

THEODORA
AND THE
CHALET SCHOOL

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

Author of
THE CHALET SERIES

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Theodora and the Chalet School (Chalet School #42)

Date of first publication: 1959

Author: Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer (1894-1969)

Date first posted: August 30, 2024

Date last updated: August 30, 2024

Faded Page eBook #20240811

This eBook was produced by: Hugh Stewart, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This eBook was produced by images generously made available by Internet Archive/American Libraries.

THEODORA AND THE CHALET SCHOOL

By

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

First published by W. & R. Chambers, Ltd. in 1959.

To
JUNE
who gave me my elder god-daughter

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. EXPELLED THREE TIMES!	7
II. THEODORA	16
III. EXPLAINING THEODORA	27
IV. TED SETTLES IN	37
V. A FIRST CLIMB	47
VI. AN UNEXPECTED EVENT	60
VII. LEN TAKES A HAND	73
VIII. INSECTS—AND A SHOCK FOR TED	81
IX. ANOTHER SHOCK FOR TED	92
X. MARGOT	101
XI. MARY-LOU BUTTS IN	113
XII. MARGOT’S DEVIL TAKES CHARGE	123
XIII. “I’M FINDING SOMETHING TO DO ABOUT IT!”	134
XIV. CON BLOWS UP	144
XV. MARY-LOU BEGINS HER CAMPAIGN	156
XVI. ZERMATT	166
XVII. A TRIP—AND A PIG!	177
XVIII. MARGOT’S CLOCK	189
XIX. MARY-LOU BUTTS IN AGAIN	198
XX. THE HEAD MAKES A DECISION	210
XXI. CHEERS FOR MARY-LOU	217

Chapter I

EXPELLED THREE TIMES!

“Well! Call me Aunt Fanny on my tombstone! The impudence of some people is past all belief! I’d like to know what will happen next!”

Joey Maynard, sitting correcting the proofs of her latest book at a table in the sunny south window of the salon of her home on the Görnetz Platz, what time Rosalie Dene, secretary of the Chalet School next door, and one of her oldest friends, dealt firmly with the correspondence of the said school at the old Georgian *secrétaire* near the west window, looked up from her work with a broad grin which Rosalie did not see. She was much too busy with the letter which had called forth her remarks.

“Of course, I’ll do what in me lies, though I should hardly imagine that anyone is likely to refer to *me* for your epitaph,” she said in her blandest tones.

“Eh?” said Rosalie, startled into lifting her eyes from the epistle.

“It’s more than likely,” Joey pursued without taking the slightest notice, “that your people will have their own ideas as to what is most suitable. Still, I’m willing to do all I can to fulfil your last wishes—always supposing you go first. But tell me, Rosalie, why ‘Aunt Fanny’? Why ‘Fanny’ at all? It’s a ghastly name, and you aren’t even Rosalie Frances. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I always thought——”

What she had always thought remained unvoiced, for by that time Rosalie had recovered from the shock. Forgetting her years and her dignity she snatched up the nearest cushion and hurled it at her friend. Joey dodged with a shriek, and the pile of galley proofs on which she had been working, exerted their usual eel-like propensities and slid off the table on to the floor in glorious confusion. She uttered another shriek before she stooped to scabble them up. She detested galley proofs at any time because of this tendency, and she was in a hurry to finish with them and return them to the publishers, being already late with them.

“Rosalie Dene, I hate you!” she proclaimed as she came up again with her hands full. “What have I done to deserve such treatment? I *promised* to do my best to see that your wishes with regard to your tombstone were carried out, and I’m sure I couldn’t really care less! Tombstones have no interest for me unless they’re at least a hundred and fifty years old. So why you should treat me like this, I can’t think.”

“Stop talking rot!” Rosalie retorted. “And while I think of it, sorry I upset your proofs and gave you a shock——”

“What shock? If you think I’m surprised at your attempt at pillow-fighting, come again. I’m surprised at *nothing* any member of the Chalet School could produce. So take that look off your face, please. It does nothing to enhance your beauty, let me tell you. Now, having done that, you get to work and tell me what is the why of your weird remarks.”

Rosalie sat down and picked up her letter. “It really is one of the most extraordinary epistles I’ve ever been fated to read. I wouldn’t have believed it of any parent, not even Professor Fry in his worst paddy!^[1] However, there it is in black and white.”

[1] The Chalet School and Richenda.

“Heaven grant me patience! Why, oh why, did I take pity on your lonesome state and invite you to spend the day with me and bring your work so that you could get on with it?”

And Joey uttered a sepulchral groan which made her indignant friend giggle in spite of herself. "Now stop tittering in that inane way and go ahead and tell me the worst."

Rosalie laughed again. "Yes, it takes you to deal with things in that fashion! But really, Joey, when I think of it! But I'll read it to you and you can hear for yourself, and then you won't be surprised at anything I might do or say. Quite apart from the cool assurance of the lady, I can't imagine any *decent* parent behaving like this. Keep cool, for pity's sake, and I'll start it at once."

"I should hope so!" Joey spoke severely as she settled herself to listen. "Go ahead and spare me all comments until you've done."

"The comments are much more likely to come from you—I know you, Joey! O.K. I'm going to read *now*!" And Rosalie, having saved herself from reprisals, read aloud:

"Dear Madam,

"My daughter Theodora has left her present school and I have been advised to write to ask if you have a vacancy for her at the Chalet School this coming term.

"Theodora is fourteen and will be fifteen at the end of October. I believe she is up to the usual standard of work for her age except in French where she seems to be well beyond most of the girls at her latest school. At the same time I feel that I must, in fairness to you, warn you that this is her third school and that, from this and her first school, I have been requested to remove her. From the second one, she was publicly expelled. In each case, it has been for bad behaviour and insubordination and in *no* case have I felt I could blame the school.

"Unfortunately, though far from being attractive in looks, Theodora seems to possess a fascination for a certain type of girl. Her last headmistress assured me that she is a born leader. She always leads in the wrong direction. She has never been out of trouble at her latest school and what makes things even worse is the fact that she seems to feel no regret or remorse for the disgrace and worry she has brought on me. Indeed, I can only feel that she is completely hardened."

"At fourteen?" Joey interrupted. "Much more likely that the poor kid has gone from one row to another and is miserable and too proud to let anyone know it. I'll bet this wretched woman has shown her not the slightest pity or sympathy, nor made the least effort to try to understand her. Good gracious me! If it had been my own Margot, do you think I'd have let it go on without at least *trying* to get to the bottom of it? What does she think she's a mother for, anyhow?"

"If it had been Margot, I can imagine you giving no one any peace until you *had* got to the bottom of it as you say, but you are you. This woman seems to be a cat of a different colour. I hope you note that all her pity seems to be for herself."

"I noted it. It doesn't make me like her any better."

"And another thing," Rosalie pursued, "you have the weirdest gift for getting into the skin of someone else and finding out how her mind works."

"That's got nothing to do with it. If a child's own mother won't take the trouble to find out what's at the bottom of anything as serious as this seems to be, she ought never to take the job on. Who else ought to be more likely to try to find out why she gets into row after row?"

Rosalie was silent. Then she said, "There's quite a lot more of it. Shall I read on?"

“I don’t want to hear it, thank you. I don’t want to be sick! I’d like to get hold of that idiot of a woman and try to hammer some sense into her head. Give me the gist of it and let it go at that. I’ve had enough of the original!”

“Well, it seems that her final effort was to join up with three other young demons after Lights Out and the four of them were caught smoking out of a bathroom window.”

“Oh, *no!* But how sadly unoriginal! Couldn’t she do any better than that?” Joey’s face was alight with laughter.

“It was the climax of a term in which she seems to have excelled herself. She played the fool all round, if this letter is to be believed; and her followers copied her, with the result that discipline in her form went to the winds. The Head evidently thought she’d reached the end of her tether. Anyhow, according to Mrs.—Mrs. Grantley.” Rosalie had hastily refreshed her memory, “she was told that in no circumstances could the school receive Theodora back for the coming term. The Head also suggested that it might be an idea to engage a governess and see if concentrated personal attention would work a reform. However, that had been tried before and was just a waste of time. Then someone seems to have put her on to us, though she doesn’t say who, and instanced two or three cases of difficult girls with whom we have worked miracles. Therefore, she is offering her demon to us. And,” Rosalie concluded, “considering the character she gives the girl, I must say it strikes me as cheek of the sublimest kind.”

“Well, come to think of it, we *have* had one or two promising young criminals in our time,” Joey said reflectively. “Our one and only Emerence for one—and I could mention at least half-a-dozen others, given time.”

“I could name quite half-a-dozen firebrands without any time,” Rosalie replied. “And it’s quite true that we’ve managed to reform most of them. Our only real failures were that ghastly German girl years ago in Tirol—what was her name? She was a cousin of Marie von Eschenau’s I remember—and Betty Wynne-Davies——”

“And let me remind you that Betty *did* pull up when she got into kind hands at home,”^[2] Joey interrupted. “I met her years later and she was really a nice girl.”

[2] The Chalet School Goes to It.

“Quite so! Well, apart from those two, the only one I’m afraid we haven’t made a big change in is Joan Baker.”

“There you’ve got to deal with heredity as well as environment,” Joey said. “And even so, Joan has improved all right. She’s not one of our most brilliant successes, I grant you, but she’s much better than she was when she first came.”

“On the whole,” Rosalie said, glancing again at the letter she still held, “I think I’d rather deal with mischief any day than the sort of nonsense that is Joan’s besetting sin. Thank goodness she never got hold of any of the others!”

“She *is* improved, though. She doesn’t use all the awful language she did, and to judge by all I hear, she is working really hard to make up for lost time. *And* her appearance shows a marked improvement from what it was, so we’ve done something towards cultivating good taste in her. How much longer is she likely to stay, Rosalie?”

“Well, she’s nearly seventeen now, so I doubt if it’ll be more than a year. She’s joining those new secretarial classes we’re starting in September and she really is slogging at languages. She knows she’ll get a better post if she can offer really fluent French and German and Spanish—she’s taking that as an extra now.”

“Good for her! By the way, Rosamund seems to have gone off the idea of air-hostess lately, I notice. At least, she’s never mentioned it to me for the last four or five months. Of course, what *she* ought to do is to go to a horticultural college and then try for one of the higher posts. She’s a born gardener. Those green fingers of hers weren’t given to her for nothing!”

“Quite so! However, we won’t play up to your talent for side-tracking, if you don’t mind. You let the futures of present pupils alone and bend your mighty mind on this present problem.”

“By all means!” Joey responded cordially. “Tell me this. Was this child ever expelled for dishonesty or—or *nastiness*?”

“Her mother doesn’t mention it, and she’s written three pages describing her brighter devilments. There’s no mention of dishonesty or cheating or anything like that and the letter her last Head sent doesn’t mention it either. She simply says that she cannot have thirty other girls upset by Theodora’s wildness and rebellious example!”

“Then that’s all right! In that case, I’d advise Hilda to give the poor kid a chance with us. There are some things we *couldn’t* pass over, but original sin of that kind isn’t one of them. If it were,” Joey concluded with a broad grin, “there are quite a number of girls in the school who would be fired regardless—not omitting my own Margot.”

Rosalie laughed. She looked considerably happier now that she had laid the problem before her friend. “Oh, Margot has reformed—to a certain extent,” she added cautiously. “She certainly doesn’t listen to her devil nearly as much.”

“I know, and thank Heaven for it! I don’t mind admitting to you that I’ve had spasms of being quite hopeless about her. For it isn’t as if she hadn’t had plenty of sympathy when she was in trouble, and Jack and I *have* tried to give her the very best training we could. It’s worked all right with the others, but Margot just didn’t seem able to respond. I’ve always said she got a bigger share of natural wickedness than all the rest put together. However, my mind really is at rest about her now.”

Thus said Joey, not knowing that before the coming term had ended she was to be as nearly in the depths of despair as ever she had been over her most difficult child.

“You laid good foundations,” Rosalie said thoughtfully. “It’s helped many a time. But to get back to Theodora. Hilda is safe to ask what I think about taking her, you know. Especially as she seems to get an influence on other girls.”

“If Hilda asks me, I shall advise her to give the girl a trial. Otherwise, it’s going to be a case of giving a dog a bad name and hanging him. *That* is the sort of thing that ‘hardens’ a child of fourteen. That, if you ask me, is largely at the bottom of this trouble. Her mother seems to have decided that the child is a bad lot and let it go at that. If you’re given a reputation, you generally try to live up to it, don’t you? That’s what young Theodora has done.”

She stopped short there and ruminated for a minute or so. Then she looked up. “I’ve got an idea! Has it ever struck you what a *ghastly* sort of name Theodora is? Enough to make any girl hit the ceiling.”

“It’s rather late in the day to think of that,” Rosalie reminded her.

“We can’t very well rechristen her I admit. But surely you needn’t use it *all*? Isn’t there a possible ‘short’ we could use. Let’s see—Theo—Dora—oh, no, I think not! ‘Dora’ always sounds to me like Mother’s Good Girl. ‘Theo’ isn’t so bad. Or what about ‘Ted’? That’s pounds better! I wouldn’t call a dog I like ‘Theodora’, but ‘Ted’ has a tang to it. That’s it! You

listen to me, Rosalie. Hilda, if I know her, will tell the kid that this is a new beginning—if she comes, that is—and so far as we are concerned, she's come with a clean slate. Make it a clean slate all round. Start her off with a new name. It's my belief it'll have a real psychological effect on her. Theodora was the Bad Girl of the School! Ted has a chance to make good. I believe she'd play up to it."

"I wonder?" Rosalie spoke thoughtfully. "It might do the trick. From what her mother says, she's been 'up agin' the Government in every possible way so far. Perhaps if she realises that everyone here is out to help her to get off on the right foot, it may make a difference. And if, as a beginning, we call her something quite fresh, well, that should be a help, too."

"I'm certain it will be. But I wonder who on earth it was who put Mrs. Grantley on to us. An Old Girl, I should think. She certainly seems to have known something of our history."

"It might be an Old Mistress," Rosalie pointed out. "Are you giving me tea, Joey? Because if so, look at the time! Hilda was coming up by the sixteen-fifteen train, so she should be here any moment now. I'll just clear this lot away and then ring up the school and leave word for Hilda to come over here. You go and see about tea. You know what it's like at school at this stage—telephone going every five minutes or so and no peace for anyone! Hilda will be tired after a day of interviewing parents in Interlaken. It'll do her all the good in the world to be here having tea without perpetual interruptions from the phone."

"Good idea!" Joey got up and began to gather up her proofs. "You hop off to the phone while I go and put the kettle on. Anna's out with the three babies, but she said she'd leave everything ready for me. The Coadjutor has had to go down to Interlaken to have a tooth removed. Jack's taken her or she wouldn't have gone. I said I could manage quite well."

Rosalie chuckled as she finished packing her correspondence into her case and shut the snaps. "Poor Rösl! She has my deepest sympathy. There! That's done! I'm for the phone!"

"And I'm for the kitchen," Joey cried as she went off, bearing her galley proofs waving round her like banners in a breeze. "And I say! When you've finished ringing up, you might fly and fish out a clean towel for Hilda and put it in the cloakroom. She's safe to want a wash."

They parted to their several jobs and the result was that as Miss Annersley, Head of the Chalet School proper—there was a finishing branch in charge of her co-Head where the majority of the girls went for a year before finishing with school—opened the side-door she was met by one of the maids with the information that Mme Maynard had rung up to say she wished to see her as soon as she arrived. Miss Annersley was hot and tired and sticky and her first impulse was to go to the study and ring Joey to tell her that she wasn't moving until she had a wash and something to eat and drink. However, she thought better of it. She handed her shopping-bag to Miggi and went round the house, across the garden, and through the gate set in the hedge that divided the grounds of Freudesheim from those of the school. Here, she was met by two excited creatures so charmed with their own cleverness that they both talked at once, and it was not until they were sitting down to what was known as "English Tea" in Joey's pretty salon that she was able to disentangle the threads of their story. But when she had finally got it all clear, she agreed heartily with all they had to say. Theodora was to be welcomed at the Chalet School and once she was there she was to be told that the school proposed—unless she objected strongly to the idea—that henceforth she was to be "Ted" and, as Ted Grantley, make a completely fresh beginning in her school life. The past was to be forgotten and no one was ever to learn about those three awful expulsions.

Chapter II

THEODORA

Joey Maynard slipped through the gate in the hedge and made her way to the school along the narrow path flanked on either side by flowering bushes. As she went, she whistled like a blackbird, but no one heard and came flying to know what she wanted. She ignored the turning which led to the front of the house, and continued on her way towards the back where had been built what was known as "Head's House," a small but pleasant annexe where Miss Annersley had her own rooms. Rosalie Dene and Mdlle de Lachennais, the doyenne of the Staff, these days, slept there as well, and though the official study was in the main building, the secretary's office was here, and so was the Head's private study, a small room opening off the office.

Joey kept both eyes and ears open. This was the first day of term, and the big motor-coaches which brought the girls up from the valley were due any time now, and she had no wish to be mixed up with a crowd of girls all milling around and all highly excited. She walked into Miss Annersley's pretty salon by way of the wide-open French window and looked round. The room was empty, and a glance at the cuckoo clock hanging on the wall at one side of the room told her that everyone would be in the entrance hall by this time, awaiting the arrival of the school. With a final triumphant cascade of silvery notes, she stopped whistling, and left the room to walk through a maze of corridors to the wide entrance hall. Here, she found that she was right. The Head, surrounded by such of the Staff as were not on escort duty or non-resident, stood in the doorway. Behind them, filling the hall and even mounted on the lower stairs of the great staircase which swept down to the centre of the hall were those girls who had arrived earlier—including her own triplet daughters.

A certain wistfulness came into the lovely black eyes as Joey surveyed them. How big they looked, even Con, the middle one, who had never grown at quite the rate of her sisters!

"Oh, *be* your age!" Joey scolded herself mentally. "They're fourteen and a half, and they can't stay babies for ever! You've three babies at home this minute, my good girl, *and* hopes for July. You be thankful they have big sisters to help to look after them—in the hols, at any rate. Oh, *drat* the kid!" as one of the girls glanced round and saw her.

She quickly set a finger on her lips, waving vehemently, and Lorraine Varley was quick to take the hint and turn round again without a word. But at this point the Head glanced over her shoulder, uttered an exclamation, and came swiftly to her friend and ex-pupil.

"Joey! This is an unexpected honour! You don't generally appear among us as early in the term as this!"

"And I shouldn't have done it this time," Joey said with an infectious grin, "only Margot, having forgotten to pack her hankies, likewise forgot to bring them with her. I came to hand them over, having visions of her awful fate if Matey discovered tomorrow that she'd left the lot behind her. Besides," she added in a confidential undertone, "I've had a letter."

With one ear alert for sounds from outside, the Head said, "A letter?"

Joey nodded. "As you remark. Further, I deem it my duty to meet young Ted Grantley the first moment she sets foot in this establishment."

"Why?" the Head demanded. Then, "Oh, I see! The letter was about her."

“Go up top! It was. I’m coming over later to read it to you—and I mean the lot of you. There isn’t time now. Those coaches will be along before you can say ‘Knife!’ Meanwhile, may I have a word with my child?”

“You may; and I hope you’ll rub it well in that carelessness of that kind won’t get her anywhere. Margot never troubles to think.”

“O.K., schoolma’am! I’ll tick her off. And may I bag your study for ten minutes or so? I want Len to bring Ted to me at the first possible moment.”

“What are you up to?” Miss Annersley demanded suspiciously.

“Please, Teacher, I only want to give the poor kid a really hearty welcome to this place. You don’t mind, do you?”

Her friend glanced at her keenly. “Don’t you trust us, Joey?”

“I do; but I also want to make sure that she also feels she has a warm welcome to Freudeshim. With your kind permission I’ll hand over her belongings to that sinful child of mine and tell Len what I want. Then I’ll depart. I don’t want to be rushed by a wildly excited mob of girls just at this moment.”

“Neither do I want it for you. Very well; Len may bring Ted to you as soon as I’ve done with them. Go to the study and keep quiet, Joey.” Then she added, “You are very free with your Teds. How do you know she will like it?”

“I’ll soon bring her round to my way of thinking, if she doesn’t. I shouldn’t think myself that that would be necessary. Is that a motor horn I hear?”

Miss Annersley gave an exclamation. “It is! I must go!” and she hurried to the door again, to be ready to welcome the school back for a new term.

Joey turned to the stairs where her daughters were jiggling wildly, and held out her parcel to Margot much in the manner of an emissary of the Borgias handing over a cup of cold poison.

“Margot Maynard! You’re the most heedless monkey I ever knew!”

Margot went pink to the roots of her red-gold curls. “My hankies! I forgot them. Did you come just to bring them? You *are* a pet of a mother!”

“That’s all very well, but what would you have said to Matey in the morning if she wanted to know where your clean hanky was? It would have served you right if I’d left you to it. I will do another time, let me warn you. It’s high time you could look after your own things. You aren’t a baby now!”

“I’m sorry,” Margot murmured.

“Well, don’t do it again or I’ll leave it to her to sort you!”

“*And* she would,” put in Len, the eldest of the long Maynard family, as she hung over the bannisters, her long curly tail of chestnut hair tumbling over her shoulder, Joey reached up and gave it a friendly tug.

“I thought I’d save her this once. But it’s the last time for any of you, so remember that! I’m not going to run after you and fetch and carry for you any more. You three will be fifteen in November, and must be responsible for your own possessions and your own doings. Please read, mark, learn and inwardly digest, for I mean it!”

“Well, you’ve saved me this time, anyhow,” Margot said with a chuckle. “You really are a poppet!”

“She always is,” said brown-eyed Con, who had shuffled along the stair to join the party. “Are you staying to welcome the others, Mamma?”

“I am not! And by that same token I hear a horn at the gate.” She laughed up at them. “Off you go and be ready to take your places. Just a moment, Len. I want a word with you!”

The other two raced off, and Len stood with eyes like English wood violets fixed on her mother’s face. “Anything wrong?”

“Nothing, thank you. I’m going along to Auntie Hilda’s private study. You have one new girl this term, and I want to see her as soon as possible. You can’t miss her as she’s the only one. As soon as Auntie Hilda dismisses you, fetch her along to me, will you? Or,” with belated caution, “you’d better take her to the Splashery first. But bring her after she’s ready.”

Len nodded. “Right you are! What’s her name, by the way? I can’t very well go up to a stranger and say ‘Hi, you!’ She mightn’t like it!”

“Her full name is Theodora Grantley. I’m hoping she’ll let us cut her down to ‘Ted,’ though.”

“I should about think she would! What a simply ghastly name! O.K.; I’ll see to it for you.” Len hung over the bannisters and kissed her mother before leaping down the three stairs above which she had been perched, and going to join the throng.

Joey laughed softly, and then went off to the study to await the arrival of Theodora.

Meanwhile, her daughters had joined the mobs of girls who were leaving the coaches and joining on to one or the other of the long lines stretching across the drive. Small girls came to the front, big ones stood in the back lines. The triplets joined on to one made up of girls of their own age or a little older, giving subdued squeals of welcome to friends as they arrived. The escort mistresses had left their parties and gone to join their confrères in the doorway, and on the broad step before it the settling of the girls was left to the prefects.

These were headed by a tall handsome girl of nearly eighteen, whose thick golden-brown curls framed an oval face that was full of character. The sensitive mouth was offset by a determined chin and steady blue eyes, and at a word from her even the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, who had been scrambling and pushing, got into line smartly and became quiet and correct at once. This was Mary-Lou Trelawney, the Head Girl of the school, who was beloved by most people, even those who were given to grumbling that it was all very well, but Mary-Lou was a lot too much on the spot when she wasn’t wanted! For all that, if anyone had hinted that she was too bossy, they would have been up in arms at once. Mary-Lou might be a trifle too peremptory at times to suit everyone, but she had the reputation of being very just, willing to listen to both sides of a question and understanding to an amazing degree for her age. Her own kind frequently accused her of getting away with things that none of them could have done, but they always backed her up loyally.

The two Sixth Forms were at the back. The three Fifth Forms came next, and when the members of Vb arrived, the triplets were kept busy answering questions and asking others in their turn, until the last of the Juniors had been pulled into line with her form. Only Len, with her mother’s charge in mind, kept scanning the faces of the girls as they marched to their places. With only *one* new girl to worry about, it ought to be easy enough to pick her out.

“I wonder why she’s coming *this* term?” the eldest of the Maynards mused as she watched. “New girls in the summer term are rather a rarity with us. Quite right, too! The poor things must be all at sea if they come for the last term of the year!”

Then she stopped thinking, for at long last she saw the new girl being brought along by Miss Wilmot, the senior maths mistress, herself an Old Girl of the school. Miss Wilmot pushed Theodora Grantley gently into place beside Jennifer Hughes, the form prefect of Inter V, and then strolled up to the house.

All the time the Head was welcoming them to the new term Len was looking curiously at the back of the new girl. She hadn't been in time to see her face. Judging by her back view she was thin enough to be called scraggy. She was on the short side, being at least half a head less than Jennifer and a head shorter than leggy Len herself. She wore the beret in which they all travelled, and from beneath it escaped a thick bunch of black rat-tails, straight and lank as an Indian's, which just reached to her shoulders.

"I wonder what her face is like?" Len pondered. "And why hasn't someone done something about her hair? Matey will have something to say about it, that's certain! Then she stopped wondering about Theodora, for the Head, having finished her remarks, changed the tone of her voice.

"And now, girls," she said, "I know you are all very anxious for the latest news of Naomi Elton. You will be delighted to hear that Naomi is well out of danger now, and though it will be a long time—more than a year, I'm afraid—before she will be on her feet again, she *will* be able to walk in time, and even to run and enter on most of the less strenuous activities of you folk. What is almost as good news is the fact that the doctors all think that when the other two operations, which she must still have, are over, she will be almost as straight as any of you. Sixth Forms, Dr. Maynard says that in another three weeks she will be strong enough to have some of you as visitors, and I know she is hoping you will turn up at the first possible moment. She was complaining to me that if you didn't, she would be all behind in the school news. In the meantime, however, if anyone would like to write to her, she may. I'm afraid Naomi can't answer your letters in person yet. She is still flat and will be for another month at least; but one of the nurses will take down from her dictation once a week. Now that is all for the moment. When I dismiss you, go straight to the Splasheries and change, and then to the common-rooms and wait for the gong. Abendessen is due in fifteen minutes' time, so you mustn't delay over your tidying. School—*turn!* Forward—*march!*"

As one girl the school turned smartly to the left, and, led by the Second Form, marched off round the house to the side door, where they made for the various Splasheries, as cloakrooms were always called at the school. Len, watching her opportunity, dashed after Inter V, and came up with Jennifer and the new girl just as the former was preparing to hunt for Theodora's peg and locker.

"Hello, Jen!" she said. "You go and fix up. I'll see to Theodora for you."

Jennifer, who was looking worried, smiled at her. "Oh, thanks a million!" she said fervently. "You can't get moved in this place when everybody's here and I haven't the foggiest notion where Theodora ought to be."

"I'll soon find out," Len said. "Come on, Theodora! This way! I expect you're down here somewhere. I'm Len Maynard, by the way."

Theodora followed her meekly to the far end of the cloakroom, where a label under a new peg proclaimed that it was hers. While she hung up coat and beret, Len found her shoe-locker, and, when she had changed into house-shoes, towed her off to the toilet basins at the other end, and waited while her charge washed hands and face and ran a comb through the untidy locks without, incidentally, making much better of them. The hair was so extraordinarily thick, quite apart from the fact that its natural tendency seemed to be to stick out in all directions, that she looked positively over-weighted with hair. She had a long, rather narrow face, at present marked by a look of mulish sulkiness. Her wide mouth turned down at the corners, and the eyes, black and big, with lashes as thick as her hair but with an upward tilt to them

that helped to redeem her face, held a queer look of unhappiness which made the eldest Maynard feel sorry for her. What on earth was wrong with her?

“Oh, well, Mamma will see to her,” Len thought comfortingly. “She’ll soon make her snap out of whatever it is.” Then she spoke. “Ready? O.K. Come along with me and I’ll show you where to go.”

Theodora followed her into the passage without demur; but when they were going along a side corridor, she asked, “Why are *you* running me round? I thought that mistress told Jennifer to look after me.”

“I expect she did; but you saw what it’s like.” Len giggled. “Everyone goes completely haywire at first. Besides, my mother wants to see you, and she’s in the Head’s private study in Head’s House. Come on! Through this door!”

“Why should I have to see your mother?” Theodora demanded.

“Search me! I rather think she knows some of your people at home. Anyhow, she told me to fetch you to her as soon as I could.”

Theodora had gone darkly red at Len’s explanation. “Which of my people does she know?”

“She didn’t tell me—only that I was to fetch you. Don’t be scared! She’s quite a poppet, if I do say it! And though she’s a writer and married, and there are dozens of us more or less, she’s still a lot of a schoolgirl, thank goodness! You’ll like her—honestly you will! Everyone does!”

Theodora said nothing. She followed Len through the baize-covered door which shut off Head’s House from the rest of the school, down the little hall and into a sunny room on the left-hand side, where her cicerone paused to close the door before she said triumphantly, “Here she is, Mamma! Theodora, this is my mother.”

Theodora looked, her mind in a complete whirl. What she had expected, it is hard to say. Certainly not what she got. A tall woman with laughing black eyes turned from the window where she had been standing, and held out both hands.

“Welcome to the Chalet School!” she said—and Theodora thought she had never heard a lovelier voice, not even the Head’s.

“Shall I leave Theodora with you and come back for her later?” Len asked.

Mrs. Maynard laughed at her. “Theodora?” She turned to the stunned owner of the name, and asked plaintively, “*Must* we?”

“Must you what?” Theodora gasped.

“Make it the whole thing? No one on this earth ought to have to answer to four syllables every day of her life! Won’t *one* do you? Mayn’t we make it ‘Ted’?” Then, as Theodora stood staring dumbly at her, she added, while her eyes danced, “Of course, if you’ve any special objection to that we could always make it ‘Theo’.” She sat down, pulling Theodora to a seat by her side on the broad window-sill. “You’ll have to make up your mind to it, my lamb! ‘Ted’ or ‘Theo’ but *not* ‘Theodora’! All right, Len; you may leave her and come back for her in ten minutes.”

Len nodded and skipped off, and Joey, still holding one of the thin hands, continued, “Come along! Make up your mind which it’s to be, for call any girl ‘Theodora’ whenever I speak to her, I will *not*! And I warn you, the school sees a lot of me in one way or another—as a general rule, that is. Which is it to be?” Then, as Ted still remained dumb, she abandoned her whirlwind tactics, and said gently, “Don’t you understand? You’ve come here to make a new start. We’re washing all the past out. It’s done and gone. We can’t do anything about that.

But you can do quite a lot with this fresh chance. As a beginning, we thought you'd like to forget all about Theodora and all the horrible trouble she has been in and see if Ted—or Theo, if you prefer it—couldn't make us glad she had come. Don't you like the idea?"

Theodora came to her senses at last. "Do you mean," she said slowly, "that it doesn't *matter* to you that I've been chucked out of three other schools already?"

Joey shook her black head with its deep fringe and great flat whorls of plaits over either ear. "Not unless you force it on our notice. It depends on *you*. We have a theory in this school that expulsion is a very bad thing, and only to be used for real wickedness—like stealing or continual lying or things like that; and only *then* if we've tried everything else and it's all failed. What's more, we consider it wrong to hark back. Once a thing's paid for, it's paid for. Whatever you may have done in the past *has* been paid for. It's no affair of ours, and we aren't interested in it. What we *are* interested in is what you do here. You've a chance to make good—turn into a different person. What about it—Ted?"

"Theodora" vanished into thin air at the last word, and, with a sudden smile that wiped all the sullenness from her face and explained to Joey her mother's statement that the girl was attractive to her own kind, "Ted" replied, "I'll be Ted! And—and"—she paused and then went on with a rush—"and I'll try to make good. It's the first really decent chance I've had since they fired me from the Beehive when I was just a kid of nine. If I'm really to have it, I'll take it—and that's a promise."

Joey nodded. "Good for you! I hope you will. But don't forget it means climbing back, and that's never an easy thing to do. But you stick to it and you'll find it isn't as bad as it may seem. And another thing. I shan't be here quite as much as usual this term—I'm going to be very busy. But if things really seem as if they were getting you right down, go to Miss Annersley and ask leave to come and talk it over with me. We'll soon be able to set things right again. Is that a promise, too?"

"Oh, it *is*!" Theodora's face was all lighted up, and Joey decided that when she had grown to her features, she might easily turn out a handsome creature. Only something must be done about her hair. However, Matey could safely be trusted to deal with that.

She bent to kiss the girl. "Good! And now, there's Len, and you must go. Good-bye! Good hunting! And come to me if you feel you absolutely must! I live next door, so you haven't far to come." She raised her voice. "Come in, Len! Now scam, both of you! There goes the gong!" as a muffled booming made itself heard. "If anyone makes remarks, Len, you may blame me. But I expect it'll be all right—today, at any rate!"

With the last words she stepped out of the window and strolled away with a wave of her hand. Len turned to the newly-christened Ted with a triumphant air, and said, "Didn't I say she was a poppet? Come on! Abendessen—and I'm hungry!"

Chapter III

EXPLAINING THEODORA

The Chalet School Staff which had been on the go all day, heaved a collective sigh of relief when the bell sounded for the Senior bedtime at half-past nine. Their duties for the day were over and they might rest and relax. The first full week of school was ended and they had got into the full swing of things.

“Come on, Kathie!” Miss Wilmot, head of the maths, said to her great friend and coadjutor, Miss Ferrars. “Let’s go along to the common-room and see if there are any refreshments going. Mary-Lou and Co. will see to the school at large and *we* are needed no longer. I heard Jeanne de Lachennais murmuring sweet nothings about coffee and biscuits when she went off a few minutes ago. I could just do with a cup of Jeanne’s coffee!”

“Oh, so could I!” Kathie Ferrars agreed with fervour as she followed her senior upstairs and through the door into the part of the school dedicated to the Staff. “It’s weird, but I honestly think the first ten days of term are more tiring than all the rest put together. Everything seems on top of one, and then there’s the worry of escort duty. I never draw a really free breath until I’ve seen my own party safely in line, listening to the Head’s welcome.”

“You’ll be off escort next term,” Nancy Wilmot said laughing. “Instead, you’ll be coping with stationery and textbooks and things like that.”

“That doesn’t prevent me feeling more or less all in now!” Miss Ferrars retorted. “Well, tomorrow’s Sunday, thank goodness! What’s more, it’s a free for me and I’m going along to spend the day with Bidy Courvoisier. It’ll probably be the last chance for a few weeks, and I’m looking forward to it. Bidy was my first friend in the school.”^[3]

[3] A New Mistress for the Chalet School.

“Wish I was coming with you, but I’m on duty with Vb and Inter V in the afternoon, so no can do. Give Bidy my love and say we’re all thinking of her and those twins she’s been screeching for. Hope she gets them!”

By this time they had reached the door of the Staff common-room so Kathie had only time to nod and say, “I’ll tell her.” Then Nancy opened the door and they both strolled in.

“At last!” exclaimed a well-known but unexpected voice. “You two are the very last. Even Matey got here five minutes ago. I was beginning to wonder if we should to have come and prise you out of your beds! What *have* you been doing all this time?”

“Joey!” Miss Wilmot exclaimed, crossing the room to pull up a chair and sit down beside her. “What, in the name of wonder are you doing here at *this* hour?”

“Aha! ‘When the cat’s away, the mice play’! I’ve come to read a letter to you.”

“I suppose *that* means that Jack’s off somewhere. Joey, you’re a bad lot!”

“If that were all!” Joey retorted cryptically. “Hello, Kathie. You look like something the cat’s brought in. What on earth have you been doing?”

“Oh, this and that. I’ll be all right after a cup of Jeanne’s coffee and a nice quiet night in my little bed.”

“Here’s the coffee,” Rosalie Dene said, bringing a cup in each hand. “Find a seat, Kathie, and let’s get down to this letter Joey’s being so mysterious about. It must be frightfully

important for she's refused to say a word about it until we were all here."

"Well, so it *is* important," Joey said as she sipped her coffee. "I had it on the first day of term, but there hasn't been a moment since it came. What with Felix over-eating himself behind my back and Cecil cutting two back teeth at once, I haven't had a moment to call my soul my own. I did tell Hilda it had come, and I meant to come over with it that first night; but Felix's attack put paid to that idea. What a fright I got! I thought he was in for appendicitis, he was so ill. Jack wasn't there, of course! He never *is* there when I need him very badly it seems to me. However, all is well now."

The Head, who had been talking to one or two of the rest, looked at her with a smile.

"I seem to remember you murmuring something to me about a letter I must see," she said. "Is that it, Joey? Am I to have it now?"

"You may have it if you want as soon as I've read it aloud to the assembled company. I rather think it'll make you open your eyes. Anyhow, everyone who was with us during the first years in Tirol! This will interest you."

Rosalie Dene laughed. "Will it? Why, Joey?"

"You'll see in a minute. Remember our Staff then? We had Mdlle Lepâtre and Bill and Hilda; my sister-in-law, Mollie Maynard and the two Dennys." Joey stopped on an upward note and those people who had been there, and were present now, stared at her. She grinned and went on: "Mdlle left us for Paradise years ago. Bill and Hilda and the Dennys are still with us. Mollie, as you all know, is married and living in New Zealand. Can you think of anyone else?"

"Carty!" Rosalie cried. "Joey Maynard! Do you mean to say you've got into touch again with Carty at long last? You *do*?" as Joey nodded. "But this is news. Where is she now? What's she doing? How many family has she, or did she stop short at the boy—what was his name?—Peter, wasn't it?"

"Yes—and yes—and yes. *Now* aren't you thrilled?"

"Oh, I am! But why on earth has she suddenly bounced up again? No one knew where she was when we were compiling the albums of Old Girls and Staff last summer, so we had to leave her out pro tem. Let me have the address and I'll see to it now."

Miss Annersley laughed. "But this *is* going back to the Dark Ages! She wasn't with us very long, I remember. Then she left to be married. Didn't her husband get some job in South Africa after the war?"

"He did—something to do with shipping. Just let me drink my coffee and I'll read you what she says. She has four children—the two girls and Peter and another boy. They've been living in Capetown, and Margaret and Susan are grown-up now. Her eldest girl is over twenty and engaged to be married. The two boys are still at school but not in Capetown any more now. Her husband—her married name was Walton by the way—died about a year ago, so she packed up and came home to England last autumn. She's living now in the village where her old home was. Peter and Cyril are at school, of course. More coffee, please, Jeanne, and when I've drunk it, you may all lend me your ears and I'll read you what she says. *I think*," quoth Joey, "that you'll all be interested, even the folk who have never heard of Carty before."

"Why?" Nancy Wilmot demanded.

"Because her main reason for writing to me is our latest effort."

"Our latest effort? What on earth do you mean?" Kathie Ferrars asked, making round eyes at Joey over the rim of her own coffee-cup.

"Speak English!" Peggy Burnett the P.T. mistress added.

“Young Ted,” Joey returned with a smirk which made her friends feel like shaking her. “She’s told me the whole yarn. It’s thanks to her that we have Ted now. However, you’ll know all about it when you hear her letter.”

“But what on earth has she to do with Ted Grantley?” Nancy queried.

“Quite a good deal.”

Miss Annersley had been lounging comfortably in her big armchair. Now she sat up. “Kindly finish that coffee and read the letter to us at once or give it to me and *I’ll* read it.”

Joey chuckled. “In my own time. I decline to be robbed of my full enjoyment of the nectar Jeanne calls coffee for anyone!”

Middle had come up behind her. She leaned over her and dexterously whipped the cup away. “Now, my Jo, you will either promise to read as soon as you can or I will not give you this again,” she said severely amid the clapping and laughter.

“My goodness! My coffee!” wailed Joey, misquoting a well-known advertisement. “O.K., Jeanne. I’ll play ball since you’re all so cruel. Let me finish it and mind you have a fresh cup for me when I’ve read the letter to you. I’ll need it!” she added darkly. “Carty’s written me a full-blown novelette!”

However, after that, she condescended to empty the cup and then settle down to reading. Everyone was waiting. To most of them, the name of Carty was something they had heard only a minute ago; but Ted Grantley was a very present problem which must be faced *now*. They were glad to know anything that would help solve it.

“Carty—otherwise Miss Carthew—is in England as I told you,” Joey said, shuffling her sheets into order. “Mrs. Grantley is a cousin of hers. I can only add that Carty seems to have the lowest opinion of her. You’ll see when you hear what she says.” She ceased teasing and plunged straight into the letter then.

“My Dear Joey,

“Now turn to the back page and see who is writing to you! I only wish I could be with you to see your reactions! Yes, it’s ‘Carty’!

“I really do feel ashamed of myself for not getting down to it sooner, but life has been very crowded of late and I was never a good correspondent. But I’ve never forgotten my happy time at the Chalet School nor any of you people who were there when I was. I’ve always meant to pick up the threads, but somehow, I’ve never got round to it. When you have a lusty family of four, it takes you all your time to keep up with them and the past simply gets shoved into the past.

“First of all then, I am a widow. My husband, Bob Walton, died nearly eighteen months ago from heart trouble. I was ill for some weeks after he had gone. He had been ill for two years and I’d done most of the nursing myself, so I was just worn out. As soon as I could pull myself together, I decided to come home. You remember Margaret and how ill she was after her accident? She’s quite fit now; engaged to an airman in B.O.A.C. so their home may be anywhere. Susan, who comes next, is eighteen and booked for Oxford in October—she wants to get a good librarianship when her course ends—and the two boys, Peter and Cyril, are still at school and down for Beaumont, where their dad was, when they are old enough. It all fitted in very nicely. Early this year, we arrived at Southampton and made tracks for King’s Cople, my old home in Dorset, where a cousin of mine lives and had found a house for us. It’s an elderly place, minus the mains services, so we got it

fairly cheaply. Mind all and any of you are to come to stay with us as soon as you can.

“But all this isn’t what I wanted to write to you about, though I felt some sort of explanation was due. It’s out of the way now, so I’ll come to my main reason for reminding you of my existence.

“As I said, we came here because I have a cousin living here and she could find a house for us. I can’t say we’ve ever been dear friends. In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, I’ve never had much use for Myra Grantley. As a schoolgirl, she was an empty-headed little ninny. Pretty enough if you like them fluffy-headed and with blue eyes like a doll’s. I don’t! She was the child of elderly parents. My Aunt Mary didn’t marry until she was nearly forty and Uncle Willy was at least a dozen years older. You can imagine that when they really did have a baby, they were nearly out of their minds with delight! Myra grew up the most spoiled little wretch I’ve ever laid eyes on!

