Title: For the School Colours

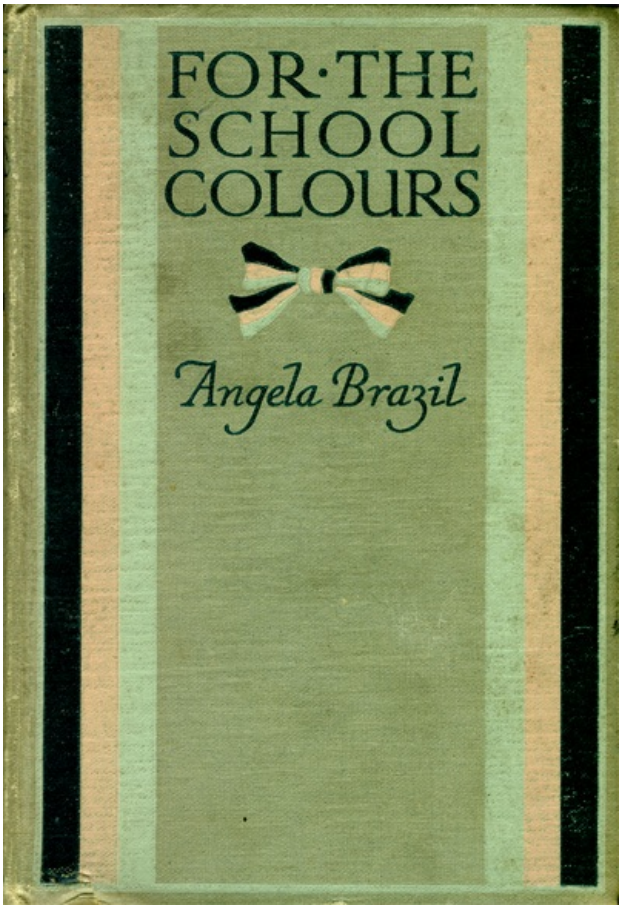
Author: Angela Brazil
Illustrator: Balliol Salmon

Release date: April 26, 2011 [EBook #35972]

Language: English

E-text prepared by Suzanne Shell
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(http://www.pgdp.net)

For the School Colours



By ANGELA BRAZIL

"Angela Brazil has proved her undoubted talent for writing a story of schoolgirls for other schoolgirls to read."—**Bookman.**

The School in the South.
Monitress Merle.
Loyal to the School.
A Fortunate Term.
A Popular Schoolgirl.
The Princess of the School.
A Harum-Scarum Schoolgirl.
The Head Girl at the Gables.
A Patriotic Schoolgirl.
For the School Colours.
The Madcap of the School.
The Luckiest Girl in the School.
The Jolliest Term on Record.
The Girls of St. Cyprian's.
The Youngest Girl in the Fifth.
The New Girl at St. Chad's.
For the Sake of the School.
The School by the Sea.
The Leader of the Lower School.
A Pair of Schoolgirls.
A Fourth Form Friendship.
The Manor House School.
The Nicest Girl in the School.
The Third Class at Miss Kaye's.
The Fortunes of Philippa.

LONDON: BLACKIE & SON, Ltd., 50 OLD BAILEY, E.C.

"WHAT'S THIS? WHAT HAVE THEY SENT ME?" SHE GASPED

page 199

FOR THE SCHOOL COLOURS

BY

ANGELA BRAZIL

Author of "A Patriotic Schoolgirl"
"The Luckiest Girl in the School"
"The Madcap of the School"
&c. &c.

Illustrated by Balliol Salmon

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY

Printed and bound in Great Britain

Contents

[5]

[6]

Illustrations

[7]

[8]

[9]

FOR THE SCHOOL COLOURS

CHAPTER I

Enter Avelyn

"It's the limit!" exploded Laura.

"An atrocious shame!" agreed Janet.

"Gives me nerve shock!" mourned Ethelberga gloomily.

"You see," continued Laura, popping the tray of her box on to the floor and sitting down on her bed, so as the better to address her audience—"you see, it's been plumped upon us without any warning. Miss Thompson must have arranged it long ago, but she never let out so much as a teeny-weeny hint. If I'd known before I came back I'd have asked Father to give a term's notice and let me leave at Christmas. Crystal clear, I would."

"Rather! so would this child."

"I guess we all should."

"I call it so mean to have sprung it on us like this! I really couldn't have believed it of Miss Thompson. She's gone down miles in my estimation. I can never feel the same towards her again —*never!* Those Hawthorners! Oh, to think of it!" [10]

"What's the matter?" asked a fourth voice, as another girl, still in hat and coat, and carrying her travelling-bag, entered the dormitory.

"Irma! Is it you, old sport? D'you mean to say you haven't heard the news yet?"

"Only just this minute arrived, and I've flown straight upstairs. I met Hopscotch in the hall, and asked, 'Am I still in the Cowslip Room?' and she nodded 'Yes,' so I didn't wait for any more. Has anything grizzly happened? You're all looking very glum!"

"We may well look glum," said Laura tragically. "Something particularly grizzly's happened. You remember that day school at the other side of the town?"

"The Hawthorns—yes."

"Well, it's been given up."

Irma flung her hat on to her bed and her coat after it.

"That doesn't concern us," she remarked contemptuously.

"Doesn't it? Oh, no, of course—not in the least!" Laura's voice was sarcastic. "It wouldn't have been any concern of ours—only, as it happens, they've all come on here."

Irma turned round, the very picture of dismay.

"*What?* Not *here*, surely! Great Minerva, you don't mean it! Hold me up! I feel rocky."

Laura looked at her, and shook her head in commiseration. [11]

"Yes, that's how it took us all when we heard," she remarked. "You'd better sit down on your bed till you get the first shock over. It's enough to make a camel weep. I couldn't believe it myself for a few minutes, but it's only too true, unfortunately for us."

"The Hawthorns! Those girls whom we never spoke to—wouldn't have touched with a pair of tongs!" gasped Irma.

"You may well marvel," sympathized Janet.

"But what's Miss Thompson *thinking* of? Why, she always looked down so on the Hawthorns! Wouldn't let us arrange matches with their teams, and kept us away from them at that bazaar as if they'd been infectious. It's been the tradition of the school to have nothing to do with them."

"Traditions have flown to the four winds. There'll be nearly fifty Hawthorners turning up by nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Nearly fifty! And we were only thirty-six ourselves last term! Why, the school will be swamped!"

"Exactly, and with day girls too. When there were twenty-four boarders to twelve day girls, we could have things pretty well as we liked, but if we've to hold our own against sixty or so—well!"

"It'll mean war!" finished Ethelberga, setting her mouth grimly.

"But what's possessed Miss Thompson to do such an atrocious thing?" cried Irma in exasperation.

"*£, s. d.*, my child, I suppose. Miss Perry was giving up the school, and Tommiekins bought the [12] connection. She's completely veered round in her opinions. She told Adah Gartley they were nice girls, and would soon improve immensely at Silverside. 'I hope you'll all make them welcome,' she said to Adah."

"Welcome!" echoed Irma, Janet, and Ethelberga eloquently.

"It wouldn't have been so bad," continued Laura, "if just a few of them—say a dozen—had been coming. We could have kept ourselves to ourselves and quite ignored them. But we're being absolutely cuckooed out. Do you know that our recreation room has been commandeered for an extra class-room?"

Howls of dismay issued from the trio now seated on Irma's bed.

"Yes, you'd hardly believe it, but it is a fact," ran on Laura with dismal volubility. "When I went to take my painting things there I found our tables and easy chairs gone, and the whole place filled up with new desks and a blackboard."

"Where are we going to sit in the evenings?" demanded Ethelberga fiercely.

"Goodness only knows! In the dining-room, I suppose."

"We evidently don't count for anything with Tommiekins now," said Janet bitterly. "The Daisy dormitory has been taken for a class-room, and an extra bed has been put in each of the other dormitories to make up. Didn't you notice, Irma, that there are five here now, instead of only [13] four?"

"Why, so there are! What a hateful cram! Who's to have the fifth?"

"I asked Hopscotch, and she said, 'A new girl.' I couldn't help flying out at that, and she simply sat flat upon me and withered me. Told me to go away and mind my own business, and she was coming round to inspect the Cowslip Room in half an hour, and I'd better get on with my unpacking."

"Oh, she will! Why didn't you tell us that before?" exclaimed the others, bouncing up with considerable haste, and setting to work again to empty their boxes.

"I forgot. I can think of nothing but those wretched Hawthorners. It's made me feel weak."

"You'll feel weaker still if Hopscotch comes in and finds you with nothing unpacked!" observed Laura sagely, stowing underclothes in her middle drawer with the utmost rapidity. "I advise you to make some sort of a beginning, even if you don't put things away tidily. Fling them in anyhow, stick a blouse for a top layer, and straighten them up afterwards. Don't let her see them still inside your box."

For a few minutes the girls suspended talk for work. Laura's flaxen head vibrated between box and wardrobe. Janet arranged her dressing-table and replaited her dark pigtail. Ethelberga hung up a selection of photographs, and placed her nightdress inside its case; Irma spread her bed with her possessions, preparatory to filling her drawers, and comforted her ruffled feelings with [14] the last pear-drop in the paper bag she had brought with her.

The dormitory was of fair size, and though the girls might grumble, contained ample space for the fifth bed. It was a pretty room with a yellow wall-paper, and chintz curtains with little bunches of cowslips on them. There were pictures of cowslips also on the walls, and all the pin-cushions and hair-tidies had yellow ribbons. The window looked over the garden, and behind the belt of trees that bordered the lawn gleamed the grey waters of the estuary, where ships were stealing out from port into the dangers of the great waters. The girls prided themselves upon this view, though at the present moment they were too busy to think of it. Three years' previous experience had taught them that, when Miss Hopkins made a tour of inspection on the first afternoon of term, she meant business, and woe betide the luckless slacker who had gossiped and dawdled instead of bestowing her property in her own lawful drawers. If she had announced her intention of visiting them shortly, she might certainly be trusted to keep her word.

Their expectations were not mistaken, for before the half-hour had expired the door opened, revealing the short stout figure and rather angular features of the second mistress. The girls jumped up and stood obediently at attention, ready to go through the usual routine of dormitory superintendence. Miss Hopkins, however, was not alone. In her wake followed a girl of fifteen, [15] whom she bustled in, in a hurry.

"This is your dormitory, Avelyn—the Cowslip Room, we call it. Here's your bed, and these are your dress hooks and your drawers. The janitor's bringing your box upstairs. Oh, he's here now! Put it at the end of the bed, Tom, please. I suppose you have the key, Avelyn? Then you'd better unlock it at once. These are your room-mates—Laura Talbot, Irma Ridley, Janet Duncan, and Ethelberga Carnforth. Girls, this is Avelyn Watson. I hope you will make her welcome. Begin your unpacking now, Avelyn. I shall be back directly to see how you are getting on."

Miss Hopkins, whose duties on the first day of term were multifarious, withdrew as hurriedly as she had entered. Her visits generally resembled the brief career of a whirlwind—sometimes her

pupils considered that they carried equal desolation.

The new girl remained standing by the bed, and for the moment made no effort to obey orders and unlock her box. She was pretty—her four critics decided that point at their first glance—her chin was softly rounded, and her nose was small and straight. Her general colouring was brunette, but the big wide-open eyes were grey as the estuary outside. She flushed vivid pink under the scrutiny of her room-mates. For a brief instant they thought she was going to cry, then she winked rapidly and began to whistle instead.

"I shouldn't advise you to whistle too loud," counselled Janet, by way of breaking the ice.

"Miss Hopkins is only in the next dormitory, and she's got a crusade on against whistling—at least she had last term, and I don't suppose she's changed her tactics; she doesn't generally." [16]

"Do the eternal snows change?" murmured Ethelberga.

The new girl stopped with her mouth puckered into a button. A look of consternation spread over her face, then passed into a smile.

"I was told I'd have to be jolly careful and mind my p's and q's here!" she remarked cheerily. "I've been just five minutes in the school, and my first impressions are that Miss Thompson aims at unadulterated dignity, and that Miss Hopkins is concentrated essence of fuss. Am I near?"

"Not so far off!" laughed Laura. "They can exchange characters sometimes, though. I've seen Miss Hopkins ride her high horse and be dignity personified, and on the other hand I've seen Miss Thompson more ruffled than a head mistress has any business to be. You'll soon get to know them."

"I suppose I shall. Whether I shall altogether like them is another question."

"You'll like Silverside!" gushed Irma. "It's a perfectly delightful school—at least it used to be. We're afraid it is going to be utterly and entirely spoilt now."

"Why?"

"Because it's being invaded. It used to be quite small and select, more boarders than day girls, you know. And now we've just had a horrible shock—the whole of another day school is being plumped upon us—a school we've always despised. We're too indignant for words." [17]

Avelyn, who was fumbling with the lock of her box, lifted her head.

"Don't you like them coming?"

"Like them! Sophonisba! How can you ask such a question? We've always looked down on them so fearfully. Why, if we met any of them in the street, we used just to stare straight through them, as if they didn't exist. They wore dark-blue coats and horrid stiff sailor hats with coloured bands, for all the world like an institution. I tell you we simply wouldn't have touched them."

"You'll have to know them now."

"To a certain extent, worse luck! But they needn't think we'll be friendly with them, for we shan't. We shall keep a strict line drawn."

Avelyn had lifted the tray of her box on to the floor, and was busy taking books from the bottom portion. She was too intent on her occupation to reply. Irma, whose writing pad and fountain pen had just come to hand, was hastily scribbling a letter home; Ethelberga, leaning out of the window, exchanged greetings with a schoolmate in the garden below; Janet's vision was focused on her drawers; and Laura had just come across the postcard album, which she was afraid she had forgotten to pack, and was rejoicing in its possession. For five minutes or so the girls were engrossed with their own affairs, then the attention of the room was concentrated again on Avelyn.

"You haven't told us yet where you live," said Laura, looking up suddenly from the contemplation of post cards. [18]

"My home is at Lyngates just now."

"Where's Lyngates?"

"About twenty miles from here."

"You say 'just now'. Haven't you lived there long?"

"Only since last spring."

"You've brought very few clothes and things with you," commented Irma, who had been watching the unpacking of the new girl's box with critical eyes. "You'll never get through a term on those, I should say."

"There isn't any need to bring so many things when I'm going home for the week-ends."

"For the week-ends? Heavens! You don't mean to say you're a weekly boarder?"

"Why not?"

An expression of deep consternation spread over the faces of Avelyn's four room-mates. Their disapproval was evident, and they voiced their objections.

"We've never had such a thing as a weekly boarder before!"

"You'll be away all Saturdays and Sundays!"

"You'll be out of all the fun!"

"Almost as bad as being a day girl!"

"Miss Thompson said once that she didn't approve of weekly boarders."

"I can't understand Tommiekins, she's changed so lately."

"Have you ever been to school before?" [19]

"Why, yes," replied Avelyn, smoothing out the folds of her evening dress, and hanging it on the hooks behind the curtain. "Though not since last Christmas."

"To boarding school?"

"No; it was a day school."

"Where?"

"I went to The Hawthorns in Harlingden."

If a bomb had fallen in the dormitory it could not have caused a greater upheaval. For a moment the girls stared at Avelyn as if scarcely crediting her statement.

"Do you mean to say you're one of those wretched Hawthorners?" exploded Janet at last.

"I used to be, but I suppose I'm a Silversider now."

"And we've got you in our dormitory!" gasped Laura.

"So it seems."

"Miss Thompson ought to be thoroughly ashamed of herself!" fluttered Ethelberga.

"You'll be rid of me on Saturday and Sunday, remember," returned Avelyn bitterly.

At this crisis, the clamour of the gong for tea fortunately put an end to an extremely embarrassing situation. The four room-mates fled, leaving their new companion to follow them to the dining-room as best she could. When she entered, they were already seated at table, and did not look in her direction. She took a seat next to a complete stranger, who indeed handed her the bread and butter, but vouchsafed no single word of conversation. [20]

When the meal was over, the original inmates of the Cowslip Room retired to a secluded portion of the garden, and held an indignation meeting. For the first frenzied five minutes they allowed their wrath full swing, and vibrated between a dormitory strike and writing to their parents to beg for instant removal from the school. Then reason reasserted itself, and decided the impracticability of both methods. Previous experience had shown them that their head mistress was a tough dragon to tackle, and scarcely likely to be coerced by even the best organized dormitory strike, while in her heart of hearts each knew that, after paying her term's fees in advance, her father would need some very solid cause of complaint to justify so extreme a measure as a return to the bosom of the family. They began to discuss the matter more sanely.

"The fact is, she's here, and I suppose we can't get rid of her," admitted Irma.

"After all, she's a boarder!" ventured Ethelberga.

"Only a weekly one," qualified Janet.

"And a Hawthorner!" added Laura.

"She said she hadn't been to school since last Christmas," commented Ethelberga.

"Why, so she did! Then she's had a sort of a break from The Hawthorns, and in a way she's making a fresh start here."

"I suppose so."

"If she'd be loyal to Silverside, though we could never like her, we might bring ourselves to tolerate her." [21]

"A boarder's a boarder!"

When the girls returned to the Cowslip Room, they found their new companion with emptied box putting the last of her possessions into her drawers.

"Look here, Avelyn Watson," said Laura. "We've been talking you over. Although you go home for the week end, you're still a boarder, and at Silverside boarders are a very different thing from day girls, as you'll soon find out. If you've had two whole terms away from those Hawthorners, just forget them, and consider yourself entirely one of us. If you do that, we'll count you on our

side; but if you've anything to do with day girls, we'll cut you dead."

"I don't quite understand," returned Avelyn.

"You soon will!" said Janet significantly.

"I advise you to think it over," added Laura.

CHAPTER II

An Invasion

[22]

The changes which were taking place this term at Silverside certainly marked a new era in its traditions. Up till now it had been essentially a boarding school. There had, indeed, been day girls, who had shared the classes and some of the games, but they were in the minority, both in numbers and in influence. They had had no part in the various guilds and societies, and had been made by the boarders to feel that they were inferior beings who did not count. The mistresses, themselves resident, had been accustomed to view the boarders as the more important factors, and arranged everything to suit their convenience. It had been the unwritten code of the school that to be a boarder meant to procure preferential treatment.

Miss Thompson, however, was a level-headed woman, who marched with the times. When the opportunity arose of acquiring the connection of The Hawthorns, the large day school at the other side of the town, she closed with the bargain, and decided upon an entire change of tactics. Henceforward Silverside was to be run as *the* girls' day school of Harlingden. The house was [23] large, its accommodation had hitherto exceeded the needs of the pupils, there was plenty of room for added numbers, and even in war-time it would be possible to run up a corrugated iron or portable wooden building to serve as lecture hall and gymnasium. The big garden already contained several tennis courts, and there was a field close at hand which might be rented for hockey. Altogether, Miss Thompson congratulated herself that she had performed a most excellent stroke of business, and she looked forward to establishing a very flourishing educational centre, and to laying by a comfortable provision upon which she might retire when the burden of teaching grew too heavy for her to bear.

Certainly, Silverside was most excellently situated for the purpose she had in view. The property had been bought some years before the town of Harlingden had expanded, and while land was still cheap. The house stood in its own beautiful grounds, on the top of a hill commanding a fine view over the estuary. It was breezy and healthy, with large lofty rooms, big windows, and ample accommodation in the way of side doors and bathrooms: just sufficiently in the country to allow of walks through fields and woods, yet near enough to the town to permit most girls to return home for their mid-day dinners. As a day school, it was far more conveniently situated than The Hawthorns. Harlingden, formerly a moderate-sized and not particularly [24] important town, had since the outbreak of the war been turned into a great munition centre; the Government, attracted by the advantages of the estuary, had established large permanent works there, together with a shipbuilding industry. In a few short years the population had doubled. Fresh suburbs sprang up like mushrooms. In the Silverside district this was particularly noticeable, for where formerly there had been quite a rural walk between hedges, leading to the town, there now stood rows of neat villas with stuccoed fronts and balconies, and conspicuously new gardens.

The boarders at Silverside, who preferred country to town, greatly deplored this suburban growth. They had always begged to take their walks in an opposite direction, and had ignored Harlingden and its industries as persistently as possible. The advent of about fifty day girls into Silverside they regarded as neither more nor less than an alien invasion. They sat together in a tight clump when school opened at nine o'clock on Wednesday morning. Until the new gymnasium could be erected, it was difficult to find a room large enough to accommodate everybody. The old drawing-room had been emptied of furniture and fitted with forms, and here, by sitting very close, the girls managed to cram themselves in for the opening ceremony. Miss Thompson, elated at heart, but more stately and dignified than ever in manner, addressed her pupils in a short speech.

"As Silverside is entering on a new chapter of its career," she began, "I should like to put [25] before you all, as briefly as possible, what I consider to be the ideals of the school. Those who have been here some years already know our traditions, but it will do them no harm to hear them again, and those of you who are new will, I hope, understand, and be prepared to accept them with equal readiness.

"First of all, we stand for Work. We are living in very strenuous times, and it is the duty of all who love their country to do their best. Every faithful struggle with your lessons here makes you more fit to help your country by and by. If you have no ambition for yourselves, remember that

you are part of a great nation, and as such you must not slack, but do your bit to raise the general standard of education. You'll find there's a joy and a satisfaction in mastering rules of arithmetic or irregular verbs, when you feel that you are doing it not only for yourselves but for the general good. Then there are certain other things for which Silverside has always stood—truth and straightforward dealings, and a spirit of unity and of loyalty to the school. We have striven to establish a high tone here, and at all costs let us preserve it.

"This term there is a very large proportion of new girls, and hence a big opportunity for everybody. There will be inevitable changes, and much pioneer work to be done, and each girl may find a chance of taking a share in consolidating our traditions. I trust that old and new will join hands and do their utmost to work together harmoniously for the good of the school, and the [26] influence which, through you, it may exercise on the community later on."

At the end of Miss Thompson's speech the girls separated, and went to their class-rooms. At the eleven o'clock "break" they poured into the garden. They stood about in little groups, eating packets of lunch, and talking. Adah Gartley, Isobel Norris, and Joyce Edwards, the three eldest boarders, kept together. To them presently advanced two of the invaders, a ruddy-haired girl of perhaps seventeen, and a stout, dark-eyed girl a trifle younger.

"Our names are Annie Broadside and Gladys Wilks," began she-of-the-chestnut-locks. "If we'd stayed on at The Hawthorns, one or other of us would have been head this term. You look about the oldest of the old lot here, so perhaps you'll tell us how this school's managed. Do you have monitresses, or prefects, or what? Miss Thompson didn't mention a word about that in her speech. We'd like to know."

Adah glanced at her rather superciliously.

"We've never had anything of the sort here," she replied.

Annie Broadside's eyes grew round with amazement.

"What? No prefects or monitresses? How in the world did you manage, then?"

"We didn't find them necessary," maintained Adah stiffly.

Gladys Wilks whistled, and looked eloquently at her friend.

"Of course it was a very small school," she remarked, "so I dare say you somehow muddled on; [27] but *now*—surely there'll have to be something of the sort instituted?"

"Those juniors will give trouble if there's no one to tackle them," added Annie. "Just look at them over there!"

The juveniles in question were certainly behaving with a lack of decorum entirely foreign to the former atmosphere of Silverside. They were, in fact, engaged in jumping over Miss Thompson's most cherished flower beds, with disastrous consequences to the pet geraniums and calceolarias.

"The little hooligans!" exclaimed Adah, rushing to the rescue of the unfortunate flowers. "Here, get away, you kiddies! this sort of performance isn't allowed. Stop, this minute!"

The five long-legged children who were making a display of their jumping agility called a temporary halt, and stared aggressively at Adah.

"Who says it's not allowed?" enquired a pert ten-year-old, who was evidently the ringleader.

"*I* do."

"Are you a teacher?"

"No."

"A prefect or a monitress?"

"No."

"Then, what are you?"

"I'm a boarder," announced Adah with dignity.

The junior sniggered rudely.

"Boarders have no right to interfere with us, that I can see. We'll do as we like. Come along, [28] girls, follow the leader!" and, turning, she made a long leap across the bed, landing in the edging of blue lobelias.

Adah stood by, raging and impotent. She would have interfered by force, but very fortunately at that moment the school bell rang, and the irrepressible juniors desisted from their occupation and raced one another to the side door. Adah followed thoughtfully. Her brain was a whirlpool of new impressions, most of them not at all favourable, and she had not yet had time to assort them and put them into mental pigeon-holes. One idea loomed large. Silverside was going to be an utterly different place from what it had been before. That brief tussle had revealed much. Hitherto the little girls had been well-behaved children, rather in awe of their elders, and easily held in check; these new juniors seemed a different generation, and a very perverse and untoward one.

Everything, indeed, was changed. Her form room overflowed with strangers, and there was a new mistress, whose methods were different from those of Miss Hopkins. Adah, mindful of her position as oldest pupil, did the honours of the school, showing teacher and girls where books, exercise paper, and other necessaries were kept, but she performed this charity more in the spirit of *noblesse oblige* than with any goodwill.

When the last of the day girls had taken her departure after four o'clock, Adah heaved an immense sigh of relief, and sent a scout round to call a boarders' meeting for 5.15 prompt. [29]

Immediately after tea, therefore, all the resident pupils of Silverside assembled in the summer-house at the bottom of the garden. They had chosen that spot because it was secluded, and they were not likely to be disturbed. Their consultations were to be of a private nature, and they did not wish any mistress to overhear them. The summer-house was not very large—much too small, in fact, to contain twenty-four girls—but some squatted on the steps, and some on the window-sills, and some overflowed on to the lawn. Adah, seated on the little rustic table, looked round to see that her full audience was assembled, and opened the proceedings in a voice that trembled with indignation.

"It seems to me, and I expect to most of you, that matters here have just about come to a crisis. The school's turned topsy-turvy. It's been invaded by this horde of day girls, and everything is altogether different. Now, Silverside has always existed for the boarders. Miss Thompson has recognized that, and we've had a great many special privileges. It's *we* who have set the tone of the school, and made Silverside what it is. As long as we outnumbered the day girls that was pretty easy, but, now that this huge flock has trooped in, it may be a difficult matter to cope with them. We must make up our minds what we intend to do. Has anybody any suggestion to offer?"

"I thought of writing to my father, and asking him to take me away at Christmas," propounded [30] Irma, flushing with nervousness at the sound of her own voice.

Adah gazed at her with an expression of mingled amazement and sorrow.

"Irma Ridley, I shouldn't have expected this from *you*! Leave the school, indeed! Where's your loyalty? I hope you haven't been spreading such an abominable notion. No, indeed! We Silversiders mustn't desert the old ship. We've got to stick to her, and steer her course for her through very troubled waters. Don't let anyone suggest ratting again."

Irma, covered with confusion, blushed yet more furiously. The sentiment of the meeting was against her, and she felt that she had blundered badly. She murmured an incoherent apology, and began nervously tying knots in her pocket-handkerchief.

"Surely someone has a better suggestion to offer than this?" said Adah, her clear blue eyes searching the faces of her companions. "Please don't be afraid of airing your opinions."

"Silverside must stick to its traditions," ventured Joyce Edwards. "We mustn't let everything be swamped by the invasion."

"Let's make a Boarders' League," proposed Isobel Norris, "and pledge ourselves to hold together and support one another—a kind of Blood Brotherhood, you know."

"The very thing!" agreed everybody.

The idea was so manifestly satisfactory that each girl wondered why it had not occurred to [31] herself to suggest it. To bind themselves in so close a bond of union seemed picturesque and romantic in the extreme. It appealed to their imaginations tremendously.

"We shall be fighting for the school colours!" said Adah, with a light of enthusiasm shining in her blue eyes. "It's *we*, the little band of old pupils, who are to preserve the ideals of the school. These new girls must be made to realize that they're at Silverside now, and not at The Hawthorns."

"I guess we'll rub it into them," murmured Laura Talbot to the still-confused Irma.

It was a new girl after all, however, who made the really practical suggestion of the meeting. Avelyn Watson had sat very quietly during the proceedings, feeling herself in a somewhat awkward position. She had been a pupil at The Hawthorns for two years, but her mother had never really liked the school, and had removed her from it the preceding Christmas. Avelyn had come to Silverside quite ready to embrace its traditions and to erase The Hawthorns from her memory. To be confronted with more than fifty of her old schoolfellows, some of whom had to-day claimed affectionate intimacy with her, had been somewhat of a shock. She did not quite know where she stood. She was not sure whether the boarders were disposed to receive her into the bosom of the League, or if they would regard her as among the aliens. One fact, culled from former experience, rose to her lips. She was too shy to state it publicly, but she bent towards [32] Laura Talbot and whispered:

"Tell them, if they want to do anything, they ought to have prefects—you see, I *know*!"

Laura immediately broached the suggestion as her own, and gained the whole credit for it. The idea, hinted at by Annie Broadside and Gladys Wilks in the morning, had been fermenting in Adah's brain all day, and she grasped at it eagerly.

