls Miss So-and-So, and make them learn their lessons out of spelling books.”

The Misses Pridwell had kept their Seminary for Young Ladies for the last thirty-five years, and though at one time it had been quite a flourishing concern, with sixteen boarders, it had gradually dwindled till twenty-two day scholars now represented the whole school. The tide of progress during nearly four decades had flowed in another direction, and left Green Kettering stranded, so that its population had greatly diminished, and also many children who, a quarter of a century ago, would undoubtedly have attended Gowan Lea, now went by train to the big High School at North Walton, five miles away. As each pupil left without another coming to fill the vacant place, more little criss-cross lines appeared in the gentle faces of the little old ladies and an added anxiety in their tired eyes. Every year it grew harder to make ends meet. They struggled on, practising innumerable economies and hiding their small shifts from even their best friends.

“It wouldn’t do, for the sake of the school, to let people know how badly off we really are,” said Miss Lydia, and Miss Hannah agreed with her.

So they darned and redarned their well-worn clothes, and cleaned their gloves with benzine, and mended the broken crockery with cementum, and did without bacon for breakfast, and pretended supper was bad for the digestion, and told people they didn’t care for holidays at the seaside, and that a library subscription was unnecessary when they had a whole bookcase full of volumes at home, and decided that the drawing-room carpet would last a year or two longer if it were turned about, and that the best parts of the dining-room curtains would re-cover the sofa. It was an immensely brave fight against heavy odds, for neither of the old ladies had the least inclination or capacity for teaching. To them school-keeping was simply a refuge for the destitute; they had taken it up in the first instance because they did not know how otherwise to earn a living, and because they had a houseful of furniture left them as their sole legacy by their father, a former vicar of Green Kettering. Then, the school once launched, they had never been able to turn to anything else.

“And it is at least a *ladylike* occupation,” said Miss Lydia, who read with blank dismay the accounts in the illustrated papers of gentlewomen who

started teashops and hair-dressing businesses, or ran registry offices or boarding houses.

Next morning at the breakfast table (Jessie had an egg and marmalade for breakfast, though the old ladies themselves only ate bread and butter) the new teacher ventured to attack the subject of classes, and to inquire about the time-table for the day.

“Let me see. Wednesday. I believe they have Scripture, history and dates, don’t they, Hannah?” said Miss Lydia. “But the girls themselves will tell you what they were accustomed to do with Miss West.”

“And which form am I to take, please?” persisted Jessie.

“The girls are of such various ages that we don’t have forms,” replied Miss Hannah. “We have them in two rooms; our governess always teaches the elder ones and my sister and I take the little ones.”

“Oh!” said Jessie.

“We find the beginners get on so much better with us,” added Miss Lydia hastily.

“Oh!” said Jessie again, commenting mentally, “they prefer the little ones, evidently. So I’m to wrestle with the seniors, am I? Poor unfortunate me!”

It was an appalling prospect. She had expected to be placed in charge of a form of juniors well under twelve, and now it appeared she was to teach girls of nearly her own age, and on a time-table of their own setting too.

“I’m not going to let them see I am nervous about it, though,” she decided.

How she longed for six inches more height and the weight of Tessie’s three extra years and experience as she walked into the seniors’ classroom! She had put on the new skirt, as it was the longest, but all the same she was conscious of looking painfully and horribly young. The morning that followed was the funniest experience she had ever had in her life, and when she wrote home the account of it to her anxious family, she scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry.

“The Miss Pridwells are old dears,” so ran her letter, “but the school! I never imagined anything so primitive and antediluvian could exist in the twentieth century. Could you believe it, the girls do their sums on slates, and have never even heard of decimals, and they learn columns of spelling, or passages out of history and geography books, to repeat by heart, parrot-

fashion! It has been anyhow ‘learn as you please’ work, and just about as different from the ‘High’ as Jane Austen is from a Girton girl. I hope I didn’t show my dismay too plainly. I tried to be dignified and firm, and they were pretty good on the whole; but when my newness has worn off I expect I shall have a lively time.”

It *was* a lively time—livelier even than Jessie had anticipated. The girls had not been accustomed to much discipline under their former governess, and they thought they could set their new teacher at defiance with impunity. Led by Marjorie Canning, they giggled and whispered, and threw paper pellets at one another, and learnt or lazed as they felt inclined. Jessie went at it bravely. She was determined not to give in and allow herself beaten, but it was weary work. She dared not tell half her troubles to the old ladies, for fear they should decide she was incapable and send her home.

“I mustn’t go back, mother’d be so woefully disappointed, and Allister and the others would tease so,” she thought. She toiled on, trying to introduce High School subjects and methodical orderly ways. It seemed wellnigh impossible to build where there was no foundation, and at every point she was baffled by finding the girls utterly ignorant of some essential fact. They resented her authority, refused to be interested, and scouted her new methods. One solitary comfort she had. On Friday mornings she was put in charge of the juniors, while Miss Lydia devoted herself to housekeeping and Miss Hannah sat with the seniors during their lessons with the French and drawing masters. Among the small girls Jessie was in her element, and an immense success. She instituted drilling, action songs and kindergarten games, and made her lessons into plays and stories. She had a real love for children and a happy way with them. As a result they adored her.

“If I might only have the juniors?” she ventured to suggest to Miss Lydia one day.

But Miss Lydia shook her head.

“We cannot afford two governesses, my dear,” she said apologetically, “and a mistress for the senior schoolroom is indispensable.”

The little old ladies were looking sadly worried. Several pupils were to leave at Christmas and there seemed no prospect of filling their places. Expenses would go on just the same, but with fewer fees to meet them. Both sisters held policies in an assurance society, and if they could only continue their payments for a few more years they could each claim a life annuity, just sufficient to live upon independently of school keeping. It was the

anticipation of this blissful future that buoyed them up day by day. In the meantime, how to get through that intervening period was an urgent and wellnigh insoluble problem.

“Would it be possible to do without a French master?” proposed Miss Hannah one day.

“I’m afraid not. We lost four pupils when we dropped the dancing class. The parents expect visiting masters,” said Miss Lydia.

“Can we ever hold out for three more years?” sighed Miss Hannah, and it seemed such a hopeless question that Miss Lydia did not answer.

Jessie did not know all the facts of the case, but she was keen-eyed enough to see the tragedy in the two sweet old faces, and in her bluff schoolgirl fashion she offered what sympathy she dared. In the evenings she read the newspaper aloud (both the sisters needed stronger spectacles, but they could not afford new ones) or she picked up the dropped stitches in Miss Lydia’s knitting, or put coals on the fire, or did any small services that came to hand. In return the Misses Pridwell made a gallant effort to amuse her. They rummaged out an ancient game of “Fox and Geese,” and a solitaire board, and some puzzles, which had been locked in a drawer for the last thirty years or more; and Miss Hannah tried to remember how to play chess. One evening Jessie, who was an ardent philatelist, brought down her collection of postage stamps.

“I believe we have a few foreign stamps somewhere,” said Miss Lydia, searching through the boxes inside the Japanese cabinet; “they belonged to our only brother James. He died when he was sixteen, and we have treasured his schoolboy possessions ever since. Ah, yes, here they are—not very many, I am afraid, but perhaps you will like to look at them.”

Miss Lydia opened the tortoiseshell snuff-box and spread the stamps out on the table. There were only a few dozen—most of them of very ordinary kinds—and Jessie examined them with a rather feigned interest. At one, however, she paused, referred to her book, looked again at the stamp, and turned to Miss Lydia in great excitement.

“Am I mistaken, or can this *possibly* be a Mauritius stamp of 1847?” she inquired eagerly.

“It is quite likely, my dear. Our mother was out in Mauritius at the time of her marriage. She may have saved some stamps. I have not looked at these for many long years. It was my brother’s hobby, not mine. I knew nothing about it.”

“But, Miss Pridwell! Don’t you know this stamp is extremely valuable? If it’s really a Mauritius of 1847 it’s worth hundreds of pounds. I verily believe it is! See, it’s exactly the same as figure one hundred and twenty-one in my book.”