“When she was eighteen, she married a man considerably older than herself who adored her at the time. Later, when the glamour had worn off, I rather think that died, too. At any rate, he carried on the spoiling process. Myra has a temper, one of the whiney-piney whimpering kind and she’s a nagger into the bargain. It was probably the thing that most made for peace. They had three boys—she was only nineteen when Gerald was born and the twins came two years later. Then they called a halt for fifteen years. There was plenty of money and Myra had nurses for the boys and only saw them when she wanted to show off with them—uncharitable me!—which was quite often. They were handsome little fellows with her fair colouring and masculine versions of her features. They did stop short at looks from her, thank goodness! Then, when the twins were fifteen, she had another baby—a little girl. She was *furious*!

“To begin with, she didn’t want any more. If she did, she wanted another handsome boy. What she got was a queer little dark thing, the image of her father who was no beauty, though he had a good face—strong and kind. By that time, too, money was getting tight. The boys were at public school and costing heavily. Theodore lost a good deal during the war with foreign investments. The cost of living was rising sky-high and you know what help was like. No nurses now to take all the worrying part of the baby off her hands. She had to tackle that job herself, with help from a young girl who didn’t know much more than she did. All the domestic help she had was a woman who came in the mornings. They had left their beautiful house two or three years before that and were living in a much smaller one where they are now—at King’s Cople.

“Myra has never had much more use for me than I for her, but this was when she began writing to me long letters of bitter complaint. I suppose it made an outlet for her, for I couldn’t do anything about it, being in Cape Town at the time. But I can tell you, I felt horribly sorry for both Theodore and Theodora—she was named after him.

“I’ve always thought that if the child had been pretty, it might not have been so bad, but that, she never was, though I fancy she may grow into something rather choice when she’s grown to her features. She is Theodore *modified*, you know.

“Along with his name and looks, she also inherited his brains and that has made matters a hundred times worse, for she very soon jumped to it that her mother had precious little use for her. She clung to her father who adored her, for the boys were away most of the year, of course, and anyhow, were so much older they must have felt like uncles, rather than brothers!

“Then Theodore died quite suddenly of coronary thrombosis when Theodora was just five. His will was an even worse shock than his death for Myra. He left the boys’ shares to them outright as soon as they came of age. Myra got everything else upon trust for Theodora except a certain sum which was set aside for her education and so on. By that time, he knew his Myra too well to leave things in her hands and he appointed trustees for that and the rest of the estate—*not* Myra at all! I had another raging epistle or two about that.

“I think that clears the board. You’ve got the position—Myra with little or no love for her daughter and the disposition of funds taken right out of her hands. And a good thing, too, or goodness knows what sort of an education the child would have got!

“When she was six, Theodora was packed off to boarding-school. Myra chose it and it was about as bad as it could be. The Head was a niminy-piminy creature who seems to have had no idea of keeping order. The children did more or less as they liked and Theodora found a good many things to do that wouldn’t occur to the average child. I told you she had brains! When she had been there a year, her mother was requested to remove her. More wails to Cape Town!

“The next effort was even worse—a *very* select school where the girls learnt ballet-dancing, riding, French conversation—she’s scored there. She speaks French like a native!—art embroidery and I’m not sure that painting on china wasn’t included! Myra’s choice again. The trustees hadn’t got wise to her then. She lasted there for three years. When she was ten, she topped up a series of wild pranks by giving a bareback riding display on one occasion when they were out for their usual tame canter along the roads. She really seems to have created a thorough sensation and the Head, terrified lest such a performance should affect her school, expelled her publicly.

“A private governess followed and lasted six months. Apart from the fact that Theodora seems to have gone all out to force the poor soul to resign, Myra found that she must forego several of her little pet luxuries if she was to keep her. *That* wasn’t to be thought of for a moment, so she left and for the rest of the year, Theodora seems to have played round, wasting her time and being nagged at perpetually by her mother.

“This was where the trustees stepped in and insisted that she *must* go to school. This time, it was *their* choice—quite a decent place and it might have done the trick, but one of the Staff from the Downs School had arrived there the term before. She lost no time in broadcasting Theodora’s doings. Even so, the Head seems to have done her best but by this time I think the poor child felt it was a case of giving a dog a bad name and hanging him. She has a queer fascination for her own kind and she was leader in one mad trick after another. The climax came when three of them were caught smoking out of a bathroom window at midnight.

“The other two, having more or less of characters, got off with a few of the more unpleasant penalties; but Theodora, having already been well warned that one more major row would mean that the school would not keep her, was sent home in disgrace.

“This was where *I* came in. I had been in England a while and I had seen how things were going. I was determined that the child shouldn’t be ruined if I could help it, so I made inquiries, discovered that the Chalet School was still in existence both here and in Switzerland and that *you*, now a married lady, were living nearby. I rode roughshod over a Myra who was alternately weeping over her own woes and raging at her child. It was no use appealing to the boys. Gerald is married and farming in Canada and the twins are both engaged and about to be married. Besides, they aren’t overfond of their sister which is hardly surprising.

“I got the name of the chief trustee and went to interview him. I kept on until he agreed to insist that Theodora should go to the Chalet School and to the Swiss branch where Myra isn’t likely to see much of her. Then I went home and wiped up the floor with Myra in my best style. She hadn’t a leg to stand on and she knew it. Finally, she agreed to see to things after she had heard from Mr. Orange—pronounce French fashion, please; he’s a Jersey man by birth!—for, as I pointed out to her, whether she likes it or not, she *is* the child’s mother and it’s her job officially at least.

“I had intended to write to Hilda Annersley who, I have been told, is Head now, but I’ve had no time, for Myra needs an awful lot of keeping up to things. However, I worked it in the end by producing a West Indies cruise which, as I pointed out, she could perfectly well manage if Theodora was out of the way. That did the trick.

“Finally, Joey—and I expect you’re thankful to know *that*—you used to be able to understand people in the old days with amazing insight, considering you were a mere teenager. I don’t suppose you’ve lost the gift. Knowing you, I expect it’s grown on you. Will you exercise it in Theodora’s favour? I have a feeling that going to the Chalet School will either make or mar her permanently. Please let it make her. I don’t know what Myra may have said in her letter to the school, but she isn’t a *bad* girl. She’s honest and truthful and she is, thank goodness, free from silliness and the kind of unpleasantness that to me constitutes a really *bad* girl. She is daring, mischievous and impudent and she has a gift little short of genius for thinking up things no one in their sane senses would ever dream of forbidding and *doing* them! Myra’s continual nagging has made her defiant, but I don’t altogether blame her for it. In short, she is thoroughly *naughty*, but she is *not* bad! I honestly think that if only you and the school can get hold of her she has a chance of becoming something even Myra, may in time, be proud of.”

“The rest,” said Joey, shuffling the pages together, “is asking endless questions about my own doings and the school. I must make time somehow to scrawl a line to her tomorrow. But I though you’d all better hear the vital part, for then you’ll be able to understand and help the poor kid.”

Miss Annersley nodded. “I’ll write to her myself if you’ll give me the address, and let her know that whatever happens, unless we find the girl absolutely impossible, we shall keep her. And I have a feeling that we *shall* do just that. It was a brainwave of yours to insist on

changing her name. But *now* I understand that queer look of always being on guard which has puzzled me so about her.”

“Good!” Joey stood up and picked up the light wrap she had tossed down when she first came in. “Well, folks, it’s getting late, and time I was back in my own little shanty, never to mention bed. Think it over, all of you, and make up your minds to develop endless patience and kindness and let young Ted have what looks to me like the first really decent chance she’s ever had.” She went to the door, opened it, and with her hand on the knob, turned, her wickedest look on her face. “Oh, and if she shows any further inclination to smoke, send her straight over to me. *I’ll* larn her!” With which she slid out, shutting the door firmly behind her and they heard her going quickly along the passage.

Nancy Wilmot and Rosalie Dene leapt from their seats and went after her.

“Joey! You come back and tell us exactly what you mean!” Rosalie demanded.

From down the stairs, the reply floated up. “Not I! It’s my affair. But I’ll guarantee that any girl sent to me for that particular sin will wish for quite a while that she’d never been born, let alone taken to smoking!”

Chapter IV

TED SETTLES IN

When Ted Grantley's entrance papers had come up for discussion, there had been some furious arguments among the Staff concerned as to which form should be adorned by her.

"Inter V would be right for age," Miss Moore, its form mistress, observed at the time, "but you tell me Ted has a reputation for wickedness, and we have already our full quota of young demons. I've Prudence Dawbarn and Elizabeth Kemp for a start. Zita Rincini isn't much improvement on them, nor is Natalie Mercier. What's more, that crowd are a flock of sheep this year. What the leading two or three think is thought for the whole lot."

"Well, I don't see how she can make Vb," Nancy Wilmot had rejoined. "Not on my subject, anyhow. She could tackle Inter V all right, but I doubt if she's up to Vb, apart from the fact that she won't be fifteen until October."

Kathie Ferrars laughed. "Age isn't a cat that will jump there, Nancy. The three Maynards are even younger. At the same time, her geography seems to be in a mess. She knows things, but not thoroughly. If we put her in Vb, it'll mean sorting things out, and won't she find that rather discouraging?"

"That will all depend on how far she is muddled," the Head said, suspending judgment for the moment. "Jeanne what about your subjects?"

"Her French is excellent. She speaks prettily and her written work is accurate and even original," Mdlle replied. "But in Latin we meet with a snag. I understand she has had only two years at it and she is some way behind Vb."

History, English language and literature, science, and above all, German, all came under review. The German was the deciding factor. Ted had done little or nothing at it and it was finally agreed that she should start in Inter V for at any rate the first half of the term, with special coaching in maths and Latin and especially German. Miss Moore agreed though she added a rider to the effect that she hoped everyone concerned would do their best to push the new girl on, so that she might be promoted at half term.

"I've quite enough bother as it is without something unique in the way of young imps added," she said ruefully. "I rather wish you hadn't moved Margot Maynard up this term. She's improved greatly of late and she *was* a steadying influence on Prudence and Co. However, it's done now."

"Margot has tried hard for her promotion and she's earned it," the Head reminded her. "Joey tells me there was great gloating at Freudesheim when she learned that at last she was joining her sisters. Surely Pen Grant is a leader, Rosalind, isn't she? And she's always been quite a steady girl."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer. Apart from Pen and Janet Ingham, that form consists of demons like Prudence, or sheep like Anne Wood."

"Then it's your business to do something about it," remarked Miss Derwent the English mistress, whereat, her colleague squeaked with indignation.

"Don't worry," Miss Annersley said with a bland smile. "Inter V are going to be woken up this term."

"What *do* you mean?" came in a chorus.

“Only that they will be told that if they can’t pull themselves together and do better, only the first five at the end of the year will be moved up to Vb. The rest will stay down for another year.”

There was silence before Miss Moore said, “Well, that ought to make them sit up and take notice!”

“I intend that it shall. They’ve been a lazy form on the whole so far. Everyone! Please take note! Inter V are to be worked hard this term.”

“How they will love us!” their form mistress murmured with a chuckle. She had suffered many things from them all that year.

“I’m not concerned with that side of the question—at present. They’ll get a little more sense as they get older we’ll hope. And we can put up with their dislike for a term or so. But they are *not* going to be allowed to go on as they have been doing. They’ll work whether they like it or not.”

There was a certain look about Miss Annersley’s mouth that told her Staff that she was in grim earnest, and everyone who had to deal with those tiresome young ladies noted it mentally. This coming term would hardly be an easy one for Inter V unless they set to and reformed with vim.

Having disposed of them, the Head turned again to the question of Ted Grantley, and it was finally decided to try her in Inter V and hope that with the good coaching she would receive, she might be fit to go up to Vb before long. If they could only have peeped into the immediate future, they would have all sat back with long-drawn breaths of relief. That, however, they could not know—yet.

Ted, on her arrival at the school, had been in a curious frame of mind, especially after her interview with Joey Maynard. Part of her wanted to play up to that lady’s firmly expressed conviction that she could not only make a new start, but could make it a good one. Part of her thought, “Oh, what’s the use? Sooner or later something will go wrong and then it’ll be just the same old story over again and I’ll be hoofed out of a *fourth* school! Who cares, anyhow?”

The first two or three days, while she was feeling her feet, she had little time to dwell on this. For one thing, so much at the Chalet School was entirely different from anything she had known previously. By the time she was safely in her pretty cubicle in Tulip dormitory, she was usually so tired with all the new experiences that she could think of nothing but getting to bed and going to sleep. She had no chance of lying awake, thinking up hair-raising exploits wherewith to dazzle her little playmates. During the day, of course, she had so much to do there was no time then either.

French days were no trouble to her. Her second school had certainly done so much for her. She could chatter in French almost as easily as she did in English. German, however, was another question. She had had about a term of it with her governess and never touched it since. As a result, on Mondays and Thursdays, which were German days, she had to be either silent or put up with being corrected by anyone who overheard her, and found that even her form-mates were prepared to see to it with enthusiasm. Being as imitative as a monkey she found that while her vocabulary was, to say the least of it, scanty, she was picking up an accent that satisfied most people. But it certainly filled up her days to the limit. Ted actually got through the first ten days or so of term without one major row and that was a record for her!

When it came to games, she proved that her tennis was quite good for her age. She had been well taught and there were no bad tricks of style to correct. Cricket, which she had not

played so much, was weak, though she could bowl a good length ball, and her fielding was neat and nippy. Still, as Hilary Bennet, the Games prefect said, there could be no doubt about it—tennis was her game.

The second Sunday of term broke with a cloudless sky, though below the Görnetz Platz, the gulf was filled with a thin white mist which, as Pen Grant informed her, was a sure sign of a hot day. She had already discovered that Sundays at the Chalet School were almost as full as weekdays, though in a different way.

Morning service was at ten o'clock and as Frühstück, as she found breakfast was called here, was at nine o'clock, it took them all their time to have it, make their beds, and walk to one or other of the two chapels the Platz boasted, in time for it.

"We ought to have our own chapels next term," Pen said as she passed the rolls to the new girl. "They've got on with them quite a good deal now. We're building them to celebrate our coming-of-age—last year, that was."

"Is the school as old as *that*?" Ted exclaimed.

"Oh, yes; didn't you know? And the year after the year after next, we'll have the Silver Jubilee. That," Pen said with an elderly sigh, "will be my last year here. I'll be nearly eighteen then."

Ted said nothing. She was wondering if the Silver Jubilee would find her still there or not. She rather fancied *not*! She had nearly lost hope that any school so would keep her long. However, that was no business of Pen's.

She enjoyed the service to which she presently went. Vater Franz kept in mind the extreme youth of a number of his congregation and Ted found to her amazement that she was really *listening* to a sermon for once.

"What comes next?" she asked Len Maynard who happened to be partnering her.

"Ramble, most likely, seeing what a gorgeous day it is," Len replied.

"*Ramble*? Is that what you call a walk here?" Ted asked doubtfully.

"We do not. I *said* ramble and I *meant* ramble. Wait till we get back and you'll see," Len told her with a gurgle.

Ted felt rather stunned. "Do you really mean," she said slowly, "that we'll go rambling about just as we like? Not a prim and proper croc at all?"

"Oh, we have to croc as long as we're on the Platz," Len explained. "Once we're well away, though, we break ranks. We'll have a mistress or two and probably a couple of prefects. We take Mittagessen with us and picnic somewhere. And," she added, "I only hope we have the luck to get Mary-Lou for one of the prees."

"The Head Girl? Why on earth?"

"Because, apart from being a jolly good sort, Mary-Lou has lived out here and she knows most of the decent places round like the back of her hand."

"Why isn't she *still* living out here?" Ted demanded.

"Because her mother's all right again and can live in England. You do know, don't you, that lots of people come up either because they are ill or because they may be. You saw the San last Sunday, didn't you? Not," she went on, "that we got much chance to see anything. What a ghastly day it was! Well, thank goodness the weather seems to have taken a turn for the better."

Ted found that as soon as they reached the school, the first thing everyone did was to crowd into Hall to inspect the big notice-board to find out what their next activity was to be. She had only half-believed Len's statements, so she was duly thrilled when she saw that

rambles were, indeed, the order of the day. Len had brought her in with a hand tucked through her arm and when that young person saw the board, she uttered a squeal of delight.

“Rambles it is! *And* we’ve got Ferry, *and* Mary-Lou *and* Vi Lucy! You Inter V people are joining up with us. Get cracking, Ted! You’ve got to change into uniform and put on walking-shoes and then be down to grab your parcel. Don’t forget your rucksac, by the way, and if you want to take snaps, tuck your Kodak in it.”

She was off, leaving a bewildered Ted to follow her slowly. It just didn’t seem possible—and on Sunday of all days! She had fully expected what she had called “a prim and proper croc” along the road. A scramble with a picnic included was almost too good to be true. Then she remembered that Len had told her to get cracking, so she took to her heels and went up the stairs like a runaway colt. She deserved to be caught, since that sort of behaviour was against rules, but everyone was busy, so she got away with it for once. She dived into her cubicle where she changed from her “Sunday” frock into her clean uniform, found her Kodak, actually remembered an extra clean handkerchief, and then scurried off downstairs to change into stout walking-shoes in the Splashery and don rucksac and big shady hat before following the others out to the path where some of the maids were standing before a trestle table loaded with packages and thermos flasks which they were told to tuck into their rucksacs. Then the prefects who were all on duty, moved them on to join their own rambles.

Most of the Staff seemed to be going too. Ted noticed that besides Miss Ferrars whom she was inclined to like, their group had Miss Bertram who was one of the Junior mistresses, and Miss Derwent. When the last Junior had appeared, the Head, who had claimed all of the two Sixths who were not prefects in addition to Va, gave the word and they moved off in various directions.

Len was partnering Rosamund Lilley, a great friend of hers, and Miss Ferrars nodded to them to lead on and they set off at a smart pace down the highroad towards the big Sanatorium.

“Which way are we going?” Pen, who had taken charge of Ted out of kindness, asked anxiously as they passed the mistresses.

“To the station,” Miss Ferrars said briskly. “We’re going by train to the Rösleinalp. From there, we walk up the path to Mahlhausen where we’ll have our picnic and you can explore. Keep together, girls! Don’t loiter and don’t race ahead.”

Mary-Lou and Vi Lucy, who were great allies, had gone to the back of the long procession to act as whippers-in. The mistresses had hurried on to the head and, thanks to the steady pace that was set them, they reached the tiny station—merely a roofed-in shed—in plenty of time to watch for the train coming up the far track.

“How on earth does the engine manage to pull it up here?” Ted demanded of Pen.

“It’s a rack and pinion affair,” Pen replied.

“*What* sort of affair?”

“Rack and pinion. There are enormous electric cables and a car on each. As one car comes up, the other goes down and they can go sliding anyhow because they sort of click on as they go,” Pen said vaguely, not being over-sure of herself.

“Gosh! It doesn’t sound any too safe. What happens if the electricity conks out?”

“Then the car stops, of course,” said Natalie Mercier behind her. “But you need have no fear, Ted. Our engineers are the best in the world and all the railways are most carefully—guarded?—No?—watched? Is that it, Pen?”

“Either would do,” Pen said cheerfully. “Look, Ted!” She dragged Ted to the verge and pointed downwards to a beetle-like contraption which was slowly but surely crawling up the track towards them. “There you are! That’s the one coming up. We’ll pass the downward one somewhere between here and Unterhofen which is the next station. It goes right on to Mahlhäusern which is the last shelf. After that, it’s just mountain and no villages or anything—at least, I believe there are one or two herdsman’s huts. That’s all, though.”

Ted stared down the long, shining tracks and watched the queer little train of glassed-in cars—three of them—being hauled up by an equally queer little electric engine which formed the front of the first car. Down there, it looked very tiny and she was startled to see that it was really quite a good size when at last it drew up before the Görnetz Platz shed. Not that she had much time to consider it, for the moment the doors slid apart, Len and Rosamund climbed up the steps into the first carriage and the rest followed. There were a double row of seats down each side and as there were only three other passengers who stared as the girls came marching in, they all found seats. The doors slid together again and the brave little train went on gliding up the steep slope.

Ted was silent at first. She had never experienced anything quite like that smooth, steady upward movement, not even in a lift. Just before they reached Unterhofen, the downward train slid past them and then she was moved to give tongue.

“But I still don’t see *how* it goes,” she complained. “And what weird trolley affairs it has!”

Mary-Lou, sitting immediately in front with Vi Lucy, looked round and laughed at her in friendly fashion. “It goes by electricity. Hasn’t anyone told you that?”

“Oh, yes; Pen said so. But I don’t see *how*!” Ted returned.

“Well, I’m afraid I’m not the person to tell you. Engineering, electrical or otherwise, means nothing in my young life. You’ll have to get hold of Miss Wilson or someone like that and ask *her*—Prudence Dawbarn!” Her voice suddenly changed as one of the worst of the school’s pests suddenly bounced up. “Sit down again and sit still! You’ll get plenty of use for your legs before long—too much for your liking, probably. What’s the matter with you?”

Elizabeth Kemp grinned at the Head Girl. “It was me, really, I suppose. I said I wondered what would happen if any of the cables or anything broke and I expected we’d probably go rolling over and over to the bottom.”

“And I was bang next a window and it sounded simply ghastly!” Prudence put in.

“Well, we certainly wouldn’t be likely to go rolling over and over,” Mary-Lou assured them. “In any case, do use your wits! You can see for yourselves that they don’t rely on just the cables for safety. Apart from that, the Swiss are the greatest engineers in the world and take jolly good care there’s no risk of that sort of thing happening. A nice sort of advertisement for their mountain railways that would be! Here’s Oberhofen, so we haven’t a lot farther to go, anyhow.” She turned to Vi with a sudden peal of laughter. “Remember our first trip up here, Vi?”

“I should think I do!” Vi, an enchantingly pretty girl and a beloved prefect, chuckled joyously. “What a schemozzle that was! Verity and Barbara slept and had to be carried all the way down, once we’d got to shelter. Everyone who heard we’d walked all the way from the Rösleinalp to Unterhofen nearly had a fit on the spot. Still, it hurt no one, not even Babs. Just the same, everyone took jolly good care that Auntie Anne never got the merest whisper of it. She still hadn’t got much beyond the stage of being terrified to let Babs go anywhere without her. So far as I know, she’s never heard *that* yarn even yet.”

“She wouldn’t worry now,” Mary-Lou said while several people who had come to the school since that momentous occasion pricked up their ears.

“This is all new to me,” said Miss Ferrars who was in their car. “When we start our ramble, you two can just tell me the whole saga. In the meantime, we are nearly at the Rösleinalp. Let me remind you all to make sure you’ve left nothing behind. You’ve seen for yourselves what a short time they stay at each place and there can be no question of holding up the train because half-a-dozen of you have forgotten and left your rucksacs or your hankies or anything else. Remember that the trains work as a pair and what affects one affects the other. So whatever you leave will have to stay left and go sailing up to Mahlhausen without you.” She raised her voice “Anna and Zita, you’re nearest the doors. Be ready to jump out the minute they open and the rest of you follow as fast as you can.”

As she finished, the train glided up to the usual shed and the doors parted. Duly warned, the girls were on their feet and in the least possible space of time, they were out and standing on the rough short turf, sweet with thyme and other herbage, while the train slid off at the given moment. Mary-Lou and Vi knew what to do and they swiftly marshalled the crowd into something like order and then marched it off to some bushes where Miss Ferrars and the other mistresses came to join them and everyone was silent while she gave them their final instructions before starting them off on the remainder of their journey up to Mahlhausen.

Chapter V

A FIRST CLIMB

“All present and correct?” Miss Ferrars queried when they were all standing in silence. “Everyone got everything? Good! Now listen, please, for I’m not going to repeat anything twice. First of all, remember that if the prefects tell you to do anything or not do anything, they are to be obeyed. No arguing and no coaxing!”

She fixed one or two people with a stern eye and there were smothered giggles and a few blushes from sinners in that direction. “Secondly, anyone who doesn’t behave herself today, won’t come on the next ramble. Understood?”

They said that it was and she nodded and went on.

“Now listen carefully. We turn left from these bushes and the path lies about twenty yards ahead. You may break ranks, of course, but don’t go racing ahead. No one will get any chance to loiter behind. We shall have our usual sheepdogs. You may not be less than four together. You are forbidden to try to climb to the top of the railway bank. We don’t want to have to go back and explain that we’re sorry but we’ve left two or three of our number behind us, frizzling on the live rails!”

Shouts of laughter greeted this sally and she let them enjoy their laugh for a minute before she held up her hand for silence again.

“I’m saying nothing about the rock side. Anyone who thinks she can climb *that* is welcome to try! Only, when you *have* done it and come crashing down with an arm or a leg or so broken, don’t ask for sympathy. You won’t get it. And don’t expect us to try to carry you the rest of the way. We’re out to enjoy ourselves. Finally, don’t all yell at the tops of your voices at once. I doubt if we shall meet any people, but there may be one or two and there are always the cars going up and down. Remember that you *are* in uniform and everyone around here knows that uniform. Please don’t get us a name for rowdiness. When we reach Mahlhausen, we’ll have our picnic first and then, after I’ve shown you your limits, you may go off exploring. In the meantime, let me remind you that if you hear me whistle the recall you’re to come at once. Don’t forget that we must catch the sixteen o’clock train down and it won’t wait for us if we’re not on the spot when it arrives. Last of all, don’t forget that no one may go wandering off by herself. Now make up your groups and let’s be off. Time is flying!”

The girls broke up into small clumps at once and Vi Lucy set off with the first batch, with Con Maynard on one side of her and a French girl and Ricki Fry, a great friend of Con’s, on the other. Immediately behind them, came Margot Maynard, her boon companion, Emerence Hope, Heather Clayton who had once been a demon for mischief, but was toning down, now that she had reached the mature age of fifteen, and Charmian Spencer, another of the same class.

Miss Ferrars, after a quick consultation with Mary-Lou, set off with a crowd of all the worst imps of Inter V and Miss Bertram went with her, leaving Miss Derwent to take the road with a bunch from Vb and two or three from Inter V. Mary-Lou was left to take charge of the rest, among them, Pen and Ted herself. However, Len Maynard and Rosamund Lilley were among them and those two young people had a well-trained sense of responsibility, considering they were both so young. Len, as the eldest of nine, came by it naturally. Rosamund, the family baby, had developed it during her years at the school.

Mary-Lou looked over her party with calm assurance and summoned Ted and Pen to keep her company. The rest, she sent ahead, with Len and Rosamund as leaders.

“We three will be whippers-in,” she told her chosen companions with a grin. “It won’t be needed so much today. There’s only the one path and it’s a lot too narrow for anyone to go straying off into a by-path; but it’s always as well to make sure that no one has a chance to dillydally. There they go and it’s our turn. *En avant, mes amies!*” And she marched them off to where the path running alongside the tracks, went up the mountains.

When they were going well, she smiled at Ted who had remained silent, though Pen had chattered easily enough. “Ever done any climbing before, Ted?”

Ted shook her head as she returned the smile. “Never been near any mountains. We live in Dorset, but I’ve been at school since I was a kid and mostly in flattish country. Of course, there are some good cliffs in Dorset, but I’ve never had any chance to play around them. We live about twenty-five miles from the coast.”

Mary-Lou laughed. “I’ve seen the Dorset cliffs. I shouldn’t think climbing about them would be exactly a piece of cake. Anyhow, it was mountaineering I meant, and really, going up a path like this.” She gestured ahead to the path which wound up the mountain slope with many twists and turns, all of them steep enough to test the girls’ power of endurance as fully as need be.

“No,” Ted replied. “Anyhow, at my last school, if we did do anything you could call a ramble, it was over the Downs—the school was in Sussex—and there’s nothing to call a real climb there. Do we often do this sort of thing?”

“When it’s possible—this term, of course, the early part of next, sometimes the last few days of the Easter term—if Easter is on the late side. That has to depend on what the ground’s like, though.”

“Seas of mud, sometimes,” Pen remarked. “You wait, Ted! You’ll know *all* about it when we’ve had one of our patent storms.”

Ted stared round. The path was a kind of miniature canyon, with a high grassy bank on the left-hand side and a sheer wall of limestone rock on the other. The rock, if it veered out of the straight, tended to slope over the path and she could easily understand why Miss Ferrars had given that casual permission to anyone who liked to try to climb it. To her mind, it was utterly unclimbable. Only a fly, she decided, could hope to negotiate *that*. Then she gave it up and attended to the path which was not only steep, but rough, with snags to be avoided and, here and there, outcroppings of the rock that must be scrambled over. In the grass bank there were wild flowers starring the green, but no one suggested stopping to pick them. The sun was blazing down and though the rock-face gave them some protection at first, the first turn in the path brought them out into the full force of its glare. Ted suddenly felt thankful for the big hat that shaded her eyes, though she had scoffed inwardly at it at first.

From above, they could hear the voices of the others and at first, Ted chattered quite as gaily, finding Mary-Lou something of a change from other prefects she had known. That young woman was hail-fellow-well-met with most folk and Ted was no exception to the rule. But before long, she found that she had not much breath left for talking. It was taking all she knew to keep up with the rest. Besides that, her legs were beginning to ache with the unaccustomed strain on her muscles. Not that she said anything. She was much too proud for that; but before they had been going very long, she found herself wishing that someone else would ask for a breather.

Oddly enough, no one had explained to her that the usual manner of walking was apt to be very tiring on mountain slopes. Mary-Lou, knowing that Pen was doing “sheep dog” as the girls called it, had taken it for granted that she had told the new girl how to manage. She was busy just then, in keeping her eyes and ears open for any possible tricks, for half her group had gone round the curve and were out of sight and they contained Francie Wilford and Carmela Walther who still had a good deal of sinful reputation to live down, though both had improved considerably since being put up to Vb. By the time they were a third of the way up, Ted was beginning to wonder however she was to drag one foot after the other. She even began to think that she must sink her pride and beg for a few minutes’ respite.

It did not come to that, however. Finally satisfied that Miss Ferrars’ remarks had gone home, Mary-Lou gave her attention to her companions. A glance at the new girl convinced her that unless she did something about it, Ted would be a very lame duck by the time they reached Mahlhausen, and she promptly did the something.

“Scoot on and tell that crowd to put a slight brake on it, Pen,” she said. “Tell them from me that if they steam ahead like that, they’ll end up by barging into the back of Miss Derwent’s little lot and I don’t suppose she’ll be too pleased.”

Pen was off, but Mary-Lou shouted after her to tell the others to wait for her and Ted at the halfway shelf. Then she turned to Ted who was thankfully leaning up against the rock wall and trying to get her breath.

“Hot, isn’t it?” she said genially. “Let’s have a minute’s squat against the bank, shall we? Come on!” And she hauled Ted over to the bank and sat her down on a narrow ridge just above the ground. Then she leaned up against it herself, pulled out her handkerchief and mopped her face.

“Ouf! It’s a scorcher today! Hang on a sec while I rummage in my rucksac. I *think* I remembered to put in my eau-de-cologne ice.” She swung the rucksac down, fumbled for a moment or two and brought out the tube with a whoop. “Here we are! Rub that over your wrists and face. It’ll cool you down a little.”

Ted took it gratefully and found it most refreshing. When she had finished, Mary-Lou used it herself. Then she put it away, shouldered the rucksac once more and took the new girl’s hands to heave her to her feet. “Sorry I can’t give you any longer, but you tend to stiffen up if you lounge around after a stiffish bit of walking like this. *Hup* you come!”

Up Ted came, but even the brief pause had helped her to second wind. “I suppose it’s like messing around after the first good game of hockey of the season,” she said.

“Exactly. Or a really stiff set of tennis. You play hockey, then? Well, it’s no use telling Hilary that, though it would have rejoiced her heart earlier on. Next term she’ll be a Millie and the school hockey won’t concern her, except that the school and the Millies meet in the inter-house matches.”

Ted stared. “I don’t know what you mean,” she said bluntly.

Mary-Lou chuckled. “Hasn’t anyone told you yet that the finishing branch is dedicated to St. Mildred? We always call them Millies. I’ll be one myself, next term, worse luck!” she added ruefully.

“Oh?” Ted was not very sure what to say. Luckily, Mary-Lou did not wait for a reply. She was anxious to help the new girl, having taken rather a fancy to her.

“She’s got a lot in her,” she thought as she glanced down from the height of her own five foot nine inches at the pointed face, at present rather tired, but vivid enough for all that.

“Here’s something else for you,” she said as she pulled Ted’s arm through hers in a chummy way. “That is that on a walk like this, you’ve got to bend your knees very slightly at each step. It saves your shin muscles enormously. Didn’t anyone explain that to you? No? Careless apes! Well, you try it, and you’ll soon see that you can get over the ground much more easily.”

Ted meekly obeyed her and discovered after the first awkwardness of it that what the Head Girl said was true. It *did* help to relieve the strain on her muscles and once she had got into it, the aching ceased to worry her quite so much.

“Take the longest breaths you can and breathe through your nose,” her Mentor instructed her. “It all helps, you’ll find.”

Up and up they went, higher and higher, now shielded from the direct rays of the sun for a short space; then, at a turn in the path, coming out into the full blaze. Ted grew hotter and hotter and her thick black hair which she was supposed to be growing and which had just reached that aggravating length which is about half an inch below one’s shoulders so that tying it back is hard and leaving it loose untidy, flopping about her till, for two pins she would have grabbed the first knife handy and shorn it all to the nape of her neck. Even Mary-Lou, eyeing it with secret horror, could think of nothing to do about it just then. But at last they reached the halfway place where the rest were waiting for them and Ted was glad to see that she was not the only one to feel parboiled. At least half of them were ripely scarlet and even active Len, whose long legs seemed to eat up the distance, was mopping her face freely.

Mary-Lou and Ted were greeted with shouts and the others clustered round the Head Girl to know if they might go on. Only Len detached herself from them and came to grab Ted and pull her to the gap in the bank, saying, “Look, Ted!”

Ted looked and gasped audibly. It was a very clear day and for miles and miles she saw through the break, across the rude fence put there to guard it, mountains rising over mountains, heaving great shoulders against the blue sky. She caught the dazzle of sunlight on ice on one or two of the highest and saw the white peaks of others and cried out with delight. She was looking at her first snow-capped mountains, and that ice could be nothing but glaciers!

“There! Did you ever see anything to beat that?” Len demanded impressively.

Mary-Lou overheard. “You sound as if you’d done it all yourself,” she grinned.

Len grinned back. “Isn’t it miraculous? Like it, Ted?”

The awestruck Ted found her voice. “I never even imagined anything like it! What mountains are those two with the glaciers on them?”

“Oh, good for you!” Len thumped her back in congratulatory style. “Most folk don’t know a glacier when they see it—not at this distance. You got it in one!”

“But it couldn’t *be* anything else in this weather and at that height,” Ted said.

“How right you are!”

“Well,” Mary-Lou elected to chip in here, “we’d better get cracking again. I’m beginning to feel hollow, never to mention the fact that if we don’t do something about it, Ferry and Co. will be coming to see if I’ve pushed a few of you over to get rid of you. Get down to it, folks!”

She shooed them on and Ted was startled to see how instantly she was obeyed. She was accustomed to the prefect system, of course, but even at her last school, she could just imagine what grumbling and arguing there would have been among the younger girls at being moved on so summarily. She glanced up at Mary-Lou who was too busy looking after the others to notice. What a handsome creature she was with her clear blue eyes set in a face whose oval

was as ripely tinted as a peach. Under the brim of her big hat, golden-brown curls caught the sunshine. Her mouth was wide, but even Ted could see that it was beautifully cut with sensitive lips. She swung along beside the new girl with an easy, graceful movement and if her manner was masterful, it was also very friendly. At the same time Ted realised that she could be a stern disciplinarian when she chose. Something about the blue eyes warned her that on occasion they could glint like steel and the smiling lips could set in hard straight lines.

“There’s an awful lot *to* her,” Ted thought as she laboured up the path. “She isn’t just jolly good looks. She’s boss when she wants to be and I can’t imagine anyone taking any liberties with her or cheeking her—not unless they wanted the father and mother of a row! And yet she’s so *matey!*”

She had yet to learn that that same matiness was given by Mary-Lou to most folk with whom she came in contact.

At this point, Mary-Lou spoke. “You’re coming on much better now. You’re getting nicely into the swing of it. Legs aching very badly?”

“Just a bit,” Ted owned—and wondered at herself for owning it. Normally, she was far too proud to admit that she was up against anything. Then she added manfully, “All the same, it’s worth it. That view of Len’s was the cat’s bath-mat!”

Mary-Lou broke into a peal of ringing laughter. “What a ghastly description! But I see what you mean. All the same, my love, I’d advise you to sort out your adjectives. Speaking decent English is a biggish part of our training here. And while I think of it, avoid ‘marvellous’ as you would the plague! The Head’s dead nuts against it. That’s why Len and Co. call things miraculous and magnificent or almost anything else. I believe they had a good wiggling on the subject from the Head last term. You may as well start off well, you know.”

“Yes, I see. Thanks a lot,” Ted said in her meekest voice. Inwardly she was wondering at herself; also at Mary-Lou. The Head Girl at her last school had been a very apart person and so had the rest of the prefects. Certainly, they had never mingled with their juniors in quite the way that the grandees of the Chalet School seemed to do; and that without prejudicing their dignity one iota.

“Where is the nearest glacier to here?” she asked a minute or two later.

“Up there,” Mary-Lou said, waving her hand upwards and to the right.

“Up there? Do you mean on this mountain?” Ted demanded.

“What else? Not that you’ll get a sniff at it today. Too far off and anyhow it’s right round at the other side. The station for that is Wahlstein which is the end of the railway at that side. All our crowd have seen it and I don’t know that I’m anxious to see it again.” She shivered a little.

“Why?” Ted smelt a story, at once, but Mary-Lou only shook her head and laughed.

“That’s another story,^[4] as Kipling says. If you really want to know anything about it, ask *Mdlle de Lachennais*. She’s climbed all round these parts.”

[4] The New Mistress at the Chalet School.

“*Mdlle* has?” Ted couldn’t believe her ears.

“Why not? She’s a member of the French Alpinist Club and jolly good.”

This left Ted without any breath for comment. What on earth sort of school was this when one of the mistresses was a member of the Alpinist Club? As she toiled upwards by Mary-Lou’s side it struck her forcibly that when her cousin had told her that she was having a complete break with her old life, she had spoken no more than the truth.

"I'll bet *Mother* knew nothing about all this or she'd have put a spoke in my coming somehow," she thought with sudden bitterness. Then she had to give up thinking for she found that steep as their road up had been, they had reached an even steeper slope and for the next fifteen minutes or so she was fully occupied with dragging herself up it and all the time she had left over from wondering just how she was to make the next step was filled with longing for a nice, deep bath—a *cold* one, for preference!—and all the time she could ask to wallow in it. The perspiration was pouring down her crimson face when she ventured at last to hint to Mary-Lou that it would be easier if she might *carry* her blazer.

"Not unless you want to risk pneumonia! And whether you like it risk to or not, I'm not having any! I can just imagine Matey on the subject and I'd rather be excused, thank you. It's best to keep in her good books—if you possibly can," she added as an after-thought. "Be warned, Ted! Keep the right side of Matey. You'll be awfully sorry for yourself if you don't."

So far, Ted had not fallen foul of Matey, but she had heard her remarks to Heather Clayton only the night before when Heather had dropped her tube of toothpaste in the corridor and stamped on it, bursting it and spreading the paste in every direction. She decided to take Mary-Lou's advice. And, since there seemed to be no alternative, to go on doggedly until she reached the top.

Just when it seemed as if she couldn't drag herself another pace forward, the voices which had been coming faintly to them, suddenly sounded close at hand as they turned a sharp curve. Mary-Lou hauled her up the last few feet of the way and she found herself standing on a grassy shelf, panting for breath, hotter than she had ever been in all her life and yet with an exultant feeling. She had done it! Then Miss Ferrars was coming to join them and Mary-Lou was patting her on the back and saying, "Well done, Ted! Jolly good for a first climb!"

"What on earth have you two been doing?" Miss Ferrars began as she reached them. Then she caught sight of Ted's scarlet face. "Ted! My dear girl, you look as if you had been well and truly boiled! Come out of the breeze and sit over here behind these bushes and cool off or you may catch a chill. No one, I assure you, wants that for any of you at this early date in the term. Make room beside you for Ted, Len, and let her cool off slowly. No, keep your blazer on for the present, Ted. You may take it off when you've really cooled down, but not before."

Len and Rosamund obligingly made room for her and Ted dropped down beside them thankfully. It was a relief to stretch her aching legs on the short, sweet turf, smelling of thyme and other aromatic herbs, and get out of the blazing sunshine. She pulled off her hat, lay flat on her back and fanned herself for a minute or two. Then the packed rucksac digging into her back made her sit up with an "*Ow!*"

"Take it off, you goop!" Len said, bending to help her. "You've done jolly well, Ted. It's a pretty stiff climb up, even if it was as safe as houses. Shall I take out your eats? Ferry was just saying before you and Mary-Lou arrived that we had best have our picnic now and then we'll have more time for a really good roust about on the shelf."

Ted rolled over on her side and watched as Len unpacked the parcels. By that time, she was beginning to cool down a little and she was able to sit up and take an interest in the spread the kitchen had provided. There were sandwiches of milk cheese and red currant jelly; a little meat pie with the meat embedded in a rich jelly; a little polythene case held salad, almost as crisp and cold as when it had been taken out of the refrigerator; another was filled with something sweet and cold and fluffy; finally, there was a bag containing a big double handful of ripe golden gooseberries. At one side was a small thermos flask of Karen's delicious lemonade which was made with real lemons and sugar and agreeably acid to the taste.

Len and Rosamund had the same and when everything was unpacked, they bent their heads to say their Grace and then fell to with sharpened appetites.

It was very pleasant up there, with the soft breeze blowing and little but the sound of their own tongues to break the stillness. It must be owned that they made quite enough noise among them, even though they remembered Miss Ferrars' warning and talked and laughed quietly. When the last crumb had vanished and the flasks were empty, everyone sighed contentedly. They packed away the papers, cases and bags into their rucksacs and then one or two jumped to their feet.

Miss Ferrars rose to hers, too. "No, you *don't!*" she said emphatically. "You may rest for half-an-hour before you do another thing. Sit down again, girls, and keep quiet until I give the word!"

They dropped instantly, though Heather asked, "Can we talk, please?"

"Judging by what I know of you all, you certainly can! So far as I am concerned, you equally may. Really, Heather!"

Heather went red. The Head was dead against the loose use of "can" for "may" and the girls were well drilled into it. However, Miss Ferrars only laughed at her, so she curled up and lay silent until she had recovered her normal colour which did not take long. Heather was rarely badly upset. For the next half-hour, they all sprawled, or curled up as suited them best and though there was an undercurrent of chatter, it was a very quiet one. Quite a number of them just lay there, enjoying the peace, the champagne-like air and their well-deserved rest.