"It would give us just the authority we want," she agreed. "We'd better make a deputation and

speak to Miss Thompson about it. Who'll go with me?"

The Principal, busy and burdened with a hundred new cares, sat in her study that evening answering letters from parents. She pushed away her papers rather wearily as the deputation, consisting of Adah Gartley, Isobel Norris, Consie Arkwright, and Joyce Edwards, entered the room with a kind of bashful assurance. She was tired, but she was always ready to listen to what her girls had to say. It had been her invariable rule to meet them half-way. She heard them now patiently, asking many questions, for they were shy in stating their case, and did not at first explain their objects lucidly. When at length she had got at the gist of the matter, she leaned back in her chair and thought for a moment or two before she replied.

"What you say is very true. The influx of another school into Silverside may certainly endanger [33] our old traditions. I look to you boarders, who have been with me for years, to uphold every principle for which we have hitherto stood. I agree that you might find your task very difficult unless you were armed with some authority. We have never had school officers before, but that was because we did not feel them a necessity. I will try the experiment and see how it answers. You four are among my oldest pupils. You know what Silverside has stood for in the past, and you shall help to mould its future. I appoint you prefects, and give you power to report to me, or to any other mistress, breaches of discipline which come under your notice, and in certain cases to take off order marks. Adah, who is the eldest, and was first in last term's examination list, shall be head girl. I will announce this at nine o'clock to-morrow. My great object is to amalgamate the two schools into one as quickly as possible, and I trust that you will not show any favouritism towards old girls, but will give the new ones equal justice."

"We'll do our best, Miss Thompson," declared Adah, Isobel, Consie, and Joyce in an obedient chorus.

And doubtless they really meant to do their best; but schoolgirls are prejudiced beings, and apt to be conservative to the core. They had decided beforehand that the former pupils of Silverside, and the boarders in particular, had the sole prerogative of high ideals, culture, and gentility, and that such refinements could not, and did not, exist among those who had come from The [34] Hawthorns. In their minds the division was as complete as that between the sheep and the goats. They looked upon the Hawthorners as heathen, and upon themselves in the light of missionaries. They set to work very patronizingly to make their influence felt. Now, there is nothing which most people resent so much as patronage. The Hawthorners had been happy enough in their old school, and they were keenly insulted at being given to understand that they were regarded by the Silversiders as inferiors. They held indignation meetings of their own on the subject.

"Why should those stuck-up things lord it over us?" exploded Annie Broadside.

"They're not as clever as we are. We beat them easily in class," added Gladys Wilks.

"I should just think we do. They're simply not in the running at maths.," declared Gertrude Howells.

"And yet they're prefects, if you please."

"At The Hawthorns prefects were always chosen from those who got the highest marks in the examinations."

"You were top last term, Annie, and would have been head girl if the school had gone on."

"You were only two marks behind me, Gladys, and you know Miss Perry hadn't counted the botany papers. It was really a toss-up between us."

"Well, we're both out of it now."

"Very much so."

"I don't call it fair that these four boarders should have all the authority." [35]

"It isn't!"

"If they think we're going to knuckle under to them they're very much mistaken."

"Giving themselves such airs about being old Silversiders, and treating us like inferiors!"

"Can't we do anything?"

"Let's form an 'Old Hawthorners' Guild', and vow to stick to one another. There are more of us than of them, and we'll beat them in lessons and at games, and let them see who's inferior."

"Right you are! You shall be captain, Annie."

"Then you shall be secretary, Gladys."

"I know everybody will be only too delighted to join."

"They will. But don't let those Silversiders know one single word about it."

"They shan't, indeed!"

"We're here, and the school is as much ours as theirs!"

"Our old set will follow us, and not care a toss about the prefects!"

Adah and her fellow-officers had indeed made a terrible mistake by their superior and patronizing ways. Instead of welding the school into one, as Miss Thompson had hoped and intended, they had entirely alienated the new element and had set up a most unhappy barrier of division. Silverside resolved itself into two parties, each apparently determined to misunderstand the other, and obstinately resolute not to mix. Miss Thompson, anxiously watching the result of [36] her experiment, saw only the surface of things, for most of the trouble lay below, deeper than the ken of head mistresses. The teachers were aware of an undercurrent of discontent, but could not absolutely discover the reason. Only the girls themselves knew that the school was split into rival factions, between whom there was going to be war.

---

[37]

CHAPTER III

Walden

As Avelyn Watson is one of the central figures of this story, it will be well to go back some months, and follow the events which preceded her appearance at Silverside. Though apparently trivial enough, they are important, because if they had not happened, she would have come to school as a day girl instead of a boarder, and the part which fate put into her hands to play could never have been acted.

It all began with Daphne forgetting to change her wet stockings. Daphne had done many imprudent things before, and had suffered more or less from them. This time Dame Nature, tired of having her laws flouted, determined to teach her a lesson. The specialist who was called in to consult with the family doctor made an exhaustive examination of the case, then pronounced his verdict.

"She mustn't live in the town. If you want her to grow up into healthy womanhood, a year or two in the country is an imperative necessity."

[38] Up to the time when Sir Basil Hunter delivered this ultimatum, the Watsons had always lived in Harlingden. Daphne and Avelyn could remember the old days when Daddy had been alive, and Mother's hair had been brown and not grey; and she had laughed as gaily and easily as they did now. That was many years ago, and to David and Anthony, at any rate, their father was little more than an enlarged photograph on the dining-room wall. They had all been born in the comfortable, commonplace house in Gerrard Square, and had taken it and its uninteresting view, and its smoky little garden, together with the round of town life, entirely for granted. Then the change came. Mrs. Watson, thoroughly alarmed at the doctor's diagnosis, and nervous over the health of her whole family, took immediate steps to carry out his advice. She let the house in Gerrard Square, and removed into the country. The place she selected was a tiny village named Lyngates, two miles from the station at Netherton, and twenty miles away from Harlingden. Its pure air, gravel soil, and record of sunshine were exactly what Daphne required; the boys could go in to town every day by train, and thus continue at King James's School, and Avelyn, who was sufficiently like Daphne to make the fatigue of a daily train journey seem a risky experiment, could be sent as a weekly boarder to Silverside.

By a most fortunate chance, Mrs. Watson came across the very little property she wanted. It was an old farm-house, with a few outbuildings at the back, and a field or two for poultry—the [39] doctor had suggested that Daphne should interest herself in poultry. It was smaller by far than No. 7 Gerrard Square, but big enough for their requirements.

"With present war prices, and income-tax what it is, and four children to educate, I consider I'm very wise to make the move," she decided, "though I should never have had the courage to do it if Sir Basil Hunter hadn't been so emphatic."

So the house, gardens, outbuildings, and fields that composed the small holding were bought and paid for, and formally transferred by deed from their former owner, George Hethersedge, yeoman, to the possession of Helena Watson, widow, and the bargain was complete. That it was a bargain the children had no doubt. So many extra things were included that were never even mentioned in the title-deeds—the thrushes and blackbirds and tits in the garden, the wagtails that flitted up and down the little stream, the owls that sat and hooted in the elm tree at dusk, the wild bees' nest in the bank, the ferns in the crannies of the old wall, the morning view when the sun shone over the valley, and the calm, quiet sunsets when the sky was aflame with rose and violet. It was the most exciting experience to explore their new kingdom. They were always making fresh discoveries. Up till now, beyond their annual summer holiday at some seaside resort, they had had no practical knowledge of the country. To live side by side with Nature was like being transferred into another world.

To Mrs. Watson, no less than to her children, the change was welcome. She had often pored [40]

over Nature books from the library, and they had been wont to stir in her a vague yearning to get away from bricks and mortar and chimneys, and spend a sylvan year somewhere far from the sound of trams or steam hooters. She chafed sometimes against the monotony of her daily shopping and household cares. She longed for lanes and woods, but there seldom seemed time to go for walks at Harlingden; it was a long way from Gerrard Square into the fields. We are such creatures of habit, that it had never struck her to uproot herself and reorder the lives of herself and her children; and if Daphne had not forgotten her galoshes, and thus brought about the visit of Sir Basil Hunter, the family might have remained town birds to the end of the chapter. As it was, they stepped into a fresh inheritance. They named the house "Walden", after Thoreau's famous *Walden*, a book which her mother loved, and which Avelyn was just beginning to read and appreciate; the magic of its radiant love of Nature, and the breadth of its philosophy appealed to her strongly.

Though the Watsons' Walden was quite unpretentious, it was certainly more comfortable than the shanty in Concord, Massachusetts, where Henry David Thoreau spent his immortal two years and two months. There was a sitting-room on each side of the little hall, a big kitchen and pantry behind, and four bedrooms upstairs. Outside, across the yard, was a cottage, with a lower room which could be used as a den for fretwork, painting, carpentering, or the pursuit of any other [41] cherished hobbies, and an upper storey containing two extra bedrooms for emergencies. The stable and barn were interesting, and held dim, cobwebby recesses, where bats hung head downwards, and a brown owl sometimes perched blinking upon the cross-beams.

In front was a small raised garden, bordered by a very wide ivy-covered stone wall. The house stood on the slope of a steep hill, so that this wall overtopped the road below like a crag. When you leaned your arms on its golden sweet-scented ivy blossom, or sombre berries and smooth leaves, you could look out over a tract of country that spread for miles—green meadows, hazel copses bursting into leaf, thick woods that hid the stream whose rushing waters yet made themselves heard, the reedy reaches of a river, and fir-clad hills that melted faint and blue into a misty horizon. There was a patch of gravel in front of the wall, and a rustic garden seat, dilapidated, but firm enough for occupation. The site made a natural outdoor parlour: a yew tree, grown slantwise with the prevailing wind, formed an umbrella overhead. At the side of the cottage, between the yard and the kitchen garden, purled a shallow little brook, at the edge of which grew watercresses and marsh marigolds. It was spanned by a bridge made of rough slabs of stone. Beyond the stables lay a couple of small meadows, containing an upper reach of the stream, and a little marshy tract interspersed with gorse and alder bushes.

The Watson family had reviewed the whole premises slowly, critically, and with unbounded [42] satisfaction.

"It's the sort of place you read about in a novel," sighed Daphne, whose tastes were romantic. "Somehow you feel as if anything could happen here—interesting things, I mean. Mysteries and tragedies, and—and even——"

"Love affairs!" finished Avelyn promptly. "Perhaps they may—sometime."

Avelyn was at the stage when life is full of dreams. It was her constant amusement to imagine all kinds of delightful but wildly improbable future happenings for Daphne, for herself, and for the boys. The number of castles in the air which she constructed would have built a city. They were all shadowy and unsubstantial, but none the less fascinating for that. Walden appeared to her, as to Daphne, an appropriate setting for golden visions.

David and Anthony, still in the age of blunt uncompromising frankness, regarded the new home from a practical standpoint.

"It's top-hole!" decided David. "I'll have a thingumjig—what d'you call it?—lathe, I mean, inside that cottage, and a joiner's bench. There's a man in the village who says he's got one to sell cheap, and a vice with it. I'm going to make a rabbit hutch, and all sorts of things."

"There are trout in that part of the stream up the field," beamed Anthony. "Not very big ones, but certainly trout. I saw them jump. The boy who brought the telegram yesterday told me that [43] he catches them with his hands. He knows of sixteen birds' nests on the road to the station, and he's got a young hedgehog at home. I'm going to just sit and sit in the field when it's getting dark till I see one for myself."

"I shall grow ten years younger when I've had a summer here," announced Mrs. Watson to her flock. "You won't know your poor old mother very soon. The country air's making her so frisky and juvenile, she wants to run about like a girl!"

"*Do*, Muvvie darling! We love you in your skittish moods," implored Avelyn. "When you wear that short skirt and that rush hat you don't look a day older than Auntie Belle—truly! You never climbed up step ladders in Gerrard Square!"

"I've begun to do many things I never did before," laughed Mrs. Watson, "partly from necessity. If I could have found anybody else to go up the step ladder, perhaps I shouldn't have tried. We've all got to work if we want to make the place look nice. It'll be worth it when we've finished."

Walden had been empty for two years before its owner sold it, and, though it was in a fair state of repair as regarded masonry and woodwork, it sadly needed decorating. The question of its repapering and painting had been the one hitch in the proceedings, for, when Mrs. Watson had

sought to obtain estimates for its renovation, she found that, in the present war-time shortage of workmen, no firm would undertake to carry out a job so far in the country. For three horrible days matters had seemed at a dead-lock, and the purchase of Walden (not quite concluded) had [44] trembled in the balance. But Daphne's white cheeks brought all Mrs. Watson's native obstinacy to the fore. She was determined not to be vanquished. She enquired in the village, and secured the services of an old soldier who used to be handy-man at the Vicarage, and with his experienced aid and the willing, though unskilled hands of her young flock, she determined to do up Walden herself. She secured lodgings for a few weeks at a farm close by, and the family devoted the Easter holidays to the purpose. It was a new experience for them, and they enjoyed it thoroughly. Armed with pails of distemper and whitewash brushes, they splashed away at the walls, painted woodwork, stained floors, or laid linoleum. They made a delightful discovery in the dining-room, for, when they came to tear down the old wall paper, they found an overmantel of ancient oak beams. The fireplace was large and old-fashioned, with ingle nooks on either side, the woodwork had been completely covered with paper and plaster, but when this was cleared away, and it was cleaned, stained, and varnished, it presented a most quaint and handsome appearance. The great beam that spanned the hearth had a flat surface, and on this Mrs. Watson decided to carve a motto. The family put their heads together over it for many days. They looked up mottoes in books, and consulted their friends, but could not find exactly the right one. Daphne and Avelyn were in favour of English, but Mrs. Watson and the boys plumped for Latin, and [45] finally evolved the following:—

POST LABOREM HAEC REQUIES HAEC FELICITAS.
(After work, here is rest and happiness.)

"When you've finished your lessons in the evenings, we can make a circle round the fire and talk about the day's doings; and it will seem a centre for the whole house and for our lives," said Mrs. Watson. "I believe this little home is going to be far more precious to us than Gerrard Square."

To the children the doing up of the establishment was the utmost fun. Thoreau himself could not have obtained more enjoyment from his "Walden" than they did from theirs. There were many humorous incidents; as when Anthony sat down in the colour wash pail, or when Daphne dropped a pot of pink paint on the top of David's head, or when Avelyn poured in paraffin by mistake, instead of methylated spirit, to thin the varnish. It was a proud day when at last colour wash and paint were dry, and the floor was swept and cleaned, and the vans arrived and the furniture was carried in. Mrs. Watson had sold most of the heavy possessions which they owned in Gerrard Square, and had bought in their place tasteful antiques which suited the house far better, and gave it an air of quaint culture and comfort. When all was arranged it looked a charming little abode, and thoroughly in harmony, from the black beams of its ingle nook to the carved settle and gate-legged oak table, or the framed samplers on its walls. [46]

Many surprising incidents happened in the first days of occupation. Very early one morning, as Daphne and Avelyn lay in bed, they were awakened by a tweeting and whirr of wings, and found that a pair of newly-arrived swallows had flown in through the open window, and were whirling overhead, evidently with designs on the big cross beam for nesting purposes. The sight of the girls, who sat up in bed, seemed to annoy them, for they twittered with anger, scintillated rapidly round the room, then flashed out through the window into the spring sunshine.

"Well," exclaimed Daphne, "this certainly is living in the country! Actually swallows in our bedroom!"

"The poor darlings!" declared Avelyn. "They've had a horrible disappointment. They'd made up their minds to have their nest on that beam. I remember Martin Jones pulled down a swallow's nest before he whitewashed, and said they had built there last year, and had got in because the window was broken. They must think we're dreadful intruders. They were scolding us as hard as they could in bird language."

"Shall we hang out a notice: 'To Let, Eligible Quarters for Swallows'?" laughed Daphne. "We might even put nesting boxes round the walls, and extend the invitation to other birds."

To anyone who wished to study natural history, Walden certainly offered advantages. There was a friendly robin that domesticated itself, and would fly into the dining-room at meal times, [47] hop on to the table, and even perch upon the loaf. He would haunt the kitchen in quest of crumbs, and grew so cheeky that when Ethel, the maid, who resented his occasional flounders into her pudding dishes, drove him out through the window, he would merely fly round the corner and pop in again through the open door.

As at first the Watsons possessed neither dog nor cat, their garden became for that spring at any rate a veritable bird sanctuary. A pied fly-catcher built in the thatch of the summer-house, a pair of gold-crested wrens swung their dainty cradle under a pine bough, a nettle creeper nested in the long grass of the orchard, cole tits and blue tits haunted the yew tree, a family of young water wagtails issued from a hole under the stone bridge, and a wood pigeon took possession of the top storey of a fir tree, to say nothing of the blackbirds, thrushes, robins, and other everyday birds that availed themselves of the hospitality of the bushes.

"I thought I owned Walden, but I'm beginning to doubt it," said Mrs. Watson. "It seems to me that the wild creatures put in a prior claim, and come unasked to share it."

"They're welcome, bless 'em!" murmured Avelyn, fondling a newly-fledged and quite

undismayed young missel-thrush, which she had temporarily taken from its nest just outside the drawing-room window.

Some of the incidents which happened were decidedly funny. The Watsons were not used to the [48]
country, and had to learn by experience. One morning they had left some washing in the field, and found that a neighbour's calves had strayed through a hole in the hedge and were contentedly sucking stockings and pyjamas, and reducing them to a jelly-like pulp. It took several sharp lessons before the family grasped that cardinal rule of country life: "Keep your gate shut". On the first Sunday of their occupation they had gone to church, and on returning had strolled into the dining-room, to find three pigs comfortably in possession. A wild scene ensued, for the intruders, instead of allowing themselves to be chased through the door, careered madly round and round the table, squeaking and grunting in protest, and finally jumped on to the sofa, and made their exit through the open window, knocking over books, work-baskets, and pots of geraniums in their hurried flight, and completely flattening a bed of young pansies that had just been planted.

One night the family, who had sat up later than usual, heard stealthy steps in the garden, and, fearful of burglars, issued forth in a body, armed with the poker and other implements of aggression, only to find a melancholy donkey cropping the grass beyond the laurel bushes, with apparent appreciation of its superior juiciness.

These little adventures, however, added a spice of excitement to their existence. They agreed that life at Walden was supremely interesting.

Daphne, who was nearly eighteen, had finished with lessons, and for the summer term Mrs. [49]
Watson allowed Avelyn also to stay at home and run wild. She had been growing fast, and a rest was considered good for her. David and Anthony left the house every morning at half-past seven, walked to Netherton Station, caught the train to Harlingden, and proceeded to King James's School, where they spent the day and dined, returning home by about six in the evening. They were sturdy boys of fourteen and twelve, and enjoyed the daily expedition. Time had often hung heavy on their hands out of school hours in Gerrard Square; it was now agreeably filled in with a railway journey and a walk across fields where birds' nests might be found, and where they sometimes saw stoats and squirrels.

To the whole family the first sylvan spring and summer had been one long round of delight. By the end of August they felt that town had faded away from their mental vision, and that they had become "sons of the soil".

In September Avelyn began school again as a weekly boarder at Silverside. She had left The Hawthorns the preceding Christmas, and the nine months' absence, with the intervening removal to Lyngates, had very much blurred its memory. She had liked some of the girls, though she had never made any really intimate friends there. She had been mildly sorry to leave, but the regret had soon worn off. She had come to Silverside quite ready to hallmark herself with the stamp of her new school, and centre her interests there. To find that the greater part of "The Hawthorns" [50]
was now incorporated with "Silverside", and that the boarders identified her with her old set, had struck her somewhat as a shock. What attitude she should adopt she could not quite determine. She wanted to think over the situation carefully before she committed herself to either side.

CHAPTER IV [51]

An Encounter

The little freehold of "Walden" was a triangle, consisting of about two acres of land. Its base abutted on the high road, and its apex was wedged into another and much larger estate. The owner of this property resided at Lyngates Hall. The Watsons had as yet only seen him in the distance, but they knew from report that he was a naturalized German, and that his name was Hockheimer. They had heard rumours that he was not popular in the district. So long as he kept his live stock on his own side of the hedge, Mrs. Watson did not concern herself about her neighbour. When his cows strayed into her field she drove them back, and had the gap securely mended to prevent further trespassing. She considered that to be the end of the matter, and did not give Mr. Hockheimer another thought. As for the young people, they had not yet realized his existence. They discovered it one day quite suddenly and unpleasantly.

The second Monday morning after her start at school, Avelyn was walking to the station with her brothers to catch the 8.15 train. The weather was still fine and summer-like, and the late September sunshine gilded the yellowing nut trees, and turned the dew-drops in the long webs of [52]
gossamer into diamonds. There was an exhilaration in being up and out so early. The three marched along very cheerily, chatting as they went. As they rounded the corner beyond the smithy, they could see, about two hundred yards in front of them, a little figure in blue sports coat and tam-o'-shanter, also making its way in the direction of Netherton.

"Who's that girl?" asked Anthony. "We see her every day; she goes in to Harlingden by the same train that we do. She must be going to school, because she always has a satchel of books with her."

"It looks like Pamela Reynolds," returned Avelyn. "She's new at Silverside this term, and, now you speak of it, I remember somebody told me she came from Lyngates, but I'd quite forgotten all about it till this moment. I don't even know where she lives. Shall we sprint and catch her up?"

The Watsons hurried their footsteps, and by dint of what might be termed a forced march overtook Pamela on the brow of the hill. Avelyn greeted her by name from behind. She turned, surprised. She was a fine-looking girl of nearly fourteen, with wide-open honest brown eyes, a clear pale skin, and bronze-brown hair, which curled at the ends, and had a tendency to make little rings round her forehead. She was really pretty when she smiled.

"Hallo!" she exclaimed. "I never expected to see you here! Aren't you Avelyn Watson? I thought you were a boarder!"

"So I am, but only a weekly one. I come home from Friday to Monday. Do you like being a day [53]
girl? Isn't it a long way to go every morning?"

"I don't mind; I used to have much farther to go to school when we lived in Canada."

"Used you to live in Canada?"

"Yes, I was born there. I've only come to England lately."

"I haven't met you about Lyngates before."

"We've only been here a month."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Just my mother and I."

"Do you like England?"

"Pretty well. It's too cultivated after Canada. All these little walls and hedges to divide the tiny fields make me laugh. It's like a dolls' country. And I hate the high roads. Look here—there's a short cut through that wood to the station. I go that way nearly every day. Will you come?"

The Watsons were perfectly ready to explore anything in the shape of a new path or by-lane. They helped Pamela to open the gate, and followed her into the wood. The long vista of trees was delightful. The short grass under foot was a vivid emerald green, there were patches of yellowing bracken, clumps of crimson and orange toad-stools, spindle bushes covered with scarlet berries, and trails of pale late honeysuckle twining over the brambles. From the direction they were taking, they must be cutting off a long corner on their way to the station.

They had walked for perhaps a few minutes, and were strolling on, chatting as they went, when [54]
they suddenly heard a shout in front of them, and someone came crashing through the undergrowth and stood barring their path. The somebody in question was undoubtedly very angry. He was a fair, short, stout, roundabout little man, with a big blond moustache. His light-blue eyes flashed, and his large teeth gleamed unpleasantly as he spoke. But he not only spoke, he shouted.

"What are you doing here? Do you know this wood's private property? You've no business to be in it! Get out as fast as you can, the same way you came! Be quick about it, or I'll know the reason why. I could have you all taken up for trespassing if I liked. Why, *Pamela*!"

Pamela was standing staring at the surly objector, with a look of mingled amazement, disgust, and defiance in her clear eyes.

"It's my fault, Uncle," she replied calmly. "It's a short cut to the station through this wood, and to-day I brought these—friends"—she hesitated for a moment over the word—"with me. I come this way nearly every morning."

"Then you won't do it again!" thundered the short man. "Don't let me ever catch you here any more, or any of your friends. You may understand that once and for all, and I'll be obeyed. Go back, I tell you!"

He waved them savagely in the direction of the gate through which they had come.

"Mayn't we go on just this once?" pleaded Pamela. "I'm afraid we'll miss our train."

"Then miss it! What do I care? It's your own faults for trespassing, and I hope you'll all get into [55]
trouble at school. You richly deserve it. Back, I tell you, you young rascals!"

With an angry man raving like a lunatic in their path, there was nothing for it but to beat a retreat as speedily as they could. When they had passed through the gate, David looked at his watch.

"Five past eight! Thunder! We shall have to sprint if we want to catch that train."

There was no time for comment. All four immediately set off running. Each, perhaps, was buoyed up with an obstinate determination to reach the station by 8.15 in spite of the unamiable

hopes of the owner of the wood. They only wished he could be there to see them defeat his prophecy. In spite of such hindrances as bumping satchels, streaming hair, and, in Anthony's case, a trailing bootlace, they panted along, and covered the ground somehow. They could hear the train rumbling in the distance, and could see the smoke of the engine as they raced down the last hill. By the greatest of good luck a special cargo of milk-cans and butter baskets had to be placed that morning in the luggage van, and the extra two minutes spent in stowing them away saved the situation. The guard was just waving his green flag as the Watsons and Pamela, scarlet with their exertions, popped into the last carriage.

For a few minutes they were too breathless to speak. It was Anthony who first found words.

"Well, of all raggy old lunatics commend me to that one!" [56]

"Strafe the baity old blighter!" gasped David.

"I never heard of such meanness!" put in Avelyn. "Actually to *want* us to miss our train!"

"I'd have knocked him over for two pins," declared David savagely.

"Wish we'd tried!" growled Anthony.

"I don't know who he is, but he's no gentleman!" exploded Avelyn, divided between her ruffled clothes and her ruffled feelings. "Sorry, Pamela, if he's your uncle, but I can't help saying what I think."

Pamela was leaning back in a corner. She had taken off her blue tam-o'-shanter, and was trying to re-tie her bronze-brown hair. She looked up quickly.

"You needn't mind me. You can say anything you like about him. I only wish he wasn't my uncle. We don't choose our relations, do we?"

"Nobody'd choose him if they could help it, I should think," replied Avelyn frankly. "What's his name?"

"Mr. Hockheimer."

"The Mr. Hockheimer who lives at The Hall?"

"Yes."

"Why, he's a German, isn't he?"

"Yes, but I'm not! I'm as English as I possibly can be."

"Then how are you related to him?"

"He married my aunt."

"Oh!"

"DO YOU KNOW THIS WOOD'S PRIVATE PROPERTY?"
HE SHOUTED

There was a long pause, and then Anthony volunteered: [57]

"If Auntie Belle was to marry a German, I'd never call her 'auntie' again—never!"

"It was before the war, and she's dead now," groaned Pamela. "Uncle Fritz has lived twenty years in England."

"How is it he's not interned?" asked David.

"He's naturalized, you see."

"Need you call him 'uncle'?"

"I'd rather not, but I've got to. I'd never seen him till I came here a month ago."

"And you don't like him?"

For answer, Pamela suddenly burst into a storm of passionate tears.

"Like him! I hate him! Oh! why did we ever leave Canada and come to England? It's wretched here, and I'm miserable. I'd like to run away!" Then, dabbing her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief: "There, don't take any notice of me, please. I get these fits sometimes. I'll feel better soon. Please don't talk any more to me about uncle."

The Watsons glanced at her compassionately, and began to converse among themselves upon other topics. Pamela stared hard out of the window, blinked, and presently regained her composure. When the train arrived at Harlingden, she and Avelyn walked to Silverside together, but they talked of school concerns, and did not reopen the subject of Mr. Hockheimer.

Before this happening Avelyn, though she had been vaguely aware of Pamela's existence, had not mentally singled her out among the general crowd of her schoolfellows. From that Monday [58] morning she began to take an interest in her. She smiled at her when they passed on the stairs, and spoke to her occasionally in the playground. As they were in different forms they had few opportunities of meeting, and even at dinner the boarders sat at a different table from the day girls. Avelyn looked out for Pamela on Friday afternoon, but she was not at the station. She had either left school early, or was travelling by a later train. She seemed such an attractive, pathetic little figure that Avelyn's curiosity was aroused. She wanted to know where Pamela lived, and more about her. She cast round in her mind for any likely source of information, and decided upon Mrs. Garside, a fat kindly old soul, who owned a farm close to Walden, and was disposed to be neighbourly and talkative. On the excuse of going for the weekly butter she tapped at the house door, and was ushered in. Mrs. Garside was busy washing pots, but she placed a chair for

her visitor, fetched the butter from the dairy, and, as she packed it in the basket, glided off into conversation. Once started, it was difficult to stop her, or to lead her away from the various topics upon which her tongue ran so glibly. It was only after much manœuvring and a considerable amount of patience that Avelyn could get her to concentrate on the subject of Pamela Reynolds. Even then her mind side-tracked.