“Too good to be true, my dear,” quavered the two little old ladies, both bending their spectacles together over the stamp album.

But after all it *was* true. Dame Fortune, who had neglected and overlooked the Misses Pridwell for so many years, had at last turned her wheel of chance and remembered them. The stamp proved to be genuine, and sold for enough money to pay up all the remainder of the premiums and put the sisters in receipt of their annuities at once.

“And we can actually give up the school!” exclaimed Miss Lydia tremulously when they heard the glad news.

“Thank God!” said Miss Hannah with a sob of relief in her voice.

It was at this crisis that Cousin Ottilia Turner came back from the Continent. No one rejoiced more thoroughly than she at her dear friends’ emancipation from teaching, but she laughed heartily at their youthful governess.

“Of course, it was Tessie I meant; I’d quite forgotten she’d gone to Hurst College,” she declared. “I never dreamt of recommending this child to teach anybody, much less seniors. I wonder she managed as well as she did. It’s a good thing she came, though, or the Mauritius stamp might still be reposing inside the snuff-box. I’m glad you speak so well of her. She’s shown what she’s worth, and I certainly think she deserves to have something done for her.”

Cousin Ottilia was as good as her word. She had never offered any help to the Lancasters before, but now she proposed to send Jessie for a complete course of tuition at a teachers’ training college.

“Your talent evidently lies with the youngsters,” she said, “and well-trained kindergarten teachers are always in demand. By the time you’ve got your certificates you won’t look so absurdly young.”

The Misses Pridwell have retired to Devonshire, to a sweet little creeper-covered place—the ideal country cottage of their dreams—where they have no financial anxieties and no more exacting occupations than keeping hens and growing roses. Jessie is to spend the next summer holidays with them, and they are embroidering a counterpane for the spare bed on purpose, for both have new spectacles that have given them new eyes.

As for the Seminary for Young Ladies, it just died a natural death, and the pupils have thankfully transferred themselves to the High School at North Walton.

XII

THE FEAST IN NO. 7

It was a quarter-past four o'clock on a November afternoon, too early to light the gas, yet much too dark to see to do anything which required the assistance of eyesight; that delightful, peaceful, lazy hour of day when one feels licensed to be idle, and enjoy oneself without the uneasy sensation that one is wasting time which should be more profitably employed. Round the fire in the playroom at Miss Clarke's school sat a little group of boarders, their chairs drawn as near as possible to the bars of the high fireguard, and their heads bent closely together, as they chatted in low voices.

"Listen!" said Ivy Hampson, as she broke a bar of chocolate into four impartial portions and handed them round to her companions. "I have had such a glorious idea. Why shouldn't we give a party in our bedroom on Thursday night? Miss Clarke and Miss Glen will be at the concert, and there'll only be Miss Miller left to look after everything. Not a soul would find us out, and it would be the most absolutely glorious fun. Who'll say yes?"

"Lovely!" exclaimed the others, all three together.

"What time should we have it?" added Phyllis Harding.

"Just when Miss Miller has turned out the gas and gone into the library, and before the big girls come up to bed. There's never anybody about then, and it will be quite safe."

"Whom shall we ask?" said Dorothy Bloomfield.

"Why, everyone on our landing: Nancy Hall, and Evelyn Drummond, and Winnie Allen, and the two Southwells, and Blanche Morrison."

"And Lotty Greenwood?" said Mabel Bloomfield eagerly. "We must ask Lotty! She's my own particular chum!"

"It will be rather dangerous, because she sleeps in Laura Hammond's room. Still, we shall be obliged to risk it. The Sixth Form don't come upstairs until half-past nine."

"We'll have such a *jolly* time," said Phyllis Harding; "but we must keep it a dead secret!"

“Of course. Nobody out of our own form must be allowed to hear the least hint. We’ll get up something in the way of theatricals, too, and astonish them all. There’s the first bell! We shall have to go and wash our hands before tea. Do be careful not to let anyone know!”

Having thus laid their plans, the four naughty conspirators issued private invitations done up into neat little three-cornered notes:

MISS IVY HAMPSON, MISS PHYLLIS
HARDING, MISS DOROTHY AND MISS
MABEL BLOOMFIELD.

AT HOME

Thursday, November 15, from 8.30 to 9.30. No. 7 Bedroom.

R.S.V.P.

There was not a single refusal. The guests were only too ready to accept, especially as they were not allowed even to guess what was to take place on the occasion, and they were naturally in a state of wild curiosity. The four hostesses kept their preparations veiled in mystery, and held rehearsals for several nights beforehand, which proved so enjoyable that they declared getting ready for a thing was nearly the best part of it. The most difficult problem that faced them was the question of refreshments.

“Couldn’t we save up some of our biscuits from lunch?” suggested Mabel.

“No; we must have something much nicer than stale biscuits,” said Ivy, “or it won’t seem a real party at all.”

“Do you think we could beg a few apples and raisins from Cook?” said Phyllis.

“That wouldn’t be safe. She might tell Miss Clarke. We’d better club together and ask one of the day girls to buy us some cakes. I think we might trust Lucy Roper. How much money have you?”

“Only fourpence,” said Phyllis, “until I get my next weekly allowance.”

“Here’s threepence,” said Dorothy, examining the contents of her little blue purse, “and Mabel has twopence.”

“I have a sixpence, which makes one and threepence altogether. We ought to be able to give a feast on that, if we plan it out well.”

Lucy Roper proved quite ready to undertake all that was required, and the parcel which she smuggled into school next afternoon was highly satisfactory. It consisted of two cheese-cakes, one bath-bun, one rock-cake, three ounces of raspberry drops, a stick of mint toffee, and a pennyworth of lemon kali. They looked most delicious, and the girls longed to sample them, but they heroically refrained, and hid them away under Dorothy's best hat until the evening.

"I don't know what Miss Clarke would say!" whispered Mabel, as they shut the door of the wardrobe.

"We're allowed to spend our pocket money on sweets," replied Phyllis, "so why shouldn't we save up sometimes and have a feast? It can't be greedy when we mean to share the things among so many."

If Miss Miller had been of a suspicious nature, she would have been struck that night by the extreme readiness with which her pupils retired upstairs. There was neither dawdling nor lingering; even Blanche Morrison did not beg for one minute more; no one remembered to have left a book in the schoolroom, and nobody asked to put paints or sewing away.

The girls had decided not to undress, but to slip on their nightgowns over their clothes, and get into bed, so as to look just as usual when the mistress went her final round; then, the moment she was gone, they intended to jump up and begin the fun. The lights were always put out on the upper landing at half-past eight, and after that they knew everything would be very quiet in the house.

Ivy, Phyllis, Mabel and Dorothy lay breathing softly and regularly when Miss Miller came into their room, as if they were already wrapped in the soundest of slumbers. They waited until they heard her close the door opposite, which was the last on the floor, then Ivy jumped up, and stealing to the end of the passage, peeped over the banisters. She watched her teacher go downstairs, and saw her enter the library, then, running back along the landing, she hummed the first few bars of "Bonnie Dundee," which had been arranged as a general signal to light the gas again. When she returned she found Phyllis, Mabel and Dorothy already busy cutting up the cakes with their penknives, and arranging them in the soap-dish lids which were the best substitutes they could think of for plates.

Punctual to the moment the visitors arrived, giggling and rather difficult to keep quiet, but evidently prepared to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

“I had a terrible fright!” said Nancy Hall. “Evelyn had gone to bed in such a hurry that she left her foot sticking from under the clothes, and I was so dreadfully afraid Miss Miller would see it and ask why she hadn’t taken her shoes and stockings off. But luckily she didn’t.”

“Laura Hammond came upstairs to fetch a clean pocket-handkerchief, just when I had put on my nightdress,” said Lottie Greenwood. “I thought she stared at me very hard, and I certainly must have looked queer and fat, with all my clothes underneath. I wonder if she guesses?”

“I hope Miss Miller doesn’t suspect anything,” said Phyllis. “I think we ought to have a scout at the end of the passage. We can take it in turns. Let us count out who shall go first.”