All the same, when the mistresses gave the signal by jumping up, no one was behindhand in copying them. Miss Ferrars blew a blast on her whistle and when they were all standing silent, she gave them their instructions.

"You may go where you like about the shelf so long as you keep away from the edge. Keep your hats on. The sun is terrific and I'm sure none of you want a go of sunstroke. What's that, Mary-Lou? May you get coffee from the Gasthaus? By all means, though I don't advise it."

"Why not?" Mary-Lou asked involuntarily.

"Because their coffee is mainly chicory and I doubt if you'd enjoy it. Now that's all for the moment. Don't forget to come the moment you hear the whistle."

She sat down again beside Miss Bertram and Miss Andrews and the girls, set free of the place, began to make up their parties before they set off to explore.

Chapter VI

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT

While the others were joining forces in groups of four, five or six, Ted stood a little to one side. She was very unsure of herself, poor child, and had no idea what she ought to do. She was in Pen's charge, but Pen was one of a chummery of five who did everything together and no matter how polite they were, she always had the feeling that they merely tolerated her because the Head had handed her over to Pen. On the other hand, she knew that Len and Rosamund were close friends and she felt that if she tagged on to them, she would be just as unwelcome.

She had got this far when Len put an end to it by holding out her hand. "Come on, Ted! You come with Ros and me. We're going up into the pines and through them to the far end of the shelf and then round by the edge. That'll give you a chance to get really cool, for we aren't going to hurry ourselves."

Pretty Rosamund Lilley joined in the invitation. "Yes, you come with us, Ted. Pen's gang always like to go off by themselves and you'll have more fun with us."

"Are you really sure?" Ted asked doubtfully, half ashamed of her own eagerness to close with the offer, but anxious, all the same, to take it.

"Shouldn't ask you if we weren't!" quoth Len. She laughed at Pen who came up to extend a half-reluctant invitation to the new girl to come with them. "Too late Pennywise! Ted's coming with us. You buzz off and leave us three to go our own way. Come on, you two! I've been up here before and I can show you everything. Oh!" she turned to the mistresses, already settling themselves comfortably in the shade with books, a sketching-block—Miss Ferrars'—and needlework. "May we take our flasks with us and fill them at the spring, Miss Ferrars? It's so hot and we might be glad of a drink when we go down."

"By all means, but take only one rucksack with you to carry them when you've filled them. Leave the others here with us. Anyone else want to fill her flask? What, *all* of you? What a thirsty lot! Don't forget it's to be from the spring only. You are not to drink from the brook. Though I doubt," she added, "if there will be much there but mud after these three days of scorching heat."

Then they really did scatter, some of them wandering to a safe distance near the edge of the shelf to feast their eyes on the wonderful view; some to go with Mary-Lou to the Gasthaus where, as she told them, it might be possible to buy woodcarvings, embroidery or hand-made laces; some to stroll about the shelf, talking hard; one bunch made for a part where wild flowers nodded in the breeze. Len slipped one hand through an arm of Rosamund, and the other through one of Ted's, and said, "Come on! We'll do a saunter across to the pines. It'll be cool there."

"Coveys of flies, though," Rosamund said, laughing, as they swung off across the shelf. "They seem to swarm under the pines. However, this weather, you get them wherever you go."

As they went, the other two chattered gaily. Ted was too busy pondering on Len's unexpected friendliness. She knew well enough that in most schools, you kept to the people in your own form. Why, then, should Len—and Rosamund, too, for that matter—be so chummy? She was not know that Len Maynard was her mother's own girl when it came to helping other

folk. When she had been at the Chalet School, Joey Bettany, as she then was, had earned for herself the reputation of being a champion butter-in. Len gave every sign of following in her mother's footsteps in this as well as in a good many other ways. She felt dimly that all was not right with this new girl. Why, for instance, did she always seem to be on the look-out for trouble? And what was wrong with her home. Without meaning it, Ted had let slip one or two remarks that had given Len to think furiously. She had been forbidden to tell the others what had happened at her other schools. That was a matter strictly for their elders and betters and no good could come of her even hinting at the reason for her being here. She herself was not exactly anxious for any of them to know that she had had to leave for bad behaviour, but she had a careless tongue and more than once she had nearly let the secret out.

Now, as she strolled to the back of the shelf with Len's arm through hers and both Len and Rosamund talking hard, she thought to herself that while the Chalet School had been really decent, so far, she had not expected anything quite so matey as soon as this. She hardly knew either of the girls so it could have nothing to do with the undoubted fascination she could use on her fellows when she chose.

As they reached the beginning of the tall pines which grew in a belt all along the back of the shelf, she kept stealing glances at Len. How pretty she was with her chestnut hair tied back off her delicate, mobile face in a long, curly tail! She had a perfect complexion, too; and as if that was not enough, her eyes like English wood violets were fringed with long black lashes and her eyebrows were slender arches. Remembering the heavy black lines that nearly met over her nose, Ted heaved a deep sigh. If *she* had looked like that, her mother might have managed to be fond of her. But she didn't and her mother wasn't—Ted was under no delusions there!—and, so far as she could see there was nothing to be done about it.

"What's the why of that?" Len demanded. "You nearly blew Ros and me right through the pines, sighing like that. Anything wrong?"

Ted came back to Mahlhausen and forced a laugh. "Nothing! It's so gorgeous up here and the air's so marvellous! I feel as fit as a fiddle again and as if I could walk miles and miles."

"Don't worry! We shall have the mile and a half from the station when we go back," Rosamund pointed out. "Anyhow, unless you propose to go round in circles, I'm afraid it can't be done. Didn't you say the shelf comes to a sudden stop over there, Len?" She gesticulated with her free hand.

"It does," Len agreed. "You can see for yourselves where that huge sort of cliff stands out. It goes sheer down and though I believe you *can* get over it, we aren't doing any more climbing than we've done already. You can go on up at the other side, of course; the path continues up; but we aren't allowed to go on. It's rather tricky, I've heard Mamma say. Here we are at the trees, thank goodness! Isn't it lovely and cool? I'm taking off my hat. Ferry wouldn't mind here." And she removed her big, shady hat and slung it on one arm by the elastic.

The other two followed suit. They had dropped arms now and were loitering through the ranks of black-trunked pines and Ted had put her troubles behind her. They had plenty to do to keep off the flies. Ted used her hat as a fan until Rosamund pointed out that she wasn't doing the brim any good.

"Matey'll have a lot to say if you take it back with a battered brim," she pointed out.

"I've heard Papa say that walnuts are among the few trees where you aren't pestered with insects," Len chimed in, slapping vigorously at her tormentors. She suddenly giggled. "What we really want is a few cigarettes. He always smokes his pipe when we go through the forest

in summer. That keeps them off. They loathe tobacco—or it may be the smoke. I wouldn't know.”

“Have you ever smoked?” Ted asked curiously.

“No fear! Mamma said if any of us started that game before we were seventeen at least, she'd give us a punishment we'd never forget. She didn't say what it was, but from the way she said it, I should say it was something too nasty for words! What about you, Ros? Ever done it?”

“Mum would have my blood if I did,” Rosamund said simply. “My elder sisters both do and she knows, of course; but they don't do it at home. Oh, Len, do you know, Dorothy's little Sylvia is running about all over now and Dorothy says she can speak quite plainly, too. I call that very good for not quite two, don't you?”

“Rather! Cecil still doesn't talk very plainly, though she's everywhere on her feet,” Len returned. “Of course, your niece Sylvia is almost six months older than Cecil.” She turned to Ted. “Ros is an aunt! D'you think she looks like one?”

“Well, so am I,” Ted replied, “though as I've never seen my nephews and niece, I never think about them very much. They live in Canada, you see. My eldest brother is fruit-farming out in British Columbia, so it's rather far for a week's trip either home or there.”

It was the first time she had been so expansive, and Rosamund took instant advantage of it. “Your brother must be years older than you?”

“So he is—eighteen years older. And the twins are fifteen. I was—was an after-thought.”

Rosamund laughed. “I'm rather like that myself. Charmian, the sister next to me, is six years older than I am.”

“If you're going to swank about things like that,” Len said, elevating her pretty nose, “let me remind you that we three are nearly thirteen years older than Cecil. And when the new baby arrives—only we're all dying for twins again—we'll be almost fifteen years older.”

Ted stared at her. “*More* babies? But I thought there were nine of you already?”

“So there are, but Mamma and Papa say: ‘The more the merrier’ and Mamma says it's far easier to run a family if there are plenty of you. The big ones help with the little ones and you never have anyone growling because it's lonely——”

“*It*?” Rosamund asked with a giggle.

“Well, you may have a boy or a girl and to say ‘he’ or ‘she’ is mad, *I* think. But we're hoping it'll be twins because they'll be company for Cecil when they grow and she'll be only two years and a bit older. Mike, my third brother, was three years younger than Charles and three years older than Felix and Felicity and he was the outside of enough last year and the year before. Now, of course, he's at prep school with the other two.”

Ted suddenly looked wistful. “I only wish *I* had a brother or sister my own age. With the boys so much older, I've always been alone.”

“But not when you're at school,” Len pointed out briskly.

As no one had ever encouraged Ted to pity herself, she was brought up short and Rosamund, noticing her blush, changed the subject to the two spotlight events of that term—the Sale of Work in aid of the free beds in the children's ward at the great Sanatorium at the far end of the Görnetz Platz, and the School Sports. Ted forgot her own griefs and listened with deepening wonder.

“What sort of thing will we do for the Sale this year?” she asked.

“Goodness knows! We'll have to be thinking about ideas for it, Ros. You know how they like to have ideas from each form. Let's get down to it early and have a chance of putting in

something they're likely to use," Len proposed.

"O.K., but not now. It's much too hot!" Rosamund said, using her hat as a fan.

Their description of the sports made Ted gasp aloud. She was accustomed to school sports. At her last school, they had been taken in grim earnest. People entered for any events trained for them most professionally. They practised hard in their free time. Diet was watched with anxious care and when the day came and the winners of the various heats met in the finals, it was a darkly business-like affair, quite unlike the light-hearted events Len and Rosamund related.

"Remember last year's blindfold race?" Len asked with a shriek of laughter, "and how you and Mary-Lou *would* insist on walking into each other's arms and embracing warmly? And Gwen Jones marched straight into the umpire's ladder where Burnie was perched and sent it flying and Burnie landed in a thorn bush?"

The pair yelled with laughter in which Ted joined.

"And Hilary Bennet just *ran* across the court and plonked herself down on Dr. Jack's knee!" Rosamund bubbled with a fresh peal.

"And then she grabbed Mamma's hat and pulled all her hair down!" Len wound up.

"I think the funniest of all was the final of the tug-o'-war," Rosamund said, mopping her eyes. "The rope snapped—remember?—and every last one landed on top of Hilda and Blossom! How they all yelled!"

"What gorgeous fun your sports seem to be!" Ted said.

"Don't say 'your' like that!" Len scolded her. "Say 'our'. You're one of us, now. Oh, and Ted, *do* go in for the blindfold race this year. Ros and I mean to."

"We could practise together in our spare time," Rosamund added.

The expression in the new girl's eyes as she said this, baffled them completely. It was a mixture of surprise, doubt and gratitude and they had said nothing, so far as they knew, to call it there. But the fact was that this was the first time that Ted had met with such open-hearted friendship. At her other schools, her own kind had admired her daring and resourcefulness when it came to thinking up and doing wicked deeds; but she had never once had a genuine friend. Len's inherited trick of greeting her with almost open arms and Rosamund's quieter kindness nearly stunned her. As for her fellow conspirators at her last school, they had mostly contrived to slide out of the scrapes they had shared with her, leaving her to bear most of the blame. She had felt no affection for them. But here were two girls who knew nothing about that side of her—and in any case, Ted felt that neither of the pair would be ready to admire a good many of her maddest efforts—and yet who seemed ready to be real friends with her. Ted was quite sharp enough to know that all Pen had done had been in the way of duty and no more than anyone else did she like being treated as a *duty*!

"I wish I was in *your* form!" she said on a sudden impulse.

"Can't you make it?" Len asked. "What's stopping you? Not brains, I'll bet."

"Oh, I don't know. My maths, for one thing, I should think. And then I didn't know the first word of German. When you've got to do lessons in a language you just don't know for two days every week, it's a bit of a snag."

"But that'll come all right," Rosamund assured her. "I didn't know a word myself when I first came, but I soon began to pick things up. What's wrong with your maths, Ted?"

"Oh, I never loved them and then we always ragged in maths at my last school."

"Well, don't try that game on here," Rosamund warned her. "Willie's a pet, but try to rag in her lessons and she leaves you wondering how much is left of you!"

"I can imagine it!" Ted murmured.

"Let's sit down. We've oceans of time," Len said with a glance at her watch. "Go on about your work, Ted. Is there anything else? For if it's just maths and German, we can soon get you on in those."

"My Latin's not up to it. I've only learnt two years and—well—we rather ragged in Latin class as well as maths."

"You seem to have done an awful *lot* of ragging!" Len said severely. "Didn't you get into ghastly rows with the Head?"

Ted had no more to say, but her cheeks were scarlet.

"Leave it," Rosamund ordered. "Ted, I'm sure you can manage to pull up in both Latin and German. I overheard someone say that your French is miraculous and you're Mdlle's blue-eyed boy in those classes. You ought to be able to manage other languages quite as well. As for maths, well, you won't get any chance of ragging with Willie. I should say you'll soon find yourself going ahead there, too."

"I'll give you a tip," Len observed. "Learn ten new words of Latin and German every day. It's vocab that so often hangs you up, but if you do that, you can't help getting on. Ros and I could hear you say them at odd times."

"But you're in Vb and I'm only Inter V," Ted pointed out.

"I know you are, but you don't have to *stay* there, you goop! If you do a spot of extra hard work in lessons *and* prep and we two give you a hand now and then, you ought to go shooting ahead in no time. If you're really good, you'll be shoved up all right. I don't see why you shouldn't manage it by half-term, say. I never heard that any of the rest of Inter V were geniuses!" Len finished with a giggle.

"You try that," Rosamund chimed in. "We'll help you out. *I* was helped like anything when I first came and *needed* it. You see, Ted, I'd never been at a school like this before and lots of things I just didn't know. But everyone rallied round and I found I was able to keep my end up and when Len and the rest went up this year, I did, too. I was jolly thankful for that, I can tell you! Jolly surprised, too, for I hadn't expected it and it took the whole year and a term for me to make up what I didn't know. But this year, it's been different. I can manage quite comfortably. So will you because you've done *some* Latin and geometry and I hadn't." She glanced across at Len who gave a slight nod. "Have a go, Ted—do! We'd like to have you in Vb with us."

Ted stared. "But why on earth?"

"I don't know. We just would."

Ted was silent. She knew all about her own powers of attraction, but she could never have imagined that they would affect girls like Len Maynard and Rosamund Lilley. Hitherto, it had always been the worst and wildest spirits who had followed her. The other two were silent as well. Neither could have said just why they felt they wanted Ted with them, but they knew that they did.

"I somehow know that it would be the best thing for her," Len thought. "Why? I don't know. Could I go to Auntie Hilda and ask her—out of school, of course. No, p'raps not. She might think it cheek. I'll have to get Mamma on the job. Now when can I see her? For the sooner it's done the better."

Well, Len might plan as she would. Her own action was to put any chance of an early private talk with her mother completely out of the question. But it was also to make it possible

for both her and Rosamund to give Ted all the help they could. Not that the experience was exactly pleasant, but it came in useful.

Ted spoke at last. "I honestly don't see why you *should*, but I can see you really mean it, so I'll have a go. Whether I'll make it or not is another thing."

"Good! Then we'd better be getting on or we shan't do all I planned," Len said, jumping up. "Give me a brush down, one of you. I'll do as much for you."

They brushed the pine needles off each other and then sauntered along again. They reached the end of the pines where they paused to pull on their hats for the sun was showing what he *could* do when he tried. Then they looked round. They were facing the great cliff-like spur Len had pointed out. They also faced a small hut-like erection which seemed to nestle under it. Huddled up outside the closed door was a small girl of eight or nine who was sobbing bitterly.

It was not in Len Maynard to see such woe and not do her best to give comfort. She rushed forward, dropped down beside the weeper, put an arm round her and said in her pretty German, "Oh, don't cry like that! Tell us what's wrong and we'll help you. Here! Take my handkerchief and dry your eyes and tell us all about it."

The other two had come up by this time and were squatting down beside the pair. The child was sobbing out a long story in what sounded to Ted and Rosamund like gibberish, but Len managed to get the drift of it and cuddled the small girl, speaking words that literally cooed with sympathy.

"Her mother's ill and her father sent her out of the house and she's not feeling awfully fit herself," she explained to the other two at last. She took one of the grimy hands in her own and gave a cry. "I should jolly well think she isn't! She's burning hot! One of you knock and see if she can't go in and go to bed. I'm sure she's feverish! She keeps on shivering and yet she's so hot!"

"I'll go!" Ted straightened up, marched to the door and gave it a hearty thump. It flew open, showing a tall, brawny man who looked at her blankly. From behind him came a low, rapid muttering and Ted could make out a badly tumbled wall-bed at the back of the room. It contained a woman, whose long hair tossed as she flung about from side to side.

Ted looked in consternation. "I say! Can we do anything?" she asked. "Could I tie back her hair or something?"

Before he could answer her—though it was clear he made nothing of her speech—a man's voice sounded behind her. "Len—Rosamund! What on earth are you doing here? Come away from that child at once—at once I say!"

There was an imperative note in his voice that admitted of no disobedience. Ted, turning, saw Len and Rosamund getting up. And then he saw *her*.

"Come here, you!" he said; and Ted shot back to join the others.

Len looked up at him with fearless eyes. "Uncle Phil! I'm most awfully glad to see you! This kid says her mother's ill and I think she's ill herself——"

"Thank you," he broke in. "You need tell me nothing. Who brought you three up here and how long have you been hanging about the child?"

"Miss Ferrars did," Rosamund said, seeing that Len remained silent. "We're on a ramble—Vb and Inter V. Len and Ted and I—that's Ted who was at the door—came through the pines and we found the kiddy crying her eyes out, so we thought we ought to see what we could do to help."

“I see.” His lips closed in a firm line. Len looked at him anxiously. “Uncle Phil, is it something *infectious*?” Then, as he nodded, “Oh, my goodness! What *will* Matey say?”

He gave her an exasperated look. “So that’s all you can think of? Let me tell you, young woman, you won’t see Matey or anyone else in the school for the next eighteen days—none of you! You’re going straight down with me to San and you’re going into Isolation. Now keep away from everyone else. Don’t let them come near you. Do you understand?”

Scared, they agreed that they did and he picked up the child who was sobbing wearily, more because she was too tired and sick to stop than for any other reason, and went into the hut. He emerged a little later, carrying a steaming pan in which lay a syringe.

“Now then!” he said, when he reached them, “up with your sleeves!” He set his case on the ground, opened it and proceeded to lift the syringe from the boiling water, fill it and then inject them all before he opened his lips again.

“Wh-what is it, Uncle Phil?” Len quavered when Rosamund, the last, was pulling down her sleeve.

“Never you mind at the moment!” he said grimly. “Thank heaven I guessed what was wrong up here and came prepared! Now listen to me. You are to stay here until I come for you. A stretcher is coming up for Frau Wilhelm and we’ll have to put Margrit on it as well. When that’s gone down *and not before*, I’ll come for you and take you down with me. Rosamund, where is Miss Ferrars?”

“We left her and the other mistresses sitting up by the path under the bushes,” Rosamund said in subdued tones.

“Right! She must take all the rest down at once before the stretcher comes. I’ll get into touch with Matey as soon as I’ve seen that off and she can send what you’re likely to need for the next fortnight or so——”

“Will you let Papa know or Mamma?” Len broke in anxiously.

“I’ll let them know. Stay here as I told you and don’t dare to let anyone come within fifty yards of you!”

With this, he was off, racing at top speed over the rough grass. Ten minutes after he had vanished round the curve of the shelf, they heard the blast of the whistle coming faintly from the other end. They knew, then, that it was unlikely that any of the other girls would appear and all relaxed.

“What do you think it is?” Ted asked nervously.

“Something deadly infectious, anyhow,” Rosamund replied soberly. “Dip, perhaps, or—or measles. Something like that, I suppose.”

But by bedtime that night, everyone was aware that the trio had been in close contact with a smallpox case and Dr. Graves had whisked them off to Isolation where they must remain for the next fortnight or so until he could be sure that the vaccination he had so promptly administered had taken effect and there was no risk of their either taking the disease themselves or infecting anyone else!

Chapter VII
LEN TAKES A HAND

Thanks in the first instance to Dr. Graves' prompt measures and to the efforts of all the authorities at San in the second, there was no smallpox epidemic. The unhappy pair who had first become ill remained the only ones. Not even the three who had been in such close contact took it, though Rosamund's vaccination certainly "took" with astonishing virulence and for two or three days she was very miserable. Her arm swelled to monumental proportions, her temperature went up with it, and Isolation Sister was sufficiently anxious to put her in a private ward by herself, leaving the other two to entertain each other as best they might.

Joey Maynard drove nearly everyone frantic with her unceasing pleadings to be allowed to go and see to the girls herself. Finally, Jack Maynard put his foot down firmly and heavily and she calmed down—the more easily because by that time, four days had passed and if Rosamund was really ill with the vaccination, neither of the others was a penny the worse. As a slight consolation, she was allowed to go and stand under the windows of the ward where they were and relieve her mind to them.

Len and Ted stood silently at the open window, listening to her diatribe. It lasted quite a while, for when Joey had really got going, she found plenty to say. When she paused for breath, Len was quick to seize her chance.

"But, Mamma," she protested, "I couldn't do anything else and we didn't know it was smallpox or anything else infectious. The poor kid was just breaking her heart. You'd have done it yourself if you'd been there and you know it!"

This was so true that Joey was left without a word to say more. She gave it up, laughed, chattered with them on various ordinary subjects and went home at last, her mind set at ease, much to the relief of everyone concerned.

In any case, Mme Courvoisier, she who had been Bidy o'Ryan, provided the school and all her friends with a fresh topic for conversation by presenting them with a son and daughter. In the excitement of suggesting names for the new babies in the clan, as well as collecting for gifts for them and wondering if they were like their pretty Irish mother or their pleasant-looking Swiss father the school calmed down. The day that the Head was able to announce at Abendessen that she had been allowed to visit them was a red letter one, especially when she could tell them that so far, the babies were both more like mother than father.

That was the day that Len and Ted, both bored to tears by being kept in close confinement with very little to do, asked Soeur Marie-Anne if she would beg the school to send them some old textbooks that didn't matter so that they might do a few lessons by way of amusement.

The Vincentian looked at them and laughed. "I agree that it would be well if we found a little work for you, mes petites. I see no reason why you should waste so much time while you are here. Once, I meant to teach, I, but then the good God called me and so I gave my life to Him. But I have not forgotten and I will give you lessons in mathematics and also request you to write essays for me. For six hours each day you will work. Perhaps that will keep you out of mischief." Her soft black Provençal eyes danced merrily under her big horned coif. "No need to ask the school for books. I have plenty. See you, clear those two small tables. I will bring paper and pencils and you may set to work at once. Three hours every morning and two

hours every afternoon after the siesta. Each evening, you will sew for an hour. We have plenty of mending to occupy you so long.”

“Oh, my only aunt!” Len said dismally. No more than her mother did she love her needle, though Joey saw to it that all her daughters were good needlewomen.

Soeur Marie-Anne was as good as her word. She brought books and writing materials and that very morning the pair found themselves set down to arithmetic and algebra, Latin grammar and Swiss history; and when the afternoon came, they each had a French essay to write and more Latin and a French poem to prepare.

“We will have a little school,” she said cheerfully, “and when *cette pauvre Rosémonde* is better, she shall join you.”

So it began and by the next day, Len was bubbling over with a new idea. As she and Ted were dressing that morning, she expounded it to the dismayed Ted.

“Ted, I’ve had an idea. We’re going to talk nothing but German during lesson hours.”

“But why ever? I scarcely know a word of it!” Ted objected.

“That’s why, dunderhead! Don’t you *see*? It’s a jolly good chance for you to learn to talk and when we get back to school, you’ll find things a lot easier on German days.”

Ted saw at once. “So it will! What a *smashing* idea!”

“Well, don’t say ‘smashing’ or you’ll get yourself fined at school,” Len warned her. “No one minds *some* slang, but things like that are definitely forbidden. Anyhow, there are heaps of other words that’ll do just as well.”

“Oh, lor’! Well, I’ll do my best to remember and saints can’t do more!”

Len had yet another idea when Soeur Marie-Anne, having set them to work and gone off to her own duties, proved to have judged them to be at the same standard. It was work that Vb had done the previous term, but two or three of the algebra problems were beyond Ted. Len instantly proposed that she should show the other girl how to do them and, indeed, help her out with anything beyond her.

Ted closed with the offer at once. She was naturally a clever girl, but she had wasted so much time before, that she was behind Len in a good many ways. What Joey had said at the beginning of term about starting with a fresh sheet had gripped her and she was anxious to make up for lost time. Len took her firmly in hand and by the time their quarantine was up, thanks to this and to the fact that Ted had set her mind firmly on her work during lesson hours, she had come on amazingly. Her maths were advanced and, as Len also took her Latin in hand, that, too, was greatly improved. German, she simply had to pick up when she spent six hours of every day speaking nothing else. Len was a stern tutor and when Rosamund was able to join them, she entered into the scheme with acclamations. Between the pair of them, Ted found that she must either try to speak German or else go dumb for they became instantly deaf to anything else. It says much for the hold the school was getting on her that apart from some half-playful grumbling, she accepted their fiat and did her best. Presently she found that so long as they spoke fairly slowly she could understand most of what was said to her and she was gaining confidence herself in speaking. That encouraged her to go ahead and when Soeur Marie-Anne, coming in one morning when Len was explaining the mysteries of quadratics in German to Ted, discovered what they were after, she backed Len up and spoke in German herself. What was more, she changed the lay-sister who had been looking after their needs to a very new German who spoke little but her own tongue. It was a great help.

Apart from the German, Ted found that she was really understanding maths as she had not done before. Len had a genuine gift for teaching and she exercised it to the full for her new

friend—for friends the two girls—three, in fact—were soon to become. These days together helped them to know each other as little else would have done. Certainly they grew close much faster than they could have done at school.

“You *can* teach!” Ted said gratefully once when Len had explained a sticky theorem in geometry to her. “I really do get this now.”

“Oh, I *mean* to teach when I’m grown up,” Len said airily. “I’m going to Oxford to get my degree and then I expect to teach in English schools for a year or so before I come back to teach at the school.”

“But why not come straight back to teach? I’m sure they’d have you.”

Len grinned. “No fear! I’m waiting until everyone at school with me has left. They’d know a lot too much about me otherwise!”

“Oh, I see! Yes, perhaps you’re right, there.”

“I jolly well know I am.” Len changed the subject. “What are *you* going to do?”

“Haven’t thought much about it so far. Not teach, anyhow! And I don’t think I’d much like being a nurse. I’d always be afraid of doing something wrong.”

“Ros is going to be a gardener. What about that for an idea?”

Ted shook her head. “Too slow! I like to be on the go all the time.”

“Years ago, I used to say I’d like to be an air hostess,” Rosamund said with an elderly air. “I’ve grown out of it by now, but that might suit you, Ted. You’ll have foreign languages to offer and you need those for that sort of job.”

“I might think of it. I don’t think even that’s exactly what I want, though.”

They had to leave it at that, but Len and Rosamund between them were putting new ideas into Ted every day. She found, much to her surprise, that she had simply next to no time to spend planning evil deeds. What was more, she didn’t even *want* to plan them. Life was much too full at present for that sort of thing!

If the circumstances had been different, it is all too likely that by the end of the first week, Ted would have been rebelling at being kept to work like this; but she had been so bored by the first day or two of quarantine that she felt that the worst punishment anyone could inflict on her just then was to give her nothing at all to do. All three felt that and were thankful for steady occupation. Soeur Marie-Anne, having begun the lessons, never let up on them. The six hours each day were not too much for them and what was left for recreation was really enjoyable.

Oddly enough, it was at this time that Ted’s long-sleeping conscience began to wake up. Hitherto, it had never bothered her much; but now that things seemed to be going better for her than ever before, it began to whisper. Len and Rosamund had taken her into their friendship most whole-heartedly and real friendship was something that was new to her. She felt that come what might, these two would always stand by her.

“*They* wouldn’t come in on the fun and then slide out and leave me to hold the baby,” she thought one night when the bright full moon, shining across her face, had roused her. “If they were in any of it, they’d be in the lot. In that case, it looks to me as if I’ll have to reform a bit. I couldn’t be pig enough to do things that would get the lot of us into trouble. Not when they’ve been so all round decent to me! But can I? It’s easy enough here. We haven’t a chance of doing anything bad. But what about when we get back to school next week? Can I go on working and all that and chuck thinking up mad things altogether?”

As this was the first time such an idea had ever struck her, it was a big step forward. All the same, having spent a good part of her life in thinking of the maddest monkey tricks and

doing them, Ted fancied that life might be rather dull for her in the future. It never dawned on her just then that the pair were most unlikely to agree to some of her wilder efforts. Indeed, if she had but known it, they would have united to squash her heavily if she had proposed them.

The question worried her badly for the next night or two. She was only human and it was most unlikely that she could turn right round and become a new person in so short a time. She was, however, despite all her short-comings, an honest girl as her cousin had told Joey, and she was quite quick enough to see that she must play fair. If she meant to accept the friendship Len and Rosamund were offering her so freely, she must give them a decent friendship in return. That was only fair. And the sort of thing she had hatched up at her other schools was not giving decent friendship if it meant dragging them into scrapes.

"I suppose," she thought on the last night of quarantine when, being unable to sleep, she had got up, pulled her kimono round her and perched herself on the broad window-sill beside her bed, "I'll just have to try *not* to think of mad things to do. It won't be easy and I rather think I'll find it dull at first, at any rate, but I don't see what else I can do. Only I hope to goodness no one ever puts up a dare to me. I've never yet passed up a dare and I don't think I *could* do it."

The door opened softly. It was midnight and Soeur Marie-Anne, coming to seek her rest, had glanced up as she crossed from the main building to Isolation and seen Ted silhouetted against the open window. She had come to find out what was wrong. As it was a light night with the moon little past the full, she carried no torch and Ted, buried in her perplexities, had no idea she was there until a hand was laid gently on her shoulder.

"Hush! You must not wake the others!" the Sister said in low, firm tones. "Why are you not in your bed, *ma fille*?" Her fingers touched hand and cheek, but Ted was quite cool. She was not ill, though the eyes she lifted to Soeur Marie-Anne's face were troubled enough.

"I was thinking—and I couldn't sleep," she said in an undertone.

Soeur Marie-Anne looked at her thoughtfully. "We cannot talk here. Put on your slippers and come with me. I will give you five minutes to tell me what is troubling you. If I can help you, I will."

She took Ted into the vacant ward next door and sat down on the first bed, pulling the girl down beside her. "Now, *petite*, tell me what is the matter."

Ted went crimson. "I—I—it's a bit hard to explain," she stammered.

"Do I not know it? But confession is good for us all. When we have humbled ourselves to own our sins, the devil is put to flight. Tell me what troubles you that you cannot sleep, and it is midnight."

Thus urged, Ted did what she had thought she could never do—tell the story of her misdeeds to someone else. Soeur Marie-Anne listened in silence. When at last the halting confession was over, she waited a moment.

"Are you sorry for all this?" she asked at last.

Ted thought. "I—I don't know. I—I don't think so," she owned honestly. "Only Len and Ros have been so decent to me and they're the kind that stand by you. I couldn't get them into rows, but I don't see how I'm to help doing mad things—especially if anyone dares me."

"By yourself—no, my child. But you need not try to do it by yourself. God will always give you strength to fight if you ask Him. Your guardian angel will help you. Ask, and you will see that it is so—if you ask truly wishing it." Then, as Ted remained silent, she added, "Come, *petite*, give me your promise that when you leave us to go out into the world again

you will try it. You will find that what I am saying is true and then you will wish to do it. None of us can hope to fight evil alone, unaided. But with God—yes!”

“All right, I promise,” Ted said slowly.

“Thank you, and I will also ask for you. And there is one other thing. Pray for the grace of repentance for past sins. You need that as well.”

Ted said nothing. It was another new idea. Besides, she was not at all sure that she *did* want to repent of past illdoing. Soeur Marie-Anne guessed it, but she felt she had said enough just then. She sent the girl back to bed and presently brought her a glass of iced lemonade. When it had vanished, she told Ted to lie down and close her eyes before she blessed her. After that, she went. But before she laid her weary body on her own bed, she peeped in again to make sure that all was well. She found Ted fast asleep and the trouble gone from her face.

The Vincentian stood looking down at her, pity in her eyes. “Poor little soul!” she thought. “But she has a chance now, with our good school and her two good friends. Holy Mary, watch over her and keep her safe!”

Chapter VIII
INSECTS—AND A SHOCK FOR TED

Quarantine ended at last. Dr. Graves kept them there for three weeks, observing that where smallpox was concerned, he preferred to be safe rather than sorry. On the Sunday morning exactly three weeks to the day when the trouble had all begun, they packed their cases. They said good-bye and thanks to Soeur Marie-Anne who kissed them and blessed them. Then Dr. Jack arrived with the family runabout and bundled them in and drove them straight back to school.

It was late May by this time and the sun was blazing down as he had blazed on that momentous Sunday. Dr. Jack decanted them at the gate and left them to go and report themselves while he went on to Freudesheim. This was his free week-end and he proposed to spend it peacefully. Joey was herself again, now that her mind was freed from outside anxieties. Winifred Embury, an old friend, had come up the Friday before and whisked off the twins for a fortnight with her own small fry at Montreux. There was only two-year-old Cecil left in the nursery and Cecil was a good little thing and very little trouble—unless she happened to be teething when she let her family know all about it! He anticipated a delightfully restful time.

The three picked up their cases and walked demurely round the building to the side entrance. They went to their Splashery where they hung up their big hats and changed into garden sandals before they went off to find someone to whom they might report.

Most people were at one or other of the church services, for Jack had come for them at ten; but after some searching, they found Miss Dene who was on duty with those people who were literally under the weather. This often happened during the very hot weather and as Rosalie herself had attended the early morning service, she had volunteered to take charge though it was a free Sunday for her. The entire party was in the rock garden which, at this hour, was well shaded from the worst efforts of the sun. The girls were resting quietly in deck chairs, reading or chatting. Rosalie herself was busy with her private correspondence. When she saw the girls at the top of the steps, she waved to them and waited until they reached her.

“So here you are at last!” she said, smiling as she looked them over. “Yes, you don’t look a penny the worse for your three weeks, not even you, Rosamund. What a mercy Dr. Graves had everything with him and was able to vaccinate you at once! I only hope you mean to settle down to work now. You must have missed a good deal.”

The three of them looked at each other and grinned, but said nothing. What had happened was a matter for themselves and they were not going to take even Miss Dene, poppet though she was, into their confidence. Let her get the shock of the results along with everyone else!

“What should we do?” Len asked. “Unpack our cases and settle in first?”

“Yes; I think that would be best. Then find yourselves books and come out here until the rest come back. No ramble today, by the way. The radio promises us something outstanding in the way of heat so we’re going to take life very quietly. This evening, those of you who like may go to Vespers at the Catholic chapel. There won’t be any service at the other one. Put your names down on the list if you want to go. Now go and unpack—and don’t forget your hats when you come back. We don’t want you to risk sunstroke on top of your latest!”

They joined in her laughter and then moved off keeping carefully in the shade. The sun was much too hot to be comfortable.

All three were not only members of Ste. Thérèse de Lisieux House, but also of the same dormitory where Rosamund was a dormitory prefect. They ran upstairs to Tulip with their cases which they took from the Splashery as they went back. Unpacking was a very easy matter and then, after hunting out books from the library shelves in the common-room, they went out to the rock garden where the others presently found them when they returned from church.

There was a rapturous meeting between Len and her triplets and even Ted was greeted joyously by Pen and Co. News of all kinds had to be exchanged, including the names of the Courvoisier twins which the three ex-prisoners had not, so far, heard.

"The girl is to be Marie-Thérèse and the boy Patrick Joseph," Margot Maynard announced. "Mamma says they're to be Marie and Pat for everyday use."

"I like them," Len said with her head on one side. "Has anyone here seen them yet? We wanted awfully to go and stand below the window while one of the nurses held them up for us to see, but Soeur Marie-Anne wouldn't hear of it."

No one had seen the new twins, however. The Courvoisiers lived at the other end of the Platz, not far from the Sanatorium and so far, the former Bidy o'Ryan had not brought her babies to show off to the school.

"Very slow of her!" Len said severely when she heard this.

"Not at all! You couldn't expect anyone to bring tiny babies out into the sort of heat we've been having lately," remarked Mary-Lou who overheard this. "If it goes on much longer, there won't be any water anywhere. Our own particular stream is dried up and you can cross it on foot."

The rest of the Sunday was very quiet. All meals were carried out into the garden and it was strictly enjoined on the girls that they *must not* run about, but must keep quiet. After Mittagessen, the Juniors were sent upstairs to get into their sunsuits and then lie down on their beds in the cool, airy dormitories—comparatively cool, that is. As Matron remarked while she mopped her face, nowhere was cool today.

The rest changed into sunsuits, and lay about in the shadiest corners of the garden that they could find and every deck chair and hammock in the place was occupied. When Kaffee und Kuchen came, it was found that Karen had not only provided iced coffee, but had also produced dishes of wild strawberries and cream. Mary-Lou called for a vote of thanks which was fervently seconded by at least a score of people and conveyed to her by the prefects when they carried their crockery back to the sculleries. In short, a more peaceful day could hardly have been imagined. However, the evening and the night made up for that.

The Head had given permission for all Catholics to attend Vespers and the usual May procession at the little chapel beyond the school. Quite a number of the other girls had also begged leave to go. So long as they had written permission from their parents to do so, it was all right. On this evening, all the prefects and most of the rest of VIb turned out and so did a fair number of the Fifths. Several of the mistresses also attended. The Head herself was not of the party. She had already attended two services in the morning at the Protestant chapel, but Rosalie Dene went and so did Kathie Ferrars, Nancy Wilmot, Rosalind Moore and Peggy Burnett. The escort mistresses were Mdlle de Lachennais, Mdlle Lenoir who took most of the junior piano, and Frau Mieders, the Domestic Science mistress. All in all, quite a large body from the school filed into the seats generally reserved for them.

The chapel had been built in a curve of the mountain wall. On the brightest day it was dark and shadowy and cool—which, it is to be feared, is one reason why some of the girls joined the long lines. The lights were switched on before the school arrived and the doors had been set wide for even here it was hot for once. There was no resident priest. It was served from a big monastery further round the mountain and it served everyone at the Platz side on the various shelves and alpes. On this evening, the procession had drawn a larger congregation than usual and before the procession began it was quite full.

The small girls in white frocks and flowing veils came first, scattering flowers. Then came the statue of the Blessed Virgin, borne high on the shoulders of four brawny mountaineers and the altar servers and the priest followed. They circled the little church going round all the aisles before leaving it, passing round outside while the congregation sang hymns. Then they re-entered the church and Vespers began.

Most of them knew the service and they joined in devoutly. The last blessing was given and the priest, preceded by the procession, the candle-bearers and with two acolytes holding the edges of his cope, passed into the sacristy. The six great candles were still blazing steadily and that was a pity, but the altar boys had had no time to come round with the extinguishers.

The girls had dropped on their knees for the final prayer when there came the sound of a deep humming—at least, that was as near as Mary-Lou could come to it when she described the scene later on for the delectation of those girls who had not been there. The next moment, a swarm of great insects swept into the church, making blindly for the lights. The noise as many of them struck hard, horny heads against the electric light bulbs or the walls of the church was amazing. A number flew straight into the candles, singeing themselves thoroughly. Others, frightened, tangled themselves in the headgear of the women and the beards of the elder men, not to speak of the hair of all. Some of the women screamed as the terrified things fought and struggled to free themselves. One highly nervous visitor fainted. Mdlle de Lachennais who was wearing a very chic little confection of massed flowers covered with veiling on her head, put up her hand to brush off the pair which were caught in the fine net and swept it clean off. It went sailing across the aisle where it was neatly fielded by Dr. Eugen Courvoisier. Several folk went into hysterics. And all the time, the cockchafers, as they turned out to be, went bumbling helplessly round the interior of the chapel, banging themselves anywhere and everywhere, while the men began to trample on those which had fallen and with their noise was the noise of the crunching of their horny shells.

Apart from Meg Whyte and Christine Vincent who were terrified, the prefects kept their heads and so did most of the rest of the Seniors. They began to bundle the screaming Juniors out of their seats with stern reminders as to where they were and orders to stop that noise at once! They got the sobbing children out into the open air and set to work to free them from their unwanted attendants. The middles followed suit and by the time Vater Moritz had got all the lights put out while Dr. Courvoisier, assisted by the mistresses, worked to restore some kind of order, the little edifice was emptied.

It had been a really alarming affair. Con Maynard, in whose black curls no fewer than three of the things had been entangled, was white and shaking and even Rosamund, who had succeeded in freeing herself from the only one which had clung to her, looked pale when they reached the daylight. However, most of them pulled themselves together and they were marched back to school where retailing accounts of the incident to the others helped to calm them down considerably, especially when a good many of them found they were objects of envy.

The sequel came later and gave Ted a shock she did not forget for a long time.

When Matron heard what had happened, she promptly issued orders that everyone who had been to Vespers was to come to her room before going to bed for a dose of her own calming medicine. Bed came early on Sunday nights in any case, so any doctoring stopped there. As quite half the school had been present, Matron had her work cut out to attend to them all, so it escaped her notice that while even Rosamund looked like her normal self, Con Maynard was certainly whiter than usual and there were faint shadows under her eyes. She was by far the most highly-strung of Joey's children and it would have taken more than the very mild dose Matron issued to steady her down properly.

Like everyone else, Ted fell asleep quickly as soon as she was in bed. It must have been two o'clock in the morning when she suddenly woke up. She sat up in bed, wide awake on the instant. She had no idea what had roused her, but she felt that all was not well. Then she heard the handle of the dormitory door being quietly turned and wondered who it was. She glanced at her watch having gone to bed with it for once. Three minutes after two! Surely even Matron wasn't awake at that time and doing the rounds!

The hinges squeaked slightly as the door swung open. No one else seemed to have wakened, though she could hear an occasional muttering from Natalie Mercier's cubicle next door. *That* wasn't what had wakened her. The very first evening, Len had told her that Natalie talked in her sleep and it had never roused her before. Then she heard the pat-pat of bare feet coming slowly up the dormitory. At that hour and in the pale light of the waning moon, it was more than creepy. Ted felt the short hair on the nape of her neck stirring and crisping as she listened. Nearer and nearer they came until they reached her cubicle. Then they stopped dead.