"A young lady with dark hair, that wears a blue tam-o'-shanter. Yes, I've seen her—not that I [59]
like tam-o'-shanters, and I wouldn't get one for Hilda, though she begged hard; I bought her a felt instead. Mr. Hockheimer's niece? Yes, he lives at The Hall, though many think he's no right to be there; and if I'd my way, I'd say an internment camp was the right place for him. With two sons in the trenches it doesn't give one any patience for these naturalized Germans, coming and turning out decent English folk, too, that ought to be there instead of him. It was a queer business, and people ought to make their wills properly before they come to die, instead of leaving them half-written. I've made mine, and divided what I've got equal share and share alike among my six children, so that there won't be any quarrelling after my funeral, for I've told them beforehand what to expect. And people say the old Squire's ghost haunts The Hall, and small wonder; though it's not much use, for a ghost can't sign a will, and he should have had the sense to do it while he was alive."

Mrs. Garside's statements were so rambling and involved, that it took Avelyn a very long time indeed to sift the information she wanted from among the large number of superfluous details supplied by her loquacious neighbour. By dint of pertinacity and tact, however, she pieced together the following narrative.—

Pamela's ancestors had for many generations been Squires of Lyngates, and had resided at The Hall. Her grandfather, Mr. George Reynolds, had lived there until his death, two years ago. Mrs. Garside could remember him since her girlhood—a tall, handsome man with a brown beard, who [60]
rode about the country on a favourite white horse named Champion. He had been a good landlord, and was well liked in the neighbourhood. His wife had died early, and left two children, a son and daughter. The son, Mr. Leonard, had been a high-spirited lad, and it was said in the village that he and his father did not get on well together. There was some upset and a quarrel, the rights of which nobody ever knew, for the Squire was too proud to air his troubles, and kept family skeletons securely locked in their cupboards. At any rate, Mr. Leonard had gone away to Canada and started farming, and had never returned to his old home, though he had written that he was married, and, later on, that he had a daughter. This was all the news that Lyngates people had heard of him in fourteen years. Whether he had prospered or otherwise on his far-off Canadian ranch they did not know. Squire Reynolds's other child, Miss Dora, had been a pretty girl, and her father's favourite. Many years went by, however, before she married. She had been fond of hunting, and used to look very smart riding to hounds in her neat navy-blue habit. It was at a meet that she had first met Mr. Hockheimer. He rented a shooting-box in the neighbourhood, and came down frequently from London for week ends. Nobody could understand how this naturalized German had obtained such a hold over Miss Dora and her father, though it was rumoured that he had reinvested the Squire's money for him to great advantage. Being a City [61]
man he was well acquainted with finance. Miss Dora was long past her first youth, but she was still handsome, and everyone in Lyngates had said that she was far too good for Mr. Hockheimer. The village worthies, however, were not consulted, and the wedding took place.

A year afterwards the European war broke out. There was great comment in Lyngates on the position of Mr. Hockheimer, but he had proved himself to be a naturalized British subject, and declared he was heart and soul on the side of the Allies. He had been very energetic on local committees, and had given large sums to the Belgian Fund.

When red war flamed in Flanders, and Britain summoned all her sons to her standard, Leonard Reynolds, on his far-away ranch in the Rockies, had heard the call and answered it. He had joined one of the first Canadian contingents, and had come over the sea to "do his bit" for the Motherland, leaving his wife and child at the ranch to carry on the brave but wellnigh impossible task of keeping the home fires burning. In his passage through England he had had thirty-six hours' leave, and had visited his father at Lyngates. The villagers had seen him again after fourteen years' absence, and had admired him in his khaki uniform. He had spoken to several of them—words of fire and patriotism and enthusiasm for the coming conflict.

Everybody lived for the newspapers in those first months of war, and Lyngates was no exception to the general rule. In farm-house and cottage they read of the retreat from Mons. [62]
Duke's son and plough-boy, Oxford graduate and City clerk, scientist, shopman and crossing-sweeper alike, had paid the great sacrifice, and the name of Leonard Reynolds stood among them. The Squire was in bed at the time, recovering from a severe operation. The news was broken to him by an injudicious nurse at a crisis in his illness, and it proved his death-blow. In his few last gasping words he had tried to say something about a will, but those who were with him could not understand what he meant to convey. With the incoherent message still trembling on his stricken lips he had passed away into the silence. He was buried with his ancestors in Lyngates churchyard, but there was no cross to mark the grave of his son Leonard. The survivors of the Canadian contingent could give no details beyond the fact that a certain portion of them had been utterly wiped out by a terrific explosion. It was impossible to identify the dead. War was reaping a red harvest of human lives.

After Squire Reynolds's funeral, Mr. and Mrs. Hockheimer had taken possession of The Hall. Though search was made everywhere the only will which could be discovered was one in the

custody of the family solicitor, which was dated fifteen years back. In the briefest terms it left a certain sum of money to his daughter, and the estate of Lyngates to his son, but in the event of the death of either, the survivor was to inherit the whole property. As it had been drawn up before his son's marriage, no mention was made in it of Leonard's wife and child. It was a [63] perfectly valid will, and it was duly proved, Mrs. Hockheimer succeeding to the entire estate of her late father. She lived only six months to enjoy it, and was laid to rest with her dead baby in her arms. She had executed a will bequeathing everything to her husband, so that Mr. Hockheimer, the naturalized German, assumed absolute command of the Reynolds property.

Meanwhile, matters had gone hardly with the wife and child of Leonard Reynolds. It had been impossible for them to farm the ranch, and they had no private means. By the advice of her friends Mrs. Reynolds had sold up her few possessions and had come to England with her daughter, to find out at first hand from the lawyers whether any provision had been made for her out of the estate. The solicitors were polite and sympathetic: they acknowledged the keen injustice of the matter, but assured her that there was no redress, and, according to British law, Mr. Hockheimer had full rights of possession in the Lyngates property, while she and her child could not claim so much as a solitary farthing. They represented the case, however, to Mr. Hockheimer, and he at once offered Mrs. Reynolds the use of a cottage on his land, together with a small annual income, and promised to pay for Pamela's education at a day school in Harlingden. As she had no other means of livelihood, Mrs. Reynolds had accepted this help, and had settled down at Lyngates shortly before this story begins. She was a fragile little woman, gentle and [64] clinging in disposition, and so battered by misfortune that she was glad to rest anywhere where she could find a home. She received Mr. Hockheimer's dole quite gratefully. With the loss of her husband life had for her practically stopped. Through her daughter it held a second-hand kind of interest. She welcomed the idea of Pamela attending a good school, and her crushed soul even began to indulge in timid little day-dreams concerning her child's future. These hopes, pathetic and tender, were like wild sweet violets springing up over the desolation of a battle-field.

Pamela viewed the situation from an utterly different standpoint. She had inherited her grandfather's strength of character along with the Reynolds features, and also a considerable share of his pride. Her early life in Canada had made her more independent than most English girls of her age. She considered that by all rights of justice an equal half of the Lyngates estate should have been hers, and that her uncle, Mr. Hockheimer, had managed to steal her inheritance. She hated to accept from him as charity what she felt ought to have been her own, and she bitterly resented the patronizing attitude which he adopted towards herself and her mother. She, too, had her day-dreams, and most of them centred round a time when she would be old enough to shake off this thraldom of dependence and strike out a line of her own in the world.

CHAPTER V [65]

Ructions

By the end of a few weeks Avelyn began to feel more settled down in her new quarters at Silverside. The old pupils might regret the former régime, but she was tolerably satisfied with the new. She was in the fifth form, and found the work not too arduous, and liked Miss Kennedy, her teacher. She had been accustomed to the bustle of a large school, and, though Laura Talbot might rave against the crowded conditions, to Avelyn it was amusing to be in a room crammed full of girls. School is a separate world of its own, and often a curious one. To outsiders and to its Principal, Silverside might appear as an enterprise that was growing and prospering exceedingly. Its numbers had suddenly more than doubled, it had fresh teachers, and was going to build a cloak-room and a gymnasium; nothing could seemingly have more hope of success. Inwardly, however, it was a seething whirl of opposing factions. The old and the new did not readily amalgamate. The boarders were jealous of their rights, and would not yield an inch of the privileged position they had always been wont to occupy; while the Hawthorners, accustomed to [66] the absolute democracy of a day school, could not and would not understand why boarders should expect to have any privileges at all.

Trouble began on the very second day of term. Adah, in her new capacity of head girl, had pinned a paper on the notice board announcing a general meeting of the Dramatic Society for 4.15 in the studio. The old members turned up at the time named, to find a group of Hawthorners already in possession of the room. Adah, after waiting a minute, glanced at the clock and coughed significantly; then, as this produced no result, she remarked:

"Won't you be rather late if you're not getting home soon?"

"We don't much mind," returned Annie Broadside easily.

"Well, the fact is, we want to use this room," continued Adah. "We're going to have a meeting."

"I know. That's why we've come."

Adah's eyebrows elevated themselves to an astonishing angle.

"You've come to our meeting?" she exclaimed incredulously.

"Certainly we have. Why not?"

Annie asked the question aggressively.

"Because you're not members of the Dramatic."

"But we want to join."

Adah turned to her friends, who stood looking scornfully at the intruders.

"Did you hear that?" she remarked. "They actually want to join the Dramatic!" [67]

"Cheek!" murmured Consie, and the others giggled.

"And why shouldn't we join?" flamed Gladys Wilks.

"Why? Because you're day girls, and the Dramatic's only for boarders. That's the reason."

"It's no reason at all," answered Maggie Stuart sharply. "The boarders have no right to monopolize any society. It ought to be free and open to the whole school."

"But it can't!" snapped Adah. "Surely you can see for yourselves that it wouldn't work. We have all our rehearsals in the evenings, when day girls couldn't possibly come."

"You could fix them from four to five instead," suggested Annie.

"We're not going to alter our arrangements for anybody," returned Adah tartly.

"The boarders have always run the Dramatic," added Consie. "We'd like to begin our meeting, please, when we can have the studio to ourselves."

"Oh, very well! Keep your wretched society to yourselves if you want!" yapped Annie; "but I'll tell you this, at any rate, I think it's most monstrously unfair. You needn't expect us to help you with any of your schemes, for we just shan't!"

"Don't excite yourselves—we haven't asked you!" sneered Consie freezingly as the Hawthorners flounced out of the room.

At first the committee was too agitated to discuss business. It was ablaze with indignation at [68] the impudence of mere day girls aspiring to join the select circle.

"How could we let them?" fluttered Joyce Edwards. "To begin with, there wouldn't be enough parts to go round, nor enough costumes. Dear me! we should have the Juniors expecting to appear on the platform! What next, I wonder? We Seniors have always done the acting, and let the kids and day girls make the audience."

"And we'll go on doing so!" declared Adah. "We're the prefects, and we'll manage the school affairs as we like, without interference from anybody."

The decision about the Dramatic was the same as regarded most of the other societies. The boarders kept them jealously to themselves. The day girls grumbled, even protested indignantly, but they were powerless to make any change. The four prefects were all boarders, and exercised their newly-granted authority for their own advantage. Miss Thompson had no idea of the state of affairs. In appointing as school officers girls who had been with her for some years, she thought she was safeguarding the tone of Silverside and preserving its traditions intact. She had certainly no intention of establishing an oligarchy; yet in effect that was what had resulted. The members of the Boarders' League felt pledged to support one another against all outsiders, and every activity of the school was in the hands of a clique.

Adah, as head girl, was intensely patronizing. She was puffed up with pride in her new office, [69] and would explain Silverside customs with an airy superiority which aggravated the Hawthorners continually. Their injured souls rallied round Annie Broadside. Annie was a born leader. She keenly resented the state of affairs, and meant to show fight. She only waited a suitable opportunity, and at length it came.

For the first few weeks of term the boarders had been busy with various affairs on Saturdays, and had contented themselves with an occasional game of tennis and croquet. At the beginning of October they suddenly realized that the hockey season was beginning. So far hockey, and indeed any organized games, had been only very languidly pursued at Silverside. The smallness of the school had not given a wide choice of champions, and for some years the elder girls had been more interested in botany and butterfly collecting than in sports.

Silverside had had a hockey team, and had occasionally played a match, though it could not pride itself on its record of goals. The present prefects had never distinguished themselves remarkably at athletics, but they were sufficiently enthusiastic to wish the school to win successes. They called a boarders' meeting to discuss matters.

"We ought to have a splendid games club this term," smiled Adah complacently. "There should be several sets of hockey going on in the same afternoon."

"There isn't room in the field for more than one," ventured Laura Talbot.

"Then we must take a larger field," decreed Consie. "With so many new subscriptions we can easily afford it." [70]

"Ninety-five girls instead of only thirty-six in a school make a difference," admitted Irma Ridley.

"The treasurer will have quite a nice little sum in hand," chuckled Isobel Norris.

"I want the school to begin and make a name for itself," said Adah. "I don't want to say anything against Jessie Carew and Maggie Stephens, last year, but really we all know they were slackers."

"Silverside must buck up!" agreed the others.

"You, Laura, and Janet, and Ethelberga have the makings of good players in you," murmured Adah reflectively, "and of course Consie and myself, and perhaps Joyce."

"What about the Hawthorners?" asked Isobel.

"We shall have to include them, of course."

"Couldn't get up the teams without them, I'm afraid," sniggered Minnie Selburn.

Adah stared hard at Minnie, who straightened her face and sat up stiffly.

"In the matter of hockey, of course, everybody in the school, whether day girl or boarder, will be invited to join," continued Adah.

"Some of those Hawthorners are jolly good," ventured Mona Bardsley.

"They won ever so many matches last year, I believe," added Alice Webster.

"Whom did they play?" asked Adah quickly.

"I don't know." [71]

"I do," said Avelyn, speaking for the first time. "It was Workington Ladies' College, Mirton High School, Redlands County School, and Harlingden Ladies' Team, and they beat them all, except Harlingden, and that was a draw."

Adah was rapidly scribbling some entries in her notebook.

"We'll challenge Workington Ladies' College," she announced. "I wanted us to do it last year, but we decided our team wasn't strong enough. I'll write to their secretary to-night and make a fixture. It would be a tremendous triumph for Silverside to beat Workington. They've rather a reputation."

"The old school's going to forge ahead!" smiled Consie.

"We'll ask Miss Thompson to speak about hiring that larger field," said Isobel. "We'd better secure it at once, in case the farmer should let it to anybody else."

Next day Adah pinned up a notice, announcing that hockey would begin on the following Saturday afternoon, and asking all girls to sign their names as members of the games club, and to pay their subscriptions to the treasurer. She watched the day girls come and surge round the notice board, then she ran upstairs to her form room. She considered that she was performing her duties admirably as head of the school.

Meantime, downstairs, a ferment was going on that would have surprised her. The grumblings and dissatisfaction increased till a whisper began to circulate. [72]

"Annie Broadside says, don't sign or do anything yet, but let the 'Old Hawthorners' League' meet on the common this afternoon at 4.15. Pass this on, and all turn up."

The boarders could not understand why, that afternoon, the day girls scuttled away so promptly at four o'clock, and seemed in such a frantic hurry to get on their boots and be gone. As a rule they loitered about in an annoying fashion, and were seldom clear of the premises till half-past four. The prefects ventured the opinion that Silverside rules were at last beginning to be properly kept. They would have been immensely electrified if they could have seen what was really happening.

Not far from the house was a small common, which most of the girls were bound to pass on their way to and from school. To-day, instead of going home they trooped here. There was an old tree stump at one side, and Annie, scrambling to the top of it, and holding on by a branch, made it serve as an orator's platform from which to address her audience, which stood below. She first of all looked round critically.

"Are we all here?" she began.

Several voices replied:

"All who could come."

"Some girls had to catch trains."

"And the Potters had music lessons."

"And Trissie Marsh had to go to the dentist's."

"But they sympathize. They'd have come if they could." [73]

"I'm glad to hear that," continued Annie. "I like to know I have your sympathy. Are we all old Hawthorners?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And no spies among us?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then I can speak freely. I want to say, what I'm sure we all think, that we're perfectly disgusted with the way those boarders have been behaving. They speak as if the school existed for them, and them alone. Some societies we aren't allowed to join at all, and those that we may belong to are kept well in their own hands, because they appoint themselves as presidents, and secretaries, and treasurers, and members of committee. We simply haven't a look in anywhere. Now, I ask you, is this fair?"

"Not at all!" howled the girls.

"We're exactly in the position of serfs, and it's monstrous. What right have those boarders to rule over us?"

"None!"

"It's quite time we showed our spirit. I've been wondering for a long time how we could checkmate them, and now I see my way clear. They're going to start the hockey season."

"Yes!"

"Who do you think will make all the arrangements and be captains of the teams? Boarders or day girls?"

"Why, boarders, of course." [74]

"And who are the best players; who are going to win the goals?"

"*We* are!"

"Of course, we are; everybody knows that! But the boarders would take all the credit, and talk about *their* successes. The very idea makes me ill! Why should we play for *them*?"

"Why, indeed?"

"We're not obliged to. Our Saturdays are our own, and nobody can make us come and play hockey if we don't want. I vote we just say we won't join their old games club. Let's start a rival one of our own."

"Yes, yes! Oh, do let us!"

"We'll call it 'The Old Hawthorners' Hockey Club', and we'll hire our old ground and wear our old colours, and play matches of our own, and let those conceited Silversiders go to Jericho."

Annie's daring suggestion met with a chorus of applause. The Hawthorners, made to feel unwelcome in their new school, clung desperately to their old traditions. They had had an excellent hockey record in past years, and felt confident that they could raise a team sufficiently strong to challenge their former rivals to matches.

"Will you elect Gladys as secretary?" asked Annie. "That's all right. And Maggie as treasurer? Then give in your names, and bring your subscriptions to-morrow, and I'll go this very night and see about getting our old field. It belongs to Mr. Gardner, and my father knows him quite well, so [75] I'm sure we shall manage it. If not, we'll hire another field."

"Or play on the common," declared the girls as they crowded round Gladys Wilks, giving in their names.

Adah Gartley had kept her word and written immediately to the secretary of Workington Ladies' College, who had replied by return of post, arranging a match for a date in November. She showed the letter with much satisfaction to the boarders after breakfast.

"By the by, have those day girls paid their subscriptions yet to the Games Club?" she asked suddenly.

"Not one of them," answered Isobel.

"The blighters! And hockey begins to-morrow. Isn't it just like day girls? I must talk to them about it at eleven o'clock 'break'."

The day girls were busy consuming packets of lunch when Adah, glass of milk and piece of bread and butter in hand, strolled amongst them, bent on her mission.

"Look here, you slackers! D'you know you've never paid your half-crowns yet? Can't admit

anybody to the hockey field who hasn't given in her subscription—that's one of the traditions of Silverside."

"Is it?" said Annie Broadside casually. "I can't see that it concerns us."

"You'll see to-morrow when you get to the field. A nice little disappointment it will be for you to find you're not allowed to play."

Annie took a big bite of oatcake and gulped it. [76]

"Suppose we don't want to play?"

"Not want to play!" Adah's expression was one of sheer incredulity.

"Why should we? You boarders have taken up all the other societies, so you may have the hockey as well. We don't want to intrude on your privileges, thanks!"

"But I say," blustered Adah, "you *must* play! We've got to win matches and keep up the credit of the school."

"Keep it up yourselves!" put in Gladys sarcastically. "You've rubbed it into us hard enough that it's only you who understand the school traditions, and we're nothing but outsiders!"

"But you're keen on hockey! Surely you want to play?" Adah was making a desperate effort to curb her temper and be conciliatory.

"Certainly we do, but we're going to have a club to ourselves."

"You can't here!"

"We don't mean to try. It's an 'Old Hawthorners' Club', and nothing to do with Silverside."

"But you mustn't! You shan't go ratting like this!" exploded Adah, scarlet with indignation.

"Don't get excited!" said Annie politely. "There's nothing to prevent us. Our Saturdays are our own, and nobody can compel us to come to school and play hockey if we don't want."

"You miserable blighters!"

"There! Keep a civil tongue, please. I thought the traditions of Silverside didn't run to slang. [77] Perhaps you'd like to arrange a match with us: 'The Old Hawthorners' versus 'Silverside Boarders'? Gladys is our secretary, and will book it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" choked Adah, beating as dignified a retreat as she could.

It was certainly a terrible blow for the prefects. They had counted entirely on the strength of the day girls in arranging teams. To be deserted in this fashion meant the ruin of the hockey season. They were aghast at the bad news.

"I wonder if Miss Thompson can refuse the larger field?" speculated Joyce.

"We certainly can't afford to hire it with the subscriptions we've got," mourned Isobel.

"And it's not the slightest use our trying a match with Workington, for we should only get a jolly good licking," announced Consie. "We don't want to court disaster."

"I shall write to the secretary to-night," said Adah bitterly, "and tell her we've been obliged to make other arrangements. Those day girls are the absolute limit!"

"Don't you think," ventured Isobel, "that perhaps you've been a little high-handed? If you'd tried to conciliate them, now——"

"Conciliate!" echoed Adah scornfully. "Really, Isobel, what next? If you think I'm going to truckle to day girls, you're much mistaken."

"I'm afraid we're making a good many mistakes," murmured Isobel, but too low for her friend to overhear her.

The three other prefects certainly laid the blame of this occurrence on Adah, and considered [78] that, if they had conducted the negotiations in her place, they would have been able to manage the refractory Hawthorners. Though they always loyally supported their head girl, they were quite aware that her overbearing manners gave offence. They sometimes suffered from her themselves. She had so thoroughly established herself as leader, however, that it was not possible to break away from her rule. She had been longer than any other girl at Silverside, and thus stood for the old traditions. Whether these in the end were going to prove the best for the school was a matter that admitted of some debate.

CHAPTER VI [79]

Reprisals

After learning the story of the Lyngates estate, Avelyn's interest in Pamela Reynolds was doubled, and she cultivated her acquaintance. The two girls travelled together from Harlingden on Friday afternoons, and arranged to meet on Monday mornings to walk in company to the station. Though Pamela was not yet fourteen she was old for her age; her adventurous life in Canada had given her a mental outlook different from that of most English girls. She proved a lively and very pleasant companion. Mrs. Watson, to whom Avelyn confided her friend's story, paid a call upon Mrs. Reynolds, and found her a timid, refined lady, of gentle birth and breeding, greatly saddened with her troubles, and evidently without much initiative. The cottage, which had been lent to her by Mr. Hockheimer, was in a very out-of-the-way situation. It was small, inconvenient, and possessed many drawbacks, but she had made the sitting-room pretty with books and flowers, and the little home had a cultured air about it. Mrs. Reynolds did not seem to wish to seek any society, and gently intimated that she feared she was not strong enough to walk [80] as far as the village and return calls.

"The poor woman has simply sat down under her troubles," said Mrs. Watson, describing her experiences at the family supper-table. "It's easy to see that she has no spirit. If she would take life more pluckily it would be better for herself and everybody. I'm sorry for that child. To live in that quiet spot with such a depressed companion, especially when by all rights they ought to have owned The Hall. It makes my blood boil! Mr. Hockheimer ought to have done more for them than this."

"Catch Mr. Hockheimer doing much for anybody!" commented Daphne. "People say he's the stingiest landlord. They grumble dreadfully. I think he ought to have had Mrs. Reynolds and Pamela to live with him at The Hall."

"Oh, Pamela would have just hated that!" put in Avelyn. "She simply can't bear her uncle."

"I don't blame her," sniffed Daphne.

"Oh, Muvvie, couldn't we ask Pamela to tea?" said Avelyn. "It must be so lonely for her up there, without any brothers and sisters. I believe she'd love to come."

"Well, we'll give her the chance at any rate," agreed Mrs. Watson. "I hope her mother won't be stupid and refuse to let her come. I think I'd better send a formal invitation."

The note was duly written and dispatched. Mrs. Reynolds appeared to need some days to think the matter over, but finally sent a formal acceptance.

"Hooray!" triumphed Daphne. "I quite expected she was going to decline with thanks. Muvvie, [81] how glad I am that you're a nice, sensible person, and not morbid! You'd have been such a trial to us if you'd always gone about with an air of depressed resignation."

"I've had my troubles as well as other people," said Mrs. Watson. "It certainly doesn't make them any better to mourn over them. We've got to sit up and make the best of things as they are. 'Never say die!' is a good old motto. I'd try to be chirpy and cheery if I were reduced to a wooden leg and a glass eye!"

"So you would, Muvvie darling! I believe you'd dance a jig with a crutch. But about Pamela——"

"We'll give her a good time when she comes, poor child!"

The warm-hearted Watsons were determined to make Pamela thoroughly welcome, and they succeeded royally. She was painfully shy for the first ten minutes, and answered all questions in embarrassed monosyllables, but after a walk round the garden she began to thaw, by the end of tea she had waxed expansive, and later on she proved downright amusing. By the time the family, in a body, escorted her home, they felt that they had sealed a friendship. They talked her over on the way back.

"She's sporty," decided David.

"Decent as far as girls go," qualified Anthony, who at twelve did not yield readily to feminine attractions.

"I call her charming," said Daphne. "You can see she's plenty in her—not one of those [82] lackadaisical people like Ella Simpson, who just put on side. It seems to me a most monstrous thing that her uncle should have been able to take all the property."

"Collared the lot!" grunted David. "The old Hun!"

"Mrs. Garside told me that everybody said Squire Reynolds must have made a later will—the butler and coachman remembered signing something. But it couldn't be found."

"Likely enough old Hockheimer suppressed it. He'd be equal to any dirty German trick!" suggested Anthony.

"If he has he deserves penal servitude."

"I'd prefer shooting for him," said Anthony grimly.

The Watsons liked Pamela for herself, but it certainly gave her an added interest to consider her the victim of her uncle's greed and injustice. They thoroughly detested Mr. Hockheimer. Since the morning when he had turned them out of the wood they had owed him a grudge, and other matters had accumulated to swell the account. His land, unfortunately, adjoined theirs. I have mentioned before that the little property of Walden was shaped like a triangle, the apex of which jutted into Mr. Hockheimer's estate. This apex consisted of a piece of rather marshy rushy ground. The brook divided at its head, and flowing round it in two separate streams reunited, making the patch of meadow into an island, connected with the main land by a rough plank [83] bridge. It was of little service from a farmer's point of view, but it was a most picturesque spot, and Mrs. Watson intended to turn it into a water garden. She and Daphne spent hours poring over Barr's catalogues, and deciding what iris, forget-me-nots, ranunculi, and other marsh-loving plants they should send for, and whether it would be possible to dam a piece of the brook to make a pool for water-lilies.

Imagine their annoyance when one day they found their cherished island in the occupation of Mr. Hockheimer's cows, which had walked down the stream from their own field. With great difficulty the Watsons drove them back, and replaced the rather broken tree-trunk, which acted as barrier, across the brook. When the same incident happened again Mrs. Watson complained, and requested Mr. Hockheimer to see that his cows kept to their own field. He replied by stating that they had always been accustomed to graze on the island, which was really a no-man's territory, not strictly included in either property, though, if the matter were to be investigated, it would probably be found to be included in the Lyngates estate.

Much surprised, and angry at such an assertion, Mrs. Watson looked up the plans of Walden which went with her title-deeds, and found the island most certainly represented as her property. She called in the assistance of the village joiner, and caused a strong barrier to be fixed across the stream at the head of the island, sufficient to keep out cows and make a landmark for the [84] boundary of her territory from that of her acquisitive neighbour. This being done she considered the matter settled, and proceeded to plant her iris and forget-me-nots. She anticipated a beautiful show from them in the spring.

Towards the end of October, Daphne, whose health had picked up with country air, nevertheless had to report herself to the specialist who had previously examined her, and she and her mother made an expedition to London. They started on a Thursday, and were to spend Sunday with friends in town, returning home on the following Monday or Tuesday. Avelyn, David, and Anthony, together with Ethel, the maid, had the establishment to themselves for the week-end. With her mother's permission, Avelyn asked Pamela to spend the Saturday afternoon at Walden.

The young folks were determined to have a thoroughly happy harum-scarum time together, and, instead of taking a conventional tea in the dining-room, they carried their meal into the barn, and held a picnic feast, sitting on blocks of wood, with the wheelbarrow for a table, and with Billy, the dog, Meg, the cat, and Tiny, the bantam cock, as self-invited guests.

"It's rather a stunt being all on our own for once!" opined Anthony, feeding Billy with crust, regardless of the rationing order.

"Top-hole!" murmured Avelyn, pouring out milk for Meg into her saucer.

"I wish something would happen!" said David, rocking himself airily to and fro on his billet of [85] wood.

"Something *will* happen if you're not careful, old sport! You'll topple over next minute!" warned Avelyn.

"What do you want to happen?" asked Pamela.

"Something exciting—an air raid, or a fire, or a burglary. Something really to give one spasms!"

Pamela did not reply for a moment. She rested her head on her hand and thought. When she spoke there was an undercurrent of doubt in her voice.