The others agreed as to the necessary precaution, and the lot fell on Ada Southwell, who departed unwillingly with half a cheese-cake to console her, while the rest of the guests seated themselves on Mabel’s and Dorothy’s beds, and partook of refreshments with much appreciation, particularly enjoying the sips of fizzy lemon kali, hastily mixed in a glass, and stirred with a lead pencil.

“It’s lovely! But a pennyworth doesn’t go far,” said Nancy Hall. “Don’t drink too much, Winnie. Evelyn hasn’t had any yet.”

In the meantime the hostesses had been preparing for their performance. With the aid of the wardrobe door and a piece of string, they had managed to screen off a portion of the room, and had retired there while the visitors finished the feast.



"Ivy drew back the 'curtain,' and disclosed what was really a very striking scene."

"When is it going to begin?" said Winnie. "We're getting impatient."

"You haven't told us yet what it is," said Gwennie Southwell.

"We're almost ready," said Ivy, "if you'll only wait quietly just a moment. It's a kind of entertainment, and the first thing is a tableau:

‘Bluebeard and Fatima,’ by Miss Dorothy Bloomfield and Miss Phyllis Harding. Now, if you’ll come and sit on my bed instead of Mabel’s, you’ll be in the dress circle.”

She drew back the “curtain,” and disclosed what was really a very striking scene. Dorothy had arrayed herself for the part of Bluebeard, with some ingenuity, considering the extremely scanty material she had at hand. She had put her feet through her nightdress sleeves to represent long, baggy trousers, had looped up her red dressing-gown over them, tied a towel round her head for a turban, and corked herself a pair of curling moustaches. She stood brandishing a key with an air of ferocious wrath and vengeance on her countenance, while Phyllis, attired as the luckless Fatima in a coloured bedspread, knelt with outstretched hands in an attitude of supplicating despair. They looked so realistic that the girls began to clap.

“Oh, do be quiet!” implored Ivy. “If you make so much noise we shall be having someone coming up to see what we’re doing. Take some more lemon kali, while we get the next scene ready.”

Ada now came running back, and said she was sure it must be somebody else’s turn to act scout; so the girls had to count out again, and Evelyn took her place in the passage. The second tableau was “Rebecca at the Well,” and was taken by Ivy, who, with bare arms, held her water jug on her head, while a pink scarf and a sheet made quite a pretty Eastern costume. She kept very still, though her arms began to tremble at last, and she nearly let the jug fall.

“It’s a mercy I didn’t drop it! There would have been a smash!” she said, as Phyllis came to her assistance.

The third scene was an ambitious effort to reproduce Millais’ famous picture, “The Black Brunswicker’s Departure.” Dorothy, in her long coat, with a red military scarf tied round her shoulder, and still wearing the corked moustaches, held Mabel clasped dramatically to her manly bosom; only Mabel spoilt it all by laughing when she ought to have looked as though she were shedding tears of grief and despair.

The audience insisted upon cheering this, and made so much noise about it that they must have been heard downstairs, for Evelyn came bursting suddenly in, exclaiming in a breathless whisper: “Quick! Quick! She’s coming! Miss Miller!”

The news caused an immediate panic. Somebody turned out the gas, and the guests fled on the wings of fear along the dark passage, all except Nancy, who crept under the nearest bed, and lay there like a concealed burglar.

Phyllis, Ivy, Mabel, and Dorothy jumped into their beds just as they were, and drew the clothes tightly over them; but there was no time to tidy the room. They shut their eyes, and tried to pretend they were fast asleep as a figure entered and struck a light.

Ivy, however, could not resist just one peep, and saw, much to her relief, that instead of Miss Miller it was only Laura Hammond, one of the elder boarders, who stood gazing at the scene of confusion before her with a very comprehending glance. She walked straight across to Dorothy's bed and looked at her critically. Dorothy lay snoring in the most obtrusive, I might almost say offensive, manner; her head was half buried in the pillow, but one cheek was visible, and showed the absurd corked moustache only too plainly.

"Dorothy! Dorothy Bloomfield!" cried Laura.

But receiving no answer, she stooped down, and pulling back the clothes, revealed the whole of the Black Brunswicker's uniform.

"So this is the kind of thing that goes on among you younger girls!" she said severely. "Get up, Dorothy, at once! Why, what's this?"

And catching sight of a shoe peeping from under the valance of Mabel's bed, she seized it with a vigorous tug.

The foot kicked desperately, but Laura held tight, and drew out the struggling Nancy in spite of her wails and protestations.

"You naughty little wretches!" said Laura. "You've been making a regular night of it! Now it would just serve you right if I went downstairs at once and fetched up Miss Miller."

"Oh! Don't! Don't!" implored the girls. "We'll never do it again! On our honour, we won't! We should get into such a terrific scrape. We'll all go to bed in two seconds—indeed, we will—if you'll only promise to say nothing."

"You don't deserve it," said Laura grimly. "But I don't want to spoil your careers, and if I tell, there'll certainly be trouble. Nancy, you'd better vanish! What's become of Lotty? I'm absolutely certain she must have been here too. Now, then, clear away this mess at once, and undress yourselves properly. I'll give you five minutes by my watch, and at the end of that time I shall put the light out. Dorothy Bloomfield, I shall be much obliged if you will kindly wash your face."

She sat down on Ivy's chair, and counted out the minutes while the four girls unrobed with a dispatch they had never equalled in their lives. Laura waited until she had seen the last safely into bed, then took a glance round the room to satisfy herself that everything was left in order.

"If I catch you at any more of this nonsense, you won't get off so easily!" she said. "What little sillies you are to imagine you can play tricks like this without being found out! Why, I could hear you clapping right down in the hall when I was fetching my French grammar. You'd better none of you so much as even dare to whisper after half-past eight again, or you'll all come to a bad end!"

And with that she turned out the gas and departed.

XIII

THE TURTON TENNIS CUP

“Girls!” urged Sylvia Broughton dramatically, “this school has just got to buck up and win the tournament again! That tennis cup ought to be ours, and if we let it be wrenched away from us it will be a blot on our record that would take years to wipe out!”

“Three years,” sighed Sara Stevens. “And who knows whether, if the luck once turned against us, it would ever come our way again. One feels it’s a case of now or never.”

“If only Marjorie Tills were here!” mourned Lucy Denham. “Why couldn’t she stop another year?”

“She’d been two years in the Sixth, which was more than ordinary luck for the school,” returned Sara. “One can’t expect to keep one’s champions for ever, I suppose. Still, when one begins to try and fill up her place it’s—well——”

“A facer!” groaned Sylvia. “I don’t want to belittle Ivy; she does her level best. But when one’s played with Marjorie!”

“Ivy Boden and Marjorie Tills can’t be mentioned in the same breath—that’s flat!” agreed Sara. “But it’s no use crying over spilt milk. If Marjorie’s left she’s left, and we certainly can’t bring her back. Ivy has points, and if we all keep her up to the mark she mayn’t do so badly. We must see she doesn’t slack. There’s no need to throw up the sponge yet.”

“We’ll show fight, you bet,” smiled Sylvia grimly; “but I hear Craigmores has got an A1 champion, so it will be a tussle. Well, I must be off now! Ta-ta! Keep up your spirits!”

Sylvia Broughton was a prefect, and one of the principal powers of West Street High School. A handsome girl, with a bright colour and fair hair, her attractive though rather masterful personality dominated the Sixth. She carried off school laurels with tolerable ease, standing high in her form as regards work, and she held the palm for athletics. She was a favourite with the teachers and popular among the juniors. Last year, with Marjorie Tills for partner, she had won the District Tennis Tournament, defeating six other schools in Homeric contest. She was the undoubted champion for this season. It was no light responsibility to uphold the honour of her school on

this occasion. Though there was a fair number of moderate players among the girls, no one rose to the front rank, and Ivy Boden, her partner, left much to be desired in the matter of service. Yet this time above all the school *must* win. For two years in succession it had carried off the cup, and if it could but succeed in gaining a third triumph the trophy would become its very own. Think of it! The beautiful silver cup which every school in the Turton district sighed for and longed to possess! For the present it stood in a glass case in the hall, and Sylvia, passing it on her way to the dressing-room, paused for a moment to contemplate its beauties. How glorious if, instead of being merely a temporary visitor, it were a permanent fixture of the hall. On one side of it was engraved a shield (empty at present) reserved for an inscription of the school and the two champions who should finally secure it. Sylvia's eye dwelt on that vacant place longingly.