If she could have moved, Ted would have shot under the sheet which was all the covering she had, but she was rigid with terror and could no more have moved than she could have flown. She was even voiceless for the moment. Worse was to follow. By the dim light, she saw long, slender fingers parting her curtains and then a figure came through and stood still with the curtains dropped behind it.

That was bad enough, but it was the aspect of the figure which alarmed poor Ted more than anything. In fact, she was too far gone for a second or two even to recognise it. It stood there in a loose white robe, black curls tumbling about its face and shoulders and with its eyes set in a wide, unseeing gaze. Scared nearly out of her senses, Ted glared back. Then there came a blessed break. Natalie, who had been lying quiet, began to mutter again and the sound broke the trance of horror that had chained Ted. She realised that the invader was Con Maynard. What was more, Con was merely walking in her sleep.

"Well, that *is* something I can tackle, thank goodness!" she said aloud to herself as she tossed back the sheet and got out of bed. "I'd better fetch Ros—or no; she was pretty well shocked herself. Len's the best."

Deliberately breaking rules, she slid through the side curtains into Natalie's abode. It was silly, but she felt that she simply couldn't go past that terrifying figure, even though she knew it was Con. Moving as silently as she could, she slid out into the aisle and began to slip down the dormitory to Len's cubicle at the far end near the door. She was quickly there and then came the task of waking Len as noiselessly as possible. Ted had once been told that you must never startle a sleepwalker or you may make her seriously ill. Len seemed to be sleeping for a wager and it took some effort to rouse her, but at last her long lashes lifted and she stared foggily at her visitor. Ted's hand was across her lips in a flash.

“H-sh!” she muttered. “Don’t make a sound you can help. Con’s walking in her sleep. She came into my cubey and I left her there.”

Len sat up, wide awake at once. “Oh, *drat* her!” she exclaimed in an undertone. “O.K., Ted. I’ll cope; I’ve done it before. She doesn’t often do it now unless she’s been all revved up. I might have guessed it would happen after tonight. Come on! We’ll get her back to her own cubey and then I’ll fetch Matey while you stay with her.”

Ted had no wish to stay with anyone who looked as uncanny as Con had done, but she decided that the less talking there was, the better. Let them get her back to her own cubey and they could arrange the rest later! Len was pulling on her slippers and kimono and then they were tiptoeing along to her own little abode. It was very dark now, for the moon had gone behind a cloud, but they dared not risk switching on the light and neither had a torch. They reached the cubicle and Len pulled the curtains aside and they looked in. There was no Con to be seen! Apart from the furniture and Ted’s clothes, it was empty so far as they could see.

“Oh, heavens!” Len said, still speaking almost inaudibly. “She must have gone in to someone else while you were waking me! Come on! We’ve got to find her before she scares someone out of their seven senses. It’s a mercy your head’s screwed on all right! The *last* thing you do is to scare a sleepwalker awake.”

They peered through the curtains of each cubicle in turn, but no Con was to be seen. Ted was certain she had not left the dormitory. For one thing, all the time she had been rousing Len, she had been listening for those frightening pat-pats again.

“She *must* have gone out,” Len argued as well as she could when she dared not raise her voice at all. “We’ve been into every single cubey and she’s in none of them. Look, Ted; go and put on your kimono and slippers and we’ll go and dig Matey out and let her cope. It’s beyond us now.”

“O.K.,” Ted said, going slowly to her cubicle for it was still very dark and she had no wish to trip over something and waken the rest. She found her kimono where she had tossed it down before getting into bed that night and shrugged herself into it. Then she stooped down to fish for her slippers under the bed. The next moment, she uttered a queer sound, half smothered gasp, half gulp. Len had been listening and she was beside her friend in a flash.

“What is it?” she demanded, her voice uncautiously loud.

Ted held up her hand. “Shut *up!*” she hissed. “I’ve found Con!”

“*What?* But where?”

At that moment, the moon sailed out from behind the cloud and her light, streaming in at the uncurtained window gave the answer. Lying comfortably curled up in Ted’s bed, was the missing Con, sound asleep as they could see. For a full ten seconds they stared at her. Then Ted pulled Len out of the cubicle and back to the door.

“What do we do *now?*” she demanded. “She must have felt and found my bed empty and got in when I was coming to you. Ought I to go to hers for the rest of the night—or what?”

Len was spared the problem. Matron, who seemed to have a sixth sense where the girls were concerned, was with them before they even knew she was coming. Both gave vent to smothered howls of surprise.

“What are you two doing out here?” she asked peremptorily. “What is wrong?” There was suspicion in the glance she cast at Ted, but Len gave her no chance.

“Oh, Matey! Thank goodness you’re here!” she cried. “Con’s been walking in her sleep again. She went into Ted’s cubey and woke her up and Ted came to fetch me and when we got back, she had got into Ted’s bed and she’s there this minute—fast asleep.”

It was a much edited version of the story, but as Len said later, it was as well to give Matey the gist then and add the frills later. It was enough for Matron, at any rate. Con had treated them to more than one sensation by her sleepwalking tendency. Mentally, she apologised to Ted for that moment's suspicion, even as she went to the cubicle where she found Con as they had said.

The pair had followed her. As she stood looking down, Ted said in a low voice, "What ought we to do? Should I just go and find her cubey and sleep there for the rest of the night?"

"Certainly not! Do you know where it is? Then," as Ted shook her head, "how do you propose to find it at *this* hour? I'll wake Con—she's sleeping normally now—and take her back and you can get into your own bed as fast as you like. You, too, Len!"

Matron might talk, but waking Con proved an impossibility unless she wanted to rouse the rest of the dormitory. That young woman was sunk fathoms deep in sleep and all Matron's gentle shaking never reached her. In the end, the stalwart Miss Wilmot had to be summoned and between them, she and Matron carried Con back to her own bed while the other two meekly got into theirs and lay down.

Both had been certain that it was impossible to go to sleep again after such an excitement, but when Matron, having made certain that Con was sleeping soundly, came to them with beakers of hot milk to soothe them, she found them as fast asleep as Con. She left the milk beside them in case they wakened later, but when the rising bell woke them next morning, the milk was still there with a good thick skin on top.

Chapter IX
ANOTHER SHOCK FOR TED

“Ted—Ted Grantley! You’re to go to the Head in the study at half-past ten this morning!”

Ted looked up from her task of sorting out the books and other oddments she would need for the first half of Saturday morning with a startled face. “Whatever for? I’ve done nothing that *I* can think of.”

“Perhaps that’s why,” Primrose Trevoase said with a giggle. “Anyhow, she didn’t confide in *me*. All she said was, ‘Please tell Ted Grantley that I wish to see her in the study at half-past ten’. You’ll find out when you get there, I expect.”

Ted looked anxious. “I can’t think of a thing I’ve done to deserve such a summons to the mat.”

“It may not be that,” Primrose said, checking her giggles. “You haven’t been to have tea with Mrs. Maynard yet. She always has the new girls during the first three weeks or so of term. Quarantine has held you up, of course, but it’s quite likely she wants you tomorrow and that’s what the Head wants you for.”

Ted shook her shaggy head. “It can’t be that. Len told me that her mother was taking things quietly this term and there wouldn’t be any Freudesheim parties.”

“Then I can’t think. You’ll just have to wait till you see her.”

“I wonder if I can guess.” Pen Grant shut the lid of her desk down and sat on it. “You’ve simply shot ahead since you came back from Isolation. How you’ve done it, I wouldn’t know, but I’ll bet when we hear the form-lists on Monday, you’ll be well up the form. You’ve had A for every single French lesson and you’ve never fallen below B in anything. And why did you tell us you didn’t know the first word of German?” she added in injured tones. “Your German’s no worse than anyone else’s and a lot better than some!”

“Because it was true. I didn’t—not even ‘ja’ and ‘nein’!”

“Rot! You were gabbing away all Thursday. Don’t tell me you’ve learnt it to *that* extent in the short time you’ve had at school, for I don’t believe anyone *could*!”

“But,” said Ted, her eyes dancing with mischief, “that’s just exactly what I *have* done—cross my heart!”

“Then all I can say is you’re the world’s wonder!”

Ted relented. “I learnt most of it in Isolation, if you really want to know. The lay-sister who looked after us was German and couldn’t speak a word of anything else and Soeur Marie-Anne said we must talk to her, or try to, in her own language. Len helped out enormously and so did Ros, once she was well again. We talked German the best part of the day and I simply couldn’t help myself. It was ghastly the first few days, of course. French is easy, but German’s the limit with its predicates at the end of the sentences. But I just had to stick to it and then it got easier and easier and I’m glad of it now. At least I can understand what’s said to me on German days and I can even talk after a fashion and it seems weird, but it gets easier and easier all the time.”

“Sez you!” Pen retorted, risking a fine, since this piece of slang was strictly forbidden. She escaped her deserts as there was no one older than Primrose to hear her and for that young lady to pull her up for slang would have been a case of the pot calling the kettle black with a

vengeance! Inter V *would* have enjoyed themselves reminding her that people that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones! Primrose let it alone.

"Mind you go the minute the bell rings," she said, taking her departure just as the said bell summoned them all to Prayers which, on Saturdays, were followed by mending, finishing odds and ends of prep left over from Friday and writing their home letters.

Ted had no mending as it happened. With a complacent grin at those near enough to see—which made some of them yearn to hit her!—she proceeded to set to work on her algebra and when that was done, to scribble her duty letter home. Then, everything done, she ignored her library-book and took out her Latin grammar and proceeded to make hay while the sun shone.

Since she found herself making such strides with Len's help, she had started a new ambition—to get up to Vb in the shortest space of time possible. As she had excellent brains, a good memory and was working honestly for about the first time in her life, she felt she had a chance of doing it if only she could keep on. As she struggled with construction rules, she wondered if, just possibly, the Head had noticed how she was improving and was sending for her to say that if she went on as she was doing, she would go up with the rest of the form next term. If it were *that*——! Ted hugged herself at the bare thought.

Then she set it aside and plunged even deeper into her Latin. So hard did she concentrate that she never heard the bell for Break and Pen had to rouse her with a nudge.

"Wake up, Ted! The bell's gone and you're to go to the Abbess. I'll clear your desk for you or you'll be late. Half a sec!" as Ted jumped up. "You can't go to her looking like that!" with a meaning glance at Ted's thick untidy hair which looked like a hurrah's nest at the moment. When she was concentrating, she had a bad habit of running her fingers through it. It was naturally untidy and at the moment, she could have given points to Shock-Headed Peter.

"Oh, bother! I'd forgotten about my hair! It's the bane of my life! O.K., I'll tidy before I go. Thanks a lot for clearing up for me, Pen!" And Ted shot off to the Splashery to do what she could about it.

It was not much. It grew in an untidy way with a swirl from the crown of her head. After Christmas, her mother had taken a sudden whim and ordered her to grow it. At the moment, it just reached beyond her shoulders and as it was abnormally thick, it was impossible to plait it. Its springiness put paid to any hair ribbon or slide and she generally wore it with clips at each side which were supposed to keep it off her face and which never did for more than half-an-hour at a time. As a result it was forever in her eyes or her mouth and Matron had already ventilated her opinion of it to her.

"Wish I could shave it all off and wear a wig!" she grumbled to herself as she clipped back the side pieces. "There! It's as decent as it ever is."

She looked at herself in the mirror and made a face at her reflection. Then she set off for the study where she tapped at the door, wondering just *why* the Head wanted her in this "dilly-dally-duckling-come-and-be-killed" style. She didn't think it was for any sin, for her conscience was clear. Life had been much too full for her to have time to get into mischief.

Miss Annersley was seated at her desk, sipping coffee and trying to clear up some of the piles of correspondence while she waited for her newest pupil. Ted entered and bobbed the curtsy demanded of all the girls coming for interview with the Head.

Miss Annersley laid down her pen and gave the girl a genial smile. "Come along, Ted! Have you had your milk and biscuits yet?"

"Not yet; I thought I had to come at once," Ted explained. "I only stopped to tidy my hair."

Miss Annersley regarded the mop thoughtfully but said no more on that head.

"I see," she said. "Pull up that chair beside me and sit down. I'll try not to keep you long."

Greatly relieved, for *this* couldn't be the prelude to a row, Ted obeyed. Then she fixed her dark, intelligent eyes on Miss Annersley's fine face and waited.

"When you first came," the Head said, "we thought it best to try you in Inter V as it seemed probable that you would find the work of Vb too much for you and we didn't want you either to feel that you must work yourself into a series of headaches, or become discouraged and sit back saying, 'I can't!' But all this week, so I'm told, you've been surprising everyone who teaches you by the improved quality of your work. Now can you explain this?"

"We—we did lessons in Isolation," Ted said, stammering a little. "It was so awfully deadly having nothing much to do. And then Soeur Marie-Anne told us she had been going to teach before she became a nun and she would help us if we liked. I mean she set us work to do and corrected it. And when I couldn't get things, like some of the maths, Len showed me how. Rosamund showed me, too, and—and I got really interested. And—and it was quite true when I said I didn't know a word of German when I came. I honestly didn't, Miss Annersley. Only Len said we would talk it all our lesson time, and that was six hours every day but Sundays. And the lay-sister who looked after us was German, too, and we just *had* to talk it to her. Then, you know, Len seemed to know just what I found hardest and she helped me—and—and that's all."

"Not quite, I think. Len may have helped you—she means to teach when she has finished at the University and we all think she has a real gift for it—but all the help in the world couldn't have got you where you are now if you hadn't done your share and worked hard. And what I want to know, Ted, is this. Is this just a flash in the pan, the result of your being bored in Isolation? Or do you mean to go on as you've begun and work steadily all the time?"

Ted gasped. "I—why—I mean to go on working. I never have before," she added with innate honesty, "but now I've really got down to it, it's rather—well, fun."

"Yes, if you've never really enjoyed work before, I can imagine you would feel that way," the Head agreed.

"It's such a decent feeling when you've got your teeth into a really sticky problem and can worry it out for yourself," Ted said, startling herself by this confidence.

"I know. I'm glad you've discovered it for yourself. Well, now, Ted, I have a story to tell you and an offer to make to you." Miss Annersley glanced at the clock. "First, though, I think you had better have your lemonade and biscuits in here. Touch the bell, will you, dear?"

Ted got up and touched the bell and presently was sitting with her glass of lemonade and biscuits, listening with all her ears.

"You do know, don't you, that many of the girls are here because they have a relation at the Sanatorium? Last week we were asked to take a girl of your age who has only an aunt in all the world. The aunt has been ill and is coming to the San for treatment. Renée could be a boarder at her convent school in Brussels, but both she and the aunt would much rather she was close at hand in case of need. That being so, we have accepted her. But you see what this means, don't you? She must certainly go to Inter V. They have sent me examples of her work from the school and she couldn't touch Vb work. But, and it's a big but, Inter V has twenty-six girls already and we never like more than twenty-five in a form. If we move you up to Vb which has only twenty-four at present, it would have its full complement and would leave Inter V with just one girl too many which won't matter for one term."

"I see." Ted spoke because the Head had paused and was looking at her. "But, Miss Annersley, aren't there lots of girls who've been in Inter V all the year and who could be moved up even better than me?"

"Than I," please, Ted! It could be done, of course; but it will be easier to move you, a new girl, than one of those who have been in the form the whole year. This is revision term and any girl we moved up would certainly miss her chance of one of the school prizes because in set books such as literature and French and Latin, for instance she would be at a great disadvantage. If you go it will make no difference to you as you won't hope for form or exam or subject prizes when you have only just come. If you make good there, you will stay there and work with those who come up for the new year; but it might mean that you would be lower in form over the whole term than if we let you stay down. Now is that going to dishearten you and make you feel it isn't worth while to do your best?"

"No," Ted said instantly. "I'm sure it won't."

"Then would you like to try it? Of course, if we find that the work is too much for you, we must bring you down again. Health comes before even lessons every time in this school! But to judge by what I hear from the Staff, I think you can do it. Everyone seems to think that your form work is very much better than your entrance papers gave us any reason to expect. But," she added charitably, "they *were* a test exam and that very fact probably made it harder for you."

Ted said nothing, but she turned darkly red, for well she knew that it was nothing of the sort. If the truth were told, she had gone at those papers in a careless, slapdash way, not really caring in the least how she did them so long as she got them done. Miss Annersley laughed to herself, for it was no more than she had suspected. She said no more about it, however, but turned to things of more immediate interest.

"Very well, then. We'll take it as settled. You won't find it too easy in Vb, but you shall have extra coaching in your weaker subjects and with that *and* your own efforts you can manage. I don't really know you yet, Ted. Thanks to Len's butting in, there has been no chance. But I think you're a very clever girl who can do really well if only you will put your back into it. I'm hoping you will and so prove to us that we are right in putting you up. And now I want to speak about something else. My dear girl, is it really needful for you to go round looking as if you had been dragged through a hedge backwards?"

Ted gasped and reddened again. She had had to listen to strictures on her personal appearance all her life, but no one had ever spoken quite like this. From sheer amazement she said, "It's my hair. I just can't help it. Oh, Miss Annersley, *can't* I have it all cut off? It's the bane of my life!"

Miss Annersley gasped and then went off into a peal of laughter. "Oh, my dear girl, what a question to ask! Most certainly you mayn't! Your mother would be very angry with us if we took the law into our own hands in that fashion." She stood up and came to inspect the untidy mop more closely. "Yes, I see what you mean. Hair like yours can be a terrible nuisance. We must think it over and see what we can do to help you. I wonder if it would be any use to tie a snood round it to keep all those long ends out of your eyes? We must certainly do something or we shall have you developing a squint! Suppose we try now. Wait a moment!"

Flashing another smile at the stunned Ted, she left the room to return with a length of crimson ribbon and a brush and comb.

"Now let's see what I can do for you! Sit up and I'll play hairdresser."

Ted sat bolt upright, wondering if she were dreaming with her eyes open. The Head brushed and combed the thick hair until it gleamed and was perfectly smooth. She took it all back from Ted's face, securing the snood at the back with a firm knot. The two clips were fastened to hold the band in place and the hair very slightly loosened in front. Then she stood back and inspected her work with an approving nod.

"Yes, that's *much* better. The band won't slip; I'll guarantee my knots! How does it feel—comfortable?"

"I—I—I feel *cleaner*!" Ted said dazedly.

Miss Annersley's lovely laugh rang out. "The result of having all that mop out of your eyes and mouth! Matron must take you to Interlaken when she next goes to our hairdresser and get him to thin it thoroughly. When the really hot weather comes, you will find it painfully heating if we leave it. There goes the bell for the end of Break. Take your glass to the kitchen as you go. Oh! Before I forget! On Monday you will be excused the morning walk and may spend the time changing over to Vb. Don't forget to take your set books to stock-room. I'll let Miss Dene know before then and she will have the new ones ready for you."

"Yes, Miss Annersley." Ted halted there; then she asked half-shyly, "May I—may I tell the others?"

"Yes, but I rather think you'll find that some of them, at any rate, more than suspect already. By the way, you'd better ask one of Vb to stay from the walk on Monday and help you get settled. Let me know who it is before bedtime tomorrow and I'll excuse her. Now you *must* run and I must see what I can do with these letters."

Ted went to the door bearing her glass. She managed a bob before she went out, but then she cast rules to the winds and went scuttering down the corridors first to hand in her glass at the kitchen and then to go flying out to the garden in search of Len and Rosamund. She wanted them to be the first to hear her great news.

But as she went, new thoughts came to her. She had been inclined to be quaky when she went to the study, but it had been all right—*more* than all right! And what a *peach* of a Head Miss Annersley was! Fancy taking all that trouble over her hair!

"I'll jolly well prove to her that I'm grateful," Ted vowed inwardly as she came in sight of the tennis courts. "And that's *another* reason for keeping out of rows and doing my best. Oh, surely I can make good this time when I've had such a tremendous shove off on the right road!"

Then she had reached the courts and Len and Rosamund were charging down on her, wild with curiosity to know why the Head had wanted her. However, her changed appearance was the first thing to catch their eyes and with one voice they exclaimed, "Ted! What *have* you been doing to yourself? You look *different*!"

"Not me—the Head," Ted said, laughing from sheer happiness. "And I'm to go to your hairdresser with Matey and have chunks cut out of my hair because when it's *really* hot, it will be far too much for me! And what I want to know," she laughed again, "is what do you call *this* weather if not really hot?"

Chapter X
MARGOT

Len and Rosamund were delighted when they heard Ted's news, though both declared that they weren't surprised.

"We really did do something when we were in Isolation," Len remarked with a smirk of satisfaction. "It was jolly well worth it after all."

"And you know, Ted," Rosamund added rather more quietly, "you really have brains. You'll soon find your feet in Vb and then you'll go ahead."

Ted grinned. "Well, thanks a lot, both of you. I know I owe it to you two and especially Len. You won't mind my saying that, Ros, will you?"

"Why should I?" Rosamund demanded. "After all, I only helped with the German. Len gave you a lift in half-a-dozen things, didn't she? And if you're in the same form as us, we can both go on giving you tips when you need them."

"How frightfully decent of you!" Then she added in rather different tones, "But there's *one* thing that's bothering me a little."

"What's that?" Len asked.

"Well, what about the rest of Inter V? Quite a lot of them are jolly good and better than me in maths and so on. Won't they be rather mad that it's me that's been put up?"

As she made her highly ungrammatical statement, she watched their faces keenly. The Head had reminded her that there was the question of prizes to be considered, but grown-ups might overlook something that girls would feel.

"No fear!" Len said. "This is prize-giving term and anyone put up would lose her chance of anything like form or exam prize. If that's all that's wrong, you can take that worried look off your face. Most likely they'll be only too thankful that it's you who's been sent up and not them."

Ted's face cleared. "The Head did say something like that, but I wondered."

"Don't worry!" Rosamund said laughing. "No one likes to lose the chance of prizes by being put up in the last term of the year. I shouldn't myself. They're much more likely to be thankful it's you, as Len said."

"When are you coming to us?" Len asked. "I mean do you shift up today or do you wait till Monday?"

"Monday morning. I'm to miss the walk and move my things then and change my set books and things like that. The Head said I could ask someone to help me——"

"You'd better do it, Len," Rosamund said quickly. "I asked Joan Baker to be my partner on Monday and you know how touchy she can be."

Len nodded, a rather more serious look on her face. She had suddenly thought of someone else who was touchy. All the same—then she set it aside. "Will you have me, Ted? I'd love to help."

"If it won't upset your plans," Ted said quickly.

"Hadn't made any as it happens. O.K. That's settled, then. I say! There's the bell for walk! Are you coming with us or with Inter V?"

"The Head didn't say, only that I was to change my books on Monday. Which ought I to do, d'you think?"

Len looked at Rosamund. “What do you say, Ros? It’s a bit of a puzzle.”

Rosamund knitted her brows. “It certainly is. You wouldn’t like to go back to the study and ask, would you, Ted?”

Before Ted could reply, a fresh voice sounded behind them. “Now then, you three, why aren’t you getting ready for the walk?”

They swung round to meet the severely judicial gaze of the Head Girl.

“Oh, Mary-Lou! Just the person to know!” Len cried. “Look! Ted’s coming up to Vb on Monday, but the Head didn’t say a thing about which form she was to be with over the weekend. What do *you* think?”

“The Head said nothing about it?” Mary-Lou addressed Ted directly.

Ted shook her head. “She never mentioned it.”

“I expect she had so many other things to think about, she forgot,” said Mary-Lou, her eyes on Ted’s transformed head. “Congratulations on your promotion, by the way! I think the best thing will be for me to go and ask her while you three change your sandals and get your hats. I’ll tell you what she says as soon as I know myself. Now scram!”

“Oh, thanks a lot, Mary-Lou!” Len exclaimed. “Come on, folks! We’ll have to fly, whatever Ted has to do, or we’ll be late.”

Mary-Lou had vanished already and the three raced to the side-door and the Splashery where they found quite half the girls there. They were leaving quickly, however, to join up with the lines waiting for instructions, so it was easy for once to get into the Splashery and find their pegs and lockers. They changed into the stout sandals they wore for walks and put on the big hats so necessary against the blazing sun of Middle Europe at that time of year.

Pen was still there and as they came in, her eyes fell on Ted and the new coiffure. She gave an exclamation at the sight.

“Goodness, Ted! How different you look with your hair taken back like that! It does suit you. Honestly, you look *quite pretty!* Whose idea was it—Matey’s?”

Ted had gone crimson at the compliment. “*Ass!*” she muttered gruffly. “No, it was the Head’s. She says I’ve too much and I’m to go down with Matey some time and get it thinned. This is just for the time being. Shan’t I be glad, though, to be rid of some of it, anyhow!”

Len giggled. “You ought to have your head shaved and then the hair might grow in curly like Mary-Lou’s did.”^[5]

[5] Mary-Lou of the Chalet School.

Ted paused, her hat in her hands. “What *are* you talking about?”

“Mary-Lou’s hair. It used to be as straight as yours—she wore in two pigtails which she called ‘Kenwigses’—out of *Nicholas Nickleby*, you know. Then she had a most ghastly accident and they had to shave her head. When the hair grew again, it came in all curls like it is now and she’s kept it short ever since. Not,” Len continued as she went over to the mirror and set her hat on her own curly head, “that she didn’t rage when she first found out what they’d done to her. But when she found she’d got curls out of it, she piped down. I’ll tell you the whole yarn some time. Meanwhile, we’d better get cracking. Mary-Lou’s a poppet, but when she gives an order, you obey it if you know what’s good for you!”

Even with her more or less brief experience of the school itself, Ted had learned that it was usually better to fall into the clutches of the Staff than those of the prefects. She pulled on her hat with due care for her snood and followed Len out of the Splashery whence both Rosamund and Pen had vanished a minute before. As she passed the mirror, she took a quick glance at

herself and nearly gasped aloud at what she saw. Not only had taking her hair right off her face improved its shape and taken away the wedgelike effect, but she had lost the yellowish tinge she had always had. Her cheeks were pink and since she had had little reason for scowling this past five weeks or so, the lines were fading from between her eyebrows.

“Oh gosh!” she thought. “What’s *happened* to me?”

Mary-Lou was waiting at the door for them. “It’s O.K., Ted. The Head says you may as well begin as you are to go on and go with Vb today. They’re round at the front. Scoot and join them, you two. I’m coming in a moment—I’m on escort duty with your lot today.”

“Oh good!” Len said instantly.

Mary-Lou laughed. “Glad you’re so pleased. Ted, you had a partner for the Inter V walk, hadn’t you? You’d better go and break it gently to her that she can’t have you. Don’t stay nattering with her. Just break the news and then go on to Vb.”

“Partner with me!” Len shrieked after Ted as she ran off. Then, to Rosamund, “You don’t mind, do you, Ros? Just for the first walk as a Vb-ite!”

Rosamund laughed. “It wouldn’t matter if I did. I don’t, as it happens. Ricki Fry was partnering Joanna Kiefen, but poor Joanna has raging neuralgia and Matey’s sent her to San to Nurse for the day, so Ricki would have had to tag on to someone else, but now we can partner each other.”

“Did I hear you say Joanna had neuralgia?” Len asked. “Sure you don’t mean *toothache*?”

“Well, Ricki *told* me it was neuralgia,” Rosamund said doubtfully.

“Huh!” Len grunted, feeling with her tongue for a tooth of which she was nervous. “Let’s hope it is only that! Matey will hold a tooth inspection if she thinks it’s a tooth. I don’t mind Herr von Francius as a man, but as a dentist I loathe him!”

“Funk!” Rosamund laughed, even as Ted came flying back to join them.

“They’re all stunned with surprise!” she announced gaily. “It’s quite O.K. though. Pen and I were going together, but she’s taking Lisa Sybel who had no one. She wants to hear the whole yarn, though, when we get back. I had to tell her Mary-Lou had said I wasn’t to stop nattering about it.”

“Good!” Len said. “Ros is taking Rikki Fry because her proper partner’s got neuralgia, worse luck!”

“Hard luck for her.” Ted said as they went to take their places.

“If it only ends at that! If it turns out to be toothache, though, Matey will hold a tooth inspection and anyone who needs it will go down with her to Berne next day. Well, in that case, *you’d* go to the hairdresser, at any rate. Hope *your* teeth are all right?”

“They ought to be,” Ted said ruefully. “Cousin May took me to her dentist the week before school began and did I have a doing!”

“We missed these hols. Our crowd were all in France, staying with Tante Simone and she thought we’d been before we went there so she said nothing about it and nor did we. Matey’s safe to find something that needs doing if she has an inspection.” Len’s voice was equally rueful. “Oh, well, it can’t happen before Tuesday. I’ll forget about it and enjoy today. Better straighten our lines. I can see Mary-Lou and Josette tooling along. Mary-Lou’s bad enough, but Josette’s our cousin and she seems to think she ought to come down most heavily on us because we’re relations!”

“Are you? I didn’t know that,” Ted said as they straightened their lines.

“We are. Mamma and Auntie Madge are sisters and Auntie Madge is Lady Russell who started the school, so that makes us cousins. I say, Margot, you and Emmy had better get

decently into line. You know what Josette can be like!”

Margot, who was partnered by her boon companion, Emerence Hope, nudged Emerence further into the line and turned to stare at Ted. “Are you coming with *us*? But why? You’re Inter V.”

“She *was*. From now on, she’s Vb,” Len returned with a glance along the line as Mary-Lou, accompanied by their cousin Josette and Jessica Wayne of VIb came round the end of the hedge.

By that time, the line was as straight as could be expected and everyone was looking as good as in her lay.

Mary-Lou projected a grin at Josette. “Too good and pi to be true!” she observed. “Pity it never lasts! O.K., you people. We’re only waiting for Hilary and then we can get off. Where’s Con Maynard?”

“I’m here,” said a meek voice immediately behind Len and Ted.

“Matey says you haven’t been for your tonic and you have to go to her for it as soon as we get back. Why *didn’t* you go, you young goop? She’ll have something to say when she does see you.”

“It wasn’t my fault,” Con protested indignantly. “Herr Helfen turned up to give Joanna Kiefen an extra violin lesson and as she’s in San, he sent for me just as I was going to Matey and he kept me till the last minute.”

“And you thought you could skip that tonic and forgot to go,” Mary-Lou added acutely. “I know you, Con!”

Con’s round pink cheeks were scarlet. The tonic she had been ordered after her sleep-walking exploits not only tasted vile but *lingered*. She had not been sorry that Herr Helfen’s summons had come when it did. But trust Matey never to let you slip! She knew better than to say anything, however, and Mary-Lou, with an annoying grin, passed on to the head of the line.

At that moment, Inter V under the escort of Vi Lucy, Lesley Bethune and Barbara Chester marched swiftly past. Every head was turned as the girls of her ex-form looked at Ted and she was hot with blushes by the time the last of them had gone.

“Rubbernecks!” Len said, loudly enough to be heard by most of them. “Don’t you worry, Ted. I’ll bet they’re envying you, even though they wouldn’t thank anyone for bunging them up *this* term!”

“Your language!” Mary-Lou said in pained tones. “Honestly, Len, if you go on using such expressions, you’ll find yourself penniless in short order.”

“Here’s Hilary at last!” exclaimed Josette, breaking in on them. “I hope she’s been long enough! What on earth have you been doing, Hilary? We’re the last to go.”

Hilary Bennet had come tearing up. “Sorry, everyone!” she jerked breathlessly. “I was with Burnie, discussing the tennis Six and I simply couldn’t get away!”

“Oh, well, better late than never,” Mary-Lou said easily. “Ready, everyone? Lead on, then, Marie and Wanda!”

The leaders, two Swiss girls who had been chattering together in German, set off and the rest marched briskly after them. Jessica and Josette took their places about the middle of the line and Mary-Lou and Hilary brought up the rear.

“Where are we going?” Len demanded of Josette who was near them.

“Down to the ski-ing meadow and across and up the path to the herdsman’s shelf. Along there as far as the stream and down that path and round back to school by the road,” Josette

replied amiably. She was a tall, pretty girl—very pretty with her wavy black hair, blue eyes and pink-and-white complexion. She was also exceedingly clever, by far the cleverest of the Russell girls, for Sybil, now at St. Mildred's, was only average and Ailie, the youngest, was a tow-headed irresponsible who scrambled through her lessons as easily as she could manage.

"Oh, good!" Margot cried. "I love that walk and it's such fun seeing the cows and hearing their different bells ringing as they graze."

Emerence made a face. "I like the walk all right, but I *don't* like the cows!"

"Oh, don't be such an ass!" her bosom friend retorted. "They can't eat you and anyhow, they'll be right along at the further end of the shelf, I expect, and we turn halfway. I'm sorry, for I love them. They have such lovely soft eyes."

"Do cows wear bells in Switzerland?" Ted asked amazed.

"Of course they do! Didn't you know that?" Margot asked scornfully.

"Seeing this is Ted's first visit to Switzerland and anyhow, she's spent most of the time in Isolation, it's hardly surprising she didn't," Len put in quickly.

Margot glanced round at her sister. "She could have read about it in books." Then she turned back to embark on a gossip with Emerence and took no further notice of the pair behind them. Con and her partner, Jo Scott, were discussing the question of how soon the school would begin to go down to Lake Thun for swimming and boating and Len, talking over her shoulder, joined in and dragged Ted into the chatter. That young woman was delighted to learn that during the summer term it was the custom for them to go down to the lake two or three times a week on fine afternoons and enjoy themselves in and on the water. She had not done much rowing, but her last school had had its own swimming bath and she knew she was good. She had wondered what would happen up here at the Platz. The news that they used Lake Thun was a joy to her, for she missed her swimming.

"Do you swim or row?" Con asked as they reached the meadow.

"Swim, but I'm not much on rowing," Ted owned. "I'd like to learn, though. What happens to our afternoon lessons when we're down there?"

"Cut early morning walk and start lessons half-an-hour earlier. Things like sewing and games and art come on the other afternoons and we're always back in time for prep which is cut during the hot weather, anyhow. We take cakes and fruit and rolls with us and there's a place where we can get lemonade or coffee or things like that. Anyhow, this is revision term, so prep doesn't matter quite so much unless you're taking one of the public exams."

"Right turn, everyone!" Mary-Lou's clear voice rang out above the chatter.

They turned and marched across the rough pasture to where the mountain began to rise with a belt of pines growing up the slopes. There, they might break ranks and they climbed the wide path in twos and threes, all talking hard, since Saturday was very much a go-as-you-please day, once it came to break. The four Sixth form girls kept behind the rest, ready to act as whippers-in if anyone strayed too far from the path, and talked tennis with vim and point. Len and Ted, Con and Jo kept together and, for once in a way, Margot declined to go off alone with Emerence and tagged on to their group.

She was, in many ways, the most difficult of the Maynard children. As a tiny, she had had a violent temper and it had taken great firmness and careful training to teach her that she *must* control it. She was also an imp of mischief and had involved herself and her friends in a good many alarms. She had been struggling to overcome this tendency for the past year or two and was certainly much better. Brilliantly clever when she chose, she hated working steadily. As she said, she liked "to go a bust" and then rest on her oars for a while. It had taken the whole

of her nearly nine years at school to persuade her that until she stopped being satisfied with this sort of thing, she could never hope to be with her sisters in form. In fact, she had only accomplished it lately.

Two years in Canada with her Aunt Madge had given her a certain amount of surface sophistication and so far, she had been content to make her closest friend of Emerence Hope, one of the naughtiest girls in the annals of a school which had never lacked its full share of sinners. No one had quite liked it, but there was nothing to be done about it. As the Head had said, you couldn't interfere with their friendships.

Len and Con were not nearly so complex. Len was a clever, hard-working girl. Her position as eldest of the family had developed her sense of responsibility. She was naturally generous and unselfish and when they were younger, Joey had often had to interfere so that Len should have her fair share of whatever was going. For a good many years she had been constant with being friendly with most folk. Then she had formed friendships with Prunella Davies and, later, with Rosamund Lilley. Prunella was much older and a prefect now, so the friendship was not so close as it might have been; and Rosamund, youngest of a family of six, was a quiet character. The pair had had a chummery of contented peace, for they thought alike in many ways and neither was over-demonstrative.

Margot had been none too pleased about it, for she liked being the centre of attraction wherever she was and was inclined to be jealous of her eldest sister's affections. When Len had become friendly with Prunella, Margot had watched it gloomily, but said nothing. She liked it even less when her sister had added Rosamund Lilley to her closest circle. It made no matter that she herself had Emerence. She felt that Len should be contented with her family and just a few outside chums who were kept at a little distance. She was clever enough to know that it was all wrong and sometimes she fought it. More often she did not.

Con was another story. She had inherited her mother's writing gifts to the full and until lately, had preferred her story-book folk to anyone but her own people. But now that she was fourteen, Con had begun to feel a lack and latterly, she and Jo Scott had shown signs of chumming up. Margot had not noticed that yet. What would happen when she did, remained to be seen. But she was very much alive to Len's preferences and was far from pleased to think that in the new girl it looked as if her eldest sister was going to find yet another pal.

Len, with her mother's tricks for "getting into the skins" of other folk, saw the signs and felt alarmed. She had liked Ted from the first and during the weeks of quarantine, they had got to know each other much better than if they had only met during school hours. She felt, though she could never have said why, that the new girl was on her guard at present. If Margot started any spats, there would be trouble.

"Oh, my *goodness!*" she thought as they climbed up the path. "What on earth shall I do? I like Ted and I hope we're going to be real friends like Mamma and the aunts. I'd like us and Ros and Jo all to be pals like that. But if Margot's going to get her monkey up, it's going to make things jolly difficult all round. And I've a feeling that Ted might go off if there were any fusses. I *wish* Margot wouldn't mind so much when I have a chum! She'd make row enough if any of us started in about her palling with Emmy!"

There was nothing she could do about it so far as she could see. Neither could she take the trouble to her mother as she might have done at another time. Their father had warned all three that Mamma was not to be worried. She had had quite enough already this year, what with Naomi's accident last term^[6] and the smallpox scare this! Anything to do with Margot would certainly be a worry, so she must just keep it to herself for the present at any rate.

[6] Trials for the Chalet School.

However Con chose to begin to talk about the school magazine just then. She herself was writing a short story for *The Chaletian* and Jo was doing what she could with a description of Mombasa which she had visited. Ted, who so far had not aspired to print, was persuaded to own that in her off times, she scribbled adventure stories. The rest instantly declared that she must do one for the magazine.

“Of course, it mayn’t be accepted, but it comes from the form and shows that we’re keen,” Con said severely when Ted protested that she couldn’t produce anything good enough. “That’s what matters most. You think up something, Ted, and have it ready by half-term. That’s when the things have to be in by.”

“Well, I’ll try if you really want me to, but I bet it’ll be chucked out,” Ted said dubiously.

“I’ll bet it won’t!” Emerence cried. “An adventure story’ll be a change from the usual stuffy things they have in, anyhow!”

Margot had forgotten her jealous feelings for the moment. “You do!” she cried eagerly. “Wouldn’t it be wizard if our form topped the list for entries? Oh, yes, Ted, you simply must have a go at it! We’ll vet it for you when it’s finished and tell you if we think it has a chance,” she added kindly.

“Well, if you think it ’ud be all right,” Ted said slowly; but her eyes were shining and her cheeks flushed. Somehow, she felt more one with them than she had ever felt at any other school.

They spent the rest of the walk in discussing Ted’s future story and it passed off quite gaily. But Len was not deceived. She decided to keep her weather eye open for trouble. More, she did not see how she could do at present.

Chapter XI
MARY-LOU BUTTS IN

“Len, will you partner me for the walk tomorrow morning?”

“Sorry. I’m afraid I can’t!”

“Why ever not?”

“Because *Auntie Hilda*”—Len laid heavy stress on the name—“has told me that I’m to miss the walk for once and help Ted Grantley move all her books and things from Inter V to Vb. I’ll fix up with you for Tuesday, if you like.”

“I’m booked with Francie Wilford for Tuesday. Can’t someone else take on Ted Grantley? She isn’t a V.I.P., is she?” Margot’s blue eyes suddenly flamed with a light her sister knew and dreaded. “Plenty of other folk to hold her hand! *I* want you and I want you tomorrow.”

“You know as well as I do that when Auntie Hilda gives an order you’ve nothing to do but obey it. I’m awfully sorry, Margot, but I can’t manage it. Can’t you get Francie to swop days with someone else for once? I’m booked up every day this week except Tuesday, as it happens.”

“No, I can’t,” Margot replied shortly. “It’s the one day Francie has free this week. I kept Monday especially for you and I think you might arrange it somehow. You could if you tried. Ask Auntie Hilda——”

“I can see myself!” Len spoke with conviction. “How much d’you think would be left of me after I’d tried *that* on? It’s no use, Margot. I’d have come if it had been anything else—or *pretty* well anything else,” she added cautiously. “If you haven’t a partner, what about Con? You aren’t booked, are you, Con?” She turned to the third triplet who had been sprawled full length on the rug they were sharing, buried fathoms deep in *The Black Riders*, and paying no attention to her sisters’ talk.

At the sound of her own name, she lifted her dark eyes from the page and asked vaguely, “Did you want anything?”

“I only asked if you could partner Margot tomorrow morning on the walk. I can’t. Auntie Hilda’s snaffled me to help Ted Grantley change forms and said we were to miss the walk tomorrow and get it done then before school begins.”

“I’m not booked so far,” Con said, closing her book and giving her mind to the matter. “Betty Landon and I were booked and then her folk arrived yesterday and took her off till Monday morning, so she’s out. That’ll be all right, Margot.”

But if Len and Con thought that settled the matter, Margot soon showed them it had done nothing of the kind. She flushed to the roots of her red-gold hair and said, “I can fix up my own walk partners, thank you! I wanted *you* Len. I’m afraid Con won’t do. Anyhow, if I can’t have you, there’s no need for you to try hunting up someone for me. I’ll see to it myself, thank you!” She got up as she spoke and picked up her book. With a final glare at Len, she stalked off, her back very straight and her head high in the air.

Con stared after her with dismay in her face. “Oh, goodness! What’s eating her now? Why on earth should she make so much fuss because you can’t partner her in the morning? She knows quite well you can’t go to Auntie Hilda about it. In school, she’s the Head and finish! What’s it all in aid of? That’s what I want to know!”

Len sat up, curling her long legs under her. “I’m awfully afraid that devil of hers is talking to her and she’s listening. But what can I do? As you say, in school, Auntie Hilda is the Head and not even for Margot—or you either, if it comes to that—am I going to get across her if I can help it. I’d like to live a little longer, thank you!”

“Gone off pop over it, hasn’t she?” Con was wide awake for once. She rolled over on to her face, laying her book aside, and propped her pointed chin in her hands. “It’s awkward, isn’t it? What are you doing about it?”