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you," she hesitated. "I'm not supposed to know, only I happened to overhear. I don't care, I *shall* tell! He's only my uncle by marriage, and I detest him!"

"Do you mean Mr. Hockheimer?" asked Avelyn, in a sudden flutter.

"Yes; I wish I didn't!"

"What about him?"

Pamela hesitated again, then whispered:

"He's coming here, just at dusk, with an axe and a saw."

"What for?"

The Watsons had clustered round, with faces full of horrified expectancy.

"To take down that barrier across the stream. He says the island's his."

If the enemy had landed, the Watsons could not have been more astonished and indignant. Their opinion of Mr. Hockheimer had been bad before, but that he should take advantage of their mother's absence to perform such an abominable and utterly illegal act made their blood boil. [86]

"There are two opinions about the island," declared David grimly. "Mr. Hockheimer will find he's not going to get things all his own way. What time did he say he was coming?"

"Just at dusk."

"All right! We'll be ready for him! Thanks ever so much for letting us know. I say, Tony, come into the yard with me; I want to speak to you. I've got a brain wave!"

"What's it about, Davie?" asked Avelyn excitedly.

"I'll tell you afterwards, Ave."

Out in the yard the two boys held a hasty confabulation. They felt that they must act quickly. It was their duty to protect their mother's property from this Hun robber. The situation appealed to their boyish instincts. David's eyes gleamed with a wrathful twinkle. Anthony's young fists were tightly clenched. They laid a careful plan of campaign, then started off to secure recruits. In ten minutes they returned from the village with three Boy Scouts, to whom they unfolded their designs. They hurried off at once to the island, to survey the scene of action. The barrier which Mrs. Watson had caused to be erected across the brook, was constructed of two stout poles with withies intertwined; the ends were secured in the banks, and there was room for the water, even in flood, to flow underneath. On the Walden side of the stream were some large stepping-stones, which the joiners had placed for their convenience when fixing the posts into the overhanging [87] bank. David and Anthony, with their scout friends, took off boots and stockings, and after a considerable amount of shoving and splashing, managed to move away the small stones that supported these boulders, leaving them apparently safe, but in reality only lightly balanced in the brook. They had barely finished when twilight began to fall.

"We'll clear out now!" commanded David. "He may come any minute, and I want him to be hard at work before we appear on the scenes. We'll catch him red-handed."

"And give him more than he expects!" chuckled Anthony.

Going back to the house, the boys took Avelyn into their confidence. They felt that it would be mean to leave her out of such a thrilling adventure.

"If you're game to come, you can," they allowed graciously. "It ought to be a sporty job!"

"Blossomy!" agreed Avelyn. "I wouldn't miss it for worlds. But what about Pamela? She'd enjoy it, of course, but her uncle would know she'd given the show away."

"She must hide behind the bushes, and not let him see her. It'll be top-hole for Pamela!"

The alders and clumps of furze were thick down by the stream, quite sufficient to give shelter to the little party of seven that presently took cover there. They preserved strict military discipline. Not a word was spoken. All crouched silently watching and waiting. The sun had set, and the red glow faded from the sky, but there was a young moon, and objects were clear. David [88] held Billy by the collar. He was a sporting dog, and trained not to bark; though he panted and his eyes bulged, he did not betray the whereabouts of his owner by even the suspicion of a yelp. Early experience with a former master, addicted to poaching, had taught him his lesson.

Just when the owls had wakened, and were beginning to hoot round the barns, Mr. Hockheimer came striding down his field. He was annoyed with Mrs. Watson for having put the barrier across the stream. There had indeed been one in the days of the former tenant, but it had conveniently tumbled into the water, leaving a pathway for his cows to graze on the island. He believed that by a little bluff and persistence he could persuade Mrs. Watson that the island was part of his own property. German-like, he had small opinion of women, and considered that a widow's substance would be an easy prey. He had decided to see to the matter himself, instead of bringing his bailiff or his keeper with him. Since the war began, his men had been apt to make themselves very disagreeable over trifles, and it was not worth having a fuss about so small a business.

He stood on the top of the crag and surveyed the barrier. How to get to it was the first question. It was fixed just where the stream ran in a narrow gully between two high banks. He mentally strafed the village joiner for having placed it in such an inaccessible spot. From his own [89] land it was practically impossible to reach it. The only thing to be done was to go into Mrs. Watson's field. He had no scruples about trespassing, and taking his axe he hacked down some branches, and cleared himself a way through the hedge. It was comparatively easy now to reach the barrier. There were stepping-stones obligingly left by the workmen, which would be of great assistance to him. Saw and axe in hand he advanced upon them, quite unwitting that seven pairs of eyes (eight with Billy's) were watching his movements from the shadow of the bushes. The first two stones were secure enough, and gave him confidence; the third tottered a little, and he stepped hastily from it on to the fourth, only to find that it capsized altogether and landed him suddenly on his back in the water. The stream was not deep enough to drown, but was quite sufficient to immerse him. He splashed and floundered about, and rose wrathful and spluttering, to find five boy figures standing in the field and grinning at his discomfiture.

"Dear me, Mr. Hockheimer," said David, with feigned commiseration, "I'm afraid you're wet!"

Mr. Hockheimer's remarks, being in German, were probably better not translated. He waded ashore and began to wring the water from his clothes.

"May I ask what you were doing?" continued David blandly.

"A job that I mean to finish, you young rascal!" girned Mr. Hockheimer gruffly.

"Excuse me, but that fence is my mother's property, and if anybody interferes with it we're out here to protect it." [90]

"And I'm here to remove it!" roared the German. "Take yourselves off, you young chimpanzees!"

"You forget it's our own field," continued David with icy politeness. "It's we who must ask you to take yourself off. Oh, very well!" as the German made a threatening movement towards him, "Billy, will you give Mr. Hockheimer a hint to go?"

Billy had been straining at his collar to suffocation point. Now, released and encouraged by his master, he flew, barking furiously, at the intruder, and seized him by the leg of his wet trouser.

Mr. Hockheimer yelled, freed himself by a kick, and, turning to see the angry dog ready to spring at him again, saved himself by suddenly climbing up an old willow stump that overhung the brook. He swarmed up with an agility surprising in a man of his stout build. Wet and draggled from his dip in the stream, he cut a sorry figure clinging among the branches, while Billy, mad with rage, jumped and yelped down below.

"Call off that brute!" shouted the German hoarsely.

"There's no hurry," answered David. "I want to talk to you a little, Mr. Hockheimer. It's a good opportunity while you're resting."

"Call him off and let me go, you little villain!"

"If you *will* trespass in our field you must expect the dog to get excited. It says in the Commination Service, 'Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark'. (Perhaps you don't go to Church on Ash Wednesdays?) Now, you were distinctly trying to remove my mother's landmark, and if I let you go I may be compounding a felony. I've got some witnesses here, at any rate. What a gap you made in the fence! We shall have to make that up. Tony, old chap, keep guard for a while." [91]

"Right you are!" answered Anthony sturdily.

Percy Houghton had brought his father's hedging-gloves and a billhook, so, leaving Anthony as sentry by the tree, David, with the aid of the boys, repaired the hedge. He whistled cheerily the while.

Mr. Hockheimer was feeling far from cheerful. He was wet, cold, and in a most undignified position. Every time he ventured to let his leg down so much as an inch the dog showed all his teeth in an ugly snarl. The prospect of spending a much longer time perched in the tree was not pleasing. He judged it wiser to arrange terms.

"Come, come, you've had your little joke," he expostulated in a milder tone. "Call your dog away, and I will go home."

"Will you give me your solemn undertaking not to trespass on our property again, or attempt to remove our landmarks?" demanded David grandly.

His victim grunted something which might be interpreted as assent.

"Then we'll let you off this time. Tony, hold Billy! Shall I help you down, Mr. Hockheimer? You're rather stiff, I expect." [92]

"I can manage myself," growled the German sulkily, as he descended with a thud.

"We've made up the fence, so we shall have to let you out through our yard," observed David. "By the by, you dropped a saw and an axe into the brook. I'll fish them out to-morrow by daylight and throw them over into your field. I call that Christian charity. I might have commandeered them or let them stop in the stream and rust away. Dear me, you're *very* wet! I hope you won't catch cold!"

Mr. Hockheimer made no reply, but stumped after the boys up the field and through the stable-yard. David held the gate open for him most courteously, and he passed through into the road. Then he turned and shook his fist.

"You shall pay for this some day!" he muttered. "I don't forget!"

"Neither do I," returned David. "Good-night, Mr. Hockheimer!"

As the boys came back round the side of the barn they met Avelyn and Pamela, who had run up from the field. The two girls had kept hidden among the bushes, but had seen and heard most of what was going on.

"You don't think he saw me?" asked Pamela. "I believe he'd kill me if he knew I'd told."

"I don't believe he could possibly see you, not even from up in the tree. It was getting so dark," David assured her.

"He has an awful temper!" shivered Pamela. [93]

"Oh, Dave, you did bait him!" said Avelyn with a chuckle. "I didn't know you could be so sarcastic. I nearly died trying not to laugh out loud. How did you think of it all?"

"It came on the spur of the moment," admitted David modestly. "I've rather an idea I'd like to be a barrister when I grow up, if the war's over."

"I'd like to be a detective and snap the handcuffs on criminals," declared Tony, giving Billy his last honey-drop as a reward of virtue.

---

[94]

CHAPTER VII

Miss Hopkins

Though Avelyn, as a weekly boarder, was not quite in the innermost heart of the Silverside clique, she was nevertheless considered one of the elect. Her room-mates rubbed it into her that she *was* a boarder, and as such must be very thankful for her privileges. On the whole, they treated her rather well. They included her as much as they could in what fun was going on, helped her to plait her hair, showed her their private treasures, and shared their occasional boxes of chocolate impartially round the dormitory. Avelyn felt that she was living two lives: one began at nine o'clock on Monday morning, and lasted till four on Friday, and the other occupied the intervening time. Each circled independently in its own orbit. The school life was quite fascinating and absorbing, especially now she was getting used to it. It was jolly to sit on the beds in the dormitory and compare experiences with the other girls. They generally had something interesting to talk about, especially Irma Ridley. Irma had an inventive mind, and a keen appetite for romance. She read every novel she could get hold of, though only a very few, and those of a [95] strictly classical character, were allowed in the Silverside library. She had a good memory, was an excellent raconteuse, and would sit in the gloaming and tell thrilling tales to anybody who was prepared to listen. To her room-mates she supplied the place of a monthly magazine of fiction. It was Irma who first started the rumour about Miss Hopkins. The girls were dressing for supper when she made her amazing statement.

"Do you know," she remarked, pausing with her hairbrush in her hand, "I verily believe that Hopscotch either already is, or is just about to be—engaged!"

If Cupid himself had darted in through the window, bow and arrows in hand, the occupants of the Cowslip Room could not have been more electrified.

"What!"

"Hopscotch?"

"You're ragging!"

"It's the limit!"

Miss Hopkins, the mathematics mistress, had never struck the school as a likely subject for romance. She was middle-aged, nippy, determined, brusque, and a disciplinarian. There was a slight burr in her speech, acquired north of the Tweed, and she had a habit of saying, "Come, come, girrls!" She had never yet been seen without her pince-nez, and it was a tradition that she slept in them. In the minds of her pupils she was indissolubly intertwined with decimals, equations, and problems of geometry. They connected her with triangles, not hearts, though of [96] course there was no telling where the little blind god might suddenly elect to shoot.

"I'm not ragging!" declared Irma earnestly. "I tell you I really mean it. What's more, I've seen him!"

"When?"

"Where?"

Irma enjoyed an audience. She sat down on Janet's bed with the pleasant consciousness that she had gripped her listeners.

"I went into the study this afternoon to fetch Miss Kennedy's fountain-pen, and I found Hopscotch there—alone with a gentleman. I'm afraid I surprised them."

"Did they look embarrassed?"

"Well, they both stopped talking, and stared at me while I hunted about for the pen. *I* felt

embarrassed!"

"What's he like?"

"Middle-aged, with a moustache that's growing grey—not bad-looking on the whole."

"It would be very suitable," decided the others.

They were trying to readjust their mental attitude towards Miss Hopkins, and transfer her from the mathematical plane to the sentimental. To do so required a wrench, but it was decidedly thrilling. They all suddenly began to remember symptoms of incipient romance on the part of the mistress.

"She wears a locket on her watch-chain. It's probably got his photo inside," decided Ethelberga.

"And she always snatches up her letters in a frantic hurry," added Janet sagely. [97]

"Has she known him long?" asked Avelyn.

Irma nodded doubtfully.

"I should think it's probably quite an old affair. They may have been boy and girl together."

"Perhaps they've been separated for years and years, and have only just cleared up their misunderstandings," suggested Laura.

"Was he holding her hand?" asked Janet.

"N—no, I can't say he was holding her hand; but then, you see, I'd knocked at the door first, and she'd said 'Come in!'"

"That would give them time," agreed Janet.

A silence followed, and the girls looked pensively at one another. The atmosphere seemed charged with romance. The ringing of the first bell for supper brought them back with a disagreeable thud to reality. They had not yet changed their dresses, and a wild scramble ensued. Whether a mistress in the bonds of Cupid would overlook such details as unpunctuality was an experiment too risky to be tried. They passed on their information in the course of the evening, and by 11.30 next morning even the day girls had digested the news.

Miss Hopkins could not understand the changed attitude which the school suddenly adopted towards her. There was an undercurrent of something inexplicable. The girls gazed at her in form with a kind of tender interest. If she toyed with the locket on her watch-chain, they visibly thrilled. Once, when she dropped a letter from her pocket, Irma, who picked it up, actually [98] blushed as she handed it back. When the twelve gates of Jerusalem were mentioned in the Scripture lesson, Laura Talbot asked whether a jasper stone was ever used as an engagement ring in Hebrew times. Being a practical, sensible sort of person, Miss Hopkins decided that the war—that national bond of union—was bringing her into closer touch with her pupils. The girls, meanwhile, were discussing a possible wedding present, and wondering who would be her successor as mathematical mistress.

Several of them were already beginning to work little good-bye souvenirs for her. They hustled them out of the way in a hurry if she chanced to come into the room. For at least a fortnight nothing happened, and speculations were rife.

"Why doesn't she wear an engagement ring?" asked Mona Bardsley.

"Doesn't want to publish it yet, I suppose," opined Minnie Selburn.

"Do you think she'll be leaving at Christmas?"

"One can never tell."

"Has Tommiekins said anything?"

"Not a word."

One Thursday afternoon an event happened. Irma, looking out at the fifth-form window, watched a masculine form walk up the drive and ring the front-door bell. She instantly identified him with the stranger whom she had seen in the study with Miss Hopkins.

"I knew him again in a moment," she assured the others. "I never forget faces, and his was [99] unmistakable."

The flutter among the boarders was immense. It was known that Miss Hopkins was in the study interviewing the gentleman. Little Daisy Garratt had been in the first-form room reworking a returned sum, when the maid had entered and announced: "Mr. Judson is in the study, please, m'm," and Miss Hopkins had risen immediately from her desk, and told Daisy she might go, an opportunity of which that round-eyed junior had instantly availed herself.

So his name was Judson! It was not highly romantic, indeed it suggested gold paint; but after all, what's in a name? Everybody decided at once that he had brought the engagement ring, and that Miss Hopkins, blushing and conscious, would wear it upon the third finger of her left hand at tea-time. They began to search about for suitable speeches of congratulation. Several daring

spirits, heedless of conduct marks, hung about the hall, hoping to catch a glimpse of Mr. Judson as he said good-bye. There was competition for front places at the windows that overlooked the steps. Twenty interested pairs of eyes watched his coat-tails disappear down the drive. There was much speculation as to why he had not stayed longer, and what he was carrying inside his little black bag. When Miss Hopkins came in to tea an electric wave of excitement surged round the room, then broke in disappointment. Her left hand was ringless. She seated herself in the most matter-of-fact manner, and began to eat bread and butter and talk about the last air raid in London. [100]

Before preparation it had all leaked out. Mr. Judson was traveller for a large firm of scholastic publishers, and on both occasions he had called to interview Miss Hopkins about some new arithmetic books. She had decided that they were suitable, and had ordered copies for the fifth and sixth forms. That was the whole of the business. In the minds of the boarders Cupid flew out of the window with a bang. He left blank desolation behind.

"Were there only arithmetic books inside that little black bag?" asked Mona disgustedly.

"It's too sickening when I'd nearly finished my pin-cushion cover!" broke out Minnie Selburn.

"Mine was to be a nightdress case!" lamented Alice Webster.

The inmates of the Cowslip Room, as originators of the whole romance, felt particularly flat. In disconsolate spirits they went to bed. It was not nice to be told by Adah Gartley that they were silly geese, whose heads were filled with a pack of sentimental rubbish. Their injured feelings seethed, rallied, and finally bubbled up.

"There's something disagreeable about Adah!" remarked Janet tartly.

"It isn't only Adah, it's Joyce and Consie," corrected Laura.

"They deserve something for their nastiness!" ventured Ethelberga.

"Something strong!" agreed Avelyn.

Irma, half undressed, paused in the act of pulling off her stockings, and made the important suggestion: [101]

"I say, let's play a trick on the prefects!"

"What a blossomy idea!"

"They richly deserve it!"

"It would be just top-hole!"

"What could we do?"

"Ah, that's just the question, my good child!" said Laura, putting a thoughtful finger to her forehead. "There's an art in ragging. It ought to be done delicately. We don't want clumsy tricks, such as apple-pie beds. As for booby traps, they're vulgar and dangerous; I wouldn't soil my fingers with making one. It must be something that will annoy them, but not harm them or anybody else. I haven't got a brain wave yet, but perhaps ideas may come."

"Suppose we go and reconnoitre," proposed Avelyn.

"A very jinky notion. We might get an idea on the spot."

The four prefects slept in the Violet Room at the end of the passage. They were allowed to sit up later than the rest of the school, and at this moment were downstairs finishing some preparation. It was an easy matter, therefore, to visit their quarters. Laura, Irma, Janet, Ethelberga, and Avelyn made a dash down the passage, turned up the gas, and began an inspection. The Violet Room was quite the prettiest of the dormitories; it was also the largest, and had a round table and four easy chairs with comfortable cushions. The table was spread with a white cloth, on which were set forth four cups and saucers, a tin of cocoa, a small basin of sugar, and a plate of biscuits. The prefects were working overtime for an examination, and were allowed this special indulgence to refresh their tired brains before they went to bed. They boiled a tin kettle on a gas ring, and brought it upstairs with them. They considered their nightly cocoa party one of their greatest privileges. [102]

"Looks jolly comfortable!" sniffed Avelyn, regarding the preparations with envy.

"It's well to be a prefect!" agreed Janet.

"Shall we eat the biscuits?" suggested Irma.

"Certainly not!" replied Ethelberga.

Laura had taken up the cocoa tin, and was plunged in thought.

"I've got it!" she announced suddenly. "I don't mean the tin, but an idea. Wait half a second for me!"

She dashed back to the Cowslip Room, and was away several minutes. When she returned, her face beamed triumph.

"They won't enjoy their cocoa to-night!" she chuckled. "I've mixed two teaspoonfuls of Gregory's powder with it! It will be a nice little surprise for them, won't it?"

"Sophonisba! I should rather think so! I say, let's turn down the gas and scoot. We shall have Miss Kennedy coming along in a minute."

The prefects came upstairs at ten o'clock, carrying their kettle. They retired into their dormitory and shut the door. Two scouts from the Cowslip Room, arrayed in dressing-gowns and [103] bedroom slippers, presently tiptoed down the passage, and listened outside. The door was thick, and denied them the full benefit of the conversation, but they caught such words as "cheek", "disgusting", and "abominable", so retreated satisfied. They expected a storm next morning, but, rather to their surprise, the prefects took no notice of the matter. Adah had decided that it would be undignified to make a fuss.

"It will fall flat if we say nothing!" she urged.

"We'll just jolly well lock up our cocoa tin in future, though!" announced Consie indignantly.

---

[104]

CHAPTER VIII

Spring-heeled Jack

If David Watson had not been notoriously careless and forgetful, the events which will be narrated in this chapter might never have happened. He was a bright boy, and well on in his form, but he had occasional lapses of memory. In one of these he left his Latin dictionary in the train. Now, if you are on the classical side of a large school, it is not only a difficult but an impossible matter to get along without a Latin dictionary of your own. To attempt to prepare your work by borrowing your neighbour's book is like essaying to live on charity. David realized this point immediately, and, instead of proceeding home as usual by the 4.45 train, he turned into the town instead. There was a second-hand book-stall in the market, which he thought might be worth a visit. It had been recommended to him by one of the other boys, who guaranteed the cheapness of its goods. Anthony, who stuck to David like a Jonathan, went to help him to look.

"I've just eighteen pence in my pocket," admitted David. "But I may get one at that. It needn't [105] be a particularly spanky one. Miller got a ripping atlas last week for one and two. He showed it to me. It only had Norway and Sweden lost out, and a few of the maps blotted."

"I can lend you threepence," said Tony, "and you could leave your watch or your penknife or something, I suppose."

The market was a large covered hall, containing rows of stalls of all kinds. The boys heroically resisted the attractions of oranges, chestnuts, and sweets, and made for the second-hand books. A pile of these, all jumbled together, were marked:

BARGAINS. EDUCATIONAL, 1*s.* each.

David and Anthony began to turn them over and look at them. They were certainly an assorted lot. There were ancient geographies and grammars dating back fifty or sixty years, catechisms of Scripture or history, guides to knowledge, botanical questions, and even an odd volume or two of sermons. A few of them were older still, and had long "S's" and calf bindings. Regarded as educational ammunition, they were as antiquated as flint-lock pistols. The boys rummaged among them for some time in vain, but, at last, almost from the bottom of the pile, they disinterred a fairly respectable Latin dictionary. It had lost its back cover and its title page, but otherwise it seemed intact and clean. David took it to the old man who presided over the stall, and tendered him a shilling. He accepted it with reluctance.

"Didn't know I'd let this slip in among the bargains," he grumbled. "It's worth two and six if it's [106] worth a penny. It came with a lot of other books from a good house. Well, I suppose, as it was among the shillings, you'll have to have it. You may thank your luck I made a mistake."

"A bargain's a bargain," said David, as he put the volume into his satchel.

Trains to Netherton were not very frequent, and the boys had to wait some time at the station. They sat down on one of the seats, and David opened his satchel and took out the Latin dictionary. He agreed with the old book-stall man that he had got it cheap, and felt decidedly satisfied with his purchase. As he turned over the leaves, a letter fell out on to the platform. Anthony picked it up. It was a square envelope sealed with red wax, and addressed: "To my son, Leonard."

"Hallo," said Tony, "we've got hold of some chap's letter here!"

"Great Judkins! So we have!"

"Whom did the book belong to?"

David turned to the cover, and there, in rather faded ink, he found written:

"George Reynolds, Parkhurst Academy, January, 1858."

He gave a long-drawn whistle.

"Here's a bit of stunt," he said. "Shouldn't mind guessing it belonged to old Squire Reynolds."

"Pamela's grandfather?"

"You bet!"

"Was his name 'George'?" [107]

"So Ave said. And Pam's father's name was Leonard."

"Then the letter was for him?"

"I suppose it was—only he's dead."

"What'll you do with it, then?"

"Give it to Pamela."

"What do you think's inside it?"

"Don't I wish I knew!"

"Suppose it's a will?"

"Exactly my brain wave. Wouldn't it be priceless if it left everything to Pamela?"

"And turned old Hockheimer out of The Hall? Rather!"

"One never knows. I'll put it in my pocket, and give it to Pam to-morrow morning."

The Watson boys sometimes overtook Pamela on the road to the station, and every day they travelled by the same train to Harlingden. They made a point of meeting her next morning, and David handed her the envelope, explaining how it came into his possession.

"I suppose you couldn't open it and see what's inside?" suggested Anthony.

Pamela looked doubtfully at the seal.

"I think I ought to give it to Mother," she said. "I expect she'll show it to me."

"Don't let that precious uncle of yours get hold of it, that's all!" warned David.

"No, indeed! I'll be careful."

"You'll tell us what it's about, won't you?" begged Tony the curious.

"If Mother will let me." [108]

"Some day, perhaps, you'll be mistress of Lyngates Hall."

"No such luck!" declared Pamela bitterly.

Though she might disclaim any expectation of good fortune, the remembrance of the letter nevertheless haunted Pamela all day long. She kept feeling in her pocket to see that it was safe. In spite of herself, bright fairy dreams floated through her mind, and mixed themselves up with her lessons. Miss Peters had to tell her twice to pay attention. She missed the explanation of a problem while she imagined herself living at The Hall and riding a white pony, and got utterly wrong in geology through planning how her mother should go up to London and buy new clothes.

Dream castles are the most delightful of possessions. We build them according to our own pattern, and live in them as our fancy pleases us. Those more sober dwellings that fate sends us are never half so beautiful, though we generally have to put up with them. The day seemed longer than usual to Pamela. She hurried off at four o'clock, though her train did not start till 4.45, and she only had to wait at the station. She did not happen to see the Watson boys, for they ran up so late that they had to jump into the guard's van, and at Netherton they went into the booking office to enquire about a lost parcel.

Pamela walked home at a good pace, though the road was all uphill. Moss Cottage, the little place which had been lent by Mr. Hockheimer to Mrs. Reynolds, was not a particularly attractive residence. It was rather dark and damp, and much shaded by trees. It had no beautiful view, such as there was at Walden. Its front windows faced the road, and the light was obstructed by a large "monkey-puzzle". Poor Mrs. Reynolds had made everything look as nice as she could, and was busying herself in trying to get the neglected garden back into a state of cultivation. She was burning weeds when her daughter arrived. Pamela opened the door and entered the sitting-room, where the table was ready spread for tea. She took the precious letter from her pocket, and smiling with pleasant anticipation, put it upon her mother's plate. She would tell her all about it at tea-time, over the bread and jam. Smelling the burning weeds, she ran into the garden. Mrs. Reynolds paused in her occupation of forking fresh fuel on to the bonfire. [109]

"Is that you, child? Then I'll go in and make the tea. How the evenings are closing in! It will soon be dark when you get home. I wish you could be a weekly boarder at school like Avelyn Watson."

"I don't! I'd far rather come back to you every evening, Mummie."

"I can't let you walk back from the station alone in the dark. I shall soon have to begin to come and meet you in the afternoons."

"Oh, Mummie, it's too far for you! I don't in the least mind walking alone. Shall I go and shut up the fowls now, or have you done it?"

"Not yet; so you may run and shut them up while I make the tea." [110]

"You'll find a big surprise on the table, Mummie darling. Don't touch it till I come, will you? I'll tell you all about it at tea."

"Very well," smiled Mrs. Reynolds, who was used to Pamela's little surprises.

She was in the act of pouring on the boiling water when there was a rap at the door, and her brother-in-law entered. Mr. Hockheimer generally admitted himself in this fashion, without waiting for the door to be answered—a lack of courtesy which invariably annoyed Mrs. Reynolds.

"I was passing, so I came for that parcel I left the other day," he explained. "You put it by in the cupboard, didn't you? Yes, there it is. I'll take it with me. By the by, have you any paraffin to spare? I happen to want a little."

"I have some in the shed outside."

"Can you give me some in a bottle?"

"Yes, I'll go and fetch it."

Mrs. Reynolds placed the teapot to keep hot on the hob and left the room. Mr. Hockheimer came over to the fire, and stood warming his back and humming snatches from an opera. Presently his eye caught the letter on the table. He picked it up, looked narrowly at the handwriting, turned it over and examined the seal. Then he thought for a moment with narrowed eyes. Finally he slipped the envelope into his breast pocket, and, catching up his parcel, made his way outside to the shed.

"Is that bottle of paraffin ready?" he shouted. "I'm in a hurry, and can't stay." [111]

"It's here. I was just looking for a piece of paper to wrap it in," replied Mrs. Reynolds. "Won't you stop for tea?"

"Haven't the time to-day. Never mind any paper, I don't want to wait. The bottle will do well enough in my pocket. I must be off now. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" returned his sister-in-law, rather relieved at the shortness of his visit. She washed her hands after pouring out the paraffin, and came into the sitting-room, Pamela, who had been tidying herself upstairs, entering at the same moment.

"I'm glad we've got rid of Uncle!" smiled the latter. "I heard his voice, and kept out of the way."

"Naughty child!"

"Well, Mummie, I can't help it. You know I don't like him. I don't care if we are dependent on him; what I feel is, that we oughtn't to be. There, I won't upset you by talking of him. I've something else I want to tell you. Why, where's the letter?"

"What letter?"

"The letter that I put on your plate. Mummie, what have you done with it?"

There was an agony of apprehension in Pamela's voice.

"I haven't seen it, dear," replied Mrs. Reynolds. "Why, yes, I remember now I did notice a letter lying on the plate when I was making the tea. I was just going to look at it when your uncle came in. It's certainly not there now." [112]

Two red spots mounted to Pamela's cheeks, and her eyes blazed sparks.