"Thinking how grand your name would look there, are you?" said a sarcastic voice at her elbow.

Sylvia started and turned hastily with a hot flush of annoyance. She had imagined she was alone, and was anything but pleased to find herself the object of the quizzical regard of Janie Broadbent. Janie, a crude and—it cannot be denied—somewhat uncouth specimen of a girl, was at present Sylvia's pet aversion. Her shambling figure, her nervous habit of blinking her eyes, her tow-coloured hair, and above all an irritating frankness in expressing her thoughts, did not commend her as a general favourite. Popular opinion, which idolized Sylvia, left Janie severely out in the cold. She did not endure the neglect with meekness; on the contrary, she took every opportunity of retaliation that her sharp tongue afforded.

"Oh, I know you consider yourself the very top show!" she continued bitterly. "You've got everything in your own hands. There are others in the school who could do as well as you if they'd your chances. It's not fair!"

"Really, Janie Broadbent, I can't see what you're driving at!" returned Sylvia icily.

"Oh, no; of course you can't see, and you don't want to see! You've all the trumps—the looks, and the position, and the popularity, and you want to grab all the prizes too! It's more than your share. Why should you be the one to win the cup for the school?"

"Don't suppose I've any chance of winning it," parried Sylvia, "and if I'm chosen champion it's by the result of the handicap, as you know perfectly well."

“Oh, I know, rather!” aggressively; “and I know one or two other things. Where would you be if you hadn’t your fine tennis court at home to practise on? Does it give girls a chance who can only snatch an occasional game at school?”

“I’m sure I can’t help it if you don’t happen to have a tennis court of your own!” Sylvia was losing all patience.

“But you crow over me for it, you and your clique! Oh, I do hate you! It’s not fair!”

The advent of half a dozen juniors rollicking noisily into the hall put a sudden stop to Janie’s eloquence. With a last defiant glare she stalked away. Sylvia, equally indignant, sought the dressing-room.

“That Janie Broadbent is getting beyond all bounds,” she said to herself as she walked home. “Why should she attack me like this? It’s sheer jealousy, because she wants to shine and can’t. She’s the most odious girl in the school, and not sporting either! What does it matter who’s champion so long as the cup’s won for the West Street High? I just shan’t listen to her heroics if she tries it on again. She’s beneath my notice.”

Feeling utterly superior and magnanimous, Sylvia ignored Janie’s very existence, both in form and in the playground. The latter, after her outburst, had relapsed into a sullen silence. She avoided Sylvia with marked elaboration. She nursed her grievance carefully, however, and would have aired it to a select audience had anyone had the patience to listen to her, but the girls were far too interested in their own concerns to trouble themselves about her real or fancied wrongs. Meantime, the term was slipping by fast, and tennis practice went on vigorously. If the cup was to be retained, the school must put forth its best energies. Everybody realized that point, and under the pressure of public opinion even Ivy Boden, inclined by nature to slack, exerted herself to the uttermost. As for Sylvia, she was indefatigable.

“Mind you don’t overdo it!” said Miss Camden, the Head. “There’s play within reason and out of reason. I’ve known girls spoil everything by over-training. Do be sane, Sylvia!”

“I’ll promise not to play before breakfast then,” agreed the too-ardent champion, who had been rousing a sleepy sister and rising at six to put in extra practice.

One day Sylvia turned up at school with excitement writ large on her face.

“My cousin Betty Matthews is staying with us,” she announced eagerly. “Betty is county champion, and she’s simply no end of a player. Her play’s the most ripping thing I’ve ever seen. She beat me hollow every game last night. She’s promised to come to the High this afternoon and give us some hints, so please brace up! She knows a thing or two about tournaments, I can tell you!”

In fulfilment of her promise, Miss Matthews called at the school that afternoon, and was escorted by Miss Camden to the tennis courts. She watched the play critically for some time, asking an occasional question of the Head, but making no comments.

“How do you think we’re getting on?” queried Sylvia anxiously as she walked home with her cousin at half-past four.

“Very well on the whole. You and Ivy supplement each other and ought to have a good chance. But where are your understudies?”

“Our what?”

“I said understudies. Each champion ought to have a thoroughly capable second to fall back upon in case she should be ill or disabled on the day of the tournament. That’s good generalship! It didn’t strike me that any of your rank and file could rise to the occasion.”

“We’d never thought of it!” exclaimed Sylvia.

“Then I should think of it at once. Choose your sub-champions and make them practise for all they’re worth. There are one or two who have decided points and who ought to be in training: a rather short, pale-faced girl I noticed specially, she has the elements of a very fine player. Let me see”—consulting a notebook—“Oh, yes; Miss Camden said her name was Janie Broadbent. You must take her in hand yourself at once.”

“Janie Broadbent! Why, I wouldn’t touch her with a pair of tongs!” gasped Sylvia. “I—I simply loathe her!”

Cousin Betty lifted her well-marked brown eyebrows.

“Oh, of course, if it’s a question of personal feeling versus the success of the school I can say no more!” she replied rather coldly, and dropping the subject, began to talk about other matters.

Sylvia listened and replied automatically. Her mind was in a ferment. She thoroughly recognized the sense of her cousin’s remarks. She wondered that it had never occurred to anyone in the school before to train understudies. But Janie Broadbent of all girls! “Oh, I can’t!” she thought.

“After the nasty things she’s said to me it’s impossible. I’ll do my best for Margot Smith instead. She and Lillie Chorley can be sub-champions; but I just don’t mean to be ill for that tournament and let anybody else take my place! If the cup’s to be won for the High, the name of Sylvia Broughton is going to be engraved upon it! That’s flat!”

The opportunity of practising with a county player was far too good to be missed. Sylvia was determined to make the most of Miss Matthews’ visit. Every available moment out of school hours she coaxed her dear Betty to the tennis court.

“Don’t overdo it, Sylvia!” counselled her more experienced cousin, echoing Miss Camden’s good advice.

“Oh, I’m as strong as a horse and as fit as a fiddle,” Sylvia replied carelessly. “Don’t you go worrying your head about me. I’m not going to break down!”

Alas, for Sylvia’s hopes! One evening Nemesis descended. At the end of her third game her right arm began to pain her. She finished the set with difficulty. By next morning there was so much swelling that her mother sent for the doctor.

“Humph! Tennis elbow!” was his verdict. “Why can’t you girls do things in reason? It’s entirely your own fault.”

“I’ll be able to play in the tournament on the twentieth of July?” gasped Sylvia.

“Certainly not! You probably mayn’t be able to handle a racket for the rest of the summer.”

Sylvia nearly collapsed on to the sofa. She would have wept had she not noticed that Dr. Macpherson was laughing at her discomfiture.

“He’s a brute, but he shan’t see me blub!” she said to herself, and bore the bad news like a stoic.

She spent the afternoon alone in the garden, thinking. The trend of her meditations was not pleasant, to judge by the puckers on her brow.

“Sylvia Broughton,” she announced at last to an audience of poppies and sparrows, “you mayn’t like it, but you’ve just got to make yourself do it somehow. That cup’s not to leave the High, and this is the one ghost of a chance of keeping it. For goodness’ sake do be sporting! What does it matter who’s champion if the school wins?”

Having arrived at this conclusion she felt better and joined the family circle at tea.

There was great consternation at school next morning when Sylvia turned up with her arm in a sling.

"I suppose Ivy Boden and Lillie Chorley will have to be champions!" said Sara Stevens blankly. "I'm afraid it means good-bye to the cup!"

"While there is life there is hope. We're not beaten yet," returned Sylvia. "There's just one thing I bargain for—don't settle the championship yet awhile. I think as I'm out of it I ought to be allowed to choose my own understudy, and I don't want to decide till the eleventh hour."

"Right you are! We'll leave it open, then."

"Thanks most awfully!"