“Nothing! What could I do? The only thing is to wait and see what happens. But I do hope Margot won’t go blowing her top to Ted.” Len frowned as she spoke.

“Anything I can do to help?”

“I don’t see what you can do. I was an ass, of course, to propose anyone else for her partner when I’d told her I couldn’t manage it myself. I might have known she’d blow up about it!” Len spoke gloomily.

Con shook her head. “You’re wrong there. It’s ages since Margot went pop over things—not since Mary-Lou had that ghastly accident.^[7] I don’t see how you could foresee that she’d do it at just this time.” She paused and hesitated before she went on. “I suppose I couldn’t go and ask Auntie Hilda if it would be all right if I helped Ted instead of you? What d’you think?”

[7] Mary-Lou of the Chalet School.

Len stared at her. “You must have a touch of the sun! What ever reason could you give? I don’t see Auntie Hilda agreeing to your doing it because Margot wants me for a partner and looks like raising a fuss if she doesn’t get me. Come to that, if she really wants me so badly, why can’t she put Francie off on the Tuesday for once? Francie wouldn’t mind.”

“I can guess,” Con suddenly looked very wise as she sat up, crossed her ankles and gripped one with either hand.

Len looked at her. Suddenly she coloured. “*Oh!* Do you mean—? Well, yes, I expect you’re right. Oh, what a mess-up! If it’s that way, we may look out for squalls. I haven’t forgotten what she was like when Ros and I first became chummy.”

“She still doesn’t like Ros awfully much,” Con said, pushing back her heavy fringe from her hot face.

“I know it! Oh, Con, I hope to goodness you’re wrong!”

“Why are you so revved up about it?” Con asked curiously.

“Well—but I may be all wrong, of course, so don’t breathe a word to anyone else—but I have an idea that just before she came here, Ted wasn’t having a very good time, and she’s still sore about it in spots. She’s got a temper—you’ve only got to look at her to know *that!*—and if Margot starts in on her——”

“Hair and skulls will fly!” Con said pensively. “No, we certainly don’t want that to happen. Besides, if it’s really Margot’s devil that’s got hold of her again, she may say or do anything. Auntie Hilda’s awfully patient, but she only puts up with so much. If Margot really gets going, she never knows where to end. And you know, Len, if she got into a really bad row at school, it would worry Mamma horribly and Papa said she wasn’t to be worried. Besides, anyhow, Margot herself would get it in the neck! She might even be sent back to Inter V and you know how much she’d like that! We’ll just have to do something about it—though I can’t see what!” she finished, looking harassed.

“Neither can I. And here’s another thing. If there’s any trouble with Ted, *she* might be sent down and I’m certain she’d be frightfully upset. We’ve got to do something about it before anyone can get going. Only I’m like you; I don’t see just what we can do. No good talking to Margot. She really would fly up!”

“Isn’t it a *mess*?” Con spoke with entire conviction.

“What’s the trouble, you two? You look as if you had the cares of the nation on your shoulders!” Mary-Lou had been passing and had noticed the worried faces of the pair. It was not in her to let it go at that and she had crossed the grass and was standing, looking down at them with dancing blue eyes. She dropped down beside them and mopped her face. “What a scorcher of a day! Much too hot for any enormous problems! Tell me what’s wrong.”

It was blazingly hot. So hot, in fact, that the girls had been kept at home where they had their own private services instead of going to the two churches where they usually worshipped. Miss Annersley had refused to allow them to tackle the walk along the blindingly white road where there was little or no shade. Next term, it was to be hoped that the two little chapels being erected to celebrate the school’s coming-of-age the previous summer, could be dedicated and put into use; but for this term, at any rate, there was no such hope.

Mittagessen had been salad and cold meat instead of the roast, stuffed veal that had been ordered the day before; afterwards, the Juniors had been sent to undress and lie on their beds in their dressing-gowns while one of their mistresses read aloud to them, and the rest had been ordered to seek the shadiest corners of the gardens and rest there. If it was cooler after Kaffee und Kuchen, they might have their walk then. At present, the Head laid an embargo on all unnecessary exercise.

Mary-Lou had been stretched full length in a hammock among her peers when she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to drop her home letters into the post-box in the entrance hall. Grumbling bitterly at her own stupidity she had rolled out and sauntered slowly towards the building to repair her carelessness when she had been attracted by the sight of Len and Con looking as if the world was coming to an end. Being, as Jack Maynard had once declared, a butter-in second only to his own wife, she had promptly altered course and come to make inquiries.

As neither answered her at once, she spoke again. “Anything I can do for you?”

“I don’t see how you can,” Len said slowly while Con looked at the Head Girl with hope coming to her eyes.

“You never know! Where’s your third, by the way. I thought you three came off together?”

“So we did. Margot went off a few minutes ago,” Con told her.

Mary-Lou shot a quick glance at her. So Margot was partly the cause—or even wholly? She must go carefully. The triplets were very loyal to each other, even though they might have quite fierce spats among themselves at times. But she was a keen-eyed young woman and during the past week, she had noticed one or two things. She began to feel her way carefully.

“Where’s Ted Grantley?” she asked.

“Sharing the hammock over there with Ros,” Len said, nodding towards one of the standing-hammocks which had been set under a cluster of silver birches. “She was all in, not being accustomed to heat of this kind. Ros had bagged the hammock, anyhow, so she asked Ted to share it with her as she thought it might be cooler than anywhere else.”

“Are Ted and Rosamund getting friendly, then?” Mary-Lou asked. “I’m glad to hear that. Ros has always rather stood alone, except for you, of course, and I’ve been sorry for her. One

of the best parts of school is the pals you make there. I ought to know! Look at our Gang! We've rather broken up *as a gang* nowadays, but we're still matey."

"Like Mamma and the aunts," Con said. "They've been a quartette ever since the word 'Go' and though they can't often meet, they're still pals. But Mary-Lou," she fixed her eyes on Mary-Lou's, "everyone isn't like that. I don't think *I* am. I'm pally with lots of people, but I haven't anyone special like you lot, or Mamma and the others, or Margot and Emerence. Somehow, I've never wanted it. Do you think there's anything wrong with me?" She looked anxious as she waited for the Head Girl's verdict.

"Good gracious, no!" Mary-Lou cried. "But I'll tell you what I think about it. In one way, you three were rather handicapped at first for that sort of thing. You began by being three instead of just one. When I first remember you, you were always stuck together like clams—or do I mean barnacles?"

"But how could that handicap us?" Len demanded, knitting her brows.

"Easily! It meant that all your early years you were enough for each other. You didn't *want* any outside friends. Then Margot went to Canada with Auntie Madge and that made a big break. In fact, it shook you apart.^[8]"

[8] The Chalet School and the Island.

Con nodded. "That's true, of course. Margot was there a whole year before the rest of us went. She'd gone to La Sagesse and when we got there, we found she'd got mixed up with quite a bunch of people and—well somehow it's never been quite the same thing since. Of course, *we* made friends there, too; but it wasn't Cordélie and Marie-Adeläide that made the difference. It was Margot herself."

"Well, of course. You two still had each other in England, but Margot was alone and had to stand on her own feet without you to back her up. It was bound to make a big difference in her."

"We didn't think of that—then," Len said abruptly. "It's only this last year that I've understood why she seemed so—changed and—well—not quite one of us in some ways."

Con continued in her rather sleepy, placid way. "You see, Mary-Lou, it made Margot—sort of—*looser* in our bunch. And then we went, too, and she—well, after the first, it often puzzled me. And when we came out here and she got so chummy with Emmy Hope, she stood more away from us than ever."

"She was chummy with young Emmy before ever we came to the Platz," Mary-Lou said with a grin. "They practically rushed on each other the first moment they met.^[9] Deep calling to deep, I imagine!"

[9] Changes for the Chalet School.

"I don't know about that," Con went on. "The thing is that now Len is making friends—she's got Prunella, though she's more or less in the background, now she's a pree, and then Ros. And now," she smiled at her triplet, "I rather think there's going to be Ted. So you see, it's only me that's standing out from things like that."

Mary-Lou gasped. "Heavens! I'd no idea you dug down like that!" She gave Con a curious look. "Of course, at fourteen and a half, it's what you ought to be doing. As for the pals question, I'll tell you what I think. You've had what the other two haven't had—your story-book people. I rather think that's what's helped to keep you from wanting ordinary friends. But if you can see it for yourself, then you must be waking up to the need for human friends as well. We all ought to have them, you know. We need them or we don't grow properly."

Len, who had been sprawling, sat up. “Then you do think it’s right for us to go out to other people?”

“Of course! That’s one reason why we’re put into the world. No one can live entirely to herself.” Mary-Lou’s eyes searched Len’s flushed face with interest. “*You* won’t be able to help yourself,” she said suddenly. “You’re awfully like Auntie Joey that way and she makes friends with anyone and everyone. I wonder if you’ll understand me when I say that each of you three seems to have taken on one special side of her character. Con certainly has her imagination and her gift for writing. Margot seems to have all her mischief—and, judging by all the yarns that go round about her schooldays, I should say she never lacked for that,” she added with a giggle. “As for you, Len, you have her feeling for people and for helping out. You’ll go on stretching out to other folk, you know, and you’ll be completely mad if you try to sit on it. It’s a gift like everything else and your job is to develop it, not suppress it.”

“You’re right,” Con said with unusual decision for her. “We’re all willing to help other people, but mostly it has to be pointed out to us. Len sees what needs doing and sails in and does it.”

“I know. She always did, even when you three were just tiny kids.” Mary-Lou hesitated a moment. Then she asked bluntly, “Is Margot objecting to Len having friends? I can see that she might, of course.”

“I don’t think she quite likes it,” Len said carefully.

Con broke in. “Margot’s my triplet and I love her and Len almost more than anyone else in the world. *We belong!* But I’ve got to say it, for Len won’t. Margot is jealous. She doesn’t like us to like other people. She has Emmy for herself, but she doesn’t like it if Len has someone and I don’t think she plays fair.”

Len darted a look of reproach at her triplet. She had done her best to keep this failing of Margot’s out of it. But you never knew what Con was going to say next. Anyhow, it *was* only to Mary-Lou. Con paid no attention. She was sitting with great dark eyes fixed on the Head Girl’s face, waiting for a comment.

“Poor Margot!” Mary-Lou said gravely. “She’s going to make herself very miserable unless she takes hold of herself. Besides, she’s got it all wrong. You *can’t* keep anyone entirely to yourself. You’ve got to share them. Gran told me that years ago when I was younger than you two.^[10] I didn’t understand then—she said I wouldn’t. But she told me to remember it and I have, and now I know she was right. Being jealous and possessive isn’t really loving people. What’s more, it’s downright selfish. In the end, you lose your friends by it.”

[10] Three Go to the Chalet School.

“But what can we *do*?” burst out Len.

“First, remember that you *are* triplets and let Margot see that you feel it and know it for a strong bond between you. Secondly, have your special friends, whatever she may say or do. You musn’t give in about that. You needn’t be always pushing them down her throat but make her understand that you claim the same right to pals as she has. Finally, if things get really bad, ask if you can go to Aunt Joey—oh, but you musn’t! Not yet, anyhow. Well, come to me if you like and I’ll do my best. Saints can’t do more! Now I must fly and put my letters in the box or the family will curse me good and hearty when they don’t get anything till the end of the week.”

She jumped up and went off and the two left behind, looked at each other. They were aware of snags of which Mary-Lou knew nothing.

“I wish she’d talk to *Margot!*” Con sighed at last.

“It might be better if she could talk to Ted,” Len said slowly. “However, we can’t exactly ask her to do that. We’ll just have to wait. Let’s hope the devil leaves Margot alone when she’s had time to think it over.”

But there didn’t seem to be much reason for the hope. Margot had all too clearly been in one of her worst moods when she had marched off and her sisters shivered when they thought what that might mean presently.

Chapter XII
MARGOT'S DEVIL TAKES CHARGE

Margot had certainly been in her worst mood when she left her sisters so abruptly. It was a long time since she had felt like this, though it had happened often in her early days. Joey and Jack had always known that she was the most difficult of their children. Her extreme delicacy as a baby and small child had made things harder. Jack had put a stop to her fits of wild rage and screaming when Joey's sending to bed had failed. *He* had administered one or two well-deserved spankings, and she had learned to control herself. But she had always been selfish and egotistical, ready to claim the best for herself and unable to see why she shouldn't have it, even if it meant other people having to do without. Allied to this was a pride that loathed apologising and this had been some help later on in keeping her from the blatant shows of egotism she had indulged as a small girl. Joey had always insisted on a full apology and Margot would have preferred the soundest of spankings to that.

Two years in Canada where children are much more independent and grow up earlier than English children had given her surface grown-upness. Underneath, however, lay a childish, not to say babyish determination to get her own way and a total inability to see why she should ever give way to others. All this had come up to the top this afternoon and she was seething as she stalked off.

Very early in life, she had produced "my devil" on whom she blamed all her lapses with a matter-of-factness that sometimes had its funny side. The family had had to accept him and his "whisperings" to which she listened far too often, though since Mary-Lou's accident which Len had mentioned to Ted, he had not come up at all. But her smooth selfishness was something that she had so far failed to recognise for yet another of his temptings and it was as bad as ever.

It would have been a relief to her to be able to let go and fling herself down kicking and screaming with rage, but at fourteen and a half, such conduct would be undignified and Margot had a strong sense of dignity. That was one reason why she left her sisters. If she stayed, she felt sure she couldn't help breaking out.

It was also the reason why she ignored the others when they called her to come and join them. Margot was a popular young person with a good many of her kind for as long as things went her way, she was a delightful companion. She didn't feel like that just now. The only safety lay in flight and solitude. She chose the one place where she thought she would be alone—the garden at Freudesheim. Jack had had a gate set in the hedge dividing their own grounds from the school's and Margot had a hidey hole not too far from it which so far no one else knew about. It meant breaking rules for they were not supposed to leave the school premises, but she rather thought she could get away with that. Anyway, it was better to break such a rule than go up in smoke as she might do at any minute.

She slipped through the gateway, turned off to the left, and made her way along a narrow path to a tangle of bushes. She wriggled through into the centre and gave herself up to the fight with her temper. It ended in a burst of tears, but they didn't last long. When she had mopped her eyes for the last time, the devil had been put into his proper place for the present and she felt better. She rolled over on to her back and lay staring up dreamily at the glimpses of blue sky through the branches.

In their spare time, Joey and Jack had turned what had been a huge cabbage patch into a rose garden. Jack had had it dug out to a depth of about six feet and then the pair of them had turned it into a rose paradise through the years they had been there. It was a favoured stamping-ground with Joey and her friends for, thanks to its being sunk, it was comparatively cool in hot weather and was sheltered from the wind as well.

On this fateful afternoon, Rosalie Dene had come to rest and relax with her old friend. The standing-hammock had been set not far from the bushes, together with a sturdy rustic table, already laid for "English tea". Anna had begged leave to take the small fry with her to a farm where she had been invited for coffee and Joey had agreed at once. She knew the people and knew that the twins and Cecil would not be given anything likely to upset them. June was just round the corner and she was feeling the great heat more than a little. An afternoon spent with Rosalie and without having to worry over the small folk would be a real rest. They had taken the family pet, Bruno, Joey's St. Bernard, with them. Jack Maynard was asleep in a hammock at the front of the house and was snoring gently and beatifically. He had had several broken nights lately and was now making up for lost time.

Margot, turning drowsy in the heart of her bushes, was aroused by the voices of her mother and "Auntie Rosalie" and nearly squeaked with horror! She knew what would happen if they caught her there! She was just preparing to crawl out as noiselessly as she could, when Joey's voice came clearly to her and the sentence she overheard checked her at once.

"I'm so glad Ted is settling down so well, poor lamb! After being expelled three times you might have expected fireworks. As it is, she seems to have really turned over a new leaf! I'm so very glad!"

"I think she's settling down nicely," Rosalie said. "She's doing steady work and now she seems to be making friends."

"Oh, who?"

"The two girls of her own age or thereabouts I should have chosen first for the job—Rosamund Lilley and your own Len."

Her mother's statement and then Miss Dene's made Margot forget for the moment that she was eavesdropping. Ted Grantley had been expelled from *three* schools! This was something she must find out about. It must be attended to at once! With a little chuckle of triumph, her devil came flying back to hug her firmly and assure her that it was her duty to do so. Her victory over him had not discouraged him. He had only been waiting for an opening and here it was!

Margot, her jealousy of the friendship between Ted and Len flooding her anew, forgot that she had promised solemnly that she would try to fight him; forgot that she was doing something that not only her family but the whole school would condemn; forgot everything, in fact, except that here seemed to be a handle she could use against the girl who was stealing some of her sister's affection from her. She wriggled as near to the edge of the rose-garden as she could and listened with all her ears.

"Oh, well," Joey said cheerfully, "that was to be expected if you ask me. Those three were simply flung into each other's arms by the smallpox business. They must have emerged from it either loving or hating each other. I'm glad it's the first and not the second. And I think it speaks well for Ted that those two like her!"

"I agree with you. For their age, they're quite good judges of character. Hilda says that they are the best influences she could have," Rosalie said. "It's done her all the good in the world! In fact she's done so well that now we've been asked to take Renée Touvet, poor child,

at almost a moment's notice, Ted has been sent up to Vb. Renée couldn't touch their work and everyone seems to think that Ted can. Len would appear to have taught her a good deal during those weeks."

"Oh, that child's a born teacher," Joey said complacently. "I'm glad she's chosen it for her career, for I think she'll do really well—an inheritance from *me*, I'd have you note."

"From you? Talk sense!"

"Certainly from me! Didn't I give Polly Heriot a shove up in modern history methods ages ago?^[11] And what about the time when Hilda and the other three were all laid out by that motor-coach accident?^[12] Did I or did I not undertake junior Latin? And Stephen only a baby to complicate matters!"

[11] Jo Returns to the Chalet School.

[12] Gay from China.

"I'd forgotten about all that. O.K., Joey, I'll take that back. You *can* teach—your own subjects, anyhow."

"Thank you! I won't get up and curtsy—too hot. You must take the will for the deed. And now about Ted! I wish I'd been able to have her over here, but as things are, it just isn't possible. July isn't very far off and you never know! My triplets were early birds and so was Charles *and* the twins. *They* were expected to be late October babies and they came along the first week in September. Don't be surprised if we have a second birthday to celebrate in June hereafter."

"It would be exactly like you! You're all right, aren't you?"

"Perfectly, except for the heat. Leave it! Let's get back to Ted. Has anyone done anything about her appearance *yet!* *No* girl could be expected to give her mind to lessons who is allowed to go about looking like a little freak! If she were mine, I'd have that awful mop of hair cropped and I'd do something about her complexion, too!"

"Good gracious, Joey! It isn't like you to make a fuss over looks."

"If that idiot mother of Ted's had only set her mind to it, I'm sure she could have done something about it. I know the poor kid has the oddest set of features—that tiny nose and huge mouth and those heavy eyebrows! Really, between them and her hair the only times I've ever seen her, I thought she looked a most hairy specimen altogether and it *can't* be necessary!"

Rosalie laughed. "Hilda has done something about her hair, anyhow. She's made her take it all back from her face and wear a snood round it and it certainly has made an improvement. She's to go to Herr Drucker at the first opportunity and have it thinned out. I don't know what you can do about her eyebrows. I suppose you don't advise us to have them plucked—at *her* age?"

"Don't suppose she'll need it now. Good for Hilda!"

The bell ringing to summon people to the school to carry out their Kaffee und Kuchen recalled naughty Margot to the time. She dared not be any later than she could help though she was dying to hear more. It was out of the question, however. She squirmed her way out of the bushes as quietly as she could and even so had a nasty shock when she heard her mother remark, "Is there a cat or a dog or something in the garden? I'm sure I heard something in the bushes."

Margot slid down to the path and scuttled along it on tiptoe. Not until she was safely in the school grounds again did she dare to draw a full breath. However, for once Nemesis did not fall on her—then. It was a pity. Things might have been different all round if she had been

caught just then. As it was, she was able to join Vb and when Len saw her next, it was with a big basket of bread twists in her hands. She grinned at her sister when they met and, apart from being rather quieter than usual, both Len and Con were thankful to see that she seemed to have recovered herself.

As the meal ended, Matron arrived among them. She glanced round for silence and when she got it, issued a fiat. "All girls who feel tired with the heat are to stay quietly in the garden. Those who feel fit, may go for a stroll but you are not to go more than a mile in any direction. Heat like this may end in a thunder-storm and there's no point in having an army of half-drowned rats in the school."

Len stood up. "Please, Matron, may we three go and ask how Mamma is?"

"One of you may," Matron replied, much to Margot's relief. She had no wish to face her mother at present. "Settle it among yourselves which goes. The other two may go some time during the week. Any more questions?"

There were none. She left them, and most of them revived by the permission for a stroll, jumped up and began to carry the china and baskets back to the house.

"Feel like a stroll?" Rosamund asked Ted.

Ted shook her head. "Do you mind awfully, Ros? I feel as if I'd been to the wash and come back unstarched. This heat is ghastly!"

"You do look rather limp," Rosamund agreed. "I'd snaffle the hammock again if I were you and keep quiet. I must say," she added, glancing up at the sky, "that I don't see the first sign of Matey's thunder-storm, but she's probably right for all that. If it comes, it'll probably cool the atmosphere, anyhow. O.K., I'll go with some of the others. Have you plenty to read?"

"Yes, thanks. Len lent me one of her mother's books yesterday—*Cecily Holds the Fort*. I've never read it and I like it as far as I've gone. Don't you worry about me. I'll be all right." She concluded with a brilliant smile which transformed her face so that Rosamund went off thinking that Ted wasn't really plain at all when you got down to it.

Unaware of this, Ted made for the hammock and her book while Len called her sisters and asked anxiously, "Which of us shall go to ask about Mamma?"

"Either of you," Margot said quickly. "I'm going with Emmy. What about you, Len? You've had very little of her this term, thanks to the smallpox scare."

"Yes," Con agreed. "If Margot is going off with Emmy, I'll come to the gate with you and wait while you go and ask, Len, and then we could do a saunter together. You're sure you don't mind, Margot?"

"Not in the least," Margot said nonchalantly. "Give her my love, Len, and say I hope she isn't reduced to a grease-spot."

She fled after that. She felt quite unable to meet her sisters' eyes. As for them, they stared after her. Then Len said thankfully, "She's all right again, thank goodness! It must have been the heat."

"I expect it was," Con assented. "Thank goodness she's got over it. I really did think she was going right up the wall!"

Margot contrived to keep away from the other pair for the remainder of the evening. They knew nothing of her doings as she was well aware, but something made it impossible for her to be with them and chatter as usual. Besides, she was rather afraid of Len. That young woman had an uncanny gift for almost reading the thoughts of both herself and Con. Margot wanted no one to know the thoughts she was having at present and certainly not either of her sisters!

Bedtime came sooner than usual that night, for Matron's storm had not yet arrived, though there was a breathless hush which the old hands recognised. The thunder might come during the night, so the girls were sent off to get what sleep they might.

Margot said goodnight to her pair and hurried to her dormitory where she made all haste over her undressing. She splashed hurriedly in the cool water, gave her head a few pats with her hairbrush, but though she knelt down by her bed from sheer force of habit, she remained dumb. Not even a parrot repetition of her prayers would cross her lips. She knew well enough that she had been thoroughly dishonourable when she had listened in to that talk in the rose-garden. She was deliberately planning to use what she had heard to spoil another girl's happiness though she knew that it was a wrong thing to do. *And* she was going to upset her own sister's pleasure in her new friend. Her devil was having his own way with her at present, but even he could not bring her to a sin of what she felt to be blasphemy.

After a minute or two, she got up from her knees, set her window wide open and pulled off all the bedclothes but the top sheet. Then she lay down and tried vainly to go to sleep. She could hear the others following her example and presently, the dormitory was quite quiet. Then she bunched up her pillow, sat up and began to think things out.

How could she best use what she had overheard? She must be careful, for she certainly didn't want her mother to know what she had been doing. It would be bad enough if either Len or Con found out; but if Mother knew, it would be ten times worse. As for *Father*—Margot positively shuddered as she thought of what *his* reactions would be!

At this point, her guardian angel murmured, "Let it alone, then. You've been bad enough already. Don't add more to it."

Margot deliberately shut her ears. She was so eaten up with jealousy just then that she would think of nothing else. Besides, her devil was murmuring, too, and what he said fitted in much better with her present mood.

"It's one chance in a thousand to put a stop to Len being pally with that girl. You'll be an idiot if you let it go. Len would be horrified if she knew that Ted Grantley had been expelled three times and she'd have nothing more to do with her."

"Yes," said Margot's self, "but I can't tell her outright. She'd want to know how I got on to it and she'd be even more horrified at *me*. Len and Con are both so *fussy* about things like that. They mustn't ever know what I did. It might change them to me and I can't have that."

"Doesn't that show how wrong you are being?" the angel whispered.

"It's Len's own fault if I've done anything wrong," Margot said pettishly. "If she'd just been content to have Con and me it wouldn't have happened."

"But *you* have Emmy." The angel was fighting hard.

"That's different!" Margot turned away from the angel and concentrated on the best means of using her information. That what she was proposing to do to Ted was not only wrong but cruel, she preferred not to think. She had got it firmly into her head that somehow she must break up that friendship. Len and Con must be satisfied to have *her* and no one else. If she did nothing and let it go, the next thing would be that Con would find someone and that wasn't to be borne. The angel turned away sadly, but the devil was dancing excitedly for never before, even in her worst moments, had she so deliberately listened to him.

The school clock struck twelve and she still hadn't solved her problem. She was sleepy now and she slid down on to her pillow and fell asleep at last. Presently, she began to dream horribly. She was in a desert place and everyone she knew was standing round her in a big ring. They were all looking at her with bitter reproach and in a silence that was frightening.

She spoke to them, but they turned away, even Father and Mother and her triplets. Then they had all gone and she was alone in the desert except for her devil who was prancing round her exultantly. She tried to break away from him, but whichever way she ran, he was there first. Round and round her he went, making her dizzy with his gyrations until at last she could bear it no longer. She screamed out and the desert began to shake under her and she awoke to find Lorraine Varley, the dormitory prefect, standing beside her, shaking her and calling to her to wake up. At the same time there came a terrific crash of thunder.

“Margot! Wake up!” Lorraine shouted. “You’re having a nightmare! Wake up!”

Margot was awake. So was the rest of the dormitory—and the school. Matey’s storm had come with a vengeance and there was no sleep for anyone until it was over. Crash after crash of thunder followed each other rapidly and the lightning cut across the heavy skies with an intensity that was frightening. Then the rain came with a whoosh and a heavy torrent beat down on the dried-up garden, it was a case of all hands to shut the windows before the place was flooded. In the excitement, everyone but Lorraine forgot Margot’s screams. By the time the windows were closed and they were all back in bed with the storm beginning to pass away, a good hour had gone and they were all half-asleep. Most of them dropped off at once, Margot among them. She was worn out with her mixed emotions and that really horrible nightmare.

Only Lorraine lay awake a little longer, wondering if she should report Margot to St. Clare’s Matron. After a tiptoe visit to that young woman’s cubicle, she decided to let it alone for the moment. Margot was sleeping peacefully now.

“Probably it was the storm coming that upset her,” Lorraine decided. “I’ll wait and see what she’s like in the morning. She seems to be all right now.”

In the morning, Margot was her normal self, so Lorraine let it go—which was a pity. Matron would certainly have reported it to Matey who was head of the domestic staff and Matey would have sent for Margot and catechized her until she had got to the bottom of it. In that event, the thing would have been quickly checked. As it was, the young sinner was left to go on her wicked way and badly though she managed to hurt Ted over the business, it was she who was to suffer most in the end.

Chapter XIII

“I’M FINDING SOMETHING TO DO ABOUT IT!”

Hilary Bennet stalked indignantly into the Prefects’ room, tossed down her racquet and net of balls on the nearest chair and then threw herself down on the broad window-sill of the casement window near which Mary-Lou was sitting. That morning, the Head Girl had slipped on the stairs and twisted her ankle. It was nothing much, but Matron had ordered her to keep her foot up as much as she could during the next two or three days to give it a chance to recover. She had been reading a book on ancient Egypt with deep interest, but at the obvious indignation, of her chum she laid it down and looked up at Hilary with a lazy smile.

“Well, what’s the matter with you, may I ask?”

“You may! What’s more, I’ll tell you. There are times and seasons when I wish I had a good springy cane and the right to use it!”

“You *do* seem to feel bad. What’s the why of all this? Have a choc, by the way? It may,” Mary-Lou added with a grin, “help to sweeten you a little.”

Hilary helped herself. “Thanks! I certainly need *something*! As for the *why* of it all, it strikes me that the one way to reform Margot Maynard *is* with a cane.”

“She’s fourteen—nearly fifteen. You can’t very well use a cane on a girl of that age,” Mary-Lou pointed out.

“Then more’s the pity! That’s all I’ve got to say. Someone will have to do something to bring that young demon to her senses—and pretty soon, too, or it’ll be too late.”

“What’s she been doing?”

“Nothing—and I mean exactly that. Nothing at all—except to cheek me till I nearly boxed her ears on the spot.”

Mary-Lou’s eyebrows went up into her curls. “You do seem to be revved up! Unbosom yourself—tell it all to Mother! Open confession is good for the soul, they say.”

But for all her airiness of speech, Mary-Lou was looking serious. Hilary was an easy-going creature as a rule. Margot must have excelled herself to have aroused the Games prefect to such fury.

“You’d be revved up, as you call it, if you’d been in my place! Listen to this! This last period, I had some of that crowd for extra coaching. As you know, those three are all pretty good, but Margot is the one that shines. She has a very pretty style; she can place her balls with quite a good deal of cunning; she’s getting quite a nasty, twisty service; she’s always on the spot *and* it’s the rarest thing in the world for her to poach. I don’t say she’s headed for Wimbledon or anything like that, but she’s *good*. When she’s older and has the strength and staying power, she’ll be very good.”

“Well?” Mary-Lou queried as Hilary stopped short. “What about it?”

“It isn’t well—it’s about as ill as it can be this week. Today, she went from bad to worse and played so abominably that I saw red. She might never have had a racquet in her hand before. She foot-faulted, she poached, when she did succeed in getting anything over the net, nine times out of ten it was right out of court and she’d skyed it like a junior. She was partnering Rosamund Lilley. Ros did her best but in a doubles you can’t carry your partner on your back the whole time, no matter how good you may be yourself. They didn’t win a single game and when I ticked Margot off—and she deserved every word I said to her!—she turned

round and cheeked me all ends up. I sent her off the court and told her that so far as extra coachings were concerned she could *stay* off until she had made up her mind to beg my pardon for being so impudent *and* to play properly as well.”

“In fact, a good time was had by all! Well, it’s no more than she deserved. Are you reporting her to Burnie? You’ll have to, won’t you, if you refuse to let her have extra coaching? Burnie would want to know why.”

“Bless you, *I’m* doing no reporting. I told her to report herself—and I only hope Burnie eats her up, the little tick!”

Mary-Lou removed her foot from its stool and sat up. “And supposing she doesn’t *do* the reporting? When Margot’s in that sort of mood there’s no saying what she may or may not do.”

“She’d better not try it on!” Hilary said stormily. “If she plays that game, she’ll find herself with a Head’s report before she can say ‘knife’! and so I’ll warn her! Not report herself when a prefect tells her she is to, indeed!”

Mary-Lou had thought of something else. “Did you see Len or Con playing? Were *they* all right? I mean,” as Hilary stared at her, “I suppose nothing’s gone wrong at Freudesheim?”

“Not so far as I know. Len and Con were at the practice boards and I noticed Con’s backhand is coming on. They seemed all right so far as I could judge. No; I don’t think you can explain Margot that way, Mary-Lou.”

“Then,” said Mary-Lou with deep conviction, “it’s her devil come back. Unless she was feeling poorly.”

“Nothing poorly about her. All I know is that she played like a Third Former or worse and took not the slightest notice of a thing I said and when I did call her to order was downright rude to me. I’m having nothing more to do with her until she sees fit to come and apologise—I say! Ought you to let your foot hang down like that?”

“Don’t you worry about my foot. It was only a twist, but Matey saw it happen and warned me off games and walks for a day or two and told me to keep it up whenever I could until it stopped aching—which it practically has, now.”

All the same, Mary-Lou put it up on the stool again. Half-term was just round the corner and she had no mind to be tied literally by the ankle and have to miss whatever trip was being planned for them. She turned back to the question of Margot.

“You know, Hilary, Margot hasn’t been herself this past week or two. I’ve noticed it when I’ve come across her. Looking back, it strikes me it began more or less after that storm we had during the night after that extra hot Sunday. I wonder if it’s——”

Hilary interrupted her. “Don’t you think it! You needn’t blame this afternoon’s performance on the weather. For one thing, it isn’t anything like so hot as it has been. For another, when did you ever know Margot to be upset by heat? I’ve always thought she was first cousin to a salamander, myself.”

Mary-Lou fetched a sigh from the soles of her sandals. “Oh, *drat* the young pest! I really thought she was more or less reformed these days. What does she *mean* by it?”

“Ask me another! I suppose the reformation was never much more than skin-deep and now it’s worn off.” Hilary eyed her friend with interest. “You seem a trifle upset yourself. Why?”

“Because Aunt Joey’s been none too well these past few days. I saw Uncle Jack last night when he came over to see the Head about something and he said she was really under the weather. She was frightfully worried over the smallpox scare and the heat’s been literally

tropical lately. If Margot gets into any major rows, she's bound to hear of it and that'll mean more worry for her and it's bad for her just now."

"I wonder Margot didn't think of all that before she started this latest attack of devilitis."

"Didn't think of it, I suppose. She's only fourteen, after all. You *don't* think awfully deeply at that age—I know *I* didn't."

"But Mary-Lou, she's not so very far from fifteen." Hilary counted up on her fingers. "July—August—September—October—November; that's five months. And apart from that, I'd have said Margot was the most grown-up of that combination."

"So she is—on the surface. Beneath, there's a lot of the spoilt kid left in her. She *was* spoilt, you know, when she was tiny. She was so ghastly frail and Aunt Joey always said that she meant her to have a happy life if it was to be a short one. I don't mean she wasn't kept in order; but she *was* the centre of attraction and I expect she's assumed that she always will be."

"And how on earth can you know that?" Hilary demanded. "You couldn't have been more than a kid yourself in those days. You're only—how much?—not four years older than the Trips."

Mary-Lou laughed. "Oh, I didn't know anything about it then, though I realised at a very early date that Margot wanted to be head and chief everywhere. It's what I've heard Mother and the aunts say since I grew up. Besides, it's never been easy for Margot to be really good. She was always the naughty one. And for all her would-be sophistication, she's a good ten years younger than Len in a good many ways. Even Con looks at things from a more grown-up angle than she does."

Hilary considered this. "I see what you mean. Yes; I think you're right there. Of course, Len is the eldest. That would make a difference, I imagine. Being a one-and-only myself, I can't speak from experience."

"Oh, neither can I; but I think you're right. Even when she was quite a tiny, I remember Len being all responsible. The amazing thing to me nowadays is the amount of quiet influence *Con* seems to have with that lot."

"*Con*?" Hilary exclaimed. "But she's just a kid!"

"No; not now. I think the fact is that she's such a quiet creature, apart from her poetry, that one tends to ignore her. I have an idea that she does a lot of her growing-up—the mental side, anyhow—inside her and then something happens to show you and you're left gasping at the change. She isn't a leader like Len—or Margot, either, for that matter; but she really has influence among that crowd and whether they know it or not, they think a lot of what she says."

"Then I wish she'd turn a little of it on to that sister of hers!" Hilary said crossly. "If Margot goes on as she's doing, there's going to be a major row—I can tell you that much. You don't suddenly go out of your way to cheek a prefect. Something has been boiling up before you get to that pitch. If Dr. Jack is right and Mrs. Maynard ought not to be worried, someone had better see to it pronto or she'll be in for something really unpleasant with Margot."

"She *mustn't* be worried!" Mary-Lou spoke sharply. "July is just around the corner and she hasn't had an easy time of it for most of this year. It goes back to last term, remember, when Naomi Elton had that awful accident and no one thought she could come through.^[13] Her own aunt wasn't able to be with her and I know Aunt Joey tried to take her place—beat her at it, if I'm any judge. I know what she was like when I had *my* accident, and Mother was ill and couldn't come."^[14]

[13] Trials for the Chalet School.

[14] Mary-Lou of the Chalet School.

“How *is* Naomi, by the way? I haven’t heard anything for more than a week.”

“Making headway slowly and steadily, Uncle Jack said last night. Her aunt is expected early next month. She’s staying until the second operation in September, but from what he said, I gathered that she means to make her home in Johannesburg to be near Naomi’s cousin. She’s going back at the end of September, anyhow. This second op. is more or less of a minor affair. The really big one won’t be done until the spring. Meantime, no one is going to agree to her taking Naomi back with her until that’s over and well over. Uncle Jack says if it’s the success everyone expects, she’ll not only be able to walk properly as well as being free from pain, but she ought to be practically straight. But it’s a very big affair and they want to build up her strength before it comes.”

“Poor old Naomi! I’m awfully glad to hear it! I must try to make time to go and visit her next week.” Hilary paused before she added reflectively, “We do get ’em, don’t we?”

“Get ’em? What do you mean? What are you talking about?”

“Queer folk, I mean. Look at Naomi, to mention only one. And Ricki Fry wasn’t like other girls when she first arrived. *And* what price Nina Rutherford?” Hilary suddenly laughed. “Remember how she *would* try to practise at all odd times?”^[15]

[15] A Genius at the Chalet School.

“Nina’s a genius which accounts for *her*. As for Ricki, she told me all about that ages ago. She and her father had been running a lovely civil war when she left home. Thanks to that little beast of a boy and his squirt, that was all cleared up and her eyes are improving now, though she’ll have to wear glasses for two or three years to come. She was always a decent kid at bottom, anyway.”

“Well, unless something happens to bring Margot up with a good round turn, she’s going to grow up anything but decent,” Hilary said, reverting to her grievance. “And there’s another thing I haven’t liked about her lately. She seems to be making a dead set at that new kid, Ted Grantley. I’ve overheard her more than once saying things. There’s nothing wrong with what she says; it’s the way she says it. I’ve seen Ted flush up and look miserable when Margot’s been at her. And for the life of me I can’t see why. Ted’s a nice enough youngster.”

“You can’t see why? Are you *blind*?”

“Not that I know of. What are you getting at?”

“Only that I’m desperately sorry for Margot, poor kid!”

“*Sorry* for her?” Hilary sat up and eyed her friend as if she thought she has taken leave of her senses. “What are you talking about? What’s all this in aid of?”

“Do you mean to say that you don’t see that Margot is as jealous as sin about both Len and Con? She can’t bear them to have any close friends——”

“*What?* But why on earth shouldn’t they? Those three can’t stick together like a bunch of burrs all their lives. Besides, Margot’s as thick as thieves with Emmy Hope. If she has Emmy, what earthly reason has she for resenting it when the other two have friends?”

“I know; but I’m certain that’s what’s at the bottom of all this latest fuss—*not* excepting the affair with you this afternoon.”

“Then she’s a silly little ass—and a selfish little wretch into the bargain. I haven’t an atom of sympathy with her!” Hilary said bluntly. She was devoid of that sort of thing herself and

she simply could not understand it. Mary-Lou was not given to it, either, but, to quote Joey Maynard, she could see much further through a brick wall than most folk. Furthermore, she had the same gift as Joey for getting into the skin of someone else—a gift that Hilary totally lacked, nice girl though she was. She gave her friend a curious look before she added to her first remarks: “Sure you aren’t imagining a lot, Mary-Lou? Surely no one could be so eaten up with herself as all that?”

“That’s Margot, I’m afraid,” Mary-Lou replied gravely. “Don’t forget I’ve known them since we were all kids and even when she was a K.G. infant, Margot was like that. The reason it hasn’t bobbed up of late years is, I suppose, because there’s never been anything much to bring it up.”

“But,” Hilary objected as she thought back, “Len was friendly with Prunella Davies—after they’d got over their first hate for each other.”^[16] She gave a giggle. “And then she’s chummed up this last year with Ros Lilley.”

[16] The Chalet School Does It Again.

“Yes; but Prunella was always in a higher form. She and Len were pals out of school hours. And Len and Ros were in a higher form than Margot until this term. Though I know,” she added, “that Margot has been unpleasant about that friendship more than once, only Aunt Joey overheard her and put a stop to it. All the same, Margot didn’t see nearly so much of it. But now she and the others *and* Ted Grantley are all in the same form and Len and Ted are as thick as you like. It’s always before Margot’s eyes and so, as you said, she’s resenting it and making herself jolly miserable over it. I honestly think that’s what’s at the bottom of all this bother with her.”

“How can you possibly know?” Hilary asked sceptically.

“I don’t *know*, but it’s what I think. Look, Hilary, how long has it been going on?”

“Oh, about a fortnight or three weeks, I think.”

“Exactly! That is, since Len and Ted and Ros came out of Isolation. Margot was all right before that. Of course, those three must have been more or less sitting in each other’s laps while they were there and they got to know each other properly. It’s hardly surprising that they look like forming a threesome. When I remember what Margot used to be like as a kid, I can see it all plainly. Don’t say you have no sympathy with her! Give her all you can manage. She’ll need it unless she can get hold of herself.”

Hilary looked solemnized. “You’re probably right. I don’t see how you can go so deep with other folk, though. *I* can’t; that’s certain.”

“The thing *I’m* afraid of,” said Mary-Lou ignoring this, “is that Margot will try to break up that combination so far as Len is concerned. In that case, my lamb, look out for squalls! Len has a temper, though we’ve never seen much of it. I’m positive she won’t stand for any interference with her private friendships from just a sister. If Margot tries that on, she’ll set Len against her and it’ll take a lot to put that right.”

“I suppose it would!” Hilary hugged her knees and ruminated hard. “Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that. That’s the sort of thing that *would* upset Mrs. Maynard. The Trips have always hung together until just recently. If they have a bad break now, it might be serious from every point of view.”

“Jolly serious! I’m with you there. We simply mustn’t let it happen.”

“But what can we do about it? Nothing, so far as I can see. We can’t very well butt in on them and tell them to stop it—or tell Margot to stop it, since it seems to be all on her side. Do

you think Len knows anything about it?”

“I don’t know.” Mary-Lou paused a moment. “No; I honestly *don’t* know. Len’s awfully like Aunt Joey, you know. She has the same gift for feeling other people. I should think that with one of her triplets it would be even deeper than with an outsider. There’s one thing. Unless something happens, if she doesn’t know it now, she will, soon. And then, as I said, look out for squalls. Margot won’t make her break with Ted. I think only Ted herself could do that. Oh, dear! What a *mess* it all is!” And Mary-Lou heaved another of those sepulchral sighs.