"This is just about the limit!" she exploded. "There's not the least shadow of a doubt! Uncle Fritz has stolen that letter!"

While these events were taking place at Moss Cottage, David and Anthony Watson were walking home from the station. They had lingered at the booking office, and had loitered on the platform to talk to some friends, and, when they finally made a start, they determined to take a path through the woods instead of keeping to the high road. There were two motives for this decision. In the first place, the woods belonged to the Lyngates estate, and, though the public had an old-established right of way, Mr. Hockheimer objected greatly to the foot-path being used, and had several times vainly tried to close it. The boys felt that they would cheerfully go out of their way to annoy Mr. Hockheimer. They almost hoped they might meet him, and, in imagination, stood firmly on the path, discussing the legal aspect of the matter, and quoting the

ancient county map as their authority.

There was, however, another reason which led them from the high road. During the last few days a curious and persistent rumour had circulated in the neighbourhood as to a "something" that had appeared in the woods. Whether supernatural or physical nobody knew, but several people vouched for having seen it. Their stories, allowing a natural margin for exaggeration, [113] tallied wonderfully. The apparition wore dark clothes and a black mask, and, instead of walking, careered along in a series of mighty leaps and bounds. Owing to this extraordinary mode of progression, it had been nicknamed "Spring-heeled Jack", and its appearance had excited considerable terror. It was reported to be abroad at dusk, and to haunt the more lonely portions of the woods.

David and Anthony, having a thorough boyish love of adventure, thirsted to get a sight of this mysterious personage. They climbed the hill over the quarry, therefore, and struck up through the woods, keeping at first to the foot-path, but they encountered nobody, not even Mr. Hockheimer. When you are out for excitement, it is disappointing to have a perfectly tame and uneventful walk. In the thickest part of the wood they paused with one consent.

"It's all bunkum about the trespassing! Let's go and explore!" tempted David.

"Right you are!" agreed Anthony, succumbing as readily as Eve yielded to the serpent.

It was a most interesting wood, with tall trees and smooth glades. It undulated, and held crags here and there, so that you could never quite see where you were going. The ground was strewn with acorns and beech mast and horse-chestnuts, quite worth picking up. The boys wandered for some little time, enjoying themselves immensely. They had no idea in what direction they were [114] going till they found themselves on the crest of the hill. Behind them was the wood, but in front was a range of open country looking towards the sea. They were standing on a platform of rock, which shelved sharply down to a patch of gorse and heather.

"Jolly view here——" began Anthony, but stopped with his sentence unfinished, for David suddenly gripped his arm and forced him on his knees behind a bush. Somebody was walking at the foot of the rock, and one brief glimpse had been sufficient to identify the plump figure and blond moustache of their arch-enemy, Mr. Hockheimer. It would never do for him to catch them so far from the foot-path. He might wish to settle up scores with them. They remembered the gleam in his eye when he had shaken his fist and said he would not forget. If they waited quietly he would probably go, and then they would hurry back to the path.

But instead of going he waited, humming a tune. He was musical and fond of operatic airs. There were other sounds, too, which the boys could not understand. They grew curious and wanted to know what he was doing. They dared not speak, but, agreeing by signs, they both crawled very cautiously to the edge of the rock, and, concealed by some branches, peeped over.

Mr. Hockheimer was exactly below them. He was kneeling on the grass, and had evidently just untied a parcel. A large bicycle lamp lay on the paper. In his hand he held a bottle, with the [115] contents of which he proceeded to fill the lamp. He felt in his pocket for matches, lighted it, and placed it on a ledge of the rock. The dusk was falling fast, and its glow shone brightly. From its position on the crest of the hill it would be visible over miles of country, probably right out to sea. Mr. Hockheimer hummed in a satisfied voice, as if he were pleased with himself. He presently lighted a cigar; the fragrant smoke rose upwards to the boys' nostrils. They could see him with extreme plainness, and indeed could follow his every movement. He fumbled again in his pocket and drew out an envelope, holding it in the glow of the lamp so as to inspect it. David and Anthony gasped, for they recognized in a moment the letter which they had given to Pamela only that morning. How had she been so foolish as to allow her uncle to get hold of it? they asked themselves. They were full of wrath at her stupidity. Mr. Hockheimer turned over the envelope several times; he looked at the handwriting and surveyed the seal, then he deliberately tore it open. He drew out a piece of note-paper and began to read it. The boys, peering through the brambles above, watched him narrowly, though they could not see the document well enough to decipher it. Its contents seemed to disturb Mr. Hockheimer. He said several untranslatable things in the German tongue. Then he brought out his smart little silver box, hesitated, and struck a match. The boys were in an agony of mind. He simply must not be allowed to burn the paper. Sooner than that they would drop from the crag and try to rescue it. [116]

The wind had risen and blew out the match. For a moment they breathed again, but it was only a temporary respite, for he immediately struck another. He shaded it carefully this time, and, taking the paper, applied the corner to the flame.

At that same moment a terrific and unearthly yell sounded in the wood above. Mr. Hockheimer started and turned, dropping blazing letter and match to the ground. There was a rustle among the bushes, and with an enormous bound a dark figure sprang sheer from the rocks on to the platform of grass, made a grab at the paper, seized it, put out the fire, and leaped away with it into the gathering dusk of the undergrowth below.

It happened with such extraordinary rapidity and suddenness that it was all over in a flash, and the boys only caught a glimpse of a black mask, and two long legs that hopped with the agility of a spider-monkey. Considerably scared, they crept back from their position of vantage, and, rushing through the darkening wood, managed to regain the pathway. It was not till they had finally crossed the stile and got into the high road that they began to compare notes.

"Well! We've seen it!" ejaculated David meaningly.

"What is it?" whispered Anthony in awestruck tones. "Teddy Jones says it's Old Nick himself. It was terrible when it yelled!"

"Those legs were human," maintained David. "I can't guess who it is, or how he manages to [117] jump like that, but I bet he's not a spook."

Anthony, who inclined to the supernatural theory of the apparition, shook his head doubtfully.

"Spook or not, he's no friend to old Hockheimer," added David.

"He's taken the letter—what was left of it."

"Only a bit was burnt."

"I wonder what was in it?"

"Something that Hun wanted safely out of the way."

"It must be Squire Reynolds's will!"

"Well, Spring-heeled Jack's got it, at any rate, and whether he'll ever turn it up again is the question. If we could find out who he is we might get on the track of it."

"We'll try, for Pamela's sake—though she's a bally idiot to let her uncle take that letter!"

"It strikes me we've got on the track of something else to-night," continued David. "Did you notice that lamp?"

"Yes, I did."

"And where he stuck it?"

"Rather!"

"The light would shine right out to sea."

"And aeroplanes could see it too, from there."

"I've always suspected old Hockheimer. He ought to have been interned long ago. I can't think why they let him be at large. The Government's very lax with these Germans. If I were in Parliament I'd clear out the whole set of them."

Anthony drew a long breath.

"We must watch him. Don't say too much to Pamela, in case the silly goose blabs. Shall we tell [118] her what we've seen to-night?"

"On the whole I think we'd better not. She hates him, and yet perhaps she might not altogether want to get him into trouble. We'll go cautiously, and hunt about, and see what more we can find out."

For a few days the boys purposely avoided Pamela, and she, on her part, did not seek speech with them. She was intensely chagrined at the loss of the letter, and did not like to acknowledge the humiliating fact to them. She searched everywhere in the cottage, in case the wind might have blown it from the table on to the floor, but it was not forthcoming. Her mother vetoed the suggestion that Mr. Hockheimer had taken it.

"Surely, dear, he would never be so dishonourable! You must have put it somewhere yourself."

"But, Mummie, I know I didn't. And you said yourself that you saw it on the table."

"It's very mysterious," sighed Mrs. Reynolds. "We might ask your uncle next time he comes if he took it by mistake."

"He'd only deny it."

"Pamela, you misjudge him."

"I hate him, Mummie; he bullies us both."

"We're entirely dependent on him, remember. He gives us the whole of our little income, and pays your school bills. We mustn't quarrel with our bread and butter. What should we do if he were to turn us out?"

"I don't know. I sometimes think I'd rather be a crossing-sweeper than take his money. Oh, [119] life's horrid, and I hate it all! I wish we'd stayed in Canada, and never come to England. Wait till I'm a little older, Mummie, and I'll get a post as teacher, and work for you. I wish I were twenty-one!"

"That's many years off, child, and in the meantime you've to get your education. You must be civil to your uncle, Pamela."

"I will, on the outside, but I can't help my feelings inside. They're boiling!" demurred Pamela, rather defiantly, scrubbing the corners of her eyes with her handkerchief, and settling down to

her lesson books.

CHAPTER IX

Concerns Day Girls

[120]

The Silverside boarders had what might perhaps be termed rather "genteel" hockey practices on Saturday afternoons. They played half-heartedly. They were not extremely keen, and they gleefully put off play in favour of a walk or of the cinema. Isobel even broached the suggestion that hockey was a rough game, but that was when she was suffering from the effects of an ugly whack across the shins, and her opinion was naturally biased. Consie's tastes were all for quiet, and she would have spent her holidays over a book if she had not been forcibly dragged out. Joyce would have preferred a dancing class on Saturday afternoons.

In the meanwhile the day-girls' hockey club prospered exceedingly. They had secured their old field, and had made fixtures with several other clubs. Their elation over their successes did not tend to promote the unity of Silverside. The school seemed more divided than ever.

In November came the Sale of Work. It was an annual affair held in aid of a Children's Home, and the Silverside girls worked the whole year beforehand for it. They considered it a great event. People in Harlingden were kind in coming to buy, and generally quite a nice little sum was cleared. As the time drew near, Adah began to make preparations.

[121]

"Will anyone who has contributions kindly bring them to me by the end of the week?" she announced one day at "break".

"Why should we bring them to *you*?" asked Annie Broadside, with a glint of battle in her blue eyes.

Adah's manner at once stiffened into the peculiar mixture of firmness and patronage which she deemed it desirable to adopt towards day girls.

"Why? What a question to ask! So that they can be put on the stall, of course."

"Thanks! But we'd rather arrange them for ourselves."

"You can't do that. The boarders always arrange the bazaar."

"But why, when *we* make the things, should *you* take them all and arrange them? They're not *your* work!"

Annie certainly had a most aggravating habit of asking questions. Adah coloured with annoyance.

"I'm a prefect, you see!" she shuffled.

"There were no prefects last year, and you quote what you've always done as your authority."

"Well, really, the few things the day girls have brought have never mattered much before. I'll keep a space for you, if you're so particular, and you can arrange them as you like, as long as you don't spoil the general look of the stall," conceded Adah, with a show of magnanimity.

[122]

"Thanks *so* much, your Majesty! It's really most kind of you to keep a little room for our poor contribution!" curtsied Annie, with mock gratitude.

When the prefect's back was turned, she fizzed over to a sympathetic and outraged circle. Adah's disdainful condescension was more than could be brooked.

"The boarders have always had *the* stall, and the day girls have humbly helped!" said Gladys witheringly.

"How delightful for us!"

"They're to be the patricians, and we the plebeians!"

"They expect us to dust their very boots!"

"Look here," said Annie, "things are really getting beyond the limit. I vote we get up a deputation, and go to Miss Thompson about this."

"What a brain wave!"

Miss Thompson listened, attentive and rather astonished, while the deputation, very shy and red-faced, blurted out their request. She tapped her desk thoughtfully with her fountain-pen, as if some new and disturbing idea had suddenly risen on her horizon.

"Certainly there will be ample room for two stalls, and if the day girls want to have one to themselves, I can see no objection. Arrange it just as you like, and bring your own decorations. [123] Yes, you may have a variety entertainment in one of the schoolrooms, and charge admission, if you wish. It will make extra money."

"You'll excuse our coming and asking?" apologized Gladys.

"I'm always ready to hear you, and to make any concessions that are for the good of the school," replied Miss Thompson, gazing at the delegates as if they provided her with considerable food for thought.

The deputation departed, feeling that they had scored their first real triumph.

"Look here!" preached Annie to the Hawthorners, "we've just got to brace up. The boarders may put what they like on their stall, but our stall is going to be bigger and handsomer, and have far prettier things, and take ever so much more money than theirs. Every single girl of you has got to do her bit. There must be no slackers over this business."

The motive—if not strictly in accordance with the best morality—appealed to the day girls. They responded gallantly, and set all their home-folks working for the bazaar, as well as doing what they could in their own spare time. They kept their activities strictly secret from the ears of the boarders, but in private they compared notes and rejoiced.

"The new Lady Mayoress is to open the sale," announced Gladys one day.

"Mrs. Parker? Why, surely she's aunt to little Violet Parker, isn't she?"

"Of course she is." [124]

"I'm going to get hold of Violet and be decent to her," nodded Annie sagely. "She's a sweet kid. I see possibilities through Violet. By the by, can you find me a copy of the Harlingden city arms?"

"It's a lion holding a broken chain. I saw it on a letter of Father's the other day. I can easily get it for you."

"Thanks! I've got a blossomy idea."

The day of the bazaar was to be a whole holiday. The large schoolroom was reserved for the sale, and the stalls were put up first thing in the morning. The day girls had elected a committee of management, and six of their number came to arrange their part of the fancy fair. They brought flags, draperies, flowers, and pots of plants, and set to work to decorate their stall. In the course of about half an hour it began to look a most artistic production. The boarders, busy setting out their wares at the other end of the room, cast surreptitious glances at it. It was a humiliating fact for them, but they were forced to acknowledge that it far surpassed their own efforts. They had never thought of a canopy of white and gold, with a border of autumn leaves, or of borrowing maidenhair ferns and forced Roman hyacinths.

But the decorations were only the beginning of the day girls' triumph. Their committee soon began to unpack boxes and spread out goods, most beautiful work of every description, which left their rivals gasping. The day girls, living at home, had really had a much better opportunity of [125] asking their friends to help, and had made a very special effort.

Gertrude Howells's cousin had contributed various dainty articles in poker work; Lucy Smith's elder sister, who was learning jewellery work at the School of Art, sent some most artistic little silver brooches and chains made by her own hands. Iris Harden's aunt gave Venetian beads and foreign curiosities; Monica Golding's family had plaited raffia baskets in barbaric, but most effective combinations of colour. Maggie Stuart caused a sensation by producing little boxes of delicious toffee—yes, real home-made toothsome toffee, in spite of the sugar rationing!

The boarders went on with their own preparations, and pretended not to take much notice, but really the spirit was knocked out of them. They had never expected the day girls to rise to such heights. They dressed rather quietly for the festivities that afternoon.

The sale was to open early, and at half-past two Miss Thompson, in her best voile dress, and with her most affable company manner, was welcoming the Lady Mayoress, a smiling, florid, rather flurried personage in velvet and rich furs, who had another function at half-past three, and wanted to get away as soon as was politely possible.

"So kind of you to ask me," she fluttered. "I'm really interested in schools—and education, you know. I'm afraid I'm not much of a speaker, but—oh, yes, I'll just say a few words to open the sale. Kind? Not at all. It's a great pleasure to me to come, I assure you." [126]

The poor Lady Mayoress was new to her work, and palpably shy. Perhaps she thought a crowd of schoolgirls an embarrassing audience. She hummed and hawed and stammered a little in her speech, and glanced several times at a piece of paper concealed behind her muff, but she nevertheless managed to say something appropriate about the object of the bazaar, and to wish it success.

"I am very pleased to declare the Sale of Work open," she concluded with a sort of gasp, as if thankful that her duty was done, and smiled nervously at Miss Thompson, whose convex eyeglasses had been fixed upon her with appreciation during the speech.

"Perhaps you would like to look at the work now," murmured the Principal.

"Oh, certainly! I'd *love* to see it. What pretty things!"

And the Lady Mayoress, though she was standing within two feet of Adah Gartley and Consie Arkwright, actually turned her back on the boarders and made for the day girls' stall! Her eyes were fixed upon the central object displayed there, a satin cushion with the city arms embroidered upon it. She examined it with admiration.

"So beautifully done! And the colours are so effective! It will just match my drawing-room. I shall be delighted to have it. How clever your girls are, Miss Thompson! I suppose these are the prefects," smiling graciously at Annie Broadside and Gladys Wilks. "My little niece tells me about [127] the school. She's so happy here."

"These are not our prefects," demurred Miss Thompson. "They are at the boarders' stall. Perhaps you would like to look at some of their work, too."

"Oh, with pleasure! Though I can't stay more than a minute. It's so tiresome; I have another engagement, and mustn't be late. But I've time for just a look, at any rate. Yes, the things are charming; they do the girls credit, I'm sure! May I have this tray cloth and this tea cosy? I'm so sorry to rush away, but I really must say good-bye."

The Lady Mayoress departed, feeling no doubt that she had successfully accomplished a civic and social duty, and quite unaware of the storm she had left behind. The boarders were staring at their prefects in shocked sympathy. The whole business seemed almost incredible. That they, the old-established original Silversiders, who had always in former years run the sale of work, should be overlooked and passed over in favour of mere upstart day girls, was little short of an insult to the school.

"She never even said 'How d'you do?' to Adah, and she shook hands with Annie!" gasped Ethelberga to Janet.

"And she spent three times as much at their stall as at ours!"

"It's a shame!"

The boarders felt that the afternoon had opened badly, and subsequent events did not tend to [128] soothe their outraged feelings. Nearly all the day girls had invited relations or friends, who naturally went first to their stall to buy, with the result that the pretty things soon began to be cleared, and the money-box to grow heavy. Miss Thompson, anxious to preserve a due balance in affairs, did her best by taking her own special visitors to buy from the disconsolate prefects, and the mistresses also nobly purchased many totally undesirable articles, for which they would find no possible use. If it had not been for this help, the boarders' stall would have had a poor innings. As it was, they barely scored one-third of the whole proceeds of the sale.

The Principal, in a pretty little speech next morning at nine o'clock, spoke of the very gratifying results of the happy spirit of unity in a school where all worked together for a good object, and the pleasure of being able to send such a large cheque to the Children's Home. Adah, with her eyes fixed on the bows of her shoes, listened grimly. It was all nice enough, she thought, for head mistresses to make soothing speeches, but boarders and day girls knew perfectly well that the welding of rival factions at Silverside would not be accomplished yet a while.

Quite apart from the warring of opposite parties, there seemed to be an element of unrest in the school. Formerly the boarders had been quite content to spend the leisure of their evenings at sewing, games, or over some of their numerous guilds. Now, incited by the accounts of the day [129] girls, they were always asking to be taken in to Harlingden to concerts or picture palaces. Miss Thompson considered that such expeditions upset their preparation, and only allowed a very occasional outing. It was irritating to the boarders to hear the day girls discussing various entertainments, and to be openly pitied because they could not attend them. The Cowslip Room in particular grumbled privately.

"We never go to anything!"

"Life's just a round of lessons!"

"There's the most gorgeous thing on at the cinema this week."

"I'd give my ears to see it!"

"It's not our turn this week."

"Strafe the wretched old turns!"

Miss Thompson, in her efforts to avoid too much dissipation, had established a new rule, by which the dormitories in regular sequence were allowed leave. Every Wednesday afternoon certain little parties of boarders trotted off to the town under escort of a governess, doing shopping and often visiting a *matinée*. No girl might go without showing an exeat signed by the Principal. The chaperon-mistress was expected to examine and file these permits before marshalling her flock.

On this particular Wednesday, Laura, Janet, Irma, and Ethelberga had set their hearts on seeing "The Temple Bells" at the cinema. The fact that they had duly had their turn a fortnight

before, and had witnessed a wildly exciting performance of "Love and War in the East", only made them keener for more thrills. When Avelyn, a little tired of the general atmosphere of lamentation, suggested palliating circumstances, their wrath blazed out in her direction. [130]

"It's all very well for *you* to talk!"

"You can go on Friday evening or Saturday, if you like."

"You're half a day girl, after all!"

"You don't really sympathize with *us*!"

"All right! Don't get baity! As a matter of fact, I never come in to Harlingden on Saturdays, so you've no need to envy me!"

"Envy you! Envy a *weekly* boarder!" sneered Laura, with a whole world of condescension in her voice. "My dear child, I think you really don't understand what you're talking about! After all, you've only been at Silverside two months!"

It is not a particularly pleasant matter to find the public opinion of your dormitory dead against you. You are apt to get awkward knocks in consequence. Avelyn put up with some very withering remarks that Tuesday evening, and consequently felt sore.

"They're absolute blighters to-day," she thought. "I wish I could play a rag on them! It would just serve them jolly well right!"

CHAPTER X [131]

Mischief

Avelyn, I regret to say, was no ideal heroine of fiction, but a particularly human girl, with a strong spice of mischief in her composition. She considered that she owed her room-mates a grudge, and she cast about for a suitable opportunity of paying the debt. As it happened, fortune favoured her. Miss Kennedy sent her to the study to fetch a book that was required. She knocked at the door, and as nobody answered she turned the handle and went in. The room was empty. She found Volume III of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and as she turned from the bookcase she cast an eye on Miss Thompson's desk. It was spread with papers, and in front, just beside the inkpot, was a whole pile of exeat forms. They were little printed sheets bearing the words:

SILVERSIDE

I hereby certify that.....is allowed leave of absence for the afternoon.

Signed.....

Date.....

When a girl visited the town, she was given one of these forms, duly filled in by the Principal, without whose signature it was not valid. The system, perhaps, savoured of red tape, but it saved the mistresses the trouble of enquiring from head-quarters who were to compose their parties. Avelyn looked critically and covetously at the exeats. Each represented so much fun to one girl. A sudden idea struck her. She laughed aloud at the thought of it, and yielding to the impulse, counted out four of the forms, and popped them into her pocket. Then she fled back to the waiting Miss Kennedy with Volume III of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [132]

Wednesday afternoons at Silverside were chiefly devoted to optional subjects. The violin master came to give lessons, and several girls whose spines were suspected of symptoms of crookedness, did special physical exercises under the eye of a gymnastic teacher. The elocution pupils met in the Sixth Form room, and learned to recite Shakespeare, while those who were taking oil-painting wended their way to the studio. Those unfortunates whose parents did not rise to "extras" were herded together in the dining-room, regardless of forms, and did plain sewing or printing. A band of privileged boarders, under guardianship of a mistress, started at 2.30 for the dissipations of the city. Now at 2.15 Avelyn was due for her music lesson. She put her pieces and studies into her case, washed her hands carefully, retied her hair ribbon, scented her pocket-handkerchief, and sauntered down the corridor. She paused for a moment at the door of the Fifth Form room, then entered. Laura Talbot was sitting disconsolately on one of the desks, girding at life to a sympathetic audience. Avelyn thrust the four exeat forms into her hand, and remarked: [133]

"For the Cowslip Room! And I've got to go to my music lesson! Isn't it hard luck! Ta-ta! I'm late as it is, and Mr. Harrison gets baity if he's kept waiting."

Laura stared at the forms for a moment, utterly staggered, then incomprehension changed to

joy, and she jumped from the desk.

"Irma! Janet! Ethelberga! We've got exeats! Oh, jubilate! Scurry quick and get ready! We've only just time to change our things. Oh, I say! To think of seeing 'The Temple Bells' after all!"

An agitated ten minutes followed, in which the four girls almost tumbled over one another in the hurry of making their toilets. Laura put on her best hat and birthday furs, Ethelberga sported a bracelet, Irma, after foraging at the back of her top drawer, was distinctly seen to abstract a powder puff and apply it to the tip of her nose, Janet tried to coax her fingers into new gloves a quarter of a size too small, there was an unlocking of cashboxes and a taking out of money. At the eleventh hour they sped down the stairs into the hall. The little party of elect were drawn up ready to go, and only waiting for Miss Peters. That lady had been impeded in her dressing, and consequently came hurrying up, very much flustered.

She was a gentle, fair-haired, middle-aged, depressed little person, who had been pitchforked [134] into teaching against her will. Her weak point was discipline, and the girls knew it, and took base advantage. Now, instead of forming an orderly crocodile, they clustered round her, clamouring all sorts of requests for things they wanted to do in town.

"If there's time! Dear me, I don't know! I can't promise anything! It will all depend!" replied the harassed mistress.

She collected the exeats and counted them automatically. In her flurry she never noticed that four of them were not filled in with names or signed. Laura had handed them to her without herself noticing the omission. There was nobody to rectify the mistake, so the four room-mates, in most exuberant spirits, started in the crocodile for Harlingden. They accomplished a few purchases in the town, but poor Miss Peters found it so difficult to keep her flock together, that she was forced to abandon the shops, and suggested the cinema. She considered her rôle of duenna anything but an enviable position, and would willingly, that afternoon, have exchanged jobs with a charwoman. She breathed more freely when she had piloted her lively young charges up the stairs at the picture palace, and ensconced them in a giggling double row in the balcony. For a blissful hour and a half they would be out of mischief, with eyes fixed only on the marvellous scenes from India.

Meantime, while Laura, Irma, Janet, and Ethelberga were staring fascinated at the bewildering [135] East, following the heroine through a series of dazzling adventures, things at Silverside were taking a prosaic and totally different turn. It happened that Irma and Janet, whose French recitations that morning had been a dismal failure, were due in the Fourth Form room that afternoon to say their returned poetry lesson to Mademoiselle. She waited a quarter of an hour for them, then, as they did not turn up, she instituted enquiries. Several reliable witnesses informed her that they had been seen (and envied) departing with the crocodile for Harlingden. Mademoiselle's temper was naturally peppery, and under such provocation as this she burst forth in great indignation:

"What! Go out to pleasure when I tell them to come and say lessons to me! It is what you call the limit! Of what use to try to teach, if they are to do only what they like? I go straight to tell Miss Thompson!"

Mademoiselle was brimming over with wrath, and poured out her complaints vehemently in the study. The Principal's lips tightened as she listened.

"I did not give exeats to Janet and Irma. This shall be enquired into, Mademoiselle," she replied.

Miss Thompson meant what she said. When the crocodile returned from Harlingden, she was waiting in the hall, and ordered Laura, Irma, Janet, and Ethelberga to report themselves in her study. The scene which followed was short and stormy. The girls, whose minds had scarcely yet become detached from Indian jungles and Hindoo palaces, were suddenly accused of having [136] played truant. They denied *in toto*, pleading that they had exeats.

"Where did you get these exeats?" demanded Miss Thompson sternly.

"They were handed to us in the schoolroom."

"By whom?"

With one consent the girls hesitated. They did not wish to throw the blame upon Avelyn.

"You refuse to tell me?" said the Principal. "Very well, you may go to the First Form room, where your tea will be sent to you. I shall sift the matter thoroughly after preparation. It is disgraceful that such a thing should happen at Silverside."

When preparation was over that evening, the boarders were ordered to assemble in the big schoolroom. They went in much astonishment, wondering for what reason they were thus summoned. A whisper got about that four girls were in trouble, but on what exact count nobody seemed to know.

They had scarcely taken their places when Miss Thompson entered. She looked worried and serious. A decorous silence pervaded the room. Everyone was alert with expectation and intense interest. There was a sensation as when thunder is in the air. After an impressive pause, the Principal, standing so that her eyes scanned all the faces fronting her, stated the case briefly.

"A thing has occurred to-day which has never happened here before. Four girls went into Harlingden without leave. They tell me that they were handed exeats by a schoolfellow, and believed that they had my permission for the holiday. I have examined the exeats that were given in to Miss Peters, and find that four of them are unsigned. I can only conclude that somebody must have taken these exeats from my study. I intend to find out who that person is. Can anybody give any information on the subject?" [137]

There was absolute stillness in the room. Every girl looked at her neighbour. Avelyn sat as if petrified. Until that moment it had never struck her that her practical joke might have any serious issue. She had not expected her room-mates to believe that the exeats were genuine. She thought that when they looked at them they would notice at once that they were unsigned, and therefore not valid. It was incredible that Miss Peters should also have accepted them. What was intended for a piece of silly fun had assumed the aspect of a very grave fault.

"I will ask Miss Peters to tell us what she knows," said Miss Thompson, turning to the mistress.

Miss Peters, much worried and embarrassed, could only state that she had counted the exeats, which tallied with the number of girls she had taken in to town. In her hurry she had not examined every paper, and could not say whether they were signed or not. It was an unpleasant situation for the poor governess. She was conscious that she had been slack in the performance of her duties, and that it was owing to her negligence that the affair had been possible. Though the Principal did not openly blame her, she felt that she stood reproved before the school. Laura, Janet, Irma, and Ethelberga sat overwhelmed and injured, but stubbornly determined not to betray their room-mate. They felt that they would rather take the blame themselves than sneak. [138]

"I give you all one last chance," said Miss Thompson. "Can any girl throw a light on this unfortunate affair?"