When mid-morning interval came, Sylvia, escaping from the sympathy of her mates, took a prowling round the playground. She was evidently in search of somebody, and that somebody was not very far away or difficult to find. Janie Broadbent was eating her solitary lunch behind the row of swings, when Sylvia touched her on the shoulder. She turned in surprise. Sylvia's face was very red. She spoke hurriedly.

"Janie! Do you want to do a big thing for the school? I believe you could win that tournament if you were properly coached! Can you come round to our garden and play with my cousin? She is county champion, and she says she'll teach you all she can."

"*Me!*" gasped Janie in utter amazement.

"Yes; *do* come. Betty says you've points, and she'll make something of you, she's sure. Only don't let us tell anyone a word about it just yet. We'll surprise them later on."

"Right-oh! Mum's the word! What time shall I turn up?"

As July passed, and the fatal 20th drew nearer and nearer, considerable anxiety began to be felt concerning the tournament. Ivy Boden at her best was only a secondary star, and Lillie Chorley was too uncertain to be depended upon.

"You never know from day to day whether Lil will be absolutely brilliant or an utter duffer!" commented Lucy Denham.

"Have you noticed Janie Broadbent's play lately?" asked Margot Smith. "She simply surpassed herself this afternoon. I never saw anything like it

since Marjorie Tills left. Janie has improved all of a sudden. In my own opinion she's the best player we have."

"Sylvia'll never allow *her* to be sub-champion though!" said Sara. "Why, Janie's her absolute *bête noire*. I expect we shall have to trust to luck and Lillie; there's nothing else for it."

"When's the committee?"

"To-morrow."

When Sylvia stood up at the monitresses' meeting and announced that she had selected Janie Broadbent as her understudy the news created considerable surprise. Some endorsed her choice, and some questioned the capacity of her champion, though all agreed to abide by her decision.

"Not a very presentable figure to represent the school!" sniffed Dahlia Morris. "Sylvia looked lovely last year."

"It's not a beauty competition, after all!" laughed Nan Harrison.

If not handsome, Janie looked neat and extremely business-like on the eventful day. The tournament was to be held at the Central Tennis Club in the town, and girls from all the competing schools crowded in as spectators. Sylvia, her arm still in its sling, cut a somewhat tragic figure as she sought the benches.

"It's jolly rough on you!" sympathised Sara.

"I don't care a penny if only we win," said Sylvia between her clenched teeth.

The battle for the cup was to prove no easy matter. Other schools had been cultivating their champions as diligently as the West Street High. Two girls in especial from Craigmere House appeared likely to carry all before them. It was just when the fortunes of war were trembling in the balance that Janie seemed suddenly to come into her own. At first she played carefully and cautiously; now she let herself go. Her schoolmates held their breath with admiration and excitement. Never in all their annals had they witnessed such magnificent play. Marjorie Tills, whose name up till then had been their watchword for prowess, paled in comparison. Ivy, who was fortunately in good form, supported her colleague nobly. It was a day of tense expectation. Once the West Streeters thought they were done for; but, as by a miracle, Janie recovered the advantage and won the set. As time went on they dared to count the score and hope. With each success their spirits rose higher. The

final tussle was an event to be remembered; the queer tow-headed figure, with its long, swinging arms, seemed ubiquitous.

“We’ve actually won the cup!” choked Sara at last, as the bystanders raised a cheer.

“It was grand!” said Sylvia afterwards to the exhausted Janie. “I couldn’t possibly have done it myself. There isn’t another girl in the school that could! We should have been beaten hollow without you! You’ve saved the credit of the High!”

XIV

MISS TRELAWNEY, B.A.

“Do you know,” said Hope Haslam, addressing the select party of boarders that stood in the schoolroom window watching the day girls’ departure, “it’s absolutely true what was rumoured a few weeks ago; Miss Bishop really *is* going to leave at Christmas.”

“Are you sure, or is it only one of Daisy Wright’s marvellous tales? She’s so fond of getting up a sensation all about nothing.”

“I’m quite certain. Miss Bishop mentioned it herself to Sibyl Collins. She said she was going to Australia to join a brother, and would be starting at the end of January. Sibyl says she seems fearfully excited about it. Surely you can believe Sibyl? But if you’re still doubtful, *this* ought to convince you. Violet Fowler gave it to me. She cut it out of the Dorfield *Daily News*. It’s proof conclusive.”

The girls clustered round Hope, all trying at the same time to look at the scrap of newspaper she held in her hand, and bumping their heads in the endeavour.

“Here, give it to me, and I’ll read it aloud,” said Natalie Hunter, snatching the precious fragment. “It seems to be something in the way of an advertisement. Oh! I say, what do you think of this?—

“‘WANTED.—Assistant governess for high-class girls’ school. Graduate preferred. Usual English subjects and mathematics. Knowledge of health exercises indispensable. Must be good disciplinarian.—Apply by letter, or personally between four and six, to Principal, Mayburn College, Tottington Park.’ ”

“Whew!” sighed Janet Raeburn, emitting a prolonged and significant whistle. “Looks like hard times ahead for us!”

“What does Miss Crawford mean by saying ‘must be a good disciplinarian’?” asked Winnie Elliot suspiciously.

“Why, somebody who can keep us in good order, of course. A regular strict old dragon, as sour as a green gooseberry and as stiff as if she’d swallowed the poker. Oh, Caractacus! It’ll be prunes and prisms the whole day long!”

“Disgusting! Sickening! Detestable!” came in a chorus from the dismayed girls.

“I see ‘mathematics’ is put in specially,” said Natalie, reading the advertisement over again slowly, so as to realize its full horrors. “I remember Miss Crawford threatened last term that she meant to make the school work harder at maths!”

“She couldn’t forgive Florence Hardy for failing in the Matric. But Florence was always a duffer at geometry, and it was a horrible paper, so no wonder she was stumped.”

“It’s too bad to avenge her sins on us, at any rate!”

“We shall have more exercises, though, you’ll see. Miss Crawford was only saying the other day that we might very well take an extra half-hour for prep.”

“It will have to come out of recreation, then! What an abominable shame! What’s put all this into Miss Crawford’s head?”

“One of the day girls’ mothers, I believe. I think it was Mrs. Bolton. She called and complained that Bessie hadn’t enough home-lessons to keep her busy in the evenings.”

“Then why couldn’t Bessie learn a string of extra dates or verbs on her own account?”

“Or make her work spin out a little longer, the stupid!”

“Anyhow, Miss Crawford is very keen at present on what she calls ‘keeping up the standard,’ and that means more grind all round for everybody, worse luck!”

“Wanted—governess,” said Natalie, returning to the advertisement. “She’s to inflict an overdose of maths upon us, and she’s to be an absolute Tartar. What else, I wonder? Why is a knowledge of health exercises indispensable, please? What are health exercises?”

“Oh! some of those horrid cranks that come up every now and then. You breathe deeply with your arms in queer positions, or you roll on the floor as if you were trying to tie yourself in a knot, or hop about on one leg while your head’s screwed on one side. They’re generally rather painful, and they look most ridiculously silly.”

“There’s one good thing, then. They’ll take the starch out of the new mistress!” laughed Janet. “One couldn’t imagine anyone looking prunes and

prisms if she were hopping round the room, or rolling on the floor.”

“It would be more comic than dignified, certainly. By the by, has anybody applied for the post?”

“I imagine several must have done. Sibyl Collins says she heard Miss Crawford talking to Miss Prowse about it last night, and she mentioned a Miss Briggs, a Miss Walton, and a Miss Trelawney, and said they were all graduates.”

“Have they ‘applied personally’?”

“No—I’m sure not. I asked Nellie, the parlour-maid, if anyone had been to call, and she said only Mrs. Barlow and Mrs. Porter.”

“That shows our Tartar has not yet turned up in the flesh. She’s an appalling prospect! I wonder if I couldn’t catch measles next term!”

“Look here!” exclaimed Janet. “Wouldn’t it be a tremendous joke to dress up and pretend to be the new governess coming to interview Miss Crawford?”

“Rather! But—oh, Janet! even *you* daren’t do that!”