“Well, don’t blow me out of the window over it!” Hilary protested. “It’s not *my* fault.”

Mary-Lou relaxed and laughed. “Sorry! But I’m awfully fond of Aunt Joey, you know and Uncle Jack was awfully grave about her yesterday. I’d give a lot to be able to save her any trouble of this kind.”

“Why don’t you get hold of Margot and put it to her that she must remember her mother?” Hilary suggested.

“I would like a shot if I thought it would do any good. But if Margot is listening to that devil of hers, I’m afraid it might do more harm than good.”

“Then we can’t interfere at all—except that we must keep an eye on the lot and step in when we think it’s necessary. I say!” Hilary whistled. “We look like having a peach of a time, don’t we?”

“If it came to that, we do,” Mary-Lou agreed. “But I won’t let it. Oh, I don’t say we mustn’t keep half-an-eye on them; but I don’t mean to leave it until it comes to us having to interfere if they scrap. I’m finding something to do about it.”

Hilary grinned. “Trust you! The world’s worst butter-in—that’s what you are. O.K.; I’ll back you up as far as in me lies.” Then she added in a different tone, “I say! What’s happening? It sounds as if a tornado or two had got loose on the stairs.”

Even as she spoke, the door burst open and the rest of the prefects came pouring in to announce that they had met Miss Dene as they came up and she had told them that she was putting up the notice about the half-term arrangements that evening and the members of Vb were forgotten by even Mary-Lou as the grandees of the school speculated excitedly about what might have fallen to their lot.

Chapter XIV
CON BLOWS UP

“Oh, goody, goody, *goody!* We’re booked for Zermatt! *And* with Mdlle de Lachennais and Ferry! Whoever was decent enough to arrange anything so—so miraculous?” Len Maynard danced a jig of pure joy and the girls standing near laughed.

“Well, now you know your fate, shove off and give someone else a chance,” Prudence Dawbarn commanded. “I want to know what’s happening to us and you make a better door than a window! Scram!”

“O.K.—O.K., keep your wool on! Inter V go to Neuchâtel with Miss Derwent and Miss Armitage,” Maeve Bettany of Va intervened. “And now *you* know where you’re going, move off yourself, Prudence, and make a little more room. What’s that, Ailie?” as her small cousin, Ailie Russell tugged at her arm. “Where are you folk booked for? Hang on a minute and I’ll see.” She turned back to scan the big notice on the board in Hall while Ailie and the other members of Lower IVa waited breathlessly. “Here we are! Lower IVa and b are off together to Lake Constance. Your escorts are Burnie and Miss Dene and Matey and Matron from St. Hild’s. You ought to have a jolly good time with those four.”

Ailie screwed up her fair little face. “With Matey?”

“Matey’s a joy forever on a trip. I’ve been with her more than once and I *know*. And if you twist your face like that, it’ll stick that way some day and Auntie Madge will have hysterics when she sees you! Stop it, Ailie!”

Ailie relieved her feelings by making an even worse grimace before she grabbed the arms of her boon companions, Janice Chester and Judy Willoughby, and went off with them to the garden where they could say what they liked without bossy Seniors butting in on them. Meanwhile, Vb having learned their destination, departed from Hall likewise and made for the tennis courts where they stood about in clumps, chattering like a flock of starlings.

“Zermatt ought to be wonderful!” Len Maynard said as she stood in the centre of a group composed of herself, Con, Margot, Rosamund, Ted, Emerence and a shy French girl, Odette Mercier. Odette was famed throughout the school for invariably starting the term with an outsize case of homesickness. It generally cleared up after the first two or three days, but while it lasted she was, as Len had once said with some disgust, a regular damp sponge. Con was by way of being friendly with her, mainly because she felt sorry for her, and brought her with the others as much as she could. Odette had made very few friends, even after two terms.

“It’ll be utterly magnificent!” Con agreed rapturously. “I’ve been yearning to visit Zermatt, but somehow all *our* trips have been in other directions.”

“I wonder if they’ll let us do a spot of climbing?” Len said wistfully. “I’m dying to have a shot and I’ve heard there are three or four quite easy climbs round there. Mdlle’s a member of the Alpine Club and Aunt Rosalie says Ferry is really awfully good, considering she hadn’t done any when she first came. Wouldn’t it be gaudy if they would take us up two or three?”

Emerence wrinkled up her pretty nose. “Rather you than I! It’s not *my* idea of a holiday! I like to rest and take things easy. We’re growing girls and growing girls need lots of rest. I don’t mind strolling round the place, but I should hate having to struggle and climb up mountains.”

“No one ever called you lazy, did they?” Len retorted scathingly. “Come off it, Emmy! It would be huge fun if they’d only agree and I’m longing to have a go. The only thing is I’m afraid they’ll say there are too many of us to risk it.”

Rosamund laughed. “Twenty-six of us? Well, *rather!* You’ll have to wait till you’re grown up and can join the Club, Len. Oh, I don’t say they mightn’t agree to take those of us who want to try it for *one* easy climb, but that’ll be the limit.”

“There’s the bell for Abendessen!” Emerence exclaimed “Come on! If we’re late they’ll say things about Seniors setting a good example!” She slipped her hand through Margot’s arm and gave her a little tug. “Come on, Margot! What’s wrong with you, by the way? You’re awfully quiet. Don’t you want to go to Zermatt?”

Margot freed herself with some dignity. “Don’t drag like that, Emmy! It’s too hot! Of course I want to go to Zermatt. It’s one of the places we’ve never seen and I want to see it.”

Emerence stared at her, but said nothing. They went with the others who were all talking as long as they were outside. Once they entered, that had to cease, but when they were all seated at table, they made up for lost time. The Head had taken pity on their excitement and though Wednesday was an “English” day, had given leave for them to use any language they liked during the meal, so long as they did not make too much noise.

“Must let them blow off steam a little,” she murmured to Mdlle, sitting next her when she sat down again. “Otherwise, they’ll all burst with excitement.”

“Oh, thrilled to the last degree!” Nancy Wilmot, who had overheard, chimed in. “I foresee you having to use the bell perpetually. Listen to them!”

The noise was rising and though the Head laughed, she replied, “I’d better warn them again. We don’t want any passers-by to get the idea that we allow our girls to behave like inmates of the monkey-house at the Zoo on occasion!” before she rang the bell and when silence had fallen, repeated her warning.

It helped to calm them down a little and the noise was, for the most part, no greater than usual.

“And just as well,” Matey said when someone pointed this out. “They were beginning to clack like a lot of windmills. Odd how shrill girls get when they’re all talking against each other!”

Miss Wilmot waited until everyone was busy again. Then she looked at Mdlle de Lachennais on the opposite side of the table. “Jeanne, what about inviting me to join your party? The bottom’s fallen out of my plans.”

Mdlle lifted sparkling black eyes to her face. “But with pleasure, *ma chère*. But what, then has happened? I thought you were to stay with Biddee and her twins. Do you fear, perhaps, that Marie and Pat will disturb your slumbers?”

“Not I! Once I sleep, I sleep. No; but Eugen’s mother has elected to come to stay with them for a fortnight which exactly covers half-term. They have only the one spare room, now that the twins have arrived, so can’t put me up. Biddee rang up this evening to put me off until later in the term, so I’m at a loose end.”

“Then come with us by all means. We are delighted to have you.”

“Especially,” put in Kathie Ferrars from her seat beside Nancy, “as we shall have some of the stormiest petrels in the school with us. Margot and Emerence, not to mention Heather Clayton, Francie Wilford *and* Carmela Walther can do with all the eyes on them that we can manage. So welcome to our midst!”

“In that case, may I beg a place, too?” This was little Miss Andrews, one of the Junior mistresses. “I didn’t expect to be free so I’ve made no plans and I’ve never visited Zermatt, so it would be new ground to me. I’ll undertake to help look after your stormy petrels.”

“What about it, Rosalie?” Nancy turned to Rosalie Dene on the other side. “Will it upset any arrangements you’ve made?”

“As it happens, not at all. In fact it keeps them as they were.”

“What *do* you mean?” Miss Derwent asked with interest.

“We had a letter this morning from Mrs. Baker. Joan has to go home. Her eldest sister was to have been married at the end of August, but the bridegroom, who is on leave from his bank in Winnipeg, has been recalled unexpectedly—sickness seems to have decimated the rest of the staff—so the wedding has been pushed on to Wednesday of next week. Joan is chief bridesmaid, so she’s going on Monday with Dr. Morris who was going anyhow on business and won’t be back till the week after.”

“And,” added the Head who had been listening to this, “Paul Scott rang up just before the gong went to ask if Jo might go home and take some friends with her. The doctors have given Maisie a clean bill of health at long last and they want to celebrate. I said it was all right and Jo is taking Eve and Primrose with her as she had Rosamund and Len last time. They’re leaving Switzerland, now that Maisie really is recovered—going in September, I believe. So this will be Jo’s last chance of half-term at home.”

“What are they going to do?” Miss Denny demanded. “Not return to Kenya, I hope and trust.”

“Oh, no, that would never do! Maisie is well again, but she says nothing would induce her to go back there after the awful experience she had with the Mau-mau.^[17] Paul is settling in Jersey and trying his hand at fruit and vegetable farming. They don’t want to risk the English climate with Maisie and don’t wish to go further afield at any rate, until Jo has left school.”

[17] A Chalet Girl from Kenya.

“Then in that case, Sharlie, there’ll be heaps of room for both you and Nancy,” Kathie Ferrars said happily.

So it was settled and the talk drifted to other subjects.

Meanwhile the girls, having taken the Head’s second warning to heart, were discussing as quietly as in them lay the various expeditions arranged for half-term. They were all excited with their prospects, but they knew that what Miss Annersley said, she meant, so they kept their voices down and anyone who showed signs of forgetting was instantly shushed by everyone else. Only Margot remained quiet and had little to say for herself. Not even Emerence paid much heed to it; but Len noticed it and she glanced more than once at her sister with an apprehensive look. As Mary-Lou has shrewdly guessed, the eldest Maynard had sensed that all was not well there and she had some idea of what was at the bottom of it all.

“I wish I knew what’s best to do,” she thought as she tackled her sweet of iced custard and wild strawberries. “If I have it out with her now, Margot will blow up and that won’t help anyone. If I let it go on, there’s always the risk that she may do it at Zermatt. It’s bound to come sooner or later. Oh dear! I wish to goodness she hadn’t a devil! Or at any rate that she didn’t listen to him as she does every now and then. She can be such a dear and he makes her such an utter pest! Once she gets going, she never stops till she’s got rid of it all and she really doesn’t seem to care what she says or does then.”

When they stood up for Grace, she was still undecided what to do about it. If Margot did “blow up” during the trip, it would mean most awful trouble for her. More than likely she would be sent home and then their mother would know all about it and Len, at fourteen and a half, realised that just at present “Mamma” ought not to be worried at all if it could be avoided. If, on the other hand, they had the sort of scene she was capable of creating *before* they went, it would be good-bye to any trip for her! It really was a very sticky problem.

It was still unsolved when they went to Prayers and though poor Len prayed hard to be shown what she ought to do, she had had no inspiration by the time they were dismissed to make the most of the time till bedtime. Nor could she do anything more about it then. Her cousin, Josette Russell, had invited her to make up a set with their cousin Maeve and Josette’s great friend, Clare Kennedy. Josette was a prefect and, cousin or not, it was an honour to have such an invitation. Len did not see how she could possibly back out now, but she went to change her shoes and find her tennis racquet with a worried frown on her face. Mercifully, it was a hard-fought set and Len simply had to concentrate on her game and leave Margot and her doings on one side just then.

While Len was playing hard, Margot, forbidden the courts out of school-hours until she chose to apologise to Hilary for her rudeness that afternoon, picked up her library book and sauntered off to the rock garden in a very bad mood. She was well aware that those girls who had been present at the scene were condemning her. At the Chalet School, the prefects were regarded as the Head’s representatives among the girls and impudence to them was impudence to her. There would be no out-of-hours tennis for her until she had made the apology Hilary had demanded and she loved tennis. She knew very well that she was a highly promising player and it was one of the few things she always worked at steadily, so the punishment hit her where she felt it most. Worse than that, she had to report herself to Miss Burnett before bedtime or else face a Head’s Report. That would mean no trip for her and then her parents would know of it and want to know why. Besides, she wanted to see Zermatt as much as anyone else; but just at present, she was ready for neither apology nor report.

“I suppose I’ll have to go to Burnie some time,” she thought as she reached the top of the steps leading down to the rock garden. “I can’t do it this minute, though. I saw her going off with Mary-Lou and her gang and they all had their racquets. I can’t go barging into a set just to report myself. Burnie would be madder than she will be, anyhow. I’ll wait a little. As for Hilary, she can whistle for an apology from me! I couldn’t care less!”

Seeing the mood she was in, it was unlucky that she should run into Con at the top of the steps. No one had ever with any truth accused Con of being tactful. What she thought, that she said, frequently with startling results. Margot would have avoided her if she could. She didn’t want to talk to anyone—and that meant *anyone*! She couldn’t, and Con stopped as soon as they met.

“Margot! Oh, *luck*! Are you doing anything in particular? If not, then do come and make up a set with Ted and Ricki and me!” she said eagerly. “We’ve bagged a court.”

So far, only Hilary and the other three girls knew what had happened that afternoon. The others had said nothing about it and the notice about half-term had put it right out of their heads. Neither Len nor Con knew anything about it.

“I’m going to read,” Margot said sulkily.

Con looked at her. The mulish expression on her sister’s face warned her that there was trouble in the offing. Being Con, she did her best to avert it. Also, being Con, she did it about as tactlessly as she could.

"I say! What's wrong with you?" she asked.

"Nothing's wrong with me! I don't want to play—that's all!"

Con slipped an arm through her. "But it *isn't* all! You can't get away with that sort of thing with *me*. We're triplets! I always know when there's something wrong with you or Len." She was at her most coaxing. "Tell me what's the matter with you, Margot. Perhaps I could help."

"Well, you couldn't!" Margot returned, wrenching her arm away. "Let me alone!"

Con was a sunny-tempered young thing as a rule, but she had her limits and Margot's tone and action had been little short of insulting. Con let go of her hold and drew away. "Oh, very well, if that's what you want. Sorry I asked you."

"Well, I *do* want it! For pity's sake mind your own business and I'll mind mine!"

"Certainly—if you're feeling as badly as all that."

"What do you mean?" Margot snarled.

"Well, you don't seem awfully inclined to be friendly to anyone at present. Never mind! I can ask Odette to make a fourth. And if she doesn't want to play, she'll say so pleasantly and not *growl* at me as you've done!" Con turned to go on, but Margot caught her arm and swung her back, none too gently, either.

"Are *you* going to be at it, too?" she demanded furiously.

Con stood stock-still. Sheer amazement wiped the anger from her face. "Be at *what*? What do you mean? What's come over you, Margot?"

This was where Margot suddenly let go of all but the last shreds of her self-control. "Oh, don't play mock-surprised like that! You know well enough what I mean! You're going off with that ghastly French kid who howls like a baby for her mommy every term, and Ricki Fry, just as Len has taken to going off with Ros Lilley and now that *beastly* Ted Grantley girl!" she stormed, tempting Providence wholesale by her outrageous language—only Providence wasn't going to be tempted just then. "You neither of you care whether *I'm* left alone or not! I think it's *rotten* of you both!"

Con's own temper began to slip badly. "And what about all the times you've gone off with Emmy Hope and left *us* alone?"

"That's a different thing!"

"Oh, *is* it? It's O.K. for you to have a special pal, but it isn't for Len and me! We're to hang round and make do with what scraps of your time you like to spare us!" For once in her life, Con was fully roused. "Of all the selfish things I think that's the worst I ever heard! What's more, I, for one, won't put up with it! I'm going to have all the friends I want, whether you like it or not, and it doesn't matter what you say or do. I'm not giving them up just to suit you! So now you know."

Margot was staggered. She had had spats with her sisters over and over again, but neither of them had ever spoken so plainly to her before and it added fuel to the flames. For a moment, she was speechless with surprise. Then the thought of all her fancied wrongs overwhelmed her.

"You needn't talk of selfishness to me!" she shouted—and it was as well that side of the building happened to be deserted just then!—stamping her foot violently. "You're selfish enough yourself! Anyhow, I'm not going to have it! I won't *have* it, I tell you! And I'm not going to have Len making a pal of that horrid Ted Grantley—a girl who's been expelled from three other schools already!"

It was Con's turn to be breathless. "Oh, don't talk such rot!" she said when she could speak again. "You must be going crackers!"

“ ’Tisn’t rot! It’s true! Mom said it! So now!”

“Mamma told you *that!* I don’t believe a word of it!” retorted forthright Con. “Even if it *was* true and she knew about it, she’d never say anything to any of us and you know it! You’re making it up and I think it’s indecent of you! And don’t call her ‘Mom’, either! You know how she hates it. She told us ages ago that we weren’t to use it and you’re doing it behind her back which is deceitful!”

“I’ll call her what I jolly well like! Who’re *you* to stop me?”

Con passed this over. Her anger was dying a little as she considered Margot’s amazing statement and when she replied, it was more quietly. “Look here, Mamma would never tell us anything like that. How did you get to know it? You’d better tell me,” she added. “I mean to know.”

Margot knew from experience that when Con dug her toes in, she was immovable. “I—I overheard her and Aunt Rosalie talking about it,” she muttered.

“You—heard—Mamma—talking to Aunt Rosalie—about a thing like that! But how could you?” Con literally squeaked on the last words in her surprise.

A modicum of sense told Margot that she had better soft-pedal this at once. The bother was that she couldn’t see how. As usual, when she lost her temper, she had let out something she had never meant to mention.

“Never you mind,” she said sullenly. “I *heard* them and it’s true! If you don’t believe me, go and ask her yourself!”

“Have a little sense! I wouldn’t dream of it! Mamma would want to know where you’d been to overhear her and wherever it was you oughtened to have been there. I jolly well know that!”

“I didn’t mean Mom, you idiot! I meant that wretched Ted! Go on—ask her!”

Con stared at her sister with eyes full of horror. “You must be clean off your head—bats—crackers! If you did hear her, then you were eavesdropping. I knew you could be nasty when you liked, but I didn’t know you were *dishonourable!*”

What might have happened, it is hard to say. Con’s pretty voice had taken on a cutting tone that no one had ever heard there before. It made Margot flinch and then hate herself for flinching. That stirred up her rage even more and her face was crimson, her eyes full of blue fire as she forced herself to meet the contempt in Con’s brown eyes. But at that moment, there came the sound of voices and then some of the mistresses came in sight, bearing books and needlework and clearly making for the rock garden themselves.

Con moved to one side to let them pass and Margot, still managing to retain enough sense to know that she must not give rein to the fury possessing her or it certainly *would* be all up with any chance she might have of sharing the trip to Zermatt, hastily turned away from the steps, dropping her long lashes as she did so. The mistresses thanked them and went on, laughing and chatting among themselves, though Miss Ferrars glanced at the pair with some curiosity as she went past. Obviously, they were quarreling about something, but you couldn’t go butting in on the girls over everything and they wouldn’t thank you for it if you did. Kathie Ferrars was near enough to her own schooldays to know that. She said nothing but she put it away at the back of her mind for later consideration.

In the meantime, Margot had followed Con round the end of the hedge. She did not quite know what else to do. Con stalked ahead until they were well out of earshot of the rock garden. Then she stopped and turned. Margot stopped, too, and looked at her. Con spoke very quietly and with tremendous dignity.

“I’m not going on with this. I’m too ashamed of what you’ve done. I think you’ve behaved abominably, but it’s *your* affair. You can jolly well square it with your own conscience. But understand once and for all that I’m having all the friends I want and so is Len. If you try to make any mischief between her and Ted, I shall know who’s doing it and I shall do something about it. Now you know what to expect. But there’s *one* thing I’m going to say. If you care at all for Mamma, you’ll stop all this. It would worry her badly and Papa told us she wasn’t well and mustn’t be worried.”

Having said her say to a silent Margot, Con turned on her heel and departed. But with that last speech, something else had gone—her childishness—No more would Joey be able to say of her, “Con’s still only a *little* girl.” The Con who came into Vb next morning, was indefinitely older and very much a Fifth form girl. They all felt it, though no one could explain it.

As for Margot, when her sister left her, she was in a state midway between another outburst of fury and even wilder tears. A saving remembrance of the fact that she had still to seek out Miss Burnett and report herself kept her from either. She sought refuge in the kitchen garden at the back where she wrestled with herself until she felt able to seek out the Games mistress for, little as she liked reporting herself, she disliked the idea of a Head’s Report even more. Con’s final remarks had given her the strength to pull herself together enough for that. At bottom, Margot loved her mother dearly. The pity of it was that she still loved herself better.

Chapter XV
MARY-LOU BEGINS HER CAMPAIGN

Margot got off much more lightly than she deserved. When she finally sought the Games mistress, that lady was in a hurry. She listened to the culprit's halting confession with a resigned look on her face. When it had ended, she merely glared at the sinner until the fair face was a dark crimson.

"I'm ashamed of you!" she said crisply. "Answer me! Whom does Hilary represent?"

"The Head," Margot mumbled very unwillingly.

"Would you speak to the Head in that style?"

"No-o-o!" Margot did not add that she would never dare. Miss Annersley was gentle and long-suffering, but she had her limits and everyone knew it. Margot thought of what would have happened if she had been as impudent to her as she had been to Hilary and found herself feeling shivery inside at the bare thought.

"Quite so! Well, tomorrow, you may beg Hilary's pardon—and do it properly, please. When you've done it, you may come here and tell me. If I am not satisfied, you will do it all over again—in my presence. Lose two conduct marks for rudeness. Don't forget to give them in at the end of the week. Now you may go. Goodnight!"

This spiked Margot's guns very neatly. She dared not disobey the Games Mistress and everyone knew that Peggy Burnett was a woman of her word. There was nothing for it but to make that apology and make it in proper form. She did and Hilary, judging that she had had enough, accepted it, pronounced forgiveness and let it go at that. Margot departed, once more seething; but she was firmly determined not to miss the Zermatt trip, so she had had no option.

She kept herself very much to herself for the next two or three days and Hilary, marking her subdued demeanour, decided that Miss Burnett had given her a good dressing-down and it had done the trick. The form, however, were well aware that Con and Margot were at odds though not even Betty Landon who had won fame as the most inquisitive girl the school had ever housed, dared ask either of them what was wrong. Con was on her dignity—very much so!—and something in her manner checked even Betty's curiosity. She was icily polite to her younger sister and avoided her as far as possible. Len did ask when they were alone, but she got no satisfaction.

"Has Margot said anything to you?" Con asked gravely.

Len shook her head. "She hasn't said a thing to me. In fact, now I come to think of it, she's been giving me the go-by as hard as she could. Her devil again, I suppose! Are you going to tell me anything, Con?"

"Not if Margot hasn't. Sorry, Len, but I can't. It wouldn't be fair."

Len gave her a shrewd look. "It's that way, is it? O.K. If you can't you can't." She let the subject drop, much to Con's relief. All the same, the eldest of the three kept a close watch on her bad triplet.

On the Saturday of that week Mary-Lou, who had been also keeping an eye on Vb whenever she could, and had drawn her own conclusions from what she saw, contrived to catch their form mistress after Frühstück. Miss Ferrars had lingered behind to scold a Junior for bad behaviour at table. Odile Badrutt was finally sent off, feeling very sorry that she had

ever tried to kick her opposite under the table and Miss Ferrars was about to turn and go to the entrance hall when she became aware of the Head Girl.

Mary-Lou came forward quickly. "May I speak to you for a moment, please?"

Little Miss Ferrars looked up with a laugh at the handsome girl who towered above her. "You're doing it already, aren't you? What's wrong, Mary-Lou?"

"I'd like a word in private if you can spare me a minute or two, please."

"Come along to Vb, then. We shall be private there for the next twenty minutes or so. It'll take the girls all that time to finish their cubicles." And she turned and led the way to her formroom. Arrived there, she shut the door, went to lean against the edge of her table and lifted quering eyebrows at the Head Girl.

"This do?" she asked, smiling. "Then go ahead! I'm all ears!"

To her amazement, Mary-Lou went violently red. "I—I'd like to say first that this isn't meant for cheek," she began abruptly.

Kathie Ferrars nodded, the smile leaving her face. "All right; I understand."

"Well, it's just—I know your party is going to be short of four people as Joan is going home and Jo Scott is taking Eve and Primrose to their place with her. What I want to ask is—er——" Mary-Lou stopped short. She took a deep breath and then blurted it out. "May I come with your party?"

Kathie Ferrars gasped. "Come with us? But *why*? You Sixth Form people are going to the Ticino, aren't you? I've heard you say you would like to see it, so why are you throwing it up like this?"

Mary-Lou reddened again. "It's awfully difficult to explain without seeming rude or—conceited and interfering, but——" her voice trailed off.

"*How* is it difficult?" Then as Mary-Lou remained silent, she laid a hand on the girl's arm. "I think you can trust me to understand. Is it something private? Or is it anything you can tell me off the record?"

"It's—so difficult," Mary-Lou repeated. "If I tell you the whole thing, it practically amounts to telling tales and I've always loathed that. If I don't, well it may look to you like outrageous impudence—which I don't mean—or interference in the Staff and I don't mean that, either."

"I—see." Miss Ferrars thought hard for a minute or two.^[18] During her first half-term at the Chalet School, she certainly had misunderstood Mary-Lou. That was all over now and, out of school, she and the girl were good friends. "Why didn't you go to Mdllle?" she asked. "She is head of our party."

[18] The New Mistress at the Chalet School.

"She went too quickly for me," Mary-Lou replied promptly. She blushed again as she added, "That isn't meant for rudeness. I was only going to ask her because I know, as you say, that's she's the head. Then I saw you ticking off Odile, so I decided to put it to you. I'll go to Mdllle if you'd rather."

"I think we had both better be in on this," Miss Ferrars said slowly. "Will you leave it to me to arrange, Mary-Lou? I'll see Mdllle and let you know when we can talk with you. But I think you'll have to make up your mind to tell us more than this."

"I was afraid of that." Mary-Lou heaved a sigh. "Thank you, Miss Ferrars. I'll leave it to you. But I hope you'll both agree to my coming. The Head won't mind, I know."

"I don't suppose she will. Are you going to explain to her yourself?"

“Not if I can help it—or not at present. But she’ll trust me!” Mary-Lou spoke with confidence.

“Well, I’ll see Mdlle and tell you when to come later on. Meantime, you’d best go and see to your room or you’ll be late for the walk.”

Mary-Lou accepted the dismissal with a word of thanks. She was still worried but she felt relieved that Miss Ferrars had understood so far. On her way up to the tiny room she occupied by virtue of her position as Head Girl, she met Con, looking very serious. At the same moment, Margot appeared from the opposite direction. She gave her sister a quick glance and then turned away with a toss of her red-gold head. Con apparently took no notice. They passed each other without a word and that little episode decided Mary-Lou. Something must be done before the trouble between the pair *and* the trouble over Ted flared out in the open. Even if it meant explaining in detail to Mdlle and Miss Ferrars, she must go through with it now.

“But I’d like to take that devil of Margot’s and bundle him headfirst back where he comes from!” she thought as she entered her room and began to make her bed.

Halfway through the working part of the morning, Mdlle came to the library where Mary-Lou and three other prefects were working hard on essays. She checked them when they would have stood up.

“But no, mes chères: I do not stay. Mary-Lou, I wish to speak to you later. Will you come to me in the rock garden at Break, please. Bring your lemonade and biscuits with you, for we shall not have much time otherwise.”

“Yes, Mdlle,” Mary-Lou replied demurely; and Mdlle, after flashing a smile round the four, left the room again.

“What have you been up to, Mary-Lou?” Vi Lucy demanded severely when they were alone again. “I’m surprised at you—and you the Head Girl!”

“Nothing that I know of,” Mary-Lou replied, picking up her pen. “Pipe down, Vi, do! I’m only halfway through this essay Miss Charlesworth has given me to do on the Sumerians and this is my last chance at it. It has to be handed in on Monday.”

“Who on earth are the Sumerians?” Lesley Malcolm asked with interest; but Mary-Lou’s head was bent over her flying pen and Lesley got no reply at all.

It was well for the Head Girl that she had learned to concentrate on what she happened to be doing, for to tell the truth, she was feeling very nervous about the plan of campaign she had concocted during the past day or two. Having made up her mind to it, however, she was carrying it through if possible. Meanwhile that essay had to be finished and she never stopped work until just before the bell rang for Break, she threw down her pen with a sigh of relief and gathered up the sheets filled with her characterful handwriting.

“See you all some time!” she said as she gathered her books together. With that, she was gone before the others could collect their wits to attack her again on the subject of Mdlle’s summons. By the time they had arrived in the Speisesaal, she had seized her lemonade and biscuits and was headed for the rock garden where she found Mdlle busy with Lower III’s needlework. She looked up smiling as the girl came down the steps to her and waved her to a nearby chair.

“Seat yourself, chérie. Miss Ferrars will be here in one little moment with Eleveses for her and for me. Meantime, begin on your own.”

Mary-Lou sat down and sipped at her lemonade. Nothing more was said until Miss Ferrars appeared with a tray holding the glasses of lemonade and biscuits for themselves. Mary-Lou

jumped up to carry it for her while Mdlle cleared her sewing off the rustic table at which she has been sitting to make way for the tray.

When both mistresses had begun to sip their lemonade, Mdlle turned to Mary-Lou. “And now, my child, I wish to hear this little history of yours. Miss Ferrars has told me that you desire to accompany us to Zermatt. But why?”

“Mdlle, please don’t think me rude,” Mary-Lou said, “but—this is right off the record, isn’t it?”

“But that is of course. We are not in school now, so pray continue.”

Mary-Lou finished her lemonade and set the glass on the tray. “It’s this way. There’s something wrong between the Maynards and Ted Grantley is mixed up in it. So,” she added, “are Rosamund Lilley and I *think* Odette Mercier, though I’m not so sure about Odette. I have an idea what it is and I want to put a stop to it if I can.”

“But how do you think that coming with us to Zermatt will help you to put a stop to it, as you say?” Mdlle asked.

“I think things are coming to a head. If they are—but I only say ‘if’—there’s going to be a frantic row—er——” as she suddenly remembered to whom she was speaking, “I mean great trouble. If that happens, it will mean that the girl who begins it will be sent back to school. I don’t want Aunt Joey to get wind—I mean hear—of it, it might upset her again and she’s all right this last day or two, Uncle Jack says.”

Kathie Ferrars nodded. “I agree with you there. And, like you, I can guess what’s happening. You think that Margot is jealous because the other two are making outside friends. But surely she’s old enough to know that it not only was likely to happen but that it *ought* to happen. She herself has been close enough friends with Emerence, goodness knows. Why shouldn’t Len and Con have their friends, too?”

“Miss Ferrars, I honestly think that right down inside Margot isn’t a lot older than ten, say; or twelve, perhaps. The other two are.”

“But there,” said Mdlle in French and with great emphasis, “you have laid your finger on the right place. I have seen that Margot has been very unhappy for some weeks now. I think you are right, Mary-Lou, though indeed, you are young to see it.”

Mary-Lou reddened. “Well, to tell you the truth, it isn’t all guessing. Len and Con have talked to me. At least, Con did most of the talking. You know what she’s like. She sits back and lets other folk do it and then all of a sudden she pitches in and tells you things no one else would dream of saying. She let cats out of bags all right last Sunday! And then, if you please, they wanted my advice!”

“And what did you say?” Mdlle asked with real curiosity.

“Oh, told them to hang on to their tripletship and try to make Margot see that it was a tremendous tie, but to have all the friends they wanted just the same. I didn’t know what else I could say.”

“It was wise advice so far as Margot is concerned. But I do not see how Ted Grantley comes into it,” Mdlle said.

“Yes; I’d like to know that, too. Len and Ted are very friendly. I’ve seen that since Ted came up to Vb,” Kathie Ferrars remarked.

“I don’t know for certain, but I rather think Margot has got hold of something against Ted—something that happened at Ted’s last school. What I’m afraid of is that she means to use it to try and break up the friendship. I don’t listen in to other people’s talk, but it can’t always be avoided. The other morning I went into their Splashery to inspect and those two were behind

the peg-stand at the far end and couldn't have known I was there and I overheard Margot saying something about 'your *last* school' to Ted. What's more, the voice she said it in was as nasty as I ever heard. I said, 'Who is here at this hour?' and they came out at once and—well—I *didn't* like the looks of either of them. Margot seemed triumphant about something and Ted looked—*browbeaten!*"

The two mistresses looked at each other. Mary-Lou was gazing across the garden so did not see Miss Ferrars raise her brows nor Mdlle's answering tiny nod.

"Mary-Lou," Mdlle said, "I will tell you something that we—by which I mean the mistresses—all know. If Margot has heard of it, then it is indeed time that one did something for she must not use it to harm Ted. Listen, Mary-Lou. We will trust you; but pray do not repeat this to anyone. Ted left her last school because the Principal refused to permit her to return."

Mary-Lou literally goggled at her. "But what had she *done?*" she demanded.

"One had found her smoking in the *salle-de-bain* with other girls after Lights Out."

"*Smoking?*" Mary-Lou's eyes were blue saucers. "But good Heavens! *That's* not a—an expellable crime! Do you mean to say they refused to take the lot back?"

Miss Ferrars took up the story. "This, it seems was only the climax to a series of things of that kind. She was never out of mischief and she seems to have led a certain bunch of her own kind by the nose. Anyhow, her conduct reports were so bad that it looks as if the Head had had no option. Ted had been warned that one more major row would mean exactly what she got and she chanced it."

"Silly little ass!" Mary-Lou commented. "All the same, Mdlle," she turned to the elder woman, "do you happen to remember Emerence Hope's first term with us?"

"But indeed I do! What a terrible child she was!"

"Exactly! But there was no question of sending her away. Everyone stuck it out and now Emmy's no worse than most folk. Well, I'm thankful it isn't anything really bad. I should have been horribly disappointed if it had been for I didn't think Ted was the kind of girl to go in for helping herself to other people's things or cheating or—or things like that. She may be a young ninny, but I'm positive she's honest and honourable."

"Oh no," Miss Ferrars replied swiftly. "So far as we've been able to gather, there hasn't been a thing like that. It was the usual sort of wickedness only rather more of it than one usually gets. For instance," her eyes began to dance, "on one occasion she treated them to a bareback riding display during the riding lesson."

Mary-Lou broke into peals of laughter. "But what a nerve! Well, so far as we're concerned I can't say I've seen much tendency to that sort of thing since she's been here. Of course, she wasn't in school for three weeks, but she's been quite all right since. But if that's all it was, can you tell me why she's begun to look so hangdog lately? If she thinks that the other girls will boycott her for that sort of thing, she hasn't thought much. It's far more likely to appeal madly to most of the wilder kind like Emmy or young Prudence."

"The trouble is," Miss Ferrars said, "that that was the *third* school which had refused to have her back and her mother seems to have treated her like a criminal over it. Ted came here with an awful reputation and feeling that she could never make good. She seems to have cheered up a little, but I have noticed that these last few days she's been going about looking hangdog as you say." Then she added after a pause, "But if Margot is holding it against her, then it's little short of blackmail and I'm horrified. What *would* her mother think?"

“Aunt Joey would be horrified, of course; but Uncle Jack would be far worse,” Mary-Lou said. “He’s always been a lot more strict than Auntie. Though when *she* puts her foot down, it’s *down!*” she added.

“Do you, then, hope to arrange for this?” Mdlle asked curiously.

Mary-Lou nodded. “I hope so. If I can only get hold of Margot and make her understand that if you don’t share, you end by losing, I think she’ll take a grip on herself and then things will improve. I may come, then? Thanks, more than I can say.” She got up, picking up the tray to bear it back to the kitchen. Standing with it in her hands, she looked straight at the two mistresses. “I’d just like to say this before I go. I’m certain Margot has no idea what it really is that she’s trying to do. She’s decent at bottom, you know. If she can be got to see it before there’s a terrific bust-up all round, it’ll save everyone a lot.”

She departed after that and the two friends she left looked at each other. “It might be impudence in some girls,” Mdlle murmured in her own language, “but this is just Mary-Lou!”

“I hope she’ll do something,” Kathie said. “I don’t want Ted to be upset now!”

Chapter XVI

ZERMATT

For the remainder of the time until half-term, Mary-Lou kept an eye on the triplets, Ted and Rosamund as far as she was able, which was mainly out of school hours. She did not think that Margot would dare to play any pranks during lessons. As a result, Miss Margot found it a difficult matter to get Ted alone and by the time the Thursday came along, the latter had lost much of her hangdog look and was doing well in her new form. It never dawned on the Head Girl that Ricki Fry might come in for some attention from the naughty triplet and Margot, finding her way blocked where Ted was concerned, did her best to break up any private confabs between Ricki and Con.

It was little she could accomplish there. For one thing, Ricki was an older girl than Ted and for another, Con had already had her eyes opened to what was happening. She kept them open for once in her life. Those few weeks did her all the good in the world for though she still revelled in her fantasy people, she learned then to make them keep their proper place. As a result, she improved in her work and began to move steadily up in marks.

“Not a very good report on work, Margot,” Miss Ferrars said when she gave that young person her half-term report. “In a form of twenty-six, you have come twentieth and it’s not good enough. You have plenty of brains if you choose to apply them. You choose next half-term and see if you can’t come nearer Len and Con.”

Margot said nothing, but her mouth dropped sulkily. Her form mistress passed on to Emerence with a word or two of praise for that young woman who had contrived to attain to twelfth and beamed as if life held nothing better for her for the moment.

This was in the morning. Mittagessen took place at twelve and after that, they all streamed off in various directions, some by means of the big motor-coaches the school mostly used for getting about the country. Vb, however, had to go down by train to Interlaken where they caught the coach to Thun and boarded the train which would take them by way of Kandersteg, Brig and Visp to Zermatt. As Rosamund Lilley had exclaimed when she first studied the route, it was a fearfully cross-country journey, but it is impossible to go by road all the way to Zermatt, so the Powers-that-Be had ordained that Vb should do the whole trip by rail.

It had been a very hot day—so hot, that the Head had ended lessons at ten-thirty that morning and Vb had had an excellent chance of going over the way they must take. They packed themselves into the carriages of the train going to Thun with more than a little grumbling about the heat, but once they rolled out of the station, they met the breeze off the lake and the grumbling died down. Len had pulled Ted and Rosamund into one compartment with her. Con and Ricki had followed and Margot had instantly hauled Emerence along to join them. Mary-Lou saw it all and after a quick word to Mdlle, made her appearance among them.

“Room for a little one?” she inquired, beaming genially on them.

“Heaps!” Len replied. “Shove up a bit, Ted. Have this seat, Mary-Lou.”

Mary-Lou sank down, pulled off her hat and fanned herself vigorously with it. “Ouf! This heat is really something! I’m melting at the moment!”

“Won’t it be cooler at Zermatt?” Rosamund asked.

“I’m hoping so. If not, you’ll probably have to leave me there as a large spot of grease in the main street! Thank goodness I’m coming with you and not going to the Ticino! I’ve been

there before in the summer and I found it the outside of enough.” She looked round. “Where’s Odette, Con?”

A quick scowl knit Margot’s brows at this public acknowledgment of the friendship existing between Con and the French girl. Con, sitting on the same side, did not see it, though Mary-Lou did, but she guessed at it as she replied quickly, “The Head had a phone call from Mme Mercier, saying she was in Interlaken and wanted Odette to spend the hol with her, so Odette went off before school this morning. I rather wish she hadn’t. I’m afraid she’ll be homesick again when we go back.”

“Yes,” said Mary-Lou judiciously before Margot could break in with a little unkind comment that was just on the tip of her tongue. “I agree that it is a mistake in one way. Still, it can’t be helped now. It’s not to be wondered at, you know. Auntie Joey told me that Mme Mercier is a sick woman and you have to remember that she and Odette have been all in all to each other. You’ll have to do your best to cheer Odette up when you go back, Con.”

“I didn’t know Mme Mercier was ill,” Con said, opening her brown eyes widely.

“Not too good, I’m afraid. I don’t know if Odette knows anything about it, though, so please, all of you, don’t mention it to her when you see her again. It would be the most cruel thing you could do if she doesn’t. I hope,” Mary-Lou added virtuously, “that *no* Chalet girl would ever be cruel, either deliberately or involuntarily. But make allowances for Odette, all of you, if she *is* rather weepified.”

Margot’s cheeks burned. As soon as she had heard Mary-Lou’s indiscreet speech, it had leaped to her mind that here would be an easy way to get rid of Odette, at any rate. But even in her present mood, she could hardly use it after what the Head Girl had added. Again Mary-Lou saw her and wished she had bitten her tongue out before she had mentioned anything about Mme Mercier. However, it had been said now and couldn’t be unsaid. She only hoped her final remarks would hold Margot.

“Odette wanted me to go with her,” Con said in her rather sleepy way, “but I told Auntie Hilda I wanted to go to Zermatt. I know all the district round the lakes pretty thoroughly now after all these years and I like seeing new places. Besides, I had an idea that they’d really rather be alone, so I said, ‘No, thank you.’”

“Very sensible of you,” Mary-Lou agreed.

“How far up *is* Zermatt?” Ted asked of no one in particular.

“Well over 5,000 feet,” Len looked across at Ricki with a grin. “You remember what Papa said when he took us all to Zion in the Christmas term, Ricki? If it’s only clear weather—and it ought to be at this time of year—we should have some astounding views of the Matterhorn!”

“Honestly?” Ricki looked suitably thrilled, “that will be simply *stupendous!*”

Mary-Lou smothered a grin. Much earlier in the year, the Head had laid a ban on the perpetual use of the word “marvellous”. As she had pointed out at the time, there were plenty of other adjectives just as suitable and the same one repeated by all and sundry on every possible occasion became monotonous. It was at that time that Lady Russell, head of the company which now owned the school that she herself had founded in Tirol in what Joey Maynard elected to call “the Dark Ages”, had sent Con a copy of Roget’s *Thesaurus* and the entire body of Vb had fallen on it with cries of joy. The result had been startling on occasion, especially as they generously shared their discoveries with the rest and everyone was not discriminating enough to use the words in their proper sense.

“Have you ever been to Zermatt, Mary-Lou?” Rosamund asked.

Mary-Lou nodded. “Ages ago, Verity and I had a day up there while Mother and Dad were living at the Rösleinalp. I’ve always wanted to stay a few days and see it properly, so I simply bounded on this chance and luckily for me, the Head saw things in the right light!” She finished with a low peal of laughter.

“Did you expect anything different?” Len asked, her eyes dancing wickedly.