The head mistress spoke clearly and slowly. Her glance passed along row after row of young faces, as if she would read their very souls. A minute of ghastly quiet followed, a horrible minute that seemed as long as a year. Then Avelyn rose. She was very pale, and stood erect with her head thrown a little back.

"I think I can clear it up, Miss Thompson," she answered, in a voice that was steady, but full of suppressed emotion. "It was I who gave out those exeats."

"*You*, Avelyn Watson! And on what authority? From where did you get them?"

"From your study table."

"*From my study table!*" repeated Miss Thompson, her manner growing still more grave. "What were you doing in my study?"

Avelyn was thoroughly ashamed of herself, but she did not hesitate.

"I was sent to fetch a book. I saw the exeats lying on the table, and I took four of them to give to the girls. I meant it as a joke. I did not think they would believe they were real ones." [139]

A murmur of amazement, almost a laugh, circulated through the room. Miss Thompson checked it sternly.

"Do you understand, Avelyn Watson, what a liberty you have taken? You were sent into my study for a certain purpose, and you took advantage of the privilege of entering my room to peruse the papers on my desk, and to steal—yes, I use the word deliberately—to *steal* some of them. I don't know how you view such conduct, but at Silverside we consider it utterly unworthy of a lady. You owe me an instant apology."

Avelyn writhed under her mistress's scathing words. "I'm very sorry, Miss Thompson. I never thought of it as anything but a joke. I apologize most sincerely. I didn't mean to get anybody into trouble."

The Principal looked searchingly at Avelyn.

"You have been guilty of a very grave breach of discipline," she replied. "I accept your apology because you have spoken up and confessed, but I cannot let such an episode go unpunished. Until you return home on Friday afternoon you are not to speak to a single girl in the school. You will attend classes as usual, but you will take your meals in the studio, and will sit alone there during recreation hours. You are also prohibited from writing any letters, or taking any books from the library. You may spend your time upon your lessons. Go to the studio now, and your supper will be brought to you. I put every girl on her honour not to speak or write to Avelyn Watson until next Monday." [140]

Avelyn walked out of the room quite steadily, but with downcast eyes. She had the feeling of one who has fallen suddenly into a pit. It was a horrible experience to be there arraigned, tried, and found guilty before all her companions. Miss Thompson's sarcastic comments hurt her more than the punishment. She spent the rest of the evening alone in the studio, and was left there half an hour beyond her usual bedtime. When she went at last to her own dormitory the other girls were in bed, and feigned to be asleep. Miss Kennedy came in first thing in the morning, and told her that she must dress in the bath-room. All day long her "Coventry" was preserved. The girls, indeed, cast surreptitious glances of sympathy at her, but they were on their honour not to speak or write, and they did not break their word. It was a hard penance to sit by herself, without even

a story-book to amuse her. She felt specially lonely after four o'clock, when she knew her friends would be laughing and chatting together round the fire, and perhaps roasting chestnuts.

The studio was not a particularly cheerful room for solitary confinement. As the dusk closed in, the casts loomed like white ghosts from the corners, and she could almost fancy that the eyes of the plaster Venus deliberately winked at her. She had no matches, and nobody came in to light the gas. She had not even the satisfaction of a fire to poke, for the studio was heated with hot-water pipes. She did not expect her tea to be brought to her before 5.30. [141]

"If I weren't going home to-morrow I don't know what I should do," she thought. "Thank goodness I'm only a weekly boarder! I do think they might have come and lit the gas."

The room was getting more and more dim, and Avelyn's spirits fell in exact ratio. She was beginning to feel an almost superstitious horror of the plaster Venus. Suppose it were to come to life, like Pygmalion's statue of Galatea? The bare fancy gave her shivers, and a sudden sound made her turn with a start. It was nothing less than an unmistakable tap on the outside of the window. Avelyn's nerves were strung at highest pitch. She almost screamed aloud. Peering in through the darkness was a face. She forced herself to approach and look, and with a revulsion of feeling recognized the enquiring countenance of her brother David, with his freckled nose pressed flat against the glass. He tapped again, and she opened the window.

"Dave! You mascot! How did you get here?"

"Climbed up the spout!" chuckled David. "It was quite easy. Move out of the way! I'm coming in."

He dropped inside the room, then turning to the window again, gave a soft whistle.

"Tony's down below," he explained, "and he'll swarm up too, now I've given him the signal. I'll just lend him a hand over that last piece of coping. Here he is! Come on, old chap! We've struck the right shanty after all. Told you you might trust your grandfather!" [142]

Anthony made his appearance with equal caution. His round face was wreathed in delighted smiles.

"It was a little difficult to fix exactly *which* window," he volunteered.

"But how did you know I was here?" asked Avelyn ecstatically.

"We met Pamela at the station, and she told us all about it. So, instead of going home by the 4.45, we thought we'd come up and see how you were getting on."

"We made Pam describe which room you were in," added David. "I say, it's a bit of beastly bad luck for you! Pretty stiff, I call it, to be shut up here!"

"It's too ghastly for words!"

"Cheer oh! We've brought you something. Look!" David felt in his pocket, and produced a paper bag full of toffee and a copy of *Tit Bits*. "It'll do to read. We'd have got you more, only we didn't happen to have much money with us."

"It was lucky we met Pam before we got into the train," commented Anthony. "We were earlier than usual at the station to-day. As a rule we tear up at the last moment."

"It was ripping of you to come!"

"Well, we couldn't desert you, old sport, at such a pinch."

"I don't believe anyone could have such decent brothers." Avelyn gazed at him through the gathering darkness with admiration. [143]

At that moment a tread of footsteps and a rattle of crockery sounded in the passage.

"Goody! It's my tea coming!" she gasped.

There was not time for the boys to make their exit through the window. While the door handle was turning they fled to what cover they could find. David took shelter behind the pedestal of Apollo, and Anthony crouched in a corner among some drawing boards. Fortunately it was Miss Dickens who entered, and Miss Dickens was short-sighted.

"Take this tray from me, Avelyn," she commanded. "Dear me, you're all in the dark here! Has nobody been to light the gas yet?"

"No, Miss Dickens."

"I must fetch some matches, then. Be careful not to upset that tray as you put it down."

The second her back was turned the boys flew to the window, and, dropping out one after the other, made their way safely down the spout into the garden below, whence they waved parting salutations, and retreated with all speed. Avelyn had just time to hide the toffee and the *Tit Bits* before Miss Dickens returned with the matches and lit the gas. She assumed an air of appropriate subjection and melancholy before her mistress, which at the moment she certainly did not experience.

Until four o'clock on Friday her punishment continued. Not a single word was exchanged between herself and her schoolfellows. She had never felt so glad to go home. The week-end made a break, and when she returned to school on Monday she found herself apparently forgiven at head-quarters, and no more a black sheep, but an ordinary member of society. Her room-mates' attitude was a mixture of admiration and gratitude. [144]

"You're the limit, Ave!" said Irma.

"I'd never have thought of it myself," admitted Janet.

"It was such a topping idea!" chuckled Laura.

"And we all got just the very time of our lives at 'The Temple Bells', thanks to you!" added Ethelberga.

"But I never intended it for anything but a joke!" protested Avelyn.

---

[145]

CHAPTER XI

Moss Cottage

Though Avelyn was happy enough as a boarder at Silverside, the real focus and centre of her life lay at Walden. The little house, with its romantic surroundings, had touched a very deep chord in her nature. Home had been dear in Harlingden because it was home, but now it was a magic spot, a palace of fairy dreams, a place where new and hitherto undreamed-of interests and ideals had suddenly leaped into being. The glamour of it seemed to begin when she stepped out of the train at Netherton on Friday afternoons and started on her walk to Lyngates. Different neighbourhoods seem to have different scents. This one smelled of lichens and green ferns, and moist, warm, rain-splashed earth, a half-pungent odour that she got used to directly, but which struck her afresh each time as she returned to it. Every inch of the road had grown dear to her, and she would welcome each clump of ferns or gurgling reach of stream as if she were greeting old friends. After five days in the prosaic, matter-of-fact, workaday, self-contained little world of school, her week-ends seemed to belong to a different planet.

[146]

Avelyn was a girl who loved sometimes to be quite alone. She had a favourite seat on the orchard wall among the ivy, where she would curl herself up with her back against an apple tree and watch the landscape below. So changeful and wonderful were the effects of storm and sunshine over this valley, that it never looked for one half-hour the same. Sometimes there would be sunrise tints of rose and violet, sometimes a soft yellow haze, sometimes storm-clouds would roll from end to end, or perhaps a magnificent rainbow would span the gorge like an ethereal bridge, or, grander still, the lightning would flash its wicked forks over the hills from summit to base, gleaming against a background of inky darkness.

The very air at Walden seemed softer than at Harlingden. It was a mild autumn; leaves lingered long on the trees and made the woods gorgeous, and traveller's-joy hung in exuberant masses over the hedgerows, like a soft silver cloud trying to veil the growing bareness beneath.

One Saturday early in December Avelyn started off to see Pamela. It was some distance to Moss Cottage, and, instead of walking by the high road, she meant to take a path that led up the gorge and across the hill. It was a glorious morning; a grey wind-swept sky showed, here and there, bright patches of blue between the masses of heavy clouds that were rolling down from the hill-tops like smoke from a cauldron, and fitful gleams of sunshine, bursting out in wonderful brilliance, made marvellous effects of light and shadow. The river, winding slowly through the [147] marsh lands, was now vivid blue, now inky purple, as it reflected the clouds or the sunshine; a mass of larch-clad hill-side showed dark in contrast to the red of the ploughed field on its summit, which was catching the light descending in rays from one bright patch above. In a few moments all had changed: the larches were tipped with gold, the marsh lands were purest emerald, and the hills veiled in filmy mists floating like threads of gossamer down the slopes. Avelyn turned from this wide prospect and plunged up the glen, with her face towards the hill whence the mist was rolling. Ages ago a glacier must have slidden down there, and left its mark on the huge boulders which lay scattered everywhere around. Over this rough bed a stream, swollen by days of incessant rain, thundered along, its brown, peat-stained waters churned to the whitest spray as it forced its way in leaping cataracts over the rocks. Stepping-stones, which could be easily crossed in July, were deep under feet of foam, and the lower boughs of the trees were washed and swayed by the flood. It was so sheltered that the gale, which had stripped the leaves on the hill-side above, had spared enough here to tint the gorge with gold and brown. Some of the oaks were still green; a birch displayed the purest Naples yellow; low-growing mountain ashes and alders had kept their summer clothing intact, and the thick undergrowth of briar and bramble was verdant as ever. Even more beautiful, perhaps, were the bare boughs of the hazel copse, the exquisite tender shades of which were such a subtle blending of purples and greys as to defy the [148]

most cunning brush that artist ever wielded, and, contrasted with an occasional pine, or holly, or ivy tree, made a dream of delicate colour.

The boulders were almost completely covered with vivid green mosses, in sheets so thick and deep and compact that a slight pull would raise a yard at a time. Here and there among them were tiny bright red toadstools, or some of the larger purple or orange varieties that had lingered on since October. On a hazel twig Avelyn found the curious birds'-nest fungus, with its tiny eggs packed neatly inside. The day was so mild that a squirrel was taking a whiff of fresh air, waving his feathery tail from a fir tree overhead, but at the sight of a human being he disappeared suddenly into a hollow in a big tree, where no doubt he had established cosy winter quarters. There were few birds—perhaps they did not like the dampness or the roar of the water—but Avelyn caught sight of a dipper darting down the stream, a flight of long-tailed tits twittering noisily for a moment or two on a tree-top, and a heron sailing majestically towards the mountains. On the brambles the unpicked blackberries still hung ripe, though so absolutely sodden and tasteless that they were not worth the eating; there was even a spray of blossom left here and there. A branch of scarlet hips shone brightly in the sunlight; the birds, sated with yew berries, had spared it thus far, and it rivalled the holly on the bush close by, while trails of bryony berries [149] repeated the colour with varieties of lemon and orange. There were a few wild flowers, even in December—a belated foxglove, a clump of ragwort, a blue harebell, or a stray specimen of buttercup, campion, herb robert, yarrow, thistle, and actually a strawberry blossom. The tall equisetum lingered on the boggy bank, and ferns were everywhere green; great clumps of the common polypody clung to the tree-trunks and flourished on boughs high overhead, and under the rocks grew the delicate fronds of the English maidenhair, or the rarer beech fern.

Avelyn had at last reached the waterfall. The great white cascade leaped over a ledge of rock, and dashed with such thundering force into the pool below that all the air around was filled with floating mist on which the sun formed a dancing rainbow. As each neighbourhood has its own distinctive scent, so each stream has its own peculiar sound, as if it would give us some message that it has no words to convey. The little gurgling brook tries to tell us cheery things; the slow-flowing river has a sadder story; the trout stream babbles kindly hopes. To Avelyn the leaping, rushing cascade, with its whirl of living, dashing foam, seemed to be calling out in a voice that rose and fell with the roar of the waters: "Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name".

She stood a long time gazing at the foam and the mist and the rainbow, then she turned and [150] plunged up among the trees to the head of the glen. Looking back she felt as if she had held Nature, or something bigger than Nature, tight by the hand.

From the top of the gorge was an easy walk across fields to Moss Cottage. In spite of the bright morning the little house looked gloomy among the trees. It always struck Avelyn with an air of extreme melancholy. She was almost morbidly sensitive to impressions. She decided that she would not go to the front door, because she would then be certain to see Pamela's mother, and somehow she felt rather frightened of poor, quiet, retiring Mrs. Reynolds. She knew that her friend would probably be at work in the garden, so she tacked into the wood and climbed the palings at the back. Only half of the ground behind the cottage had as yet been brought into cultivation, and the part where Avelyn descended was still a wilderness. There were large rocks and tangled masses of brambles, and faded clumps of ragwort and teasel, and yellow bracken stumps. Not far away, however, was a newly-dug border, with a spade lying on the ground, and Pamela's hat. Pamela herself was not to be seen, but surely she must be somewhere near. Avelyn prowled about in search of her. She did not want to go up to the cottage, and decided that if her friend were indoors she would wait until she came out again. Possibly she might be in the hen-house. That was certainly an alternative. She had heard Pamela mention hens. In the distance some roofs were visible which looked like outbuildings. She went to investigate. Right in the far [151] corner of the garden, almost indeed in the wood itself, and thickly embedded in trees, she came upon a ramshackle, tumble-down, two-storied kind of stable. A giant oak, shrouded with ivy, stretched out long protecting arms and almost hid it from view; the roof was built against the very bole of the tree, whose branches sheltered the windows. Was Pamela here? Avelyn gave a long coo-e-e and called her name. The next moment a startled face looked out from the upper window.

"Hallo, Pam!" shouted Avelyn gleefully, "I've unearthed you at last, old sport!"

"Wait a sec. I'll come down," returned her friend in a cautious voice.

Pamela appeared from out the stable door, with a rainbow face in which storm and sunshine seemed to be struggling.

"I never expected to see you, Ave! Have you dropped from the skies?"

"No, climbed over the palings. I thought I'd be sure to find you somewhere about in the garden. I saw your hat, and went to look for you."

"Yes. I was gardening."

"Is this your hen-house?"

"No, it's not the hen-house, it's—just a kind of stable."

"It reminds me of the Swiss Family Robinson, or Robin Hood's shanty in the depths of

Sherwood Forest. You could climb up that tree if you got on to the roof."

As Avelyn's eyes glanced up the bole of the huge oak Pamela's followed with a look of strained anxiety. She laid her hand on her friend's arm and drew her inside the stable. She seemed ill at ease. [152]

"What's the matter, Pam?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"You're not yourself at all."

"Yes, indeed I am."

"I don't believe you're pleased to see me!"

"Ave! I've been dreaming of you all the morning."

"Then what is it?"

Pamela was silent.

"Something's worrying you. I can see that plainly enough."

"Yes. I own I'm worried."

"Won't you tell me?"

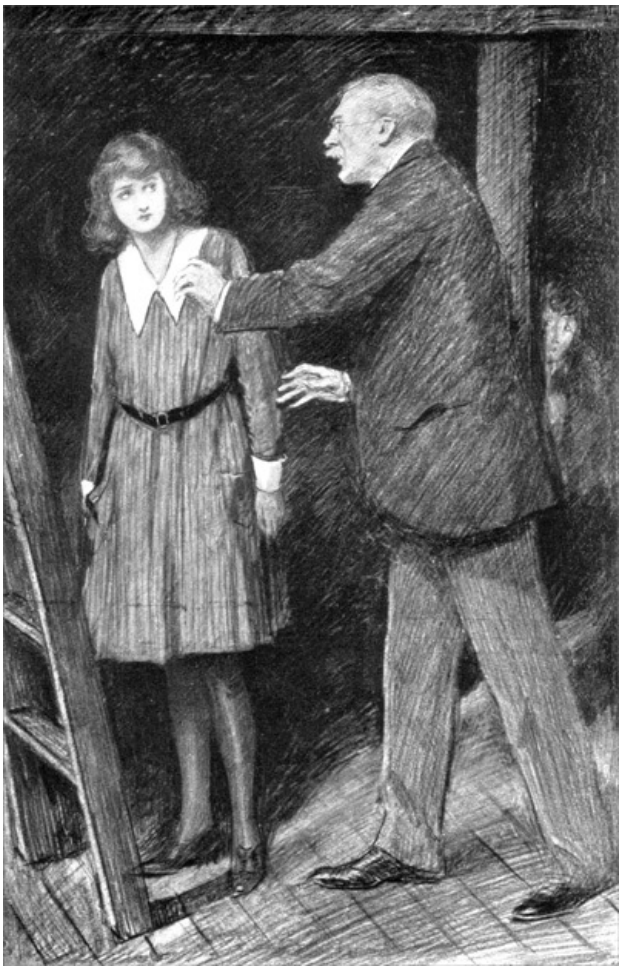
"I can't."

"Is it a secret?"

"It is just at present. I want to think it over."

While she spoke Pamela kept glancing anxiously out at the door. She suddenly turned with frightened eyes.

"Ave! Uncle Fritz is coming! You must hide, quick! He mustn't catch you here for all the world! Run behind this stall. Don't move till he's gone."



AVELYN, CROUCHED UNDER THE MANGER, COULD HEAR THE BULLYING TONE IN HIS VOICE

She hustled Avelyn into the darkest corner of the stable, then herself sat down on the foot of the ladder that led to the floor above. A sound of footsteps brushing the grass was heard from outside, and in another moment Mr. Hockheimer entered. [153]

"What are you doing down here?" he asked sharply. "I told you to stop upstairs."

"I've only just come down."

"Any message?"

"No, none at all."

"One might come just when you are fooling about here," he frowned. "Why don't you do as I tell you?"

Avelyn, crouched under the manger, could not see his face, but she could hear the bullying tone in his voice.

"Do you think I feed you and educate you for you to do just as you like?" continued Mr. Hockheimer angrily. "What would become of you if it weren't for me, I should like to know? Another time when I set you to do anything you'll do it, or I'll know the reason why. Here, get up and let me pass!"

He pulled her roughly off the ladder and walked up himself. His footsteps creaked on the boarded floor above, then all was silence. Pamela crept softly up the ladder, peeped into the room above, and descended as quietly as she came; then, crossing to the stall where Avelyn was hidden, put her finger on her lips for silence and beckoned her friend towards the door. She led her hurriedly along the garden. Neither spoke a word till they reached the palings.

"I'm awfully sorry I came, Pam!" apologized Avelyn.

"Never mind, you couldn't help it. How should you know Uncle Fritz would be here?" [154]

"I certainly shouldn't have come if I had known."

"Who would? Ave, have you ever seen a little wild linnet get into a bird-catcher's net?"

"No."

"I have. It runs and struggles and beats its wings, and the more it tries to escape the worse it gets caught in the meshes. Ave, at present I feel like that linnet."

"Can't I help you, Pam?"

"Not yet. I want to think. When I really feel you can help me, I shall come and ask you. You wouldn't fail me?"

"I'd help you for all I'm worth, if it's against your uncle."

Pamela's eyes filled with tears.

"I'm so utterly alone," she faltered. "Mother doesn't understand. Since Father died she has never cared for anything. She's content to live here on Uncle's bounty. She's so absolutely trusting and unsuspicious, just like a child. I never can get her to see things as I do. Although I'm hardly fourteen, I often feel that I know more of the world than she does. Just at present Mother is going about with her eyes closed."

"And you?"

"I'm keeping my eyes particularly wide open, and my mouth tight shut," replied Pamela, as she kissed her friend good-bye and helped her to climb the palings.

Avelyn went home very thoughtfully. She found the boys digging in the kitchen garden, and confided to them her morning's experience. They decided that something mysterious must be going on at Moss Cottage. [155]

"It looks fishy!" said David, slowly scraping the earth off his boots with the edge of his spade.

"What has that old Hun got up his sleeve?" enquired Anthony, shaking his head.

"I don't know. After what we saw in the wood I'd believe anything of him."

"Shall we tell the Vicar, or somebody?" suggested Avelyn.

"No! no!" protested David emphatically. "Whatever you do, Ave, for goodness' sake don't blab! We've no proper evidence yet, and if stories begin to get about the village he'll know he's suspected, and he'll be careful. Just you leave this to me. It's my first 'case', and I want to worry it out. Remember, I'm going to be a barrister some day, when the war is over, if I don't go out to France first and get killed. Old Hockheimer's deep, but he doesn't know we're watching him. Two British boys ought to be a match for a German!"

"I'd shoot him first and watch him afterwards if I had my way," declared Tony bloodthirstily.

It was on that very same afternoon that a fresh planet swam into the Watson horizon, or, in other words, that they made a new acquaintance. The Vicar was distinctly responsible for it. He

was standing at the top of the churchyard steps, talking to a somebody, the toe of whose boot alone was visible round the corner, and when he saw Anthony passing in the road below he [156] beckoned to him. Tony mounted the steps, and found that the boot belonged to a young officer in khaki, who stood with his hands behind his back contemplating the tombstones.

"Hallo, sonnie!" said the Vicar affably. "Doing anything special this afternoon? This is Captain Harper, who's in charge of the camp near the river. He wants to go and see the Roman fort on the top of Weldon Hill, and he doesn't know the way. Have you time to take him?"

Anthony's grey eyes scanned the Captain's dark ones for one searching moment, but in that moment he loved him, and would have offered to act guide to the top of Mount Everest if required.

"I'd like to go," he volunteered. "You don't mind David coming too, do you?"

"I don't know who David is, but let him come, by all means!" smiled the officer. "Thanks very much, Mr. Holt, for finding someone to 'personally conduct' me!"

So it happened that David and Anthony started off with Captain Harper, and by the time they had reached the Roman Camp they had decided that they "liked him awfully", and when they returned to Lyngates they felt as if they had known him for years. They talked about school, and football, and fishing, and treacling for moths, and a great many other interesting topics, and he told them a little about his experiences at the front, and how he had been wounded.

"How long have you been at Netherton?" asked Anthony as they paused by the gate of Walden. [157]

"About six weeks."

"I wonder we've not seen you before."

"I've been very busy with my work. Is this where you live?"

"Yes. Come in and see Mother, won't you?"

Captain Harper's glance swept the front of the picturesque little house, and finally rested on the patch of ivy-covered wall where Daphne, a bewitching, hatless vision, with the sunset gleaming on her bronze hair, stood with unconscious profile turned towards them, planting snowdrop bulbs in the crannies.

"If she won't think I'm intruding," he replied diffidently.

But the boys had him each by an arm, and were hauling him in by sheer force.

"Mother's not one of those horrid stuck-up people who'll offer you two fingers to shake, and wither you up. Just come and speak to her, and judge for yourself."

"Mr. Holt calls her the very soul of hospitality," declared Anthony impressively.

CHAPTER XII

[158]

"Lady Tracy's At Home"

During almost the whole of the term the Dramatic Society had flourished among the boarders. That is to say, the prefects had chosen a play, had taken the best parts for themselves, and had allotted the minor parts to those girls who were fortunate enough to be their favourites. The particular piece they had selected was named "Lady Tracy's At Home", and included a large number of characters. Many of these were only in the nature of "supers", and had no words to say; others had a few short speeches. All the main action of the play centred on six principals, who were represented by the four prefects, with Muriel Knighton and Mabel Dennis, also members of the Sixth Form. There had been endless rehearsals. Adah, as stage manager, was extremely particular, and drilled her company remorselessly.

"We've got to make it a good show this time," she assured them. "Remember, we're a big school now, and we shall be acting to a large audience. I expect those day girls will be fairly critical, so we mustn't give them any opportunity to find fault. Let's show them we know how to act."

"They used to have plays at their old school," volunteered Consie. [159]

"I suppose they did, but I dare say they weren't up to much. You see, as they weren't boarders, they couldn't have had proper time for rehearsals, and perhaps didn't think out their costumes as we're doing."

"Very likely they only took Shakespeare or scenes from Dickens, or something tame of that kind," nodded Isobel.

Miss Thompson had allowed the Dramatic Society a certain wideness of choice, so they had abandoned the classics, which seemed to savour too much of the schoolroom, and had selected an entirely modern and up-to-date comedy. In their eyes it was going to rival a piece from the real theatre. They had all seen up-to-date acting, and had their ideals of what a comedy ought to be.

"You must try to live in your parts beforehand, so that you catch the spirit of them," counselled Adah. "I've heard that Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt always did that. It was the secret of their success. Throw yourself into your character till you entirely realize it."

"I suppose that's the artistic temperament," agreed Consie. "It would be gorgeous to take up the stage as a career, wouldn't it?"

"The stage of the future is going to be a School of Education for the People," moralized Adah. "Conscientious and cultured actresses will be a want."

"Miss Hopkins says Nature never creates a vacuum," ventured Joyce.

"Trust Mother Nature! If there's a want, she'll send someone to fill the gap." [160]

"Only, of course, they've got to train themselves. There's nothing like beginning when one's young. And having the wish is half the battle."

As a result of this serious interest in dramatic culture, the character of the six "principals" underwent sudden and astonishing changes. Isobel, erstwhile a rather shy and retiring maiden, put on a perkiness and a coy assurance very puzzling indeed to anybody who did not know that *pro tem.* she was Miss Diana Davenport, the beautiful, dashing, fascinating Society debutante, who was breaking the hearts of young and old in fashionable Mayfair. She practised casting a glamour over people and glancing from under veiled lashes, and succeeded fairly well with those who understood and played up, but indifferently with Miss Hopkins, who asked her if she were suffering from an attack of indigestion, and whether a dose of sal volatile would relieve the pain. Muriel, whose rôle was that of Diana's rejected lover, Lord Darcy Howard, went about endeavouring to remember that she had a broken heart. She sighed frequently, kept an expression of yearning in her eyes, and smiled a sad, wan smile, fraught with memories. She maintained a calm, yet melancholy dignity, befitting one who is singled out by fate for disappointment, heroism, and an early grave. It was really a very difficult part for Muriel, whose natural tastes inclined to a more sporting character, and she would have preferred to act a comic [161] Irish servant; but Adah assured her that it was useless to think of the stage unless she was prepared for all emergencies, and could take any rôle that might be offered her. Adah herself, as Lady Tracy, had blossomed into a loquacious, clever, manœuvring, brilliant hostess, much set on worldly advantages, and immediately concerned with the due disposal in life of her daughter Marigold. Adah's manner had always been rather consequential, now it surpassed itself, and she swam about the school as Queen of Society. Mabel, as Marigold, schooled herself to extreme innocence. She would practise making round eyes and an engaging pout as she lisped out: "But, Mother dearest, what is the great big world really, really like?" After many rehearsals, she succeeded in sidling bashfully into a room, and extending a timid hand without relapsing into laughter. Consie, the dashing *débonnaire* hero of the piece, had an easier task. It was comparatively simple to stride about paying flowery compliments and carrying all before her. She soon acquired an irresistible manner, and a habit of flinging herself lazily into arm-chairs and toying with an imaginary watch-chain. She succeeded so admirably, that when she wore her costume at dress rehearsal, some of the girls almost fell in love with her. To Joyce, as the villain, fell a harder lot. It is difficult to live the part of a villain consistently for weeks. At rehearsals, much coached and chivied by Adah, she would slink and frown and bite her finger-tips and look daggers, and throw sarcasm into her voice, but off the stage she would relapse at once into the [162] comfortable, easygoing, happy-go-lucky ways which usually characterized her personality. She was a sore trial to Adah.

"If you'd ever seen 'Shylock' or 'Mephistopheles', you'd have a better idea," urged the head girl. "You're not nearly bold and bad enough, somehow. We'll give you a dark wig and a curled moustache, and that paper cigar, and you must grind your teeth when Lord Archibald taxes you with the conspiracy."

"Will the audience hear me grinding them?" asked Joyce helplessly.

"Of course not, stupid! But they'll see your mouth move."

"If the moustache doesn't cover it."

"We'll take care it shan't. Can't you manage to look like 'Gentleman Jim' on the cinema when the detective caught him with his hand inside the safe?"