“Indeed! Who says I daren’t?”

“Why, you’d be found out directly, and then—just think of the row you’d get into.”

“I shouldn’t be found out. Not if I dressed myself up cleverly. I wouldn’t mind undertaking—well, not that Miss Crawford would engage me, but at any rate, that she wouldn’t know me, and she’d suppose me to be a real applicant.”

“I’ll give you six chocolates if you succeed in taking in Miss Crawford!” said Hope Haslam sceptically.

“Make it a dozen!”

“All right. I’m quite safe.”

“I’ll win them this afternoon, then!” declared Janet. “No time like the present. Just to show you I *dare* do anything I happen to like. Come along to my room, all of you, and help to rig me out.”

The girls followed giggling, some a little incredulous as to the stability of Janet’s intention, but others prepared to see her embark upon any mad adventure. She was a determined young person, full of high spirits, and with

a talent for acting and a power of mimicry that had often won her laurels at school entertainments.

“If it’s possible to carry such a thing through, Janet will do it,” whispered Natalie Hunter. “I shouldn’t like to be in her shoes, though, if Miss Crawford finds out.”

The enterprising Janet was already ransacking her own and her roommate’s wardrobe and drawers, but she tossed aside one thing after another with dissatisfaction.

“Phœbe, lend me your navy serge skirt—that’s a cherub!” she demanded. “All mine and Winnie’s are too short, but you’re such a giant that anything of yours ought to be long enough on me. Yes, I should be glad to borrow Lesbia’s black coat, too, and Hope’s motor veil. Thanks, awfully! Now I shall manage all right, and in a few minutes you’ll see a transformation. Go out of the room, all of you! Miladi prefers to arrange her own toilet in strict privacy; I’ll call when you may come back. No, Winnie, I won’t have even *you*.”

Five tittering girls stood upon the landing waiting the signal to return, and giving an occasional rap at Janet’s door to encourage her to hasten, but they were allowed no admittance until the costume was absolutely complete. When at last they received permission to enter the room they burst into squeals of delight at the vision which greeted them. In Phœbe’s long skirt Janet looked many inches taller, and Lesbia’s coat added to the grown-up effect. She had put on a small felt hat and a motor veil, and donned Winnie’s spectacles. But, besides these additions, she had contrived to alter her whole bearing and expression; there was a slight frown on her brow, her chin was elevated, and—greatest marvel of all—the shape of her mouth seemed utterly changed.

“It’s splendid! How *have* you done it?” exclaimed the girls.

“A piece of blotting-paper tucked inside my upper lip,” chuckled Janet. “It’s not at all uncomfortable, and it makes me talk in a queer toothy manner. I’ve scraped back my hair tight from my forehead, so that I’ll look intellectual and Girtonish and all the rest of it, and I believe Winnie’s spectacles give me a slight squint. Whom did you say Miss Crawford mentioned to Miss Prowse?”

“A Miss Briggs, a Miss Walton, and a Miss Trelawney,” said Hope.

“Then I’ll be number three. Miss Trelawney, B.A., at your service,” and Janet dropped a mock curtsy. “I really don’t think it’s bad,” she continued,

surveying herself in the wardrobe glass, and first taking a few mincing steps, then practising a graceful bow. "You see, I have to unite mathematical genius with health exercises. I'm to be a kind of combination of Minerva and Sandow, and it's not a little difficult to run the two together. I'm not quite sure whether to wring Miss Crawford's hand with Titanic strength, or to give it a limp shake as if I were absorbed in calculations."

"You remind me of Charlie's Aunt!" shrieked Lesbia, "Don't put on the Sandow business too much, or you'll overdo it. Remember, please, that you're a graduate and a good disciplinarian. That implies dignity."

"Yes, I haven't forgotten that," said Janet, deepening the frown, and poking out her chin yet farther. "I feel a B.A. to the backbone, and capable of quelling any number of schoolgirls like you. I only hope Miss Crawford won't ask me to work a problem as a test of my capacity. I could manage a rolling exercise better. Phœbe, go and see if the coast is clear. I thought of scooting quickly down the stairs, running out through the side door into the garden, and then marching boldly up the front steps."

"Oh, if we could only hide and watch the interview!" sighed the girls.

"I'm afraid that's impossible. You'll have to take my word for it all afterwards. Everything serene, Phœbe? Then ta-ta, for I'm off!" And Janet skipped down the stairs.

She met nobody, either in the passage or in the garden, and gaining the porch, she rang the electric bell vigorously. The parlour-maid who opened the door gazed at her with polite unrecognition. It was evident she had not the slightest suspicion of the visitor's identity. She ushered her into the drawing-room, as if she were any ordinary visitor, and departed to inform her mistress of the arrival.

"Kindly say a lady has called in answer to the advertisement. Miss Trelawney is the name," said Janet, in the most scholastic tone she could assume.

She felt she was in for it now. There was certainly no drawing back possible, for already she could hear Miss Crawford's step in the hall. She braced her nerves, gave a stately inclination as the principal entered, and advanced to meet her with what she hoped was a mathematical expression and an athletic walk.

"Miss Trelawney, I believe?" began Miss Crawford. "This is indeed quite a surprise, as I understood from your letter that you were in Cornwall."

"I found myself in your neighbourhood to-day," replied Janet, rising to the occasion, and affecting a slight lisp to veil her familiar voice. "I thought it better to call, as a personal interview is so much more satisfactory."

"Ah! Quite so! I think you stated your qualifications in your application," said the principal, looking rapidly through some papers which she held in her hand. "Yes, here I have it. First-class mathematical tripos, Cambridge; graduate of the Dublin University; has studied gymnastics on the Norwegian system under Madame Wirtemberg. You did not mention if you have had any experience in teaching?"

Miss Crawford was prompt and business-like, but not very encouraging in her manner. She looked at the extraordinary figure facing her with no trace of recognition, but with a slight embarrassment, as if she were sorry to be compelled to give disappointment.

"I am obliged to make a great point of experience," she added, rather apologetically. "I need a teacher who is well accustomed to keep order."

"That's no difficulty at all," replied Janet, frowning through Winnie's spectacles, and pursing up her lips in her character of disciplinarian. "I assure you I've been used to girls. They won't take advantage of *me*!"

"Indeed! Well, of course it is necessary to keep a firm hand over a class; still, at the same time I like my governesses to be on good terms with the pupils. We try to keep up a very pleasant feeling at the college."

"I've overdone it, and she thinks I'm too strait-laced and strict!" thought Janet; and changing her tone, she brightened into a gushing smile, and replied aloud:

"Oh, please don't mistake me! I'm always most popular in the schoolroom. The girls adore my lessons. They behave quietly, just because they're enjoying themselves so much. I can make mathematics seem as interesting as a novel."

"Indeed!" said Miss Crawford incredulously.

"And you should see me at the health exercises," continued Janet in her most engaging manner. "I make a great point of those. 'Mens sana in corpore sano,' you know." (This, by the by, was a favourite quotation of Miss Crawford's.) "You'd be astonished what a difference you'd soon find in their chest measurements! Nothing like gymnastics for developing the general physique."

“You don’t appear very strong yourself,” remarked the principal, regarding with a look of perplexity the queer, undersized little object who seemed so voluble and so anxious to obtain the post.

“I mayn’t be tall, but I’m remarkably wiry,” returned Janet, drawing herself up with dignity, and remembering to poke her chin out again. “I believe I forgot to mention that I’m a champion tennis player and an excellent swimmer. I feel sure that if you engage me I shall give you all-round satisfaction.”

“Well, it’s hardly possible for me to decide anything to-day,” said Miss Crawford, rising to put an end to the interview. “Thank you for calling, Miss—er—Trelawney, is it not? I have several other applicants, and I must take time to consider. I will write to you, and let you know. I have your address on your letter. Good afternoon!”

Janet was bowed out of the drawing-room and dismissed through the front door with no more suspicion as to her identity than she had aroused at her arrival. She walked demurely down the drive till the thick laurels hid her securely from all view of the windows; then, diving under the bushes, she tacked through the shrubbery, reached the side door in safety, and made a bolt for her bedroom, where a few seconds sufficed to tear off her incriminating garments.