“Well, you never know. She might have refused me.”

“I doubt it! You do get away with the most unheard of things!”

“So I’ve been told a score of times!” Mary-Lou sighed. “Oh, well she did agree, and here I am, honouring you with my presence!”

The girls chuckled and then Con asked, “Can you tell us about it at all?”

“That depends on what you want to know. You don’t see much in a day!”

“Well, tell us what it looks like for a start,” Emerence suggested.

“Right! First, then, it lies at the bottom of a cup——”

“Of a *what*?” demanded Emerence, looking as if her eyes would drop out.

“Well, it’s really a cup-like depression in the mountain with steep sides rising on all sides but one. As Zermatt itself is surrounded by green meadows and over it hangs the Matterhorn, not to speak of a good many other peaks, you can imagine that it really is worth seeing. You’ll love the houses! They’re like all those of the Valais and delightful to look at. You’ll see when you get there.”

“And in the meantime,” Len exclaimed, jumping up to lift down her suitcase, “if we don’t scam, we’ll be carried on to wherever this train may be going! We’re practically at Thun! Get cracking, all of you!”

They were on their feet instantly and when the train pulled up in the station at Thun, everyone was ready. They had a few minutes’ wait for the Thun-Kandersteg-Brig-Visp express, but it swept in and they hurried into the carriages. Mary-Lou contrived to keep her party together, though it involved some of the smaller members sitting in the laps of the others, for a good many people were making for the great Rhône glacier and the train was fairly full. However, they did it in the end.

Once they were off, the Vb girls returned to Zermatt promptly.

“What would you say was the *chief* characteristic of Zermatt?” Ricki said, quoting from exam papers, whereat the others chuckled.

“Its lack of noise,” Mary-Lou replied instantly. “Stand up a moment, Ted. You’ve got my skirt all rucked up.”

Ted bounced to her feet and the Head Girl pulled her maltreated skirt straight before sitting down again and pulling Ted into her lap once more.

“How do you mean lack of noise?” Rosamund asked with real curiosity. “Aren’t there *any* sounds?”

“Oh, plenty!”

“Then why did you say it lacked noise?” Margot demanded indignantly, her own grievances forgotten for the moment.

“I meant you don’t hear any motor horns, nor the awful screeching you get with brakes and things like that.”

“Do you mean there aren’t any up there at all?” Emerence exclaimed.

“Just exactly that.”

“But—but *why*?” Ted asked, startled. “How do people get about?”

“On their own arched insteps—or by train. Or I believe you can hire mules if you absolutely *must*. And there are the hotel coaches, of course, to bring visitors and their luggage to and from the station; but they’re horse-drawn.”

“Gosh! It must make you feel as if you’d landed way back into the middle of Queen Victoria’s reign!” Emerence exclaimed in awed tones.

“Never having lived then, I couldn’t say!” Mary-Lou retorted. “I can tell you, though, it’s quite a treat to be free from petrol smells. And all the horses wear bells so you get the jingling of them most of the time. It reminded me awfully of the time when they broadcast some of the Sherlock Holmes stories and they went about in hansoms and you heard the bells jingling as the horse trotted along.”

“It sounds wizard!” Len commented. “But of course, you wouldn’t get motor sounds or smells. Ferry told us that we were going by train because motor vehicles couldn’t get any further than Visp.”

Emerence, lazy as usual, broke in to demand if they could hire the hotel coaches for trips. She was instantly assailed by a storm of scorn, Mary-Lou asking if she wanted to ride *everywhere*? Len, however, put the finishing touch by pointing out that if she went on like this for the next few years she would get so fat from want of exercise, she wouldn’t be able to pass the door of a motor!

“You’re on the chubby side already!” she wound up.

This happened to be true. Emerence, who had been a shrimp of a girl when she first came to the school, had suddenly begun to put on weight this last year and she had been horrified to find that last summer’s frocks wouldn’t meet on her. At sight of her face, Mary-Lou went off into peals of laughter which even the strangers of their compartment joined in. Finally, a middle-aged lady with a pleasant face, intervened to say, “Never mind, my dear. It’s only puppy fat which bothers most people of your age sooner or later. You’ll fine down again presently.”

That brought Mary-Lou to a sudden recollection of her duty and she ordered them all to wait until they saw the place for themselves. She further relieved Emerence’s mind by saying that if they visited the Gornergrat as they were sure to do, they would go up by the rack-and-pinion railway from Zermatt.

Active Len looked disappointed. “Don’t you think some of us might climb?”

“No fear! You haven’t brought your skis and as you go up another 5,000 feet or so, mainly through snow-fields, it couldn’t be done.”

They calmed down after that, but the people who had been nursing others were very thankful when at last they reached Visp where they all had to tumble out. The little mountain railway had its train waiting and they crowded in, the only passengers to Zermatt on that particular train. Up and up they climbed, at first between fields and vineyards tilting upwards on either side of the line. Then, suddenly the valley of the river Visp narrowed and they were among towering mountains. The river still flowed at the side of the line and as they mounted and the gradient grew steeper, it seemed literally to plunge downwards. The valley widened at St. Niklaus, then on and up again, steeper and narrower until at last it broadened out again and the train drew up in Zermatt station. They were there!

The mistresses were out first and stood waiting until their flock were all clustered together. Then Mdlle took charge.

“Into line, mes filles!” she said firmly. “You will have time for wandering after we have reached our pension. Betty and Priscilla, lead, if you please. Follow Miss Ferrars and Miss

Wilmot. They know the way.”

They marched off briskly, casting curious glances round as they went. The evening sun was shining now, and Zermatt was very gay with the jingle-jangle of the horsebells and the houses, all typically Valaisian, with bronzed guides hanging about the one street with the station and the main hotels at one end, then shops, smaller hotels and pensions, until at last it petered out into dark brown chalets running down to the bridge that crosses the Visp to the green pastures, where sheep and the soft-eyed cows grazed placidly.

They had taken barely three steps when a sudden joyful outcry from Len halted the line. “Look—*look!* The Matterhorn!”

They all looked and there was a concerted gasp as the loveliness of the great gleaming peak, lined by a thousand deep blue and purple shadows in the evening sunlight broke on them. The mountain which has been declared by many to be not merely the loveliest mountain in Europe, but the loveliest in the world can be seen from almost every point in Zermatt—unless, of course, you turn your back on her! The Chalet girls had no mind to do that. They stood stockstill, gazing with all their eyes and the mistresses gazed with them, though all of them had been there before with the exception of Miss Andrews.

Emerence spoke first. “*Oh!* I heard it was lovely, but I’d no idea it was *so* lovely! I—I think it even beats our Jungfrau!”

“*Don’t* call her ‘it!’” Mary-Lou said reprovingly. “Mountains are mainly feminine—like watches and ships. Say ‘she’ when you speak of her.”

The rest took note. Mdlle let them gaze their fill. Then she moved them on again.

“You are hungry and, I am sure, fatigued,” she said in her fluent, prettily accented English. “Come! We will seek our pension and wash faces and hands and make neat our coiffures. Then when we have had our meal, we will come out again and you may promenade as you will for an hour.”

Mdlle was a delightful person when she chose, but her discipline was firm. With a last glance, they set off again and in five minutes had reached the quiet pension where they were to stay for the week-end. The hostess greeted them warmly, showed them to their rooms—three long narrow ones with narrow wooden beds set against one wall and a chair between each bed and the next. There was one large mirror. Rows of pegs were ready to hang frocks and coats on and there was a big armoire, black with age and gleaming with hard rubbing where the rest of their belongings might go. That was all, except that every room had electric light, of course.

“It looks,” said Len with a giggle as she established her claim to one of the beds, “exactly like the dormitories you read about in old-fashioned school-stories.”

“Are Mdlle and the rest in one of these?” Ricki asked in awed tones.

“Ask me another! I couldn’t tell you!” Len had untwisted her heavy pigtail and was brushing it out before one of the windows. “Come and plait my wig, will you, Ted?”

Ted, whose hair, thoroughly thinned out these days, gave her much less trouble than Len’s lengthy locks, obliged. Margot, who insisted on being bobbed, had merely to run a comb through her halo of curls and she was ready. Ricki’s hair, too, was cropped. Rosamund and Con still had long pigtails, though Con had remarked more than once recently that her hair took so much time in the mornings, she was thinking of asking leave to have it cut again. Betty Landon was bobbed and so was Francie Wilford. Emerence wore her light, wavy locks tied in two tails at the nape of her neck. Alicia Leonard, did hers in a pony tail which gave her endless trouble as it was straight, heavy hair and needed careful manipulation to look tidy.

At last they were all ready and trooped off downstairs, headed by Emerence and Margot. Abendessen was ready, with the Valaisian dish of raclette to give them a good start off. They were thrilled by it. One of the large local cheeses had been put to melt before the electric heater and it was brought to table hot and soft. From this, everyone scraped off fragments which they ate with floury potatoes cooked in their jackets and gherkins.

"I only hope," said Miss Ferrars as she looked thoughtfully round the table after the cheese had been removed to give place to dishes of strawberries, served with cream whipped to a thick foam, "that none of you will have nightmares after this!"

Abendessen over, they raced upstairs to the bathroom to wash their fingers free from stickiness and then, having been duly warned that they must keep to Zermatt for this evening, were sent out to wander about as they chose.

Len tucked a hand into the arms of Ted and Rosamund, and turned them towards the more rural end of the street. "I want to see the Visp up here," she announced. "Come on, folks! Let's go along here and take a dekko at it. Coming, Con? Coming, Margot?"

Margot, on the verge of refusing, changed her mind. It had struck her that if she was with them, she could keep an eye on Len and her doings. Con agreed easily and the party sauntered off down the street, admiring everything they saw. At first, they passed shops, small hotels and pensions. Then these gradually became chalets until they petered out not far from an entrancing fountain with marmots in bronze frolicking round it. From there, they strolled down to the bridge over the young Visp and stood on it, gazing down at the grey waters, tossing and swirling in their headlong rush to the valley to join the Rhone on its way to the Mediterranean.

"Why's it so grey?" Emerence asked presently.

"Because it comes from a glacier," Len explained. "Mamma says that all glacier-born rivers are like that at first. They lose it as they hurtle down, though. I suppose their colour changes with the rock and so on of their beds." She turned for a satisfying look at the Matterhorn and the village beneath it. Lights were twinkling from some of the windows and she marshalled the rest to turn back.

"It's going to be dark pretty soon now. We'd better be going back. Oh, aren't those chalets lovely? They remind me of Sion—remember, Ricki?"

Ricki gave a chuckle. "Do I not! I don't think I ever enjoyed a trip more than that one."

"It seems awfully odd to hear of a place called Sion in Switzerland," Ted remarked. "It always makes me think of *Jerusalem!*"

"Oh, heaps of places called Sion all over the world," Margot said airily. "I believe there are two or three in the U.S.A., for instance. You never expected to see anything like that when you were at your *last* school, did you, Ted? What a good thing for you that you—er—*left* and came here?"

Ted flushed at the note in her voice, but before she could reply to her tormentor, Con had broken in. Speaking in the chilly voice she had used for the past few days to Margot, she said, "If you come to that, neither did we at one time."

It was Margot's turn to colour. She shot Con a most unsisterly glance. Con paid no heed to it, but Len saw it and gave the pair a startled look. So far, Con had said nothing about what had happened on that fatal Sunday and the eldest of the family knew nothing about it. But the little episode which had just occurred had told Len a good deal and she guessed at more. That Margot was jealous, she knew. Now she realised that she must be on the look-out or her younger sister would try to break up her friendships.

“And that, I won’t allow for a moment!” Len thought. “What’s more, the parents would back me up. But I hope it won’t ever come to such a pitch that either of them has to know. That really would put the tin hat on everything!”

Chapter XVII
A TRIP—AND A PIG!

On the Friday, they all went up to the Gornergrat by the funicular. As the train left at eight-thirty, it meant early breakfast, but Frau Rinteln was accustomed to that. Half-past seven found the entire party sitting down to coffee, rolls and black cherry jam, all clad in heavy nailed boots and climbing kit and all excited.

“Which way do we go?” Mary-Lou asked Mdlle between two bites of buttered roll heavily loaded with jam.

“By the Riffelalp where, on Monday, Miss Ferrars and I will take all those who wish to try to make their first Alpine climb,” Mdlle said smiling. “There are easy climbs there for the beginners, though there are also some quite difficult ones.”

“And what about us who *don't* want to?” Emerence asked.

“There is plenty to amuse you there, ma petite. Today, we must see which of you who wish to go are not troubled by the altitude. Many people cannot endure it and suffer from mountain sickness. So we will take only those who are not affected and who wish to go. The Gornergrat will make us a good test, for the trains run with fair frequency. Nor do we go further than the terminus.”

“And that reminds me,” Miss Wilmot put in, “that you must all wear your sunglasses.”

“Why?” Con asked involuntarily.

“Because, my good girl, the Gornergrat lies above the snowline. You can imagine what the glare from the snow will be like in *this* kind of sunshine!” She glanced out of the window to where the sun, early as it was, was blazing down.

“Oh, I see,” Con murmured.

“And,” Miss Ferrars added, “anyone subject to sunburn, should use sun-tan cream. You don't want to return to school with strips of reddened skin dangling around your faces and necks, do you? Apart from the fact that it is so painful.”

No one did and as soon as breakfast was over, they all clattered upstairs to dab the cream on all exposed parts as well as get their sunglasses.

The journey up the Gornergrat takes about fifty minutes, but no one found the run boring. Turn which way they would, they saw new facets of the Matterhorn's glory and by the time they had reached the Gornergrat Bahnhof, they were so overawed by the majesty and dignity of the great mountain that even Margot was subdued and never attempted to tease Ted.

They remained near the station. Mdlle was much too old a bird to be caught with mountain-sick girls on her hands and she had noticed that Priscilla Dawbarn was whiter than usual before they had been up there an hour. She had a brief confab with the other three mistresses and the result of it was that at half-past eleven, the girls were summoned to the station where they were to eat their meal. The Gornergrat Hotel remains closed during the out-of-season months, but Frau Rinteln had packed lavishly for their rucksacs and by the time they had disposed of her meat patties in pastry that melted in the mouth, compôte of fruit safe in jars with screw-tops, rolls and butter and flasks of coffee, most of them felt better, though Priscilla was very piano and Emerence seemed to have nothing to say for herself.

“What do we do now?” Mary-Lou demanded when all traces of their meal had been hidden. “Can't we go just a little way up, Mdlle? I would so like to go on.”

Priscilla caught at Miss Ferrars' arm. "Please, Miss Ferrars, I'm sorry, but I don't think I *can*! I feel most awfully queer."

Miss Ferrars looked sharply at her. "Yes; the altitude is too much for you," she said. "I'm sorry, Priscilla, but you'll have to go back to Zermatt or you'll be really ill." She raised her voice. "Anyone else who doesn't feel very well?"

Half-a-dozen others had to confess to feeling less fit than usual—among them, Rosamund Lilley and Emerence Hope. Charmian Spencer also remarked that every now and then she turned slightly dizzy. In the end, of the twenty-two present, only fifteen were left by the time Miss Ferrars had finished her rounds. The rest were bundled into the next train down, escorted by Mary-Lou who offered to give up the rest of the trip to allow Miss Andrews, who had never been up here before, to stay.

Middle had already departed with some of the keener spirits so it was more or less left to Kathy Ferrars to decide. She looked round at the affected ladies and decided that Mary-Lou would be able to handle them easily. However, before she could say anything, Miss Wilmot broke in.

"Suppose Mary-Lou and I take charge of the invalids and you and Miss Andrews march the others after Middle?" she proposed. "All that they need, really, is to get down to more normal air. That and a rest on their beds will cure them. Meanwhile, Mary-Lou and I can entertain each other very nicely. What about it, Mary-Lou?"

Mary-Lou's face lit up. "I'd love it if you're sure you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't! Just think," Nancy Wilmot said solemnly, "what a chance it will be for me to try to get some last oddments of maths into you!"

Mary-Lou's face was a study! "In that event, I shall play nurse to all the patients and sit with them the entire afternoon!" she retorted.

Miss Wilmot grinned. "Yes; one has to be up very early in the day to catch *you*! Very well, you may consider my kind offer withdrawn. No maths, but pleasing conversation shall be the order of the day. And by that same token, here comes the train. Pick up your things you crowd, and be ready to board her. Priscilla, take my arm."

She hustled them all off and Miss Ferrars turned to collect the few remaining to her and take them on to where Middle and the others had come to a stop. Middle considered that they were as far up as she wished to take them today. Now she and they were standing gazing at the magnificent panorama of mountains, glaciers and mountains again, clear-cut and wonderful against the brilliant blue of the summer sky. Over all in one sense, almost dwarfing the rest, the Matterhorn was silhouetted starkly above giving a sense of grandeur and solitude which none of the others did.

"I do think," Len said presently, "that to call such a stupendous mountain 'Matterhorn' was ridiculous!"

"Why?" Heather Clayton asked. "Has it any special meaning?"

"Of course it has!" Margot, who was nearby, told her. "It means 'Peak of the Meadows'. 'Matt' is German—or Swiss-German; I'm not sure which—for 'a meadow'."

"Well, you could always use the French name for it and call it Mont Cervin," Miss Ferrars pointed out. "What is the meaning, Con? I haven't the remotest idea. I never worried about it."

"Or," put in Middle who had been listening to all this with laughter in her eye, "one may always return to the past and use the name given by the Romans—Mons Sylvius. It is thought that Sylvius was the Romanized name of one of the Helvetian gods, but I have heard other meanings given as well. At least, Len, you may have a choice of names."

“Oh, I see,” Len murmured, rather overwhelmed by all this.

Mdlle gave her a smiling look and then turned to naming some of the more outstanding peaks and passes for the girls.

“Yonder is Monte Rosa. See how it has many peaks and ‘saddles’ as they are called, and all matched in pairs. Those twin peaks are Les Jumeaux—Castor and Pollux, named after the Heavenly Twins. Yonder lies the Breithorn and that little sharp peak further round is known as the Kleine Mattherhorn. Between it and the Mattherhorn lies the pass of St. Théodule.” She paused before she added, “I have a story to tell you of that.”

“Oh, what?” It came as a chorus, Con adding, “It’s so much easier to remember places if you have a story about them.”

“This is a legend,” Mdlle said. “The pass leads from Zermatt into Italy and so far as we have records, it was first crossed before the fourth century before Christ. There have been many Roman coins dating from 200 B.C. found. But it takes its name from St. Théodule, the first Bishop of Sion, which he ruled from A.D. 381 to 391. The Bishop was offered a very fine bell by the Pope, but the cost of transporting it from Rome and Sion would have been so enormous, that the Bishop hesitated about accepting it. However, the devil, who was on the watch for souls and especially holy souls, made a bargain with him. He would transport Bishop and bell from Rome to Sion in a single night on the sole condition that if they arrived at Sion before cockcrow, the soul of the Bishop should be his. St. Théodule accepted this offer and that evening, the devil with the bell over his shoulder and the Bishop clinging to the clapper of the bell, set off across the Pass. When they came in sight of Sion some hours before the dawn, the devil was exultant at the thought of this capturing an episcopal soul. But his exultation changed to disappointment and fury, for the Saint suddenly cried out:

“Coq, chante!

Que tu chantes!

Ou que jamais plus tu ne chantes!”

And immediately, all the cocks in and around Sion woke up and began to crow their loudest, so St. Théodule won, for it was an easy matter to bring the bell safely to the cathedral and he had saved his soul from Hell.”

“It’s a gaudy story,” Con said with a chuckle. “I do so love to hear of Satan being cheated in that way.”

“What is the *exact* meaning of what the Bishop said, Mdlle?” Betty Landon asked.

Mdlle threw her an indescribable glance. “But Betty! After all these years are you not yet able to translate so simple a phrase?”

Betty blushed. “I had an idea it was some kind of idiom,” she apologised.

“It’s easy enough,” Margot said with a little scorn in her voice. “All it means is: ‘Sing, cock! How you sing! Or never sing again!’ I don’t suppose the cocks liked the idea of being dumb forever, so they *sang!*”

“And,” chimed in Kathy Ferrars who had once spent a week-end at Sion, “they still do it. They start in well before dawn and go on crowing until they have every visitor in the place awakened. I suppose the inhabitants of Sion are accustomed to it and it doesn’t worry them!”

“What amazes me,” Len said thoughtfully, “is that Satan always seems so easy to cheat, according to these yarns about him.”

“What amazes me,” Mdlle said with one of her rapid changes from gay to grave, “is that human beings are even more easily cheated by *him*. That is why it is so dangerous to listen to

his lightest whisper. He is so clever that he can make one believe that black is white and white is black and so we go lower and lower until we are completely caught in his net and the way to freedom is a hard and toilsome one.”

Margot shot a quick look at her. Was this intended for her? As a matter of fact it was not. Mdlle had spoken without thinking—or rather, she had been thinking aloud. All the same, it gave Margot pause. In one way, it helped to save the situation when it looked as if it had been utterly lost.

The other girls were quiet for a moment. Then Heather said with a sigh, “Well, I’ve seen some marvellous sights since we came to Switzerland, but I almost think this is the most marvellous. All those waves and *waves* of mountain peaks, all white and gleaming in the sun—at least, most of them are! I’ll never forget it.”

It was Miss Andrews who finally brought them back to earth. She glanced at her watch and gave an exclamation. “Mdlle, didn’t you say we were to go down by the mid-afternoon train? Then we’ll have to fly or we’ll miss it! Look at the time!”

Mdlle cried in horror when she saw. “But where, then, has the time gone? Come, mes filles! We must make all haste or we shall indeed miss the train. Dépêchez-vous, tout le monde!”

They *all* examined their watches. Then they turned and made all the haste they could, which was not exactly easy up there, even in nailed boots and with their stocks. However, they did it by one minute and as the last mistress bolted into the car, the doors slid to and they began to descend slowly to Zermatt.

“That was a near thing!” Ted remarked.

“Too near for my liking,” Len returned. “Mary-Lou and Miss Wilmot would have been imagining all sorts of horrors if we didn’t turn up on time.”

“Mdlle, what would have happened if we *had* missed it?” Margot asked.

“We should have waited for the next; but that would have been some time and I imagine you would all have been very hungry by the time we reached Zermatt,” Mdlle replied, smiling. “Also, Miss Wilmot and Mary-Lou would certainly have been anxious lest there had been an accident and I am glad they are spared that.”

“What are we doing this evening?” Carmela Walther, a Swiss girl, asked.

“I think you may rest until Abendessen, and when that is over, you may go for a walk in the meadows,” Mdlle replied. “Tomorrow, we will visit the Riffelalp which is the summer resort up here and very beautiful. That will be an easy expedition and you will all enjoy it.”

“Well, we shall have an easy time till bedtime, anyhow,” Ricki Fry remarked. “Can we do any sort of climbing at the Riffelalp, Mdlle?”

Mdlle laughed. “We will see. Meantime, you are missing some amazing scenery so look out of the windows. You may talk when we are back in Zermatt.”

That stopped the questioning, for they all turned to the windows and eagerly watched the changes in the panorama of mountain scenery as they slid slowly downwards. They were met outside the station by the rest of their party, all excepting Priscilla who still, to quote herself, “felt jolly rocky”. They strolled back to their pension where a meal was awaiting them of wonderful pastries, ivory butter piled thickly on fancy bread twists, and what Mary-Lou called “lashings of coffee and cream.”

When that was over, they went out to buy postcards to send home and Ted was appalled to find how much a postcard cost if you really wrote on it! The postage was, as she remarked to the nearest person, Margot, outrageous.

“I know,” Margot said. “But it’s always the same. You’ll just have to be content with something like, ‘Gorgeous time here’, or ‘Wish you were with me’ or something like that and let it go at that. It’s really a lot cheaper to send a letter.”

She spoke as pleasantly as she did to anyone else and Ted, having managed to decide on her five words, remembered it and felt a glow.

In any case, they had an adventure ahead which was, as Mary-Lou later remarked, to make the trip outstanding.

It happened when they had left the pension for their stroll in the meadows. Miss Wilmot was sauntering along with the triplets and their special friends surrounding her. They had left the village by way of the bridge over the Visp and were walking across a meadow where the ground sloped upwards. Beyond it, was a farm, and, though this they were not to know till later, a Scots family were staying there en pension. The family consisted of father, mother, young uncle and a small boy of five who had an unbridled passion for babies of all kinds but human. He had already gone crazy over the goat kids which skipped about besides their mothers and had been well butted by one outraged mamma when he tried to hug her baby. The cat was always being robbed of one or more of her kittens and as for the calves, he could never have enough of them. His unlucky family scolded, coaxed and finally punished. Nothing would make small Ian leave the animal babies alone.

Seven days before this, the family sow had produced a family of eleven piglings. Warned by what had happened, everyone concerned had kept Ian away from her and he knew nothing of the new family until that evening when he met one of the young sons of their hosts, bearing a bucket of buttermilk to the proud mamma.

Ian had quickly picked up enough of the local dialect to understand and make himself understood and he soon got it out of Hansi where he was going. Nothing would serve him but that he must come, too. When they reached the pigpen, he was enthralled by the pink babies who snuffled and snorted with shrill little squeals as they nuzzled each and their mother. Hansi opened the door of the pigpen to pour the buttermilk into the lady’s swill tub. Ian slipped in after him, grabbed the nearest baby and clutched it lovingly to him, talking to it affectionately.

Unfortunately, the pigling was terrified and he squealed his terrors abroad. Mamma heaved herself to her feet, while Hansi with a yell, tried to push Ian out, snatch the pigling from him and shut the door of the pen all at one and the same time. Between this and the infuriated sow, he lost his footing and fell full length while Ian, taking alarm from the furious grunting of the pig and Hansi’s wild yells, fled from the pigpen, still clutching his prey and made off, followed by the pig who was now raging.

He made for the open gate from the farmyard, his short legs going at full speed. Down the meadow up which Nancy Wilmot and her flock were strolling, he went. Behind him came the pig and she was followed by Hansi, who had found his feet again; Mr. McCleod, Ian’s father, who had come round the corner in time to see what was happening; and Herr Schultz, righteously angry at the thought of what all this might mean to a sow with babies to feed.

It took neither the mistress nor the girls two minutes to grasp what was happening. With a shout of, “Steady, the Buffs!” Nancy straddled the pathway to try to check young Ian’s headlong flight while the girls scattered to try and turn the sow.

How it actually happened, no one could ever quite determine. Somehow, the terrified Ian and his squealing burden were diverted and the triplets caught and held him while Ted snatched the baby from him, crying, “We’ll give it back to her!”

The sow was so blind with rage that she simply hurtled ahead. Her head and forequarters passed under Miss Wilmot's legs, then as she pushed, she brought that lady down on her back and went rushing on. Instinctively, Miss Wilmot had clamped the fat flanks with her knees, so she, too, went on, perforce, riding the pig hindside foremost! The unexpected weight—Miss Wilmot stood five foot ten and was plump to put it mildly, brought up the enraged animal before she reached the torrent where she might have come to a sudden and tragic end. She rolled over, tossing the mistress to the ground, and discovered that she had no more breath to run. Indeed, the farmer, rushing up first of the crew after Ian, was alarmed about her. Pigs are not built for racing.

By this time, Mr McCleod had reached the party, snatched his son from the arms of Margot and Len, and taking him under his left arm, was proceeding to teach him a lesson. A more awful noise was never heard. The pig was grunting and gasping; Herr Schultz, shaken out of his usual monumental calm was letting off a series of exclamations in dialect; Ian was screaming for a good reason—his father had decided to give him a lesson he would never forget—and what with the piglet squealing, the girls shrieking with laughter and the added cries of Hansi who had managed to reach the spot but was last, the din must have been unique for Zermatt.

Mary-Lou heard it as she reached the bridge and her long legs made short work of the distance as she came up breathlessly to help Miss Wilmot rise and ask anxiously if she were hurt.

By this time, Herr Schultz had decided that his sow was not so much the worse though it was as well that her babies were beginning to demand to share Mother's tub. He put a brawny foot under her at a nicely-judged place, calling on Hansi to come and help, and together they got the lady to her trotters. Ted at once ran up and handed over her noisy burden to its owner. His son was busy fastening a cord to one of her legs, but he finished, handed the other end to his father and took the terrified baby with the remark that he would carry it back to its brothers and sisters.

Mr. McCleod had set his sobbing son down by this time, but still held on to him. "And what did ye think ye were doing, ye wee gomeril?" he demanded.

"I wanted to love it," the "wee gomeril" sobbed. "It was so wee and pink and long-nebbit! I thought maybe I might take it to bed with me!"

That really did top it! Even his father had to forget his annoyance and for the next minute or two, they all rocked with laughter. The rest coming up, could get no sense out of any of them, but caught the infection and just what the worthy burghers of Zermatt may have thought who saw the scene, will never be known.

Eventually, they managed to pull themselves together. Madam Pig was persuaded to walk up to her pen where her family were waiting for her. Ian was marched off, still weeping, to be put to bed on dry bread and milk. The mistresses gathered their flock together and bore them off to their pension. But weeks later, Margot proclaimed that she woke up during the night to hear a queer sound from Ted Grantley's bed and when she went to demand what Ted thought she was doing, found that young woman under the sheets, giggling madly. She had dreamed the whole thing over again and wakened herself by laughing and was unable to stop.

Margot dealt with it promptly. She fetched a glass of water from a shelf where carafe and glass stood, and lowered it over Ted threateningly. "One more sound out of you and I'll chuck the lot over your head!" she proclaimed—as far as one *can* proclaim in a whisper.

Ted made a herculean effort and at last stopped, but her eyes were swimming in tears and she was fighting for breath. “S-sorry!” she gasped. “B-but it w-was so f-funny!”

“Yes, and if you bring Mdille or Willy or anyone else here, it’ll be funnier still!” Margot warned her. “Here! Drink this and don’t be such an ass!”

Ted sat up and sipped and felt better. Margot took the glass when she had finished and put it back. But before she returned to her own bed, she bent over Ted to mutter, “Now you just shut up and go to sleep. We don’t want a row for talking after Lights Out!”

Oddly enough, her devil sulked after this, but her guardian angel smiled. There was still a chance!

Chapter XVIII
MARGOT'S CLOCK

“Oh, Margot! Con and I want to go to buy our gifts for the parents and we want to go now. Will you come with us? You're joining in, of course?” Len looked eagerly at her sister.

Margot frowned. “Oh, Len, I can't! I've promised Emmy I'll go with her to buy hers. Can't you wait till later on?”

“How can we?” Con asked reasonably. “It's now or never. We leave as soon as Mittagessen is over so if we don't go now, there won't be time.”

The half-term was almost at an end. Whether it was due to the awe the amazing mountain panoramas had inspired in her or whether it was all the laughter they had shared over the episode of “Wee Ian” and the piglet, everything had gone smoothly. Margot had let Ted alone. Indeed, she had been almost friendly with her. Ted, basking in the peace, seemed happier than ever and was so fully occupied with all the new sights and sounds, that she had no time for anything else. The rest enjoyed themselves to the top of their bent. As Nancy Wilmot had observed to her colleagues only the night before when they were enjoying a last cigarette after the girls had gone to bed, it had been the most peaceful half-term she ever remembered. It is true that Kathy Ferrars had warned her not to talk until they got the girls safely back to school, but it seemed hardly possible that any trouble could arise now.

Mary-Lou, who had been keeping a firm, if surreptitious eye on the triplets and their friends, felt that she might relax her efforts for a couple of hours and had gone off with Miss Ferrars and Miss Andrews for a last short scramble. She was friendly with both out of school hours and though she would be a “Millie” next term, there would be only one year of that. Then would come the university and thereafter her training as an archeologist and after that, as she had observed, she might be anywhere!

Middle had given the girls leave to spend what time was left to them before Mittagessen in buying such souvenirs and gifts as they wished. She had warned them once again that Zermatt was an expensive place, reminded them of the school's Sale, not so far away now, and then sent them off. They might not leave the village, but she did not see how they could come to any harm shopping. She herself and Miss Wilmot remained behind to attend to such details as checking on the cases, settling their various small accounts and going through the bedrooms to make sure that nothing had been left behind. She bade the girls put on their wide-brimmed hats for the sun was blazing down again and she did not wish to have to cope with any cases of sunstroke; reminded them not to go in groups of more than four or five at a time, and sent them off.

Most of them had gone already when Len put her request to Margot. Ted and Rosamund had joined forces and departed together, leaving Len and Con to collect their third. This had been Rosamund's idea.

“The Maynards are sure to want to buy something for their mother and it'll be easier for them if they go together. Shall you and I go on our own?” she proposed. “I asked Ricki Fry, but she's joining up with Betty and Alicia.”

Ted was quite agreeable. “O.K.—though I haven't much to buy. It's no use getting anything for my mother. She's touring the West Indies and then she's going on to Canada to spend six months with my brother Gerald and his family. I haven't a clue where she is at the

moment, so I couldn't send anything. But I want to get something for my cousin May. I can't afford much, but I'd like to get her some little thing. If it hadn't been for her I probably shouldn't have come here."

"Well, I haven't a lot to spend, either," Rosamund replied. "But I want a wooden bear for my niece and something for Mother. Postcards must do for the rest."

They went off after informing Len what they were doing and it had seemed to that astute young person that here was a chance to get Margot to themselves again and show her, as Mary-Lou had advised, that their tripletship was still the biggest thing in life to them. Unfortunately, Margot had plans of her own.

When they heard her reply, Len and Con looked at each other with dismay.

"Aren't you coming in with us?" Len queried. "We could get each of them something decentish then and that's better than two or three little oddments."

"Oh, I'll share all right," Margot returned. "But if you want me to come with you to help choose, you'll have to wait until Emmy's finished."

"But why shouldn't we all go together?" Con asked. "Then you could help Emmy and after that she could come with us while we chose for the parents."

Margot shook her head. "No; I promised Emmy we'd go together. But if you like to hang about until we get back, I'll come then."

The fact of the matter was that, to her at any rate, the most important part of Emerence's shopping was to be a present to herself. What was more, it was to be the sort of present that almost any parent would have objected to her girl receiving from another. No one would have minded a trifle, though the girls were not in the habit of buying gifts for each other. This, however, was no trifle.

On the Sunday morning, when they had been sauntering about the village, Margot and Emerence had gazed into the window of a jeweller's shop. There they had seen a gem of a clock and Margot had fallen in love with it. She had voiced her admiration aloud without, it must be said, ever thinking of having it herself. Emerence, who always had far more pocket-money than the school authorities thought at all good for her, had instantly proposed giving it to her.

"Emmy, you can't possibly!" Margot had exclaimed. "Besides, I couldn't let you. It must cost the earth! All that beautiful enamelling and the face has that rim of rhinestones round it! Do talk sense!"

"They're not proper stones—only chips," Emerence pointed out. "Besides, I've piles of money. When Mr. Peddy came to see me a fortnight ago and bring me some messages from Dad, he brought me a smashing big cheque Dad sent for half-term, so I've any amount. Besides, I *want* to give you something decent, Margot—honestly I do!"

What she could not yet tell Margot was that the said Mr. Peddy who was her father's London agent, had brought her word that this was to be her last term at the school. She was well past seventeen, though she was in the same form as girls of fourteen and fifteen. But then Emerence had never been clever and the first few years of her education had been decidedly sketchy. There was little hope that she would ever go much higher up the school than she already was and her parents had decided against giving her the usual finishing year at St. Mildred's. Mr. and Mrs. Hope proposed to visit the U.S.A. in the autumn and wanted their girl with them and altogether, it had seemed an excellent plan to them. The letter which Mr. Peddy had brought from her father had told Emerence that she was to say nothing about the latest plans until much later in the term. Mr. Hope was a casual parent in many ways, but once he

gave an order like that, he expected to be obeyed and his daughter knew it. She could not even tell her *alter ego* until he gave leave. But when she saw the size of the cheque he had sent her, she had made up her mind at once that Margot was to have a gift worth having as a good-bye gift. The little clock was the very thing and they had finally arranged to go together on the Tuesday morning when there could be no expedition as they were returning in the afternoon and buy it.

Margot knew perfectly well what both father and mother would say about such a present, but when Emerence insisted, she had been unable to hold out. She wanted that clock more than anything she had seen before. She gave in. But it would never do for Len and Con to be with them. They would raise an instant outcry. It had been quite a jolt to her when Len had come to ask her to join them.

She proceeded to ram her opinion home. “Emmy doesn’t want anyone but me with her. I don’t suppose we’ll be so very long. You two hang about and I’ll join you as soon as she’s finished,” she said.

Con opened her lips to say something, but Len guessed what was likely to come and was too quick for her. “Very well. We’ll go and be looking at things in the windows and get some idea of what we’re likely to be able to afford,” she said. “We’re giving fifteen francs each. Will you do the same?”

Margot nodded. “Oh, yes; I can do that all right.” She suddenly sighed. “I wish we were rich—like Emmy, for instance!”

“Well, we’re not, nor likely to be,” Con said with some tartness. “Emmy’s only one and there are squads of us! Anyhow, I’d rather have a big family and not much money than be an only and spend what you like. Being an only must be very *lonely!*”

“Here’s Emmy! I must go! See you shortly!” Margot raced off, thankful to get away without further trouble.

The pair vanished out of hearing before Con let loose.

“Did you hear *that?*” she demanded of Len.

“I did—I did! But for pity’s sake don’t go bargaining in! I know all you’re thinking—that Margot goes her own way and doesn’t mind about us. But don’t say it here and now, Con. We’ve got through the week-end decently and let’s finish it decently! Anyhow, she doesn’t really mean it nastily, though I know it looks like it. It’s just that she doesn’t think. Oh, Con! Don’t *you* start listening to a devil!” Len cried tragically.

Con looked startled, as well she might. “Goodness, what a thing to say! I don’t listen to a devil, only I must say I do not think Margot has a cheek to expect us to give her our time exactly when, she wants it and yet wait for her convenience when she chooses.”

“I know, but I can’t help it. It won’t do any good to have a row with her here. It would only spoil the whole holiday for everyone—probably get to Mamma’s ears and worry *her!* Pipe down, at least till we get back to the Platz. Come on! Let’s go and see if we can find anything that won’t mount up to more than forty-five francs!” And she slung her arm through Con’s and that young woman stopped talking.

Meantime Margot, swinging along beside Emerence, was in high feather. They made for the jeweller’s where they paused before the window a moment. The clock was still there and they stood admiring it. It certainly was charming; small—about four inches high, in a case of cream enamel with tiny clusters of alpenroses in each corner. The tiny face was rimmed round with a double row of rhinestone chips which glimmered and sparkled like rainbows where the light caught them. It was a most expensive trifle, as Margot’s own sense told her. Her parents

would certainly have a good deal to say when they got to hear of it, but she told herself that she would get round them somehow. The thing that mattered was that she really did want it badly and Emmy was giving it to her.

As if she guessed what her friend was thinking, Emerence turned to enter the shop, saying, "Come on! If you're sure you really like it, we'll get it. You *are* sure, aren't you, Margot? I want to give you something you really want."

She spoke with a little anxiety. Emerence might be dull at lessons, but she was not the daughter of a wealthy man for nothing. She recognised far better than Margot did that it would be costly anywhere and even more so in a place like Zermatt. Once she had paid for it, she would not have a great deal left out of even the outrageous cheque her father had sent her with the suggestion that she might like to buy some leaving presents for her special friends. If Margot were not sure, it would be better to let the clock go and wait until they could find something she liked better. But Margot had no doubts.

"I'd love it more than anything I can think of!" Then her conscience roused a little and she added, "But it'll be frightfully expensive. Are you *sure* you can afford it, Emmy?"

Emerence grinned. "Of course I'm sure! Dad sent me a really noble sum this time and as I got Mr. Peddy to cash it for me before he left, I didn't have to pay it into Bank so I've got the lot with me."

By this time, they were in the shop and an assistant was coming to ask how he could help them. Three minutes later and the clock in all its beauty was before them on the counter. Margot looked at it with longing eyes—and fell. She simply *must* have it as Emmy was being so kind about it! It was easy enough to suppress the feeble protests of her conscience and the upshot was that they left the shop with the carefully packed parcel in Emerence's big handbag beside the sadly depleted purse of its owner. She had judged its cost rightly and any other leaving presents she might make would indeed be trifles. Then she remembered that she had drawn very little from her Bank and as she was leaving school, she could use every penny there.

"We'll keep it a secret to ourselves," Margot said as they left the shop. "Just between you and me, Emmy. I don't want to share it with anyone else at present. Let's keep it a secret between you and me for a week or two, anyhow. Oh, it *is* dear of you to give me such a lovely thing! I'll keep it all my life!"

Emerence had been rather surprised at her first remark. Then the idea of a secret for just the two of them settled her. She was deeply fond of Margot and the younger girl had far too much influence over her to be good for either of them. She fell in with the idea and even offered to take charge of the clock until they reached school, as her bag was so much larger than Margot's.

Margot consented easily. To tell the truth she had begun to wonder how she was to get it back to school without either of her sisters finding out. She knew that it wasn't going to be easy to hide it, but she trusted to luck. She ought to be able to slip home during the next day or two and then she could tuck it away in her own bedroom. On their fourteenth birthday, the triplets had been presented a bedroom apiece, Joey insisting that they were old enough to require their own sanctums now. During term-time, Anna kept them swept and dusted, but in the holidays they looked after their own. Each room had a small cupboard that locked. Margot felt that she could keep her clock there until she had had time to consider how best to explain it to her mother.

They walked down the street and came up with Len and Con flattening their noses against the window of a shop that sold wood-carvings, peasant ware and other bric-à-brac. Both turned as Margot touched Len on the arm with an airy, "Well, here we are, you see! We haven't kept you long!"

"No; you've been awfully quick," Len agreed amiably. "I suppose, though, you knew exactly what you meant to get, Emmy. Margot, do you think Mamma would like those book-ends with the St. Bernard dogs?"

"Love them, I should think," Margot said, glancing at the book-ends.

"Then what do you say, Con?" Len turned to her other sister. "Shall we fix on those? We can get Papa one of those letter-openers. He says he can always do with another because most of his are always missing."

"Well, if we buy the book-ends, we certainly can't manage a pipe-rack as well," Con said. "O.K. If you two are agreed, so am I. We'd better go and get them."

They trooped into the shop where they found Ted and Rosamund waiting while the pretty girl attending to them packed up the model chalet finally chosen for small Sylvia, Rosamund's niece, and the similar one Ted had bought for her cousin May, the former Miss Carthew.

"Come and help us choose a letter-opener for Papa while you wait," Len promptly invited them. "We're getting book-ends for Mamma."

Margot was far from pleased by this turn of events. In any case, she was none too happy about the clock. She was delighted to have it, but no girl as carefully trained as she had been could pretend not to know that her parents would never have allowed her to accept such a valuable present. She might try to smother her conscience; it refused to stay smothered. As a result, she turned nippy and in the end her sisters had to choose the letter-opener without any help from her.