"I'll try; but how long must I go on looking like that? In the cinema they whisk on to the next picture in half a second, but on the stage I'll have to stand there, and I don't feel inclined to grind my teeth for five minutes. I hope that tweed suit will fit!"

All the performers felt their costumes to be their last resource, supplying any deficiencies in the acting. They were determined to be ultra-fashionable, and sent home for suitable garments. Adah secured a perfect dream of a dress in grey voile trimmed with sequins, and a silk petticoat that rustled as she walked. They lent an added graciousness and seal of society to her impressive [163] manner. Isobel borrowed a toque, and a veil with spots, and a feather boa, and a pair of tan boots

with high French heels, and a large cameo brooch, and a vanity bag, and looked dashing enough to break the heart of the most hardened and deliberate woman-hater who ever trod the boards. Her companions, gazing at her bewildered, assured her that she looked at least twenty-one, if not more. The way she stretched out a dainty gloved hand and murmured "How d'ye do?" was considered a triumph of acting.

"If we do it really well, of course, we might be asked to give it over again," Adah confided modestly to her fellows.

"Here?" asked Isobel.

"Well, not necessarily. Sometimes managers lend theatres for charities."

"An amateur play generally makes a heap of money!" opined Joyce.

"It would be lovely to act it in a real theatre!" gasped Mabel.

"The Harlingden Operatic Society cleared thirty pounds for the hospital by the 'Gondoliers'," volunteered Consie.

In imagination the Silverside Dramatic was already emulating this gratifying example. They could picture their appearance on the boards of the Prince of Wales Theatre before a distinguished audience, including possibly the Mayor and Mayoress. Meantime they expected quite a crowded audience in the big class-room, and made grand preparations. The performance [164] was to be on the last Wednesday afternoon of term at four o'clock. It was a custom as old as the school. The day girls had always been invited to attend, and this year Adah pinned up the usual announcement on the notice board. She saw Annie and Gladys sniggering over it, but set that down to their general lack of manners. She hoped what they were going to see would duly impress them. They would surely be proud to belong to a school that could get up such a dramatic entertainment.

The performers were allowed to stop lessons at 3.15 in order to change their costumes, and, after a tremendous amount of breathless work in the way of dressing, accomplished their toilets to their own and everybody else's satisfaction.

"You look A1," said Adah to Muriel. "If you don't absolutely take the house I shall be really astonished."

Lord Darcy laughed nervously. His clothes were immaculate, but not very comfortable. He showed decided symptoms of stage fright. Joyce, as the wicked earl, was anxious about the set of her wig. It was rather too large, and exhibited a tendency to tilt over on one side unless she held her head very stiffly erect, an attitude that did not correspond with the sinuous, snake-like poses which she had practised as appropriate for the villain of the piece.

"My moustache makes my upper lip quite stiff. I'm sure I speak funnily," she fluttered.

"No, no, you're all right! I'll tip you a wink if your wig gets crooked, and you can push it [165] straight. Consie, you look an absolute bounder in that blue tie! If I were Marigold I should prefer the villain instead of falling into your arms."

"Many thanks!" said Lord Archibald, regarding himself in the mirror with satisfaction. "As you're to be my prospective mother-in-law you ought to appreciate me better!"

"It's high time we began," urged Mabel.

"I'll take a look and see that everything's ready," said Adah.

She ran to the platform and held a hasty review of the stage properties. Yes, all was arranged exactly as she wished. Minnie and Alice had done their duty. From the other side of the curtain came the sound of talking. She could not resist a peep at the audience and applied her eye to a small chink. What she saw made her gasp. Instead of a whole schoolroomful of people only the three front rows of seats were occupied. Much disturbed she rushed back to the dressing-room, and, calling Mona Bardsley, who was acting prompter, sent her off as scout.

"Go and find out why they're not ready, and tell them to hurry up and take their places or we shall begin without them," she commanded.

Mona was away some little time. She returned looking decidedly blank.

"They say they're ready and waiting, all those who are coming."

"But the room's only a quarter full! Where are the others?" [166]

"The day girls have nearly all gone home."

"Gone home! Didn't they understand we'd invited them?"

"Oh, yes, but they said they'd rather not stay."

Adah's face was a study.

"Do you mean to say they don't care about seeing our play?"

"So it seems."

"The slackers! They've just done it on purpose, out of spite. Well, if this isn't the meanest thing I've ever heard of! How perfectly sickening!"

The injured performers received the bad news with much disgust, but their grousing was cut short by the arrival of a fourth-form girl with a message.

"Miss Thompson says, will you please begin at once, because it's getting very late?"

There was nothing for it but to go through the piece with the best grace they could, before an audience of mistresses, boarders, and about ten of the old Silverside day girls. It is poor work playing to an empty house, and they felt that half the spirit had gone out of the performance. Adah's manner was not nearly so gracious and impressive as at rehearsals, Lord Darcy got confused and mixed up his speeches, and Marigold giggled palpably when she ought to have been looking love-lorn. As for the wicked earl, his black moustache dropped off just when he was in the very midst of his villainy, and spoiled his best point. The Principal and the mistresses [167] clapped their hardest, and so did the rest of the scanty audience, but everybody felt that the whole affair had been a fiasco.

"It was very nice, my dears!" said Miss Thompson, congratulating the disconsolate actresses as they came in to tea afterwards. "Quite one of the best plays we've ever had here."

"She means kindly, but she knows it was a failure," whispered Adah gloomily to Consie. "I'll never forgive those day girls!"

CHAPTER XIII [168]

Reports

Avelyn was looking forward with wildest joy to the Christmas holidays. There were so many things she intended to do at home. She and Daphne and the boys were all going to set to work to construct chicken coops in preparation for the hatching of clutches of eggs that would be put down in January. Then, if the weather kept open, there were wonderful improvements to be made in the garden, stones to be brought for a rockery, and ferns to be fetched from the stream to plant upon it, to say nothing of the vegetable culture which in these days of food shortage was the main feature of their outdoor activities.

Avelyn's whole heart was at Walden. She had grown to love every corner of it with an intense clinging attachment. No place in the world was so precious as those few acres of land she called home. The prospect of an entire glorious month there filled her with bliss.

"L'homme propose et Dieu dispose", however, and our best-made plans have a knack of "ganging agley". On the Thursday before the holidays Anthony broke out in spots, and the doctor, [169] who came six miles in his car from the little town of Roby, looked at them critically, shook his head, and remarked: "Chicken-pox! There's a good deal of it about just now."

Mrs. Watson was a woman who acted promptly. When she had ushered the doctor out she tucked up the invalid warmly, put on her hat and coat, and went to the village, where there was a public telephone call office. Here she rang up 138 Harlingden, and held a brief but satisfactory conversation with her second cousin, Mrs. Lascelles. Then she went home, wrote a letter to Avelyn, and posted it, after which she focused her attention on the invalid, who was feverish and fractious. The news which Avelyn received in the letter came as a bolt from the blue.

"I'm so sorry, darling," wrote her mother, "but the doctor says Tony has chicken-pox, and you mustn't come home to-morrow. I have telephoned to Cousin Lilia, and she offers to take you in for the holidays, so will you tell Miss Thompson that you are to go there. No time for more, as I want to catch the early post. Good-bye, darling! Much love from Mother."

Avelyn had taken the letter to the Cowslip Room to read. She put it in her pocket, sat down on her bed, and tried to face the situation. Not to go home for the holidays! The idea was unbearable. Great tears welled into her eyes, and for a few minutes she was an absolute baby. Red-hot rebellion raged within her. She was tempted to go home in spite of her mother's [170] prohibition, and beg to sleep in the cottage, or at Mrs. Garside's farm, and risk the chance of infection. She would cheerfully catch chicken-pox if only she might have it at Walden. A wild idea struck her of asking Pamela to take her in, but the remembrance of Mr. Hockheimer intervened. She was sure Pamela would not dare to invite a visitor to Moss Cottage.

"And we were going to have such fun together!" she moaned. "I'll hate to spend the holidays in town and at the Lascelles's. Oh, it'll be grizzly! I wish I could stay at school instead. I *will* go home!"

Better reflections, however, prevailed. Mrs. Watson had brought up her children to respect her authority, and Avelyn knew that she would not be able to meet her mother's eyes if she turned up

at Walden in distinct defiance of instructions. There was nothing for it but to submit, though it was a miserable business. She took her letter to Miss Thompson, and told her of the altered arrangement. The Principal looked worried.

"I hope you haven't taken the infection yourself," she remarked. "You might spread it over the school. Are you sure you have no spots?"

"Not a single one," Avelyn assured her.

"Well, don't mention anything about it to the other girls; it would only make their mothers nervous. Your box shall be left in Harlingden this afternoon, when the second batch of luggage goes. I suppose you can walk to your cousin's house. They'll be expecting you?"

"Oh, yes! Mother would tell them what time I am coming." [171]

Avelyn went back to the Cowslip Room and began to put her various possessions into her box. The packing was a stale business, without any heart in it. It is horrible to be obliged to pay a visit when you don't want to go. In spite of Miss Thompson's injunctions, she could not help confiding her ill news to her room-mates. It was impossible to keep her woes bottled up in her own breast. She wanted sympathy badly.

"Hard luck!" said Laura.

"Beastly not to be going home!" agreed Janet.

"Poor old sport! I'll send you some picture post cards," consoled Ethelberga.

"Suppose you break out in spots at your cousin's?" suggested Irma.

This was a new view of the case that had not before occurred to Avelyn.

"I'd *welcome* them!" she declared. "I'd get Cousin Lilia to put me in an ambulance and pack me off home."

"Suppose they wouldn't? They might say it was too far, and send you to the fever hospital instead."

"I wouldn't stay. I'd run away and manage to get home somehow. By the by, don't tell anybody else about this. Miss Thompson told me to keep it dark."

"Right you are! We won't blab."

All five girls were busy packing. Their beds were strewn with blouses, stockings, and other impedimenta. In the midst of the proceedings entered Miss Hopkins, rather flustered and [172] overdone with the responsibility of seeing that thirty-six boarders took their essential possessions home with them.

"Dear me, you're very slow in this dormitory!" she observed. "The Violet Room have finished and gone downstairs. If there were less talking you'd get on a good deal quicker. Here are your reports," dealing out from a packet in her hand five envelopes, addressed respectively to Mrs. Watson, E. A. Ridley, Esq., Mrs. Talbot, Colonel Duncan, and the Rev. F. Carnforth. "Now, make haste! I shall expect to find your boxes strapped when I come up again."

Miss Hopkins departed to do her duty in other dormitories, leaving a sensation as of east wind behind her. Avelyn stood staring at the envelope. She was anxious to see her report for this term. The Watson family were lax as regarded letters; at home they usually passed round their correspondence as common property. She tore open the envelope, therefore, and read the report. It was quite a good one, and ended: "Has done conscientious work, and shows marked improvement."

Avelyn purred with satisfaction.

"Tommiekins is a dear! Mother will be ever so pleased. Even Hopscotch has given me 'satisfactory', which is more than I expected from her, and Mr. Harrison has put 'painstaking' for music, though I know he thinks I'm rather a duffer at it."

"I wonder what they've said about me?" speculated Laura, fumbling in her box for the envelope [173] which she had just packed.

"And me?" echoed Janet.

There is force in example. In another moment Laura, Janet, Irma, and Ethelberga were all perusing their reports.

"'Good' for botany! Oh, how precious!"

"Wonders will never cease! I've actually got 'fair' for general knowledge."

"Oh, hold me up! I've passed muster in maths."

"What does Miss Kennedy mean by this: 'sadly lacking in order, and wants more application'? I'm sure I'm no worse than the rest of you," exclaimed Janet indignantly.

"Has she put that?"

"Yes, I call it spiteful of her!"

"Poor old sport!"

"It isn't as if I'd been so very behindhand all the term. Miss Kennedy knows I haven't. I declare I shall go and ask her what she means by it!"

The offended Janet, in a furious temper, flounced out of the room in search of her form mistress. She found her in the study addressing luggage labels.

"Miss Kennedy, I do think it's too bad to give me such a horrid report!" burst out Janet. "Why am I specially 'lacking in application'? I'm sure I've worked just as hard as most of the other girls; and if it's a question of order, Irma's far more untidy than I am, and so is Ethelberga! I don't call it fair. You've no right to say such things about me!"

Miss Kennedy looked up in extreme astonishment. [174]

"How do you know what I've said about you?" she queried.

"Why, it's here, in black and white!"

"What paper have you there?"

"My report."

"Do you mean to say that you have opened your report?"

Janet's face fell. She shuffled her feet uneasily, and did not reply.

"It was addressed to your father. Who authorized you to open it, I should like to know?"

"Well, Avelyn Watson read hers, so we all thought we could read ours," urged Janet in exculpation.

"Indeed!" Miss Kennedy's tone was as iced vinegar. "What an extremely honourable proceeding! Miss Thompson will have to hear of this! It's something new in the school for girls to open their parents' letters."

Miss Kennedy abandoned the labels she was directing, and went at once in search of the head mistress, to whom she told her astounding tale. Miss Thompson took off her convex glasses, wiped them solemnly, and put them on again.

"I couldn't have believed they would have *dared*!" she said, with a note of battle in her voice. "Send Avelyn Watson to me. I must deal with the matter at once."

Miss Thompson might not be very tall, but she was thoroughly capable of managing her school. [175] Every inch of her bristled with dignity. Avelyn entered the room a trifle jauntily, but one steady glance from those convex glasses caused her feathers to fall.

"Avelyn Watson, I understand that half an hour ago Miss Hopkins gave you a letter addressed to your mother, to take home with you."

"Yes, Miss Thompson, but I'm not going home for the holidays."

"So I'm aware. In the circumstances the letter should have been posted, but that has nothing to do with it. What I want to know is on what authority you have presumed to open it?"

Miss Thompson's grey eyes were almost hypnotic in their power. Avelyn's fell before their keen scrutiny.

"Mother always used to let me see my reports," she faltered.

"That's quite a different matter, to allow you to look at what she had already seen herself. To open a letter addressed to anyone else, without permission, is one of the most dishonourable things that anybody can do. No lady would disgrace herself by such an action. I am amazed beyond measure to find that any girl in this school could be capable of it. I thought you knew our standards better. Have you been a whole term here, Avelyn, and not yet learnt the very elements of honour? Silverside has always prided itself upon its traditions."

Avelyn stood aghast. It had never struck her that anyone would construe her thoughtless and [176] impulsive action in such a light. She had no further excuse to urge.

"Have you the report here? Then go and fetch it," commanded the Principal.

Avelyn went without a word. When she returned and handed Miss Thompson the paper, the latter took out her stylo and appended another line:

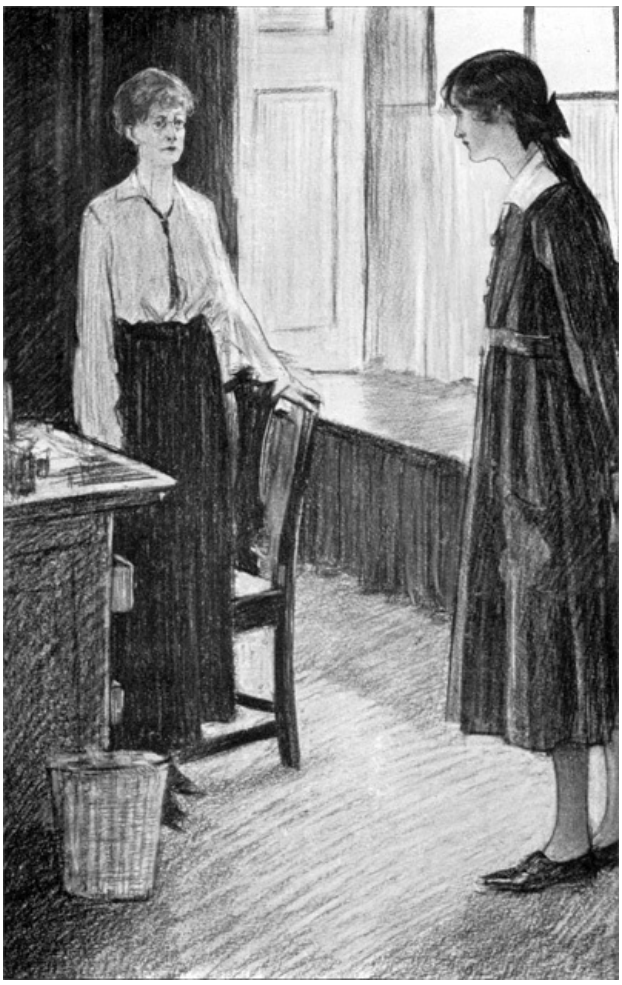
"Conduct unfortunately not strictly honourable."

She showed the addition to Avelyn.

"I am going to *post* this to your mother," she remarked pointedly. "You may tell your room-mates that they are each to bring me her report. I shall post theirs also. I am very much disappointed in you all."

Avelyn left the room in the depths of dejection. She had been very near tears all the morning,

and now she could restrain herself no longer. It seemed an absolutely pixie day, with disgrace on the top of bad news. She gave a husky message to Laura, telling her to pass it on to the others, and then flew into the bath-room and had a good weep in private. Crying is a horrid business; it makes one's head ache, and one's eyes feel bunged up, and one's throat sore, and one's heart like a lump of lead. If it is true that our emotions cause waves of colour to emanate from us, poor Avelyn's aura must at that moment have been a particularly dingy drab.



AN INTERVIEW WITH MISS THOMPSON

"What will Mother think of my getting 'dishonourable' in my report?" she sobbed. "And I can't [177] go home and tell her all about it. I'll write to her and try to explain, but I'm always a silly at writing. She's kept all our reports ever since we first went to school, and we've none of us ever had anything nasty like this in them. It'll just spoil the record. Oh, dear, what an idiot I've been! I wish I hadn't to go to Cousin Lilia's this afternoon! I know I'll hate Christmas there. Life's a perfectly sickening business!"

---

[178]

CHAPTER XIV

War Work

After all, Avelyn enjoyed her holidays far more than she had ever expected. The Lascelles gave her a kind welcome, and tried to make her feel at home. They were quite a jolly family—all considerably older than Avelyn. Two sons were in the Flying Corps, and the third was at a Government office in the town. The daughters, Mary and Gwen, were busy with various kinds of war work, and had little time to spare. They made a great effort, however, to amuse their visitor, and took her out in turns. Avelyn was treated to pantomime, concerts, and cinemas, and was invited with the Lascelles to many little parties and social evenings. She would infinitely rather have been constructing a rockery in the dear Walden garden than sitting in a picture palace looking at the eccentricities of Charlie Chaplin, but she appreciated the kindness of the Lascelles,

and felt what the French call *reconnaissante*, which has a far more subtle meaning than "grateful".

"Couldn't you take Avelyn to the Munition Hostel, Mary?" said Mrs. Lascelles one day, when [179] plans for entertaining the young guest were running rather low. "I'm sure Bertha Gordon would show you over the canteen if you asked her."

"If it would amuse Ave?" began Mary doubtfully.

"I'd just love it!" agreed Avelyn, brightening perceptibly.

"Then I'll ring up Bertha. If it's her afternoon off I'm certain she'll have us. She told me to come the first opportunity I had, and I've always seemed too busy up till to-day. I've been wanting to go for ever so long."

A brisk ringing of the telephone bell followed, and Mary came back presently with the welcome information that her friend Bertha would be free from three till six o'clock, and would be delighted to see two visitors and show them all in her power.

"We'll get up there as early as we can," said Mary, "so that we'll have time for sight-seeing before tea."

Miss Gordon was doing Government war work in Harlingden. She had taken her certificate for domestic economy at a training college in London, and now held a post in the canteen department of a huge munition factory. The place lay a few miles out of the town. Mary and Avelyn first caught a tram-car, which whisked them along an uninteresting stretch of shabby road, and put them down at a corner where three ways met. It was a tolerably long walk from there to the munition works. The neighbourhood was dingy, with rows of small cottages and [180] second-rate shops, and tall chimneys or furnaces in the background. The Chayton Government factory was a colony in itself, with a special railway line out from Harlingden. The station platform marked its boundary. After that came rows and rows of munition cottages—little wooden houses, each containing three rooms and a bath-room, all exactly similar except for the numbers on the doors. The girls passed these, and went in the direction of the hostels. At the great gate of the works stood a sentry on duty, who asked them their names, residence, and whom they were going to visit, and entered these particulars in a book before he would admit them.

"It's all right. Miss Gordon told me that she was expecting you," he volunteered, as he opened the gate for them.

Feeling rather as if they were going into prison, Mary and Avelyn stepped forward, and found themselves in a big enclosure fenced with barbed wire. Each hostel was a large, separate bungalow building, and there were also several recreation halls. Patches of ground planted with cabbages lay between. It all looked very new and unfinished, something like the pictures of mushroom cities in America. In front of them loomed the canteen, an enormous red-brick structure with a corrugated-iron roof. Mary enquired at the office for Miss Gordon, and her friend soon made her appearance.

"I'm so glad you've found your way here! Come in, and I'll show you everything. It's a queer [181] place, isn't it?"

"I should get lost in it!" declared Mary.

"Oh! it's wonderful how soon you learn to find your way about. What would you like to see first? The canteen? We shall just have time to go round before tea, then we'll do the hostel afterwards."

Avelyn trotted off with great interest in the wake of Mary Lascelles and Miss Gordon. She was going to see a new side of life, and learn what some women were doing to help the war. Out at the front our boys were fighting for Britain's honour, but their heroism would be of no avail if the hands slacked that forged the weapons at home. The workers who made the munitions, and those who toiled to feed the workers and keep them fit, were taking their share of the burden, and, in however small and obscure a way, were pushing the world on towards the victory of Right over Might.

Miss Gordon first led the way into the canteen, an enormous hall with seats for three thousand people. There were long tables with benches, placed in rows, and over these hung sign-boards: "Hostel I", "Hostel II", "Hostel III", &c.

"Each hostel has its own tables," explained Miss Gordon, "and the girls are bound to go there. It saves scrambling. They all have food coupons, and they take them to the counter, and exchange them for any dishes they want, and then carry their plates to their own places. There's [182] a menu hung up, and they generally have the choice of several things. It's a tremendous sight to see them all filing in for their meals."

"Are they easily satisfied?" asked Mary.

"As a rule, but sometimes we get grumblers, and they inflame the others. You see, there are all sorts and conditions of girls here, and some of them are a rough lot. Individually they are quite nice, but when they get together in crowds some spirit of lawlessness seems to permeate them, and they get utterly out of hand sometimes. Once there was a terrific row. They were discontented with their rations, and they put the blame on Mr. Jennings, the canteen manager. Some agitators stirred up trouble, and one evening things came to a head. There was rice

pudding for supper, and the girls didn't like rice pudding, so they flung it all about the room and smashed the plates; then they stood on the seats and shouted and yelled. They said that, if they could catch the manager, they would teach him a lesson. He dared not show himself. Indeed, he was obliged to go away altogether. It was about two hours before the row subsided; all that time the girls were shouting in the canteen. They had utterly lost control of themselves, and wouldn't listen to anyone who tried to speak to them. We've a new manager now, and things are going better."

"How fearfully exciting!" commented Mary.

"Rather too exciting at the time, I can tell you! And the hall was in such an awful mess, with rice pudding flung about everywhere. Come into the kitchen now and I'll show you my [183] department."

Avelyn had never seen cooking on so vast a scale before. There were great polished copper cauldrons for stews, so large that they looked as if Giant Blunderbore's meals might be prepared in them; there were rows and rows of ovens and steamers; and an electric meat cutter that sliced up the joints. Puddings were being mixed in big washing basins, and vegetables were cut up by a machine. There were enormous cans of milk, and all kinds of receptacles for other stores.

"We have to calculate exactly what we require, so that there's no waste," said Miss Gordon. "We send up lists every day, and the lists are inspected."

The tea canteen kitchen was a department in itself. There were huge boilers for hot water, rows of bright copper tea urns, and an electric cutter for bread. Two girls stood at a table buttering enormous piles of slices.

"What monotonous work!" remarked Avelyn.

"Yes, it is rather," answered Miss Gordon. "They give that to the novices, and pass them on to something else afterwards. But one gets accustomed to all the work, and doesn't mind. Now we'll have some tea ourselves. Come to the Staff Room. I'm allowed to bring in my visitors."

The sitting-room reserved for the members of the staff was divided by glass doors from the canteen. It had little tables and chairs, and its wooden walls had been decorated with pictures [184] from magazines, fastened up with drawing pins. Some of the staff were already seated there having tea—brisk, capable ladies, most of whom had left comfortable homes in order to take up war work. Miss Gordon greeted several friends, and introduced Mary and Avelyn. The scones and the oat cake were delicious, and were certainly a good advertisement of the cookery done in the canteen. It was quite a merry little tea-party, for the lady workers appeared to have a stock of jokes among themselves.

"Now you must see my hostel," said Miss Gordon, pushing aside her cup and rising when her guests had finished. "If you've seen mine you've seen them all, for they're exactly alike."

The colony consisted of thirty-two hostels, each holding a hundred girls. The buildings were separate bungalows, and each had its own matron, who was responsible for the comfort of its inmates. Miss Gordon showed Mary and Avelyn into her bedroom, a little room nine feet square, heated by hot-water pipes, and containing a bed, chest of drawers, table, wash-stand, chair, and cupboard for dresses.

"They give us the necessary furniture," explained Miss Gordon, "but we must find our own pretty things. I brought the curtains and the bed-cover and cushion and dressing-table mats, and of course my own pictures and photos. There's a good deal of competition in making our rooms nice."

"This one's perfectly sweet!" exclaimed Avelyn. [185]

"It's not so bad, and there's quite a comfy chair to sit in to rest and write letters. We can lock up our rooms if we like; the matron has duplicate keys for cleaning purposes."

There was more to be seen at the hostel: the laundry, where any girls who liked might wash their own clothes, and where several were busily at work with an ample supply of water and hot irons; the matron's little office, with its piles of papers neatly filed; and the store-room, with its sacks of flour, sugar, rice, and other commodities, that were weighed out daily and sent to the canteen.

"We lack a cosy sitting-room," said Miss Gordon; "we have to use our bedrooms instead. There's a recreation hall, where we can dance in the evenings if we wish, and I hope sometime there's going to be a library. At present everything's so new, and they have to think of the stern business part first before they give us luxuries. It's a utilitarian sort of life."

"Do you like it?" asked Avelyn.

"Yes, on the whole very much. It's interesting, and I always enjoy being among a crowd. Masses of people attract me, and I've got the community spirit at present, and want to work with the hive."

Avelyn looked thoughtful. It was not the kind of life that appealed to her at all. She loved Nature's solitudes, and the companionship of woods and streams more than crowds of people. To live in a hostel and canteen would be absolute purgatory. She hoped she was not unpatriotic. [186]

Then her face suddenly cleared.

"I could go on the land when I leave school!" she exclaimed with relief.

Mary Lascelles and Miss Gordon laughed. Avelyn's train of thought had been so evident. Palpably she was not attracted by what she saw.

"Yes, you'd be doing your bit on the land just as much as in a factory," said Miss Gordon kindly. "It isn't everybody who cares to take up canteen work. Let's hope the war will be over before you leave school. You'll have several years more at your lessons yet, I suppose."

The little country mouse was certainly turned into a town mouse for these Christmas holidays. Avelyn felt that she had never before seen so much of Harlingden, even when she had lived there. The Lascelles were very public-spirited people, who were interested in everything that was going on in the city and anxious to lend a hand in all schemes for the general good. They sewed national costumes for the Serbians, rolled bandages at the War Supply Depot, distributed dinners at the municipal kitchens, taught gymnastic classes at girls' clubs, visited crippled children, got up concerts for wounded soldiers, and organized Christmas parties for slum babies. They seemed to be occupied nearly every minute of the day, and they soon swept Avelyn into the whirl of the war activities. If it was not exactly her ideal life, she nevertheless liked it, and felt that she was being of use. She went with Cousin Lilia to the Town Hall, and rather enjoyed standing behind a [187] counter handing out pies, or ladling soup into jugs for the rows of busy people who kept pushing in from the long queue standing in the courtyard outside. She admired the smart quick drill in Mary's gymnasium class, and marvelled that the girls had so much spirit left after their long day's work; she made the whole of a Serbian child's dress herself, with beautiful barbaric red-and-blue trimming on it; she helped to hand cigarettes round to the soldiers at their concert; and she played "Blind Man's Buff" and "Drop the Handkerchief" with the slum children at the New Year's party in the Ragged School.

She had an altogether fresh experience at the Crèche. This day nursery was a new institution in Harlingden, and had been opened in order that women who wished to help at munitions might leave their babies to be taken care of while they were at work. Gwen Lascelles gave two mornings a week to it, as a voluntary nurse, thereby releasing some of the staff to go off duty. One day she offered to take Avelyn with her, and the latter jumped at the invitation.

"Matron doesn't mind, and you'd be a help," said Gwen. "Nurse Barnes is away ill, so we're short-handed just now, and sometimes it's all I can do to manage. One or two of those toddlers are the limit!"

Elton Lodge had been lent by a patriotic citizen for use as a day nursery, and was well adapted for the purpose. It had plenty of accommodation, and a garden where the babies could be out of [188] doors in summer. Gwen and Avelyn arrived here by ten o'clock, took off coats and hats, donned aprons, and entered the ward. This was a large, light, airy room, or rather two rooms thrown together. At one end stood twelve cribs in which lay twelve babies, most of them fast asleep. At the other end, grouped round the high fire-guard, were sixteen little toddlers of all ages from eighteen months to four years. The nurse in charge rose with an air of relief and handed over her duties to Gwen.

"They're all right," she remarked, "all but Curly, who's in a temper to-day. Don't let George bully the others, and smack Eddie if he tries to unfasten the fire-guard. He knows what to expect! Nurse Peters will be in the laundry if you want her."

The nurse made her escape, and the toddlers came crowding round Gwen, clamouring for her to open the toy-box. Avelyn strolled across the room to inspect the babies. They had just had their bottles, and indeed some had not yet quite finished and were sucking away contentedly. They were dear babies, some quite wee who counted their ages by weeks, and older ones with little tight silky curls. One blue-eyed, tearful, barefooted person stood up in her crib and held out a beseeching pair of arms. Avelyn could not resist the appeal. She took up the small creature and cuddled it; it clasped her tightly round the neck, put a confiding head on her shoulder, and sobbed gently. Gwen disengaged herself from the toddlers and came across.

"We're really not supposed to take them up and nurse them," she said. "But I own I break the [189] rules sometimes. Poor little Queenie's a new-comer; she's been petted at home and hasn't got used to crèche ways yet. She'll soon settle down. Look at Arthur! Isn't he splendid? When he first came he was simply skin and bone through improper feeding. His mother used to give him tastes of tea and red herrings. This is Frankie, our special crèche baby. He lives here altogether. His mother is in prison for ill-treating him, poor wee darling! She's not to have him again when she comes out—the judge said so. I know you'd love Patty if she were awake. She's got the cutest little ways."

Gwen went round from cot to cot performing services for the babies, restoring a teat to a small mouth that had not yet finished its bottle, covering cold hands, turning the position of some, and patting others who were inclined to be fretful and wail.

"I just long to nurse them," she assured Avelyn. "But you see it really wouldn't do to let them get into the habit of thinking that they must be taken up and played with every time they cry."

"Don't they howl when they first come?"

"Simply yell for a day or two. Sometimes we have to put them in the isolation ward because

they disturb the others so dreadfully. They soon get accustomed to crèche life, though. Their mothers bring them at about six in the morning, and take them home after work in the evening. When they arrive here they're washed, and dressed in the crèche clothes, and their own clothes are put on again at night." [190]

"They don't seem shy," remarked Avelyn, who was still hugging Queenie.

"No, that's the best of them. With seeing so many nurses and helpers they'll go to anybody. They're very sweet when you may have them up and attend to them. Queenie's getting sleepy. I think you'd better put her back to bed."

Avelyn disengaged the clinging little arms with reluctance. She would cheerfully have acted nurse all the morning if allowed. She lowered her sleepy burden into the crib, and turned her attention to the toddlers, who certainly needed it. Several of them had followed Gwen, and were popping mischievous fingers through the bars of the cribs and poking the babies; some were indulging in a free fight over a toy. Eddie, the black sheep, was attempting to climb the fire-guard; George was punching the head of a smaller boy, and Curly, for no particular reason, was standing with arms outstretched, yelling at the pitch of his lung power. It took the best energies of the two young helpers to restore order.

"My clothes aren't comfy!" pleaded one small sinner in a tight jersey. "I'd be good if you'd let me have my own clothes on!"

"George took my horse!"

"I want a doll!"

"Give me a picture-book!"

"I want one too!" [191]

"You won't get anything at all unless you ask prettily!" declared Gwen sternly. "Where are your manners, I should like to know?"

By the end of the morning Avelyn decided that she could thoroughly sympathize with the trying experiences of the old woman who lived in a shoe. She felt in a perfect whirl of babies. They were sweet little souls, but she would have enjoyed them more individually; to wrestle with so many at once was decidedly wearing. At twelve o'clock came dinner. Tiny chairs were placed round low tables, feeders were tied on, and the children were put in their seats and taught to say grace. The nurses brought in an enormous rice pudding, and gave platefuls to those who were old enough to use spoons. Avelyn, sitting in a rocking-chair, fed alternately one small person on her knee and another by her side. Gwen was performing a like service.

When the meal was at length over, the toddlers trotted off to low camp-beds for their midday sleep, leaving a blissful calm in the ward, where the babies were now receiving their share of attention.

"Do you do this two mornings a week?" asked Avelyn as the girls walked home.

"Yes, but the children aren't always as troublesome as they were to-day, and if they get very bad I can call Matron, or a nurse."

"I'd like just the babies alone, if there weren't the toddlers as well to look after. But to have sixteen of them to keep in order is the limit. I feel——" [192]

"You'd rather go on the land?" queried Gwen, with an amused smile.

"Yes, if I can choose my war work, I certainly should!"

---

[193]

CHAPTER XV

The School Birthday

When Miss Thompson had bought the connection of The Hawthorns, and amalgamated that school with her own, she had undertaken a more difficult task than she had altogether anticipated. She had spoken much of Silverside traditions, but it had never struck her that the Hawthorners might have some of their own to which they might cling tenaciously. It was not easy for the Principal to get to know the exact mind of the school. She saw the girls in class, respectful, well-behaved, and very much in awe of her, but it was another matter to judge the mental barometer of the play-room. She suspected that there was an undercurrent of trouble: the smallness of the Silverside Hockey Club, the rival stalls at the bazaar, and the scanty audience at the dramatic performance had shown her clearly which way the wind was blowing. She thought the matter over seriously. From her knowledge of girls she decided that it would be unwise to

interfere directly. You cannot cause rival factions to love each other by act of parliament. She trusted that time and tact would cement a union, and meanwhile she meant to hold her judgment [194] in the balance and favour neither party.

On the first day of the next term she made the important announcement that she had appointed two new prefects, Annie Broadside and Gladys Wilks, who would be given equal powers with their co-officers. It was a great step for the day girls to have their former leaders raised to a recognized position in the school. Though they were only two, as opposed to four prefects who were boarders, they could look after their own flock, and redress their grievances. Adah and her companions took the news badly. They considered that their old privileges were being outraged.

"What's Miss Thompson *thinking* of?" asked Consie indignantly.

"She absolutely truckles to those wretched Hawthorners!" declared Isobel.

"Will Annie and Gladys expect to come to our prefects' meetings?" demanded Joyce.

"Of course they will! That's the sickening part of it!" said Adah bitterly. "If Miss Thompson thinks she's going to manage us that way, she's mistaken. I *won't* be friends with those Hawthorners! I wish they'd never come to the school at all!"

"Pretty prefects Annie and Gladys will make!" sneered Joyce.

To do Annie Broadside and Gladys Wilks justice, they made excellent prefects. They were the acknowledged leaders of their own clique, and they insisted upon certain rules being obeyed. They even suggested a few innovations, which, though resisted at first by Adah, were afterwards [195] acknowledged as so excellent that they were put into force. It did not add to their favour with the boarders, however, to have the changes recommended as "what we always did at The Hawthorns".

"What you may have found expedient there need be no law for us here," replied Adah with uplifted eyebrows.

January 21st was the school birthday. It was exactly fourteen years since Miss Thompson had first opened Silverside, and she had kept the anniversary as a festival ever since. This year it was to be quite a public occasion. The house was far too small for the increased number of pupils, and she had decided to build on an annexe, consisting of a large hall and cloak-rooms. An architect had been busy drawing out plans, but, owing to the difficulty of getting labour during the war, the contracts had only just been passed. Now, after many delays, all was in training, and the builders were ready to begin their work. Miss Thompson felt that it would be an appropriate act for the foundation stone to be laid on the school birthday. She was fortunate enough to persuade the Bishop of the diocese to come and perform the ceremony. It was to be a great day at Silverside. The girls discussed it freely beforehand, especially the inmates of the Cowslip Room.

"Ever so many smart people will be there," said Laura delightedly. "Tommiekins is sending out heaps of invitations. I know, because Miss Kennedy told Consie, and Consie told Nita Paget. The [196] Bishop will make a speech."

"And what are *we* going to do?"

"Stand round and listen, and look intelligent and appreciative, and all the rest of it, I suppose. We'll have to be saints during the ceremony, but we'll have some fun afterwards. D'you know the school's to be thrown open to all sorts of visitors? Not only old fogies who make speeches, but other people. The day girls may each ask three friends, and they can bring brothers if they like."

"You don't say so! Miss Thompson *is* coming on. Are you certain?"

"It's quite true," confirmed Avelyn. "I was allowed an invitation card too, and I've asked Mother and Daphne and David, and I've got Pamela to ask Anthony with one of her spare invitations."

"What sport!"

"We'll all have to wear our best dresses," said Janet.

"Rather! You bet we do!"

In preparation for the coming event, a wave of what Miss Hopkins would have dubbed "worldliness" swept over the Cowslip Room. The girls reviewed their frocks critically. Laura implored Miss Kennedy to allow hers to be sent to the dressmaker, to be lengthened two inches. Janet borrowed the last drops of Ethelberga's before-the-war bottle of benzoline, to remove a stain left by the dropping, butter-side down, of a piece of muffin. Avelyn brushed her hair every night with eau de Cologne to make it glossy. Ethelberga, in defiance of food saving, begged [197] oatmeal from the cook, and rubbed it on her face to improve her complexion. Irma, after criticizing the costumes of her friends, sprang a surprise on them.

"I've sent home for a new dress," she announced carelessly.

"You haven't!"

"Yes, I have, and what's more, I expect it to-morrow. Mother wrote that she was telling Barclays to post it to me direct."

"Well, I do think you might have told us before."

The other girls felt as if Irma had stolen an advantage. If the idea had occurred to them they might also have written home for new dresses. It was unfortunately too late now. Irma alone, of the Cowslip Room, would attend the festival in the glory of a new gown. She gave herself airs in consequence. It was an unfortunate characteristic of Irma that she was apt to get swelled head on occasion. Her room-mates were constantly on the look-out for symptoms of this complaint, and generally applied drastic measures before things went too far. In a dormitory it does not do to allow a girl to maintain too exalted an opinion of herself.

"Irma's swanking no end!" affirmed Ethelberga.

"Putting on side galore!" agreed Janet tartly.

"We ought to do something to take the wind out of her sails a little," said Laura, looking pensive.

Avelyn's eyes suddenly sparkled. [198]

"I've got it!" she chuckled. "We'll play a rag on her this afternoon. It'll be ever such fun! Oh, I've thought of a perfectly gorgeous plan. No, I don't think I'll tell you what it is yet; but stroll up to the dormitory as soon after four as you can, and make Irma come too on some excuse. Then I'll have a little surprise for you."

"You might tell us!"

"No, no! Not a word! It would spoil the surprise."

The members of the Cowslip Room were always ready for some diversion. They wondered what kind of a practical joke Avelyn was going to play on Irma. They took particular care to decoy their victim upstairs at four o'clock. As a bait, Ethelberga offered to lend Irma her manicure set. They were rubbing pink powder on Irma's almond-shaped nails when a rap came at the door.

"Entrez!" shouted Janet casually.

It was a demure-eyed junior who made her appearance, carrying a large parcel.

"This has just come, and it's for your room, so I brought it up," she announced, dumping it down on the bed, and leaning over to read the address. "Miss Irma Ridley. Wish it had been Miss Dorothy Elston. I've no luck. Ta-ta!" and she waved a rather impertinent hand, and trotted away.

Irma jumped up, upsetting the box of manicure powder, and scattering the other implements over the floor.

"It's never my box!" she exclaimed. [199]

At that psychological moment Avelyn entered the room.

"I didn't expect it until to-morrow," rejoiced Irma. "They must have sent it by carrier instead of by post. Lend me your scissors, Janet. Oh, I'm just dying to look!"

The parcel was a large cardboard box done up in rather untidy brown paper. It had evidently suffered considerably on the journey. Irma cut the string with the utmost haste, and began to tear off the wrappers and open the box.

"I know Mother will have chosen me something pretty," she purred. "Mother's got such lovely taste, and she wrote that she'd seen the very thing, and was sure I should like it."

"It's well wrapped up," remarked Janet.

Irma was removing sheet after sheet of tissue paper with a pleased giggle. At last she reached the core of the package, and unfolded—not a smart new frock, but her own ordinary school evening dress. Her stare of blank astonishment was comical.

"What's this? What have they sent me?" she gasped.

But her room-mates were collapsing in various attitudes of mirth, and she understood. For a moment two red spots flared in her cheeks, then she had the sense to take the joke with a good grace. If she was angry, the others shouldn't have the triumph of seeing her annoyance.

"You geese!" she remarked. "I might have known the box couldn't arrive to-day. So this is why you hauled me upstairs, is it? Oh, go on and laugh if you like! It doesn't hurt me. I don't mind." [200]

She hung the dress up again in her wardrobe, and folding the sheets of tissue paper, appropriated them.

"I've been wanting some tissue paper," she said airily.

The girls restrained themselves and sobered down.

"You're a trump, Irma!" declared Avelyn.

"It was too bad, but we couldn't help laughing," murmured Janet.

"Poor old Irmie, you took it sporting!" sympathized Ethelberga.

"You'll like your dress all the more when it really comes," comforted Laura.

When Irma's parcel arrived the next day her room-mates, having played their joke upon her, had the grace to be nice and to admire the new frock, which was a charming creation in blue, and suited its owner admirably. They went out of their way to be pleasant about it, and Avelyn lent a hair ribbon which exactly matched the shade of colour, while Laura offered a chain of Venetian beads. They all felt, as they dressed for the festival, that if Irma's costume eclipsed the rest of them, she deserved her little triumph for keeping her temper.

"It's a shame to have to put a coat over it," said Ethelberga.

"Well, she certainly can't stand outside in the cold with only that thin dress on," decreed Laura.

[201] The ceremony was to take place at three o'clock, and shortly before that hour all the school, in hats and coats, were marshalled outside to the spot where the new hall was to be erected. It was a cold, grey January afternoon, with one or two snowflakes floating down, and everybody stood and shivered. Some of the invited guests were keeping warm in the house, and others strolled out to the scene of action. The girls, drawn up in line, nodded and smiled to many friends from the town. They were cold, and impatient for the proceedings to begin. Waiting is weary work on a January afternoon. Their talk, which at first had been low and subdued, began to buzz, and rose higher and higher.

"What a disgraceful noise!" said Adah. "It's all those wretched Hawthorners. If Miss Thompson brings out the Bishop while all this clamour is going on she'll be thoroughly ashamed of the school. Less noise, girls! Do you hear?"

The girls heard perfectly well, but they did not heed, and the hum of unrestrained conversation continued. Adah waxed desperate.

"This can't go on! It mustn't!" she said indignantly.

She thought for a moment, then took an extreme measure. She walked up to Annie Broadside, and confronted her with flashing eyes.

"You're a prefect! If you've any influence with your old crew, why don't you stop this din? It's a disgrace to Silverside! I've said what I can!"

[202] Annie looked astonished, but for once she fell in with the head girl's suggestion. Passing along the lines, she commanded silence, and she was obeyed. Where Adah had failed to restore order, she succeeded. At that moment the house door opened, and Miss Thompson appeared, ushering out the Bishop—a reverend figure in gaiters—and followed by the mistresses and a number of guests. A dead hush fell upon the school, and all eyes were fixed at attention.

The little ceremony was not very long—perhaps the Bishop himself felt the cold. There were one or two brief speeches, and Edna Esdale, the youngest member of Form I, handed a trowel decorated with ribbons, a dab of mortar was deposited, and the foundation stone laid. The girls sang "God Save the King", then, as the snow was beginning to come down in good earnest, everybody thankfully turned into the house. It was certainly a crowd, but it was pleasant to meet friends. The Watson family had all turned up, and had actually brought Mrs. Reynolds with them, to Pamela's great triumph, for as a rule her mother shunned all public gatherings. The poor lady, though very nervous, seemed to be mildly enjoying herself.

"I am glad Pam didn't ask her uncle," thought Avelyn. "I shouldn't have been surprised if he had insisted on coming!"

There was actually a birthday cake for the school, with fourteen little candles on it, and the Bishop, at Miss Thompson's request, cut the first slice. There was only enough for visitors, but the girls had had the satisfaction of viewing it lighted beforehand, and had known that it was not [203] big enough to go round, so consequently were not disappointed. Irma, in her new blue dress, produced quite a sensation among those of her form who had not yet seen its beauties. Its attractions even went further.

Miss Thompson, ciceroning the Bishop round the premises and expatiating on the value of her new scheme of ventilation, let her eyes pass over a line of girls, flattening themselves dutifully against the wall, and singled out the creation in blue.

"We've many nice children here. Come here, Irma dear! This one is Irma Ridley. Run, child, and fetch me your Nature notebook. I should like the Bishop to look at it. We make a point of Nature study, my Lord."

Irma departed on her errand like a blue sunbeam. She stood smiling and speechless while the great Church dignitary benevolently examined her record of the months, and murmured his approval.

"Miss Thompson says it all went off splendidly," declared Janet, as the girls warmed themselves at the class-room fire afterwards.

"David and Anthony called it 'ripping!'" affirmed Avelyn.

"And *I* was introduced to the Lord Bishop of Howchester!" triumphed Irma, with the glamour of the honour still dancing in her shining eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

Under the Pines

[204]

When spring came, bringing daffodils in the orchard, and primrose stars under the alder bushes in the meadow, and tiny green shoots on the hedges, and singing of larks and cawing of jackdaws and twitter of linnets, and all the other dear delights of the "return of Proserpine", Walden also celebrated a birthday. It was a year since the Watsons had obtained possession of their little property. To them all it had been a glad, golden, glorious year, full of fresh interests, new awakenings, and hitherto undreamed-of experiences. They had been living spiritually on a far higher plane; almost unconsciously the influence of hills and wide skies and dashing waters had passed into their lives and widened them. So much of what we are in our after years depends on the standard of happiness we form when we are quite young. If we learn to take Nature's hand and read in her book, she can teach us wonderful secrets, and lift our souls so that we can never again be really narrow, or vulgar, or petty, or commonplace. It is not the mere fact of living in the country that gives this inner vision. Too often country dwellers go about with closed eyes and sealed hearts to the meaning of the beauty around them; but to those who will listen to Mother Nature's many voices, there comes a wonderful refinement and purity of taste, quite irrespective of wealth or class distinctions, the mark of the spirit that is daily growing, overmastering the claims of the physical body, and fitting itself for something that as yet we only grasp at but cannot reach. God must love His children very dearly to send them such beautiful things as the April sunshine, and the light on the hills, and the white spray of the whirling waterfall, and the violets in the hazel coppice. They may spoil His earth for themselves, but the springtime comes again, and the little heartsease flowers will bloom, not only over those graves in France, but over deeper graves of fallen hopes and lost ideals.

[205]

Mrs. Watson reviewed the year at Walden as so much gain. To begin with, her primary object in the removal had been an entire success: Daphne, formerly pale, thin, and an object for anxiety, was now as radiant as a pink-tipped daisy, and pronounced by the specialist to be absolutely fit and sound. She spent most of her time out of doors, gardening and looking after her colony of fowls, and, though she might not be doing definite war work, felt that she was helping her country by the production of food-stuffs. Daphne had suddenly grown very pretty. Avelyn, who often looked at her critically, decided that point emphatically. It was a delicate, ethereal, elusive kind of beauty, due as much to expression as to straight features and smiling grey eyes. Daphne never came out well in a photograph—that was quite a recognized fact in the family; to appreciate her, you had to see her when she was excited, or gardening, with her hair rumpled.

[206]

The Walden birthday fell early in April, and the Watsons decided to celebrate it by having a Saturday picnic. Captain Harper promised to join them—he came up sometimes from the camp to Lyngates—and they also asked Pamela and her mother. Rather to their surprise, Mrs. Reynolds accepted the invitation. The poor lady was still somewhat crushed and depressed, but she seemed to be trying to bestir herself, and, for her daughter's sake, to make faint, almost pathetic efforts at friendship. She was shy and uncommunicative, but she evidently liked Mrs. Watson, and would cheer up a little in her presence, and venture a few remarks, and even a watery smile. The picnic was to be in the pine woods, so all met at the cross-roads by the pond as a common starting-point, and set forth together, armed with tea baskets.

It was a two-mile walk up hill, along a road that twisted at sharp angles and gave lovely views of the landscape below. Presently they reached the beginnings of the wood, and some pines rose like giant sentinels guarding an enchanted land. As they tramped on, the trees stood thicker, tall and straight as the masts of a ship, with a carpet of soft fallen needles underneath. All at once a gleam of water flashed, and they had reached the bourne of their journey, a little grey lake set in the midst of the wood, with heather and whinberry growing round its banks. There was a space of shingle down by the water, and here, after a grand hunt to collect sticks, they lighted a fire and boiled the kettle they had brought with them.

[207]

It was fun sitting round in a gipsy circle, even if the tea was rather weak and smoky, and the war cake was conspicuous by its lack of sugar and currants. Everybody could have eaten a great deal more than the ration, and the provisions disappeared down to the very last crumb. Afterwards the young folks started to explore the banks, and had a wild time scrambling over fallen tree trunks, jumping small streams, and pushing through thickets. At a particularly large fallen pine Avelyn struck, and demanded a rest. She and Pamela perched themselves on the top, and announced their intention of sitting still for at least ten minutes. The boys, who had been cutting walking-sticks from the hazels by the lake edge, consented to a halt, and settled down with their penknives, whittling away busily. Mrs. Watson and Mrs. Reynolds were washing up the tea-cups at the picnic place, and the sound of their voices echoed faintly over the water. Daphne and Captain Harper seemed temporarily lost.

"It's like home to be right amongst the pines!" said Pamela, looking with far-away eyes at the vista of red-brown trunks and green needles.

"Did you live among them in America?" asked Avelyn.

"Yes, our ranch was out in British Columbia, close to the edge of the forest. At one time Daddy had lumbering business there, and we spent the summer at a log shanty right up on the mountain. It was glorious, and I loved it, but it was very lonely. Daddy used to be out all day, looking after the timber, and Mother and I would be left by ourselves until evening. Sometimes we didn't see anyone except our own family for weeks and weeks." [208]

"Were you frightened?"

"Only once, and then we really had an adventure. I was more scared when it was over than at the time."

"Do tell us about it!" pleaded Avelyn.

Pamela hesitated, and threw pine cones into the lake. She had never been very expansive about her life in Canada, and the Watsons had heard few of her experiences there. They had a general impression that Mr. Reynolds had not prospered in the New World, and that Pamela shrank from letting her friends know the roughness of her early upbringing. As a rule they refrained from questioning her—she was not a girl whom it was easy to question—but an adventure could not be resisted.

"Do tell us, Pam!" urged the boys, wriggling nearer, and stopping their whittling.

Pamela threw away all the pine cones that lay in her lap, seemed to think a moment or two, then finally decided.

"All right, I'll tell you if you like! Well, as I've just said, we were living in a log-house in a little clearing in the forest. We used to hear the coyotes howling about at night, but we didn't mind those in the least. They're cowardly beasts, and we'd never seen anything else to frighten us. One day Father had a much longer round to go than usual, and he said he should not be back at night, but would sleep with some friends at a ranch a good many miles off. Mother and I did not mind being left. Daddy had been obliged to stop away like that before, so we were accustomed to it. I went out in the afternoon, across the clearing, and through part of the forest to some open pastures where the berries grew. I stayed there, picking some and eating them, and putting some in my basket, for just ages. It was nice there: I found flowers as well as berries; and I'd brought out a book with me, so I sat down and read and enjoyed myself. Suddenly I noticed that the sun was beginning to set, and I jumped up and felt guilty. I knew that Mother would have supper ready, and that she'd be waiting for me. I ran home all the way. It was getting quite dusk in the forest as I went through. When I came near the house, I could see that the shutters were up, covering the window. That didn't surprise me, because Mother generally closed them as soon as she lighted the lamp. But she always left the door standing open for me, and to-night the door was shut too. I was rushing forward to open it, when I heard Mother's voice calling me. [209]

"'Pamela, stop! Don't come a step nearer, child!'

"I looked round to see where Mother was, and she was in the funniest place. Our log-cabin had a loft above it, which was reached by a ladder from the living-room. This loft had a tiny window in the roof, and, lo and behold, there was Mother peeping out of the window and waving me back! I thought it so funny that I began to laugh, but Mother wasn't laughing at all. She called out again: [210]

"'Keep back!'

"Her voice sounded so queer that it suddenly scared me. My legs began to shake in the silliest way.

"'What's the matter?' I shouted.

"Mother's voice quavered a little:

"'Don't be too frightened, darling! There's a puma shut up in the house!'

"I was fearfully frightened, all the same. I should have run away if Mother had not been at the window. I stared at the house, picturing that horrible thing moving about inside. Mother went on explaining:

"'I'd lighted the lamp and closed the shutters, and I'd left the door open for you. Then, suddenly, I saw the creature creep into the room. My first idea was that it would rush out and catch you just as you were coming home, so I slammed the door, and dashed up the ladder into the loft, and then kicked the ladder away. He's downstairs quite safe, and I'm up here and he can't get at me. I've put down the trap-door.'

"'Can't you crawl through the window, Mummie?' I gasped.

"'No, it's too small. I've tried. I'm caged up here, just as much as the puma is caged down below, and I can hear him raging about. If he upsets the lamp, the whole place will be on fire.' [211]

"I gave a great cry at that, because it seemed almost a certain thing that the puma would upset the lamp, and then I knew the log-cabin would be in a blaze. What could I do? Daddy would not be returning home that night, and our nearest neighbours were miles away. Yet I must get help, and at once. There was nothing else for it; every minute was of consequence.

"'I'll go to the Petersons' ranch, Mummie!' I shouted, and I started off running without waiting for her to reply.

"I was only eleven, and the forest was getting dark. I had never been out alone in it at that time of evening. I wasn't brave at all. My legs shook under me as I ran, and I imagined a puma behind every bush. Then I was rather uncertain about the trail. In that dim light it would be very easy to lose my way and never reach the ranch at all. I decided to keep near the stream, which would guide me. I went stumbling on for what seemed a long time, and everything was getting darker, when suddenly, on the other side of the stream, I saw the light of a camp fire. I knew some lumbermen must be spending the night in the woods there, and that they might help me. I hallooed and cooeed as loudly as I could, but the wind was in the wrong direction and carried my voice away, and the stream was noisy, so I couldn't make them hear me.

"I didn't know what to do. Then, a little farther down, I saw that a tree had fallen across the [212] stream. I ran along and looked at it. It was a horrible bridge—I'm a coward at crossing water—but I had to crawl over it somehow. For a year afterwards I used to dream that I was doing it again, and would wake up gasping. I've hated running water ever since. Well, I managed to get across, though I never quite knew how I did it, and then I ran up to the camp fire, shaking so that I could hardly tell what I wanted.

"Three men were sitting there, cooking their supper, and one of them called out: 'Hallo! What's up with you, young 'un?'

"When I said there was a puma inside our house they all whistled. Then the one who had spoken reached for his gun, and said: 'We'll come with you, lassie!'

"The others didn't say anything, but they got up and found their guns too. One of them took me on his back and carried me across the bridge when he saw how I funked it. He went over without minding it in the least. I don't know how he could!

"It was fearfully dark going home through the wood, and I could only just manage to find the trail. We got to our shanty at last, and I shouted, and Mother looked out of the window and said: 'Thank God you're back safe!'

"The three men talked over the best way of killing the puma. One of them prised open the shutters and the other two stood ready with their guns. The creature had been quiet (so Mother [213] told us afterwards) for a long while, but when the shutters fell back it went wild, and came tearing across the room to the window, knocking over the table and upsetting the lamp. It was shot directly, and fell dead inside the room. But the lamp had broken and set up a blaze. The men rushed to our shed for spades and threw earth on the burning paraffin, managing to put the fire out before any real damage had been done. Then they fixed the ladder again, and Mother came down from the loft.

"When Daddy came home next day she said she daren't be left alone in the woods again, so he took us to the settlement, and we lived there the rest of the summer."

"Did you keep the puma's skin?" asked Anthony, who had followed the story with breathless interest.

"No, I'd have liked to, but the lumbermen had dragged the thing outside, and the coyotes got hold of it in the night, so there wasn't much skin left by morning."

"I think you were immensely plucky!" exclaimed Avelyn warmly.

"Plucky! What else could I have done? I tell you, I felt the biggest coward out!"

---

[214]

CHAPTER XVII