“Here are your specs, Winnie! Take this wretched veil, Hope! Phœbe, your skirt was no end, but I’m glad to get rid of it all the same. Oh, girls! I’ve had the time of my life!”

“Did she know you?” asked the confederates, sitting chuckling on the bed.

“Not the least atom in the world! It was an absolutely business interview from beginning to end. I played up, I can tell you, and I imagine I rather startled her.”

“She must have thought you a queer stick, certainly,” laughed Natalie. “I hope she didn’t engage you.”

“No; we didn’t get as far as that—in fact, I could see she was trying to shuffle out of it. Miss Trelawney, B.A., didn’t seem altogether to suit.”

“She wasn’t an attractive-looking person,” giggled the girls. “Did you mention discipline and health exercises?”

“Oh! I piled on the agony tremendously, but it wasn’t any use. On the whole, I’m rather glad, though. It would have been distinctly awkward if

she'd engaged me on the spot. I've done what I said I should, and that's quite enough. Hope, hand over those chocolates!"

As the girls came from supper that night they had the supreme satisfaction of overhearing a fragment of conversation between the principal and Miss Prowse.

"An *impossible* person!" Miss Crawford was remarking. "Her qualifications may be excellent, but it only shows how necessary it is to have an interview and judge for oneself. Why, she could never be tolerated for an instant; her appearance, her manners——" But at that moment the two mistresses turned into the study, and the listening young pitchers heard no more.

"She means *me*!" whispered the jubilant Janet. "I must have taken her in completely. Oh! isn't it just too lovely a joke for anything!"

But there are two sides to every question, even to a joke. Janet had been so wrapped up in her part of the affair, and so keenly enjoyed the triumph of her successful acting, that it had never struck her to give a thought to the actual Miss Trelawney. She scarcely realized that such a person existed, much less that she had really applied for the post of teacher at the College. A week afterwards, however, Janet had a rude awakening.

She was on duty as monitress, and was filling the ink-bottles, and performing various other small offices in the study. Miss Prowse was standing by the window speaking to Miss Hill, and the two teachers talked on, regardless of the girl's presence.

"We shall miss Miss Bishop dreadfully," said Miss Prowse. "It's not yet decided who's to fill her place, I believe?"

"No. I had hoped that my cousin, Miss Trelawney, might be chosen," replied Miss Hill. "She has such splendid qualifications, and she is most suitable for the post. But Miss Crawford has written refusing her application. She did not give any reason. It is a great disappointment, for my cousin was most anxious to come to the college, and, of course, it would have been delightful for me to have her here."

Janet nearly spilt the ink in her agitation. It had not before entered her thoughtless schoolgirl head that her mad prank could be prejudicial to anybody's interests. She saw now only too clearly what she had done.

"It is always so difficult to find a good post at Christmas," continued Miss Hill. "Most schools change teachers after the summer holidays, and my cousin is afraid that she may not get anything now until next September. It is

very trying, as she really can't afford to be out of employment so long, and yet she does not wish to accept any second-rate engagement."

Janet could not bear to hear any more. She popped the ink-bottle back on the shelf in a hurry, and taking the pile of corrected exercise books, fled from the room. What *must* she do? The whole point of her joke had lain in the fact that Miss Crawford had not recognized her; she had known it was a risky adventure, and that if she were found out she would get into a very big scrape, and she had been rejoicing in her complete success. Now the aspect of affairs was altered. Unless Miss Crawford were speedily undeceived, a great wrong would be done to an innocent and deserving person. Not for a moment did Janet hesitate. She plucked up her courage, and walked straight to the door of the principal's sitting-room.

"I shall probably be expelled," she thought. "But it can't be helped; I shall *have* to tell."

"Come in!" said Miss Crawford, in reply to her timid tap, and with a very fluttering heart Janet entered. It was terribly hard to make a start, especially as the mistress, after an interrogative "Yes, my dear?" sat silently waiting for her to begin. She blushed crimson, and then, with a desperate effort, plunged into her confession. Miss Crawford's eyes narrowed, and her mouth took on a stern expression.

"So you masqueraded as Miss Trelawney?" she said gravely. "You no doubt thought you were doing a clever thing thus to impersonate a lady with whom I was in correspondence. Did it never occur to you that you were acting a most deceitful part? You were not only imposing upon me, but you were creating a false reputation for Miss Trelawney."

Janet had turned exceedingly pale. Her voice trembled as she answered:

"I never dreamt of all that, Miss Crawford. I—I—meant it just for a joke. I'm very ashamed of myself, and very, *very* sorry."

"You have certainly taken a great liberty, Janet. It is a good thing for you that you have come and told me yourself. Had I heard of the occurrence from anybody else, I could not have passed it over. I will accept your apology, but I must have your word that such a performance does not occur again."

"I promise, on my honour!" protested Janet, dissolving into tears.

"Then you may go, though we have not yet altogether righted the matter. Your confession to me does not make amends to Miss Trelawney. Her

chance is lost—through your fault. For, unfortunately, I have just engaged another teacher; the letter was posted an hour ago.”

Very humiliated and crestfallen, Janet withdrew; the principal had a reputation for strictness, even severity, so she thought she had done well to escape without punishment.

“If anyone else had told her, I should certainly have been expelled,” she said to herself. “Oh, dear! I shall be out of favour for ever so long, and I’m sure I shan’t be chosen to play a piece at the school concert, or even to sing in the chorus. Well, it can’t be helped now. I’m most sorry for Miss Trelawney.”

After all, things did not turn out quite so badly as had been expected. The lady whom Miss Crawford had written to engage replied that she had already accepted a position in another school, so that the post at the college was still vacant, and the principal was able to offer it to Miss Hill’s cousin.

When Miss Trelawney, B.A., really arrived, she proved an utterly different individual either from Janet’s impersonation of her, or from the strait-laced disciplinarian whom the girls had imagined. As for Janet, she was very subdued and crushed, and took her banishment from the Christmas Concert with such meekness that—provided she continues on her good behaviour—Miss Crawford fully intends to allow her to be a stall-keeper at the school bazaar next term. But that is a dead secret, and she does not yet know of the honour in store for her.

XV

RUTH'S PENNY SQUIRT

It was a noticeable fact at Leaford High School that each time of year seemed to have its own particular form of amusement, which returned as regularly as spring flowers or autumn tints. During the Michaelmas term rounders was the universal custom, but as soon as the Christmas holidays were over a season of skipping would come in, and rows of small girls might be seen hopping diligently over long clothes-lines, practising "follow my leader" or "one, two, three, and a hot pepper." Some of the more skilful could manage double ropes, but it was so difficult to find anybody who could turn them with the exact evenness required from both arms that this feat of agility was not often performed. In February an epidemic of whip-tops affected the school; it was introduced by the day pupils and proved as infectious as measles, being taken up hotly by the boarders, who even indulged in it during evening recreation, until they were strictly forbidden by Miss Berners, the head mistress, who thought the classroom far too narrow a field for them to wield their lashes in safety.

With the March winds battledores and shuttlecocks became the fashion, and were followed by kites, of pink tissue paper with green and white tails, which could be procured for a few pence each at a small shop in the neighbourhood, where a grumpy old man did quite a thriving business by the sale of pencils, chalks, india-rubbers, rulers, button-hooks, foreign stamps, scraps, transfers, crochet needles, coloured wools, and other articles dear to the hearts of schoolgirls.

Lillie Masters, one of the day pupils, had even purchased a peashooter, and fired off volleys of peas in the playground, greatly to the admiration of her friends, until her weapon was confiscated as dangerous by Miss Berners, who solemnly prohibited any girl from possessing one in future.

"It's too bad, she's taken it away," lamented Lillie. "I wouldn't have done any harm with it. My brother has one, and so have all the boys in his class at the grammar school."

"It must be rather fun," said Ruth Harcourt, one of the boarders.

"You might hit someone in the eye, though," said Janet Ashworth. "A pea could give a very hard knock, quite enough to blind one."

“Yes, if you aim at people’s faces, but I was only shooting at a mark.”

“You might miss your aim.”

“I’m sure I shouldn’t.”

“Well, I think it wasn’t safe, and Miss Berners was quite right to stop it,” said Janet in a very consequential manner. “I’d have stopped it myself if I’d been in her place!”

“Really, Janet, you are a prig!” cried Lillie.

“You are a prig!” exclaimed Ruth at exactly the same moment.

“Philippine!” said Lillie promptly, turning to Ruth.

“What do you mean?” asked the latter, astonished.

“Why, don’t you know what a Philippine is?”

“Indeed I don’t.”

“It’s when two people say just the same thing at the same second. We’ve to wait now until we meet to-morrow morning, then whichever of us shouts ‘Philippine’ first, can claim a present from the other.”

“I never heard of it before,” said Ruth.

“Is it really true, Janet, or is Lillie making fun?”

“It’s quite true,” answered Janet. “We were rather fond of them last year (that was before you came to the school), though no one seems to have troubled about them lately. If you have a Philippine on with Lillie, you must remember to say the word first to-morrow if you don’t want to lose.”

“I won’t forget,” said Ruth.

The idea rather pleased her fancy, so next morning she stationed herself behind the classroom door, and, the moment Lillie made her appearance, called out, “Philippine!”

“Why, what a hurry! I’d scarcely time to see you,” said Lillie. “But you’ve fairly won, all the same. I’ll bring you a present this afternoon.”

Lillie’s offering turned out to be a penny squirt, selected at the before-mentioned shop from among a variety of interesting trifles, over which she had lingered so long that she was late for school.

“I couldn’t decide whether you’d like a hopping frog, or one of those dear little snakes in a box, or a jump-jack, or a balloon that you blow out and it makes a noise as it goes small again,” said Lillie, who judged others’

tastes by her own; “but a squirt is always jolly, and we’ll go and fill it now in the dressing-room.”

I am afraid Ruth was sufficiently fond of practical jokes to enjoy thoroughly her new possession. It was fun to frighten the girls, if she did not actually send water over them, and she caused an amount of squealing and running away in the playground which ought to have amply satisfied her. Unfortunately, far from being content, she took the squirt to evening preparation, and began to handle it longingly under the desk. It was certainly playing with temptation, and as a natural result, her love of mischief prevailed over her common sense, and she could not resist firing it off at Blanche Trafford, her great chum, who was sitting next to her. Blanche was even more of a tomboy than Lillie Masters, and a prime mover in such affairs as sham ghosts or apple-pie beds. She was so accustomed to amuse herself with a little surreptitious fun in class, and to be the recipient as well as the player of tricks, that, though she gave a short gasp when the water poured over her hand, she did not betray any further emotion calculated to call Miss Leonard’s attention to their quarter of the room.

Instead of that she waited her opportunity, and, when Ruth was least expecting it, suddenly snatched the squirt from her hand. Ruth, of course, dared not raise a protest, though she signalled violently to Blanche for the return of her property. The latter took no notice and turned her mind to schemes of retaliation. The squirt was now empty, and as there was no water near at hand she filled it from the inkwell in her desk. It was undoubtedly a very naughty thing to do, as well as a very imprudent one; but Blanche never stopped to consider consequences, and, without a moment’s hesitation, discharged the contents of the squirt full at Ruth’s head. Ruth saw it coming, and ducked; the stream of ink passed her, splashed against her desk, and made a large puddle upon the floor.

This time it was impossible to conceal what had happened. Miss Leonard rose with an exclamation, and gazed in horror at the stain on the nice white boards.

“Who has done this?” she asked sternly, turning to Blanche and Ruth, who were both looking equally guilty.

“I did, Miss Leonard,” faltered Blanche.

“But it was my squirt,” added Ruth, who thought it would be mean to leave her friend to bear the whole blame.

“You are two extremely naughty girls,” said Miss Leonard. “Ruth, bring the squirt here to me at once. Now fetch the duster and wipe up this ink. You must each take a bad conduct mark and report yourselves to-morrow morning to Miss Berners.”

A bad conduct mark was not often given at Leaford High School, being a penalty reserved for specially unruly behaviour; so the two girls looked sober, particularly at the idea of the coming interview with the head mistress.

“I’m afraid she’ll be dreadfully angry,” said Blanche, when they had talked the matter over afterwards. “You needn’t have said anything, Ruth, and then you’d have got off.”

“It was as much my fault as yours. I should have felt horrid to sneak out of it,” replied Ruth. “I don’t believe I shall sleep all night for thinking about to-morrow. I wonder what Miss Berners will say!”

The two culprits rose the next morning with somewhat the same feeling as a prisoner may experience on the day of his trial. The prospect of that terrible visit to the study so weighed upon their spirits that they could scarcely eat any breakfast, and when prayers were over they were almost too nervous to follow the other girls upstairs. They hung about in the passage for a while, pretending to read the notices on the dressing-room door, and to take a lively interest in the result of the recent Sixth Form examinations which had just been pinned up on a board on the wall.

“Let us go and get it over,” said Ruth at last, and, as Blanche agreed, they gave themselves no more time for thinking about it, but went at once to the study door.

It took all the courage they possessed to enter when Miss Berners, in answer to their knock, said, “Come in!” and I believe if there had been the slightest suitable opportunity they would have both run away.

Miss Berners laid down a book which she was reading, put some letters and papers into her desk, then turning to the girls asked their errand. Blanche blushed very red, and gave a glance at Ruth as if imploring her to be spokeswoman.

“Miss Leonard has given us each a bad conduct mark,” volunteered Ruth in a rather small voice.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Miss Berners gravely. “What have you been doing to deserve it?”

“We—we sent a squirtful of ink on to the schoolroom floor,” blurted out Ruth, trying to make her confession as brief as she possibly could.

“It was I who let it off, not Ruth,” put in Blanche, anxious to take her share of the blame.

“But I’d squirted at Blanche first with water,” added Ruth.

Miss Berners looked from one to the other with a serious face. “When did this happen?” she asked.

“Last night at preparation,” Blanche replied promptly.

“And it’s made such a big stain on the floor and spoilt the duster with wiping it up,” explained Ruth, who was determined, while she was about it, to make a clean breast of the whole affair.

“You know perfectly well that you ought to behave properly in preparation,” said Miss Berners, “and that at any time I should not allow you to have a squirt, and certainly not to fill it with ink. It is a great breach of discipline, and one which must not happen again. It is a pity I shall not be able to give either of you a first-class report for conduct this term. You must buy an ounce of salts of lemon between you, out of your pocket money, and wash the stain from the floor, and you must stay indoors on Saturday afternoon instead of going out with the others, and each hem a new duster for the blackboard.”

Feeling very crushed and contrite the two sinners crept from the room, and fled as fast as they could down the passage, glad that the dreaded interview was over. They were obliged to give a report of the interview and the extent of their punishment to Miss Leonard, who bought the salts of lemon that same day, and stopped a penny from both their weekly allowances.

She superintended while they fetched a basin of hot water and a cloth from the kitchen, and made them rub away at the boards until not a trace of the ink was left.

Ruth felt her squirt had cost her dearly when it came to Saturday afternoon, and instead of taking a walk on the shore with the other girls, she and Blanche were each provided with a duster and told to remain in the classroom until they had hemmed them neatly. Neither was particularly fond of sewing, and the sunshine outside made the thought of the beach more than usually tempting, so that they longed to be out in the fresh air.

They dared not disobey, however, so toiled wearily round the four sides, lamenting as they did so that school dusters were made so large and stitches were expected to be so small.

“Done at last!” cried Blanche with a sigh of relief, as she folded her work and laid it on Miss Leonard’s desk, for her teacher to find when she came in.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Ruth, “if ever I have a Philippine again I shall let the other girl get it. Or, if I win, and she gives me a present, I declare I won’t take it; not unless it’s something like a pencil, or a penwiper, or a ruler, or a piece of india-rubber, that’s perfectly safe and not in the least likely to get one into trouble!”

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THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

The image listed as being in the frontispiece is missing from this ebook.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Queen of the Dormitory and Other Stories* by Angela Brazil]