When that was settled, Margot, carrying matters with a high hand, swept off Emerence for "just one last stroll round". The rest had to wait until the parcels were packed. When their business was ended, they, too, decided that they might, as Ted put it, "Do a meander down to the bridge". Margot and Emerence had disappeared by the time they reached the street, and the four trotted off to take a final look at the Visp tearing and brawling its way under the bridge and down the mountain slope to join the Rhone in the valley far below.

As it happened, this was the way Margot and Emerence had gone and once they were free of the crowds and standing a little way up the bank of the river, Margot begged for another peep at her new treasure. She had opened it and was standing, gloating over it when the others arrived and seeing them, turned to join them.

"Oh, Emmy, it's simply beautiful!" she was saying as they came up. "It's quite the nicest present I've ever had and I can't thank you enough for it!"

Then the rest were on them before she had time to think and she was standing there with the clock sparkling in the sunlight. Len and Con took one look at it. Len was stunned into silence, but Con, for once, was not. Tactless as usual, she gave her sister a horrified look, even as Emerence caught the clock from Margot and hurriedly bundled it into her bag.

"Oh, Margot!" she exclaimed. "You can't possibly let Emmy give you a thing like that! What *would* Mamma say if she knew!"

Chapter XIX
MARY-LOU BUTTS IN AGAIN

That did it!

Never in all her life had Margot been so angry as she was at that moment. For once, she went white instead of red and her eyes gleamed like pieces of chilled steel. For a second, she was silent, literally unable to speak. At last: "Perhaps you'll try to mind your own business!" she said in as insolent a tone as she could produce.

"But it *is* my business!" Con assured her. "You're my sister."

"It's *not*! It's *my* business—mine and Emmy's! It's nothing to do with you, whatever you may think. Nor you, either, Len!" she added, swinging round on Len. "No, Emmy!" as that young person tried to intervene. "You leave this to me. It's time these two realised that if I *am* the youngest, they aren't my nannies *or* my keepers. Do you hear, you two? You're to let me alone!"

Len eyed her steadily. "How can we when we know that you're doing something both Father and Mother would hate——"

"The one thing that surprises me," Margot said in low, venomous tones, "is that they're letting you pal up with a girl who had been expelled from three different schools! That's right, isn't it, Ted?" with a malicious smile at Ted.

Ted went white, but she held up her head as she replied sturdily, "Expelled from only one to be strictly accurate. The other two just asked my mother not to send me back. And how," she went on, carrying the war into the enemy's country, "did *you* ever get to know of it? Miss Annersley said no one was to know except just the people *she* told and she forbade me to mention it. So how do *you* know?"

"Yes—how?" Len cried, suddenly waking up to this aspect of it.

Margot reddened. In her fury, she had been careless and now she did not know how to turn the questioning aside. All she could do was to retort, "Never you mind! I *do* know and that's all about it!"

Con slowly turned and eyed her triplet from head to foot. She said nothing, however. She knew that it was her fault that this had ever started. If she had held her tongue until they were safely back at school, Margot would have kept her temper.

"Oh, dear!" she thought dismally. "I do wish I could learn when to speak and when not! Mamma's always said that if I didn't look out I'd end by hurting someone badly and now I've done it—and to Margot, of all people! What an *ass* I am!" Len's mind was on Ted. She turned to her. "Tell me this, Ted, since cats seem to be popping out of bags in all directions. *Why* were you expelled or whatever it was?"

"For thinking of mad things to do—and doing them," Ted said, looking straight at her. "The last lot was for smoking at midnight out of a bathroom window, but I only topped up with that. There'd been plenty of that sort of thing before. The Head had warned me what would happen if I got into one more really bad row and I more or less asked for it, I suppose."

"Oh, yes; you *would* say that, of course!" Margot sneered. She was possessed to hurt someone just then, so furious was she. "You never cheated at lessons—nor told lies—nor stole
——"

“Pipe down!” Rosamund said, suddenly waking up. She turned and slipped a hand through Ted’s arm.

Ted smiled at her gratefully. Then she swung round on her accuser and her next speech was the final touch. “Do use your common sense! Is it likely that Miss Annersley would have agreed to have me here if it had been that sort of thing?”

Margot stared at her. Then she suddenly sprang forward and boxed Ted’s ears. “How *dare* you speak to me like that?” she shrieked, while the rest, suddenly galvanised into action, crowded round her, trying to hush her. “How dare you? I hate you, do you hear? *Hate* you! You shan’t stay here, stealing my sister from me! I’ll manage to get rid of you somehow——”

“Will you, indeed?” A fresh voice broke in on Margot’s diatribe and the horrified party turned to face Mary-Lou—and Mary-Lou was looking quite as angry as Margot had been.

She and Miss Ferrars had got back ten minutes sooner and in reply to Mdlle’s suggestion that it might be as well if the girls began to gather at the pension, had gone off to see how many she could hunt up. She had already sent in three batches from the shops and had come down to the bridge, knowing what a fascination the mountain torrent had for some of them. As the party were behind a bush, she had not seen them but she had heard the voices and come to call them. She had just been in time to hear Ted’s speech and Margot’s outrageous reply and it did not take her a moment to realise what was happening.

“Must put a stop to this pronto!” was her instant reaction; but it was not so easy. Margot, at the moment, was almost beside herself and not even the sight of the Head Girl looking, as Len said later, like an avenging Fury, could curb her.

“Keep out of this!” she shouted at Mary-Lou. “It’s none of your——”

Smack! Len did not intend to slap her sister, but she was in a hurry to stop any further enormities from her and when she removed her hand in a hurry, the marks of her fingers flamed on Margot’s face. At least it had one good effect. The younger girl had been on the verge of hysterics and the sting of the blow brought her to her senses in a hurry. She said not another word, but she stood still, a blackly sullen expression on her face.

Mary-Lou slowly looked each one of them up and down. Emerence, the innocent cause of the immediate upheaval was crimson and nearly crying. Len and Con were red, too. Rosamund still held Ted’s arm and Ted herself stood with her head held high, though she was rather white.

Mary-Lou spoke and her voice was as icy as the Matterhorn glacier itself. “You will all come back to the pension at once. No one will say a word of all this to anyone else—anyone at all! When we are back at school—after Abendessen this evening, I expect—I’ll see you all and deal with it. Until then, you are to be absolutely silent about it.” She stopped a moment. Then her voice rang out like the crack of a whip. “Is that clearly understood?”

With Mary-Lou looking and speaking like that, they could do nothing but murmur, “Yes” and she set out at once. “Rosamund and Ted, lead the way,” she said curtly. “Con, you take Emerence. Len, come with Margot and me.”

She marched them back to the pension where most of the others had already arrived. With an eye to keeping them as much as possible from the others, she ordered them straight upstairs to tidy themselves for the meal, taking Margot with her. What was more, she kept the girl with her. Mdlle and Miss Wilmot were too busy to do more than note that there seemed to be some trouble with the Maynard crowd and little Miss Andrews was chattering with Heather and two or three of the others. Only Kathy Ferrars saw clearly that matters had come to a head and

when Nancy Wilmot commented on Margot's sulkiness in an undertone, she hushed that young woman briefly.

"All right. I can guess what it is and Mdlle knows something about it. Leave the thing to Mary-Lou for the present, at any rate, and say no more until we can get you and Sharlie to yourselves. Then we'll explain."

As a result, Miss Wilmot saw to it that the six were put into a separate compartment with Mary-Lou in charge so that if any of the other girls noticed anything, they were unable to ask questions for the present. Naturally, all of them had seen that there was something wrong, but even Betty the inquisitive dared say no more after she had been severely snubbed by Mary-Lou for asking, "Is there anything wrong with Margot and the others?" That, however, did not prevent her from discussing it with her own crowd when they were left alone for a short while and the upshot was that they all decided that there must be bad news from Freudesheim and had better leave the three to Mary-Lou and their own chums. In fact, by the time evening had come and Abendessen was over, it was all round the Senior school that Mrs. Maynard was very ill and the triplets had gone home to be close at hand in case they were wanted, and the other three had gone with them to stand by them in case of need. Though it was rather odd that the Head made no mention of it at Prayers! However, no one contradicted it for certainly the six had vanished as soon as Prayers were over.

However, far from being at Freudesheim, they were all in the Prefects' room with a Mary-Lou who was the complete Head Girl for once and therefore, rather alarming. No one had ever seen her quite like this before. She had got hold of Hilary and Vi before Abendessen and begged them to see that the Prefects' room was left free for her for the evening.

"But why on earth?" Vi had demanded.

"Because I've something serious to tackle and I want it for that. Don't ask any questions now, you two. If I can, I'll explain later—or as much as I can, anyhow. At present, I've quite enough on my plate without having to talk about it. I want to think and if you folk ask questions, I warn you I'm quite likely to go completely scatty!"

"I suppose," Hilary said slowly, "that this business of young Margot's has come to a head and you're going to settle it yourself if you can. Well, more power to your elbow! Oh, by the way, do you know anything about this rumour that Mrs. Maynard is awfully ill?"

Mary-Lou had already heard the rumour and had gone straight to the Head to make inquiries. She laughed, though she felt very far from laughter. "Not a word of truth in it! Maeve Bettany was at me about it, so I asked the Head and she says Aunt Joey is very fit, really. She had tea at Freudesheim this afternoon and Aunt Joey was her usual self. You might suppress that rumour, you two. I can guess how it's started—and who's responsible for it! Wait till I have time and I'll deal with her morals! At the moment, though, do get all our own gang on to something that will keep them out of our room for the rest of the evening."

"O.K. We can start them off on the Sports. We have not discussed a thing about it yet and Burnie will be asking for ideas by the end of the week or I don't know my Burnie! I haven't any myself. Let's hope genius burns with a few other folk!"

"I've got one for you, anyhow," Vi put in. "Come on, Hilary, and don't stand there nattering. Mary-Lou is dying to be rid of us! See you later, Mary-Lou!"

The pair had departed to summon the rest of the prefects and demand any ideas they might have for the Sports while Mary-Lou sent Rosamund whom she chanced to meet on the stairs, to call the other five and meet her in the Prefects' room. They came and she waved her hand towards the chairs round the table and said curtly, "Sit down!"

When they were all seated, she looked coldly at them before she said, "And now, I want to know the meaning of this morning's disgraceful scene. Rosamund! you're as likely as anyone to be able to tell me a plain, straight story. Begin, please, and don't leave anything out."

Rosamund, blushing wildly, stood up and told it with a good many halts and stumblings. She did not know nearly everything and Mary-Lou had to question one or two of the others before she had it all. Then she turned to Emerence.

"What is this clock? Where is it?"

"It's in my bag," Emerence said in subdued tones. She had begun to realise that she ought not to have bought it and she could only hope that Mary-Lou would not ask what she had spent on it.

"I'd better see it. Go and fetch it, please."

While Emerence was gone, she turned, again to Rosamund, "Is that all you or anyone else can tell me, do you think, Rosamund?"

"I—yes, I think so," Rosamund replied. "It's all I know myself."

"Right! Then you can trot off. It's evidently no affair of yours and you've come into it more or less by accident. Sorry about that, but it couldn't be helped. Anyhow, no one blames you for anything. By the way, don't say a word to anyone else about this, will you? I must," Mary-Lou said gravely, "make up my mind about whether I can really deal with it myself or whether it must go to the Head. I hope it won't come to that, but I can't say yet. If it does, Mrs. Maynard would have to know about it and no one wants that to happen."

Margot reddened and shot a quick, horrified glance at Mary-Lou. Her sisters also sent appealing looks to where the Head Girl was sitting. It was wasted effort at the moment. Mary-Lou meant to get to the bottom of every thing before she pronounced judgment. Rosamund opened her lips to say something and then closed them again. She had the feeling that the less she said just now, the better. All the same, when she reached the door and had opened it, she turned.

"You needn't be afraid I'll talk. But I'd like to say here and now that I hope you *can* settle it yourself."

Mary-Lou nodded and Rosamund went off to seek some hidey-hole where she remained hidden until bedtime. She felt the less she saw of the other girls, the happier she would be.

By this time, Emerence had returned with her bag. She set it on the table and took out the box containing the clock. She lifted the pretty toy out and handed it to Mary-Lou. That young woman stared at it with startled eyes. She had expected nothing like this and the sight rocked her clean out of her icy mood.

"What on earth did they rook you for this?" she demanded in her usual clarion tones. "*Emerence!* You must have taken leave of your senses when you squandered on a thing like this! What *were* you thinking of?"

"I wanted to give Margot something she really liked," Emerence muttered.

"My good girl, couldn't you have been satisfied with something considerably less? Besides, why on earth do you want to do that *now*?"

Emerence lost her head. "It's because I'm leaving at the end of the term," she explained. "It's really a good-bye present." Then she caught her hand to her mouth. "Oh, my word! Dad said I wasn't to say anything about it yet! I quite forgot!"

But the news had reached Margot and cut right through her sullen defiance. She gave a low cry of dismay. "Emmy! You're not *leaving*?"

Having let the cat out of the bag, Emerence decided that she might as well own up fully. “Margot, I’m dreadfully sorry, but I am. Mr. Peddy brought me a letter from Dad telling me. And he sent a cheque so that I could buy leaving presents for my friends. That’s why I wanted to buy you the clock when you loved it so.”

Mary-Lou’s eyebrows could go no higher. They had already disappeared beneath her curls. In fact it was fully ten seconds before she got her breath. Then she said, “It strikes me there’s a good deal for you folk to tell me. Sit down, Emerence. No, leave the clock where it is. I can’t decide about that for the moment. I rather think this must go either to the Head or—or Dr. Jack. I don’t for one moment believe that Margot will be allowed to keep it. It’s far too valuable.”

Emerence’s face fell, but Margot was too much taken up with the news that she was to lose her bosom friend to pay any heed to Mary-Lou’s last dictum. She sat staring at Emerence, consternation in her eyes. Emmy was leaving! She would be going back to Australia and they might never meet again! It was a stunning blow.

Pity softened Mary-Lou’s eyes as she saw the expression on the younger girl’s face. All the same, this must be dealt with and quickly. She rapped on the table.

“Margot! Wake up! Pay attention to me, please. I want to know what reason you have for hating Ted as you seem to do.”

All her grievances—and they were many—came crowding in on Margot.

“Because I do! She’s stealing my sister from me. And Con’s being infected by Len and *she’s* begun to have special pals. I don’t want them to—they ought to be satisfied with *me!*”

Ted sat up with a bang, her eyes looking ready to drop out of her head. Len and Con kept theirs on the table and Emerence let her mouth fall open, which made her look like a stranded codfish!

“But you have Emerence,” Mary-Lou pointed out, paying no attention to the others. “Do you expect them to think and say that you’re not to be friends with her any more, but be satisfied with *them?*”

“It’s quite different. Emmy and I have been pals for years.”

“It’s *no* different! It’s precisely the same thing for any of you. If one can have a friend, so can the rest. However, we’ll leave that alone for the moment. Tell me; how did you propose to force Ted to break with Len if Len wouldn’t break with her?”

“I—I was going to threaten—to tell all the others—that she’d been expelled from three other schools if—if she wouldn’t promise me faithfully she—she’d have no more to do with Len. I—I didn’t think she’d—like that!” Margot faltered. Somehow it sounded so very much worse when she put it into words herself and yet, with Mary-Lou’s grave blue eyes holding hers, she couldn’t refuse to explain.

“I see.” Mary-Lou leaned back in her chair and thought. She decided that Margot needed a shock. It was high time she stopped this sort of thing. “In other words,” she said slowly, “you proposed to commit *blackmail*. That’s a criminal offence, in case you didn’t know it and one of the nastiest there is. Men and women are sent to prison for that sort of thing.”

Margot gazed at her in silence.

“But,” Len said rather shakily, “I though blackmail was demanding money by threats.”

“That’s one form of it. There are others—trying to force someone to do something they don’t want to do by using threats is one. That’s what Margot meant to do,” Mary-Lou said drily. “Now I’ll tell your four something. One of the chief reasons why the thing was kept quiet was that the Head thought there were plenty of young idiots in the school to think Ted

had been very daring and rather clever if they knew some of the things she had done. She wasn't!" Mary-Lou was quite ruthless about this and Ted's face burned as she went on. "She was merely making a sickening nuisance of herself and behaving like a silly young ass. She wouldn't be warned, so she got what she asked for—and serve her right!" At which point, Ted wished she could slide under the table and keep out of sight for the rest of this devastating interview. Mary-Lou carried right on. "When all comes to all, you know, she hasn't really done anything worse than Emerence, with whom you're so chummy, did in *her* early days!"

It was Emerence's turn to wish she could vanish as she recalled some of those exploits and she reddened as furiously as Ted had done.

"In fact," Mary-Lou continued sweetly, "I don't see that there's much to choose between the pair of them. However, Emmy began to get sense quite a while back and she's pulled up enormously. And I think, Ted," she suddenly projected a brilliant smile at the bemused Ted, "that we may say that you're doing likewise. Good for you—both of you! Keep it up! And now, that's all I've got to say to you two at present, though I certainly want to know more about this cheque of yours, Emerence. However, first things first! It may wait. You two may go. Leave the clock, Emmy. As I've said, I'm afraid it's something I must hand over to the Head or Uncle Jack to deal with. I haven't quite made up my mind which, but I rather think that's what it'll come to in the end. Off you hop!"

Thankful to get away with whole skins, the pair "hopped". Mary-Lou was left with the triplets. She regarded them in silence for a moment or two. It was easy enough to deal with both Ted and Emerence, but this was more complicated. Finally she spoke.

"Len, it's more than time that you stopped worrying over your sisters and left them to stand on their own feet. They're quite capable of looking after themselves. If you don't take care, you're going to turn into a fidgetty, fussy old maid before you're thirty and a nice thing *that* will be! Have all the friends you want and then perhaps you'll be able to get it out of your head that Con and Margot need you on their tails every other minute of the day. Anyhow, it's your right, as I told you before and it's time you looked after your own rights a little. That's all I have to say to *you*."

Len got up and trailed to the door, for this was clearly dismissal. Arrived there, she turned. "I suppose you're right, Mary-Lou," she said subduedly, "but I honestly didn't mean to be fussy and interfering."

Mary-Lou gave her an indulgent smile. "I don't suppose you did, but that's where you're heading unless you check it right now. However, I think this has been a pretty sharp warning. You can look out for signs of it recurring in the future and stamp on it at once."

Len slipped out and Mary-Lou turned to Con who was looking as she felt, thoroughly alarmed. "Con," she said gently, "I'm sure you meant well, but it's high time you stopped blurting out just what's uppermost in your mind. There *is* such a thing as tact and if you're born without it, you can try to acquire a little. It was all very well when you were a little girl, but you're that no longer. Grown-up people who do that sort of thing are often avoided like poison by others because they won't try to think before they speak and so often hurt their friends badly. You can see for yourself what's come of your latest efforts. Margot is in a nice mess and though most of it is her own fault, you're not entirely without blame. Things were bad and you made them worse. Go away, and in future, try to think before you speak."

Exit Con, her cheeks fierily red, for she felt that every word of this speech was deserved. No one could say that Mary-Lou wasn't dealing as faithfully as in her lay with the whole lot.

Only Margot was left now. Mary-Lou looked at her as she sat there with a dazed expression and her heart sank. How could she possibly cope with things as serious as the youngest triplet's sins? Wisely, she decided that it really was beyond her. She waited a minute to pray inarticulately but earnestly for the best words. They came to her.

"Margot," she said, and her voice was very kind, "I don't think you've ever fully realised till now just how awful your way of thinking has been, though I'm sure you do know it—now. But this is something even the Head Girl can't tackle—not properly. I'm not going to report you to the Head—I'm not even going to tell you to report yourself. But I *am* going to say that until you either do that or go to Uncle Jack—not Auntie Joey; or not at present, at any rate—you'll never know another happy moment. I'm leaving it to you to decide what you'll do. That's all." She paused. Then, touched by the deep unhappiness she saw in the blue eyes, she added, "But if you'd like it, I'll come with you to the Head and help you out at first if that's what you decide to do. But if you want to be happy again, honestly, it's the only thing that will do it. I mean that—honestly!"

Margot sat silent, but the dazed look had gone. Mary-Lou watched her anxiously. Which way would she decide?

Margot had a hard fight with her pride and jealousy. It lasted a short while, during which the Head Girl remained as silent as she. But she did her best to make the younger girl feel that she hadn't to stand alone, at least, not until the confession was over. The voiceless sympathy turned the trick. Margot looked up suddenly. Her jaw was set and her eyes were bright again. She got up from her chair.

"Come with me to the door, anyhow," she said with a gulp. "I'm going *now!*"

Chapter XX
THE HEAD MAKES A DECISION

“And I’m not to ask a single question—not one?” Joey looked at Miss Annersley over the small dark head of her very new youngest daughter with pleading eyes.

“Not a single question,” Miss Annersley returned firmly as she cuddled the young lady’s equally new twin brother.

“I’m not sure that I like it, Hilda. Oh, I can see that things have been happening while I’ve been out of circulation! For one thing, Margot is sweeter and more subdued than I’ve ever known her to be before. Con seems to be trying to think before she speaks; *and* I can see that Len is leaving her sisters to look after themselves and is going all out for her friendships with Rosamund and Ted. I’m more than thankful for that last! What I want to know is what have you all been doing to bring about such a state of things in so short a time?”

Her friend shook her head. “Ask nae questions and ye’ll be tellt nae lees’.” she quoted. “I *told* you not a single question!”

“I know. Oh, well, if you won’t answer, you won’t. But you can’t stop me from guessing at things,” Joey said defiantly.

“Quite so! But I can and do refuse utterly to answer. So don’t fish, for it’ll be waste labour. Instead, let’s talk of these two. You’ve managed very neatly, Joey. You have those second twins you and Jack were pining for and that makes you more than well ahead of anyone else in the clan in the matter of family. They’ve come in good time for you to be present at the Sports, too, even if it did mean you had to miss the Sale. By the way, did I ever thank you for your cheque?”

“I’m sure you did. They did very well over it, didn’t they?” Joey had given up her questions for the time being, but she meant to find out sooner or later what had been happening for the change in her girls was so great as to be startling.

“Very well indeed. When are you bringing these two to show them off to the school? Will you fetch them along to the Sports?”

“Babies of just a month old? Where are your wits? Of course I won’t! They’ll stay comfortably at home in the garden with the Coadjutor and Anna to look after them. I’m not coming all the time, you know. But I’ll show myself at the before lunch session and later in the afternoon. I’m still supposed to lie down for an hour then; but I’ll come along after that. I don’t want to miss *all* the fun and I’ve had to miss a lot this term. Still, Geoffrey and Philippa are worth it, after all!” And she smiled down rapturously at the sleeping baby she held and bestowed another smile on little Geoffrey.

“Of course they are! Do you think you’ll be able to insist on their full names being used?” Hilda Annersley asked this with real curiosity.

Joey laughed. “Not a hope, my dear! When the girls were over last Sunday, they were talking of ‘Geoff’ and ‘Phyll’. Cecil, by the way, goes one better. *She* makes ‘Deff’ and ‘Pill’ of them! Oh, well, she’s only two and a bit. By this time next year, I expect she’ll have come to the same as the rest. Here comes Anna to take them to bye-byes in the pram! All right, Anna. You may take them now. I’ll be on hand at feed-time.”

Anna beamed at her mistress and took the babies one by one to tuck them into the big double pram that had served all Joey’s children from the triplets downwards. When they were

settled, she wheeled it off and Joey returned to the charge.

“Hilda, you can’t expect me to be satisfied with vague answers or no answers at all! I *don’t* want to question the girls, but I must know something more definite. I won’t ask for details as you’re so determined I shan’t know them; but tell me this. Is it good or bad? I *must* know that. After all, I’m their mother. They’re my first babies.”

The Head pondered her reply. “Jack knows all about it. Can’t you trust him and me?”

“Oh, I can trust you all right. But for my own satisfaction, I must have more than I have. Tell me if it’s good or bad. If your idea is to save me from worrying, let me tell you that I’m far more likely to worry if you try to keep me in ignorance in this style!”

“Yes, I see that. I can’t tell you much, Joey or not yet. But it *has* been bad—very bad. But good is coming out of it. I’m sure of that. I think the worst is all over now; but it’s been a long pull and a hard pull and your triplets have had some very stiff lessons to learn—are learning and likely to be for some time, for that matter. But they’ve come to it of their own free will, thanks, in the main, I think, to Mary-Lou. But you can’t call them babies any longer, my dear. They’re growing up and doing it quickly. But it *is* good and I feel that it will go on being good. Now that’s all I can say—except don’t worry! Your girls have fine stuff in them and before they’re done, I *know* you’ll have reason to be proud of every one of them—and I mean that!”

“Well, I suppose I’ll have to let that do me for the present. You’re right, of course. I can’t hope to go on shielding them. They must stand on their own feet now and face whatever life holds for them, just as we all must. But it’s awfully difficult to be—detached.”

“But it’s the only thing to be at that age,” Hilda Annersley said quietly. “They’re at the age now when they’re inclined to think that grown-ups are always wanting to pry into their concerns and order them about and they resent it, even if it’s in secret. You know we’re long past the era when Mother could say she knew best and impose her will on her children after they had reached the teens. I’m not saying whether I think it a good or bad thing. The fact remains that it is so.”

“Oh, I know!” Joey sighed. “They can’t understand that you love them so dearly that you want to stand between them and trouble as long as you can. Still, I do see that you’re right. I must stand back now and let them find their feet for themselves. At least I can see to it that they know that I’m always there to help if they want it. Well, thank goodness I still have five babies who won’t want to push me to one side for years to come!”

“Quite true. And in that, you’re luckier than a good many women. Well, my dear, I must get back to my job. I love your babies, Joey, and it’s delightful to see you with twins that simply *can’t* be mistaken for each other. I remember what a time we had when Felix and Felicity were babies!”

Joey began to laugh. Then she stopped. “Just five minutes more, Hilda! What about Ted? Has she made good?”

Miss Annersley nodded. “Yes, she has. She’s working hard, playing hard and between that and the real friendship I can see between her and Len and Rosamund, she simply has no time to think out outrageous freaks. What’s more, she’s improving in looks amazingly and that’s having a good effect, too. But I’m afraid there’ll never be much more than a cool friendship between her and her mother—if as much. Ted’s a clever girl and she realises that her mother has very little affection for her. Luckily, May Carthew—Walton, I mean—is doing her best to fill up the place. But I’m sorry for Mrs. Grantley. The day may come when she needs Ted and she’s forfeited the right to demand first place with her. But I think we needn’t trouble about

that young woman any more. By the way, I understand that Mary-Lou, having heard the whole story, told her that she had been neither clever nor funny, but merely a sickening nuisance! So if Ted was under any misapprehension about *that*, it has been well and truly corrected. Now I *must* go! I expect half-a-dozen people are crying out for me!”

She went off and Joey, still not too satisfied, but with her mind easy about her triplets as it had not been since she had come home early in July with her new twins, also departed. A batch of proofs had arrived that morning and she wanted to look them over before she settled down to correcting them properly.

The Head was right when she said she was wanted. From the time she reached the school until the time when she shut her bedroom door on the world and sank down in a chair for an hour's rest before going to bed, she was kept hard at it. But then her mind went back to that night when Mary-Lou had brought Margot to her to confess.

It had been a difficult interview, but by the time Margot had got to the end of her sorry tale—including the eavesdropping—the Head had known where she stood.

“I certainly didn't spare her,” she mused. “And from all I can gather, Mary-Lou expected that, for from what Margot says, it was her kindness and offer to stand by that finally persuaded her to come to me. What a blessing that girl has been to us, all through her school-life! Though,” and she laughed to herself, “I admit I didn't think so much of it when she made that wild start and nearly gave herself brain-fever by trying to catch up with Clem. But all through, she has been just what we want our girls to be. When the time comes for her to say good-bye to us finally, I shall have the joy of knowing that we are sending forth a girl who will bear the standard of the Chalet School right through her life.”

Her thoughts went on with the days immediately following when Jack Maynard had to be called in to ask what should be done about the clock. He had insisted on hearing the whole story and his deep disgust at his daughter's doings had nearly broken Margot's heart. For a full fortnight he had refused to have anything to do with her. Margot adored her father and his coldness had made her realise more fully than ever how far she had fallen. He wanted to have the clock given back to Emerence, but the Head had coaxed him to change his mind.

“Let her keep it, Jack,” she pleaded. “Emerence had no right to give her such a thing, but it's done now. Emerence is leaving and goodness knows when those two will meet again. Let them have what comfort they can out of the clock. Not,” she had added with a flash of insight, “that Margot will get much pleasure out of it for the present. It will remind her too much of all that has happened. But to return it, will hurt Emerence badly and she doesn't deserve it. I've told her all I think of her for suppressing that cheque when she knows the school rules as well as anyone.”

So Margot was allowed to keep it and it was in her bedroom at Freudesheim. But the Head was quite right. It would be many a long day before the girl could rejoice in it again, and it served as a reminder to her of all that had happened at the time, but Margot was changing and changing fast. Her feet were on the right road and she would do her best to keep them there. When the day came that it was her turn to leave school and fare forth into grown-up life, she admitted to Miss Annersley that the little clock had helped her time and again to stop short when she had been going to go wrong.

“And I'll have it with me while I'm at college,” she added. “After that, it must go to someone else—Phyll, perhaps. You know what I told you I hoped for. I know I don't deserve to have my heart's desire, but I *have* tried these past four years.”

“And succeeded,” Miss Annersley said with a smile. “You must wait for it. Margot, but I am sure you will get it in the end.”

But all that was four years ahead. In these days, Margot was a girl who was truly repentant and doing her best to make good, as the Head believed. And when she had reached that point, Miss Annersley found herself yawning and decided that it was time to go to bed if she wanted to be fresh for the next day’s work.

She undressed, said her prayers with special thought for Margot and Ted, opened her windows and then lay down. But before sleep finally came, she had made up her mind about a project very dear to her heart. She must discuss it with Madge Russell and Joey, but she felt sure that she knew what they would say.

“But I shan’t say anything to her until the time comes,” she thought drowsily. “And it shall be for the school only. After all, it’s to the school that it matters most. The girls who are leaders can make or mar a school. Thank God, so far all our leaders have led the right way; but, apart from Joey herself, Mary-Lou most of all.” Then she really did stop thinking, mainly because she was so drowsy, and fell asleep to slumber peacefully until the morning.

Chapter XXI
CHEERS FOR MARY-LOU!

“Heigh-ho! This is our last Sports Day as members of the Chalet School!” And Vi Lucy heaved a deep sigh.

“Well, that’s no reason for trying to blow us all down into the valley!” Hilary snapped at her. “Stop it, Vi! Don’t be a sentimental Sally by way of memorial. We have a year as Millies, anyhow. You think of that and cheer up! Be your own sunny self, in fact, and stop grouching!”

Vi giggled. “You ass! Sentimentality was never my longest suit as you ought to know after all these years. All the same, I’ve had the happiest schooldays any girl could ask for and I’m sorry to have to say good-bye to them. Millie’s won’t be at all the same thing, you know. Both Julie and Betsy said so.”

“I don’t suppose it is,” Hilary said calmly, “but that needn’t prevent us from enjoying it. Anyhow, I’ve made up my mind to look forward and not back as the Head said last year about this time when Betsy and Co. were leaving. And now, having settled that, perhaps you’ll bring your weighty mind to bear on the problem of how we’re to find any more seats for the visitors. Apart from the Head’s drawing-room, I don’t believe there’s a chair, stool or form left in the place and Burnie told me she didn’t think we had enough, even so. Any ideas on the subject?”

“None whatsoever! I suppose the school will sit on rugs as usual? Have we got everything Auntie Joey can spare?”

“I expect so. Mary-Lou had a string of half-a-dozen hard at it before Frühstück, carrying over every thing she could spare.”

“Then the only other thing I can think of is to use the trestle tables and perch all the lightweight on them.”

“And how do you propose to manage *that*, may I ask? You can’t very well ask people if they weigh less than—well, nine stone? Most of them would look on it as a deep and deadly insult.”

“Ye-es, that certainly might happen. Then the only other tiring that I can see is to collect up all the rugs and mats we can find and spread them in front of the chairs. Sure to be plenty of people who won’t mind sitting on the ground for once. Any Old Girls, for instance.”

“Well, I suppose it’s the best we can do,” Hilary assented, going off to find the Games mistress and explain to her.

Vi remained where she was and here Mary-Lou found her when she came flying along to order all the Juniors into the house to go and change before Mittagessen.

“Hello!” she said, pausing a moment. “You seem to be taking things very easily.”

“I’ve slogged the whole morning,” Vi said with dignity.

“Well, come and help me round up the kids. Matey wants to make sure that they’re all changed and ready before Mittagessen. Where’s Hilary?”

“Gone to tell Burnie that if there aren’t enough seats, we must use rugs and mats. O.K. I’ll come. Is Auntie Joey bringing the new babies along, do you know?”

“She is not! She’s coming long after her rest, I believe. I rather thought she’d have been here this morning, but she didn’t turn up and I didn’t see her when I went over for chairs earlier on. Thank goodness none of the visitors turn up till fourteen o’clock!”

“And thank goodness the rain ceased at the end of the afternoon yesterday! I had horrid visions of having to cut at least half the sports! But it’s been so hot this morning, that everywhere has dried up nicely and certainly the whole place looks really fresh and clean after the downpour.” Vi cast a complacent look round as she followed Mary-Lou to the en-tout-cas tennis courts where most of the sports would take place. All the nets had been removed, thus throwing the six courts into one big one which was surrounded now by the long rows of seats—a very mixed bag of them, too.

“Thank goodness indeed!” Mary-Lou agreed fervently. “Hello! There are Loyola de Manselle and Nest Owen. Latch on to them and send them in while I hunt up the rest!”

After that, they parted and from then until after Mittagessen which took place at noon, all the prefects were kept busy. But once the meal was ended and they had cleared they had time, as the Head Girl said, to breathe freely.

It had been decided to invite the visitors to come for the afternoon session and during the morning, such unspectacular events as throwing the cricket-ball, some of the short sprints and both the long and high jumps had been got out of the way. What was left would, they all hoped, provide their audience with thrills at least.

“It’s to be hoped that a third of them haven’t to be treated for hysterics!” Lesley Malcolm said darkly. “Thank goodness we’ve cut out the flower-pot race. We’ve had it so often, it must be palling on people.”

“Anyhow, it’s always been a gift to Verity Carey,” Vi put in. “Verity, how *do* you do it? You just seem to *float* from pot to pot. I never saw anything like it!”

Verity, a tiny girl and “sister-by-marriage” to Mary-Lou, since her father had married that young lady’s mother, merely smiled sweetly and said nothing.

“Can you wonder?” Mary-Lou herself said. “There’s nothing of her and never was. I’m eight solid inches taller than she is!”

The bell rang at that moment, so conversation had to cease and they all marched to Hall where they stood in their lines, wondering what was going to happen now. They couldn’t take their usual half-hour’s rest, since every deck-chair was beside the courts.

They were not left to wonder long. The top door opened and the Head, very stately and very much the Head in her festal garb of blue silk dress and big hat to match, appeared.

“Just a minute, girls! We are going to send you out to the courts and you are to sit down and keep as quiet as you can for the next twenty minutes. The interval for refreshments will come at sixteen o’clock. All those helping in the visitors’ marquee must be there at least ten minutes before then. There will be drinks for you in the other and also biscuits. Abendessen will come half-an-hour earlier in the garden and you can make up for it then. Juniors, remember what I said to you this morning and don’t raise the whole Platz with yelling. That is all. Turn! Forward—march!”

Led by the prefects for once, the school passed out through the double doors at the bottom of Hall and marched smartly to the far end of the tennis courts where they sat down on the rugs spread for them. For twenty minutes they rested there with the prefects to see that they kept quiet as the Head had commanded. The Staff came strolling out in twos and threes to take up their positions nearby. The Head, with Mdlle, Miss Wilson from St. Mildred’s and Rosalie Dene went up to the other end and then the first visitors arrived in state.

Joey Maynard led the way with one of her first twins on either side of her. Jack followed, accompanying a tall, dark lady whom none of the girls present had ever seen before with one exception. Ted Grantley first stared incredulously. Then she gave a cry.

“It’s Cousin May! I didn’t even know she was coming! Oh, how *stupendous* of her!”

“Ted! Sit down!” Vi’s warning voice came. “You can’t go dashing at her now.”

Ted sat down and then the girls were treated to a scene in which the two Heads hurried past Joey and caught at the stranger. Miss Wilson’s voice came to the goggling school on the clear air.

“*Carty!* Carty herself, large as life and twice as natural! My dear girl, this *is* a surprise!” After which they all found seats and talked vehemently until Miss Annersley, recalled to her senses by a word from Rosalie Dene, got up to receive her guests and left the other three talking hard. Presently, it seeped through to the girls that besides being Ted’s cousin, this was a very “old” mistress and one whom no one had seen for many years. But by that time, most of the visitors had arrived and the bell had rung for the first race.

It was a full and busy afternoon. The sports were as good as usual and the girls showed that if they worked hard in school, they also played hard. Mary-Lou won the long distance race, her lengthy legs eating up the distance. Margot took the high jump under sixteen and the egg-and-spoon open. Len and Con won the three-legged race by a very comfortable margin and Ted showed what she could do in the way of rope-climbing. As Margot said with a giggle, she must be first cousin to a monkey for nothing else could have climbed at that rate!

Next came the open obstacle race which had been concocted by the prefects and a nice time they gave the competitors!

Besides climbing a tree and wriggling through three nets, they had to skip for twenty yards, hop on one foot for another twenty—whereby, five people were out of it—turn ten cartwheels, thread a dozen needles, add up an appalling sum of francs and centimes and get the answer right—this eliminated another four—roll over and over for a short distance and finally throw somersaults up to the rope which was held by two of the younger doctors from the Sanatorium. In the end, it fell to Verity Carey, who got through the nets faster than anyone else and, for a wonder, got the right answer to the sum first time.

The Blindfold race was the usual yell, to quote Mary-Lou and was won by no one, for no one contrived to get anywhere near the tape. Finally, they came to what Mary-Lou described as the cream of the day. This was the idea Vi Lucy had said she had and it was funny, to say the least of it.

Ten girls were left in the finals, the heats having been run off earlier in the week, and they ranged from Mary-Lou herself to small Ailie Russell of Lower IVb. The competitors stood on their marks and a big bundle, well tied up, was put in front of each. When the pistol banged, they all squatted down and began to undo the knots with frantic haste. Then it was seen that each bundle held a collection of weird garments and the audience simply screamed with laughter at the sight of Mary-Lou trying to pull on a pair of Dutch breeches meant for a twelve-year-old over her long legs. Slim as she was, she filled them more than comfortably and her loud groan of, “Ow! I’ll have to crawl or bust them!” was to be heard all over. The next article was a Georgian polonaise followed by a large shawl and a tiny mobcap which she perched carefully on top of her rampant curls. An enormous umbrella completed the collection and she opened it and then set off at a snail’s pace in case she really did burst her seams!

Verity had to get into a voluminous skirt that trailed all round her feet, a pair of gum boots so large, that when she set off, she could merely shuffle in them, and, as a finishing touch, a pair of wings and a halo! The rest were equally weird and the sight of all these extraordinarily clad creatures shuffling, waddling, mincing and, in the case of Con, who had found an old-fashioned hobble skirt, on her so tight that she dared not try to walk, *jumping* along, can be

better imagined than described. Joey laid her head on her husband's shoulder and wept gently. Mrs. Walton—née Miss Carthew—alternately mopped her eyes and gurgled unrestrainedly. The most serious-minded person there held her sides and shouted. Vi had certainly succeeded in livening up the Sports on this occasion!

The race finally fell to Emerence Hope who had found a Father Christmas outfit in her bundle, complete with wig, beard and sack crammed with hay. She arrived at the tape crimson and perspiring, but Ricki Fry who was in full mandarin's dress and had had to race fanning herself the whole way as well as carrying a huge Chinese umbrella, tripped up over her petticoat; otherwise, the race had looked like being hers.

Only the tug-o'-war, a Houses event, was left then and Joey, remembering her new babies, had to slip away before then, so she missed seeing St. Clare's beat everyone hollow. But she managed to turn up for the prize-giving, looking as trig and fresh as if she had spent the entire afternoon resting.

But the highlight of the term came on the following Monday evening at Prayers. As many of the girls would be leaving at seven the next morning, these were the end of term Prayers. When the little services were over and the Catholics had come to Hall to join the school to hear the Head's good wishes for their holidays, there was a little pause and then Joey, accompanied by "Carty", appeared on the dais. The girls quite frankly gaped. This was a new departure.

But Miss Annersley had come forward to the lectern once more and all eyes were turned on her as she spoke. "Girls! This years, we are awarding a new prize. It has never been given before, but I hope that, in the future, we may be able to give it again and again. It has been said that what a school is must largely depend on its leaders among the girls themselves. We have had many girls who have been fine leaders, but I think you will agree that one of the finest we have had has been Mary-Lou Trelawney who leaves us tomorrow to become a member of St. Mildred's next term."

"Mary-Lou!" She faced Mary-Lou who was staring with her mouth open. "It is with the very greatest pleasure that we present you with this—hardly prize, for there has been no competition—but reward for all you have done for the school during your time here. We are grateful for your help and our best wishes go with you into the future."

She stopped there and waited. But Mary-Lou was so overcome that Hilary and Vi had to pull her to her feet and push her towards the dais before she got there. Finally, she was standing beside the Head and Joey who was offering her a case, stoutly made of leather. Joey opened it before she put it into her hands and inside was a very complete first-aid outfit.

"For your use when you're trotting round eastern countries, pursuing archaeology," Joey said with a grin as the bemused Mary-Lou accepted it. She turned to the girls, but her own Margot was before her.

Springing to her feet, Margot cried, "She jolly well deserves it! Everyone! Cheers for Mary-Lou, the best Head Girl we've ever known!"

The cheers came—in such volume that the Head afterwards remarked that she only wondered someone from the Sanatorium didn't ring up to ask what was happening.

Mary-Lou stood stockstill, going alternately red and white. Then, still holding the case, she turned to the school and the shouts died down. Crimson and overcome to the point of tears in her eyes, Mary-Lou spoke.

"It's far, far more than I could ever deserve. I've only done what I thought I ought, and not always that. If you want to thank anyone, you ought to thank the school for it's the school

that's showed me how to manage. Thank you all, awfully, both for this lovely thing and for cheering me. But I don't deserve it, honestly, I don't!"

Then she raced off the dais and hid herself as much as she could among her peers while once more the school let itself go in cheers for Mary-Lou.

[The end of Theodora and the Chalet School by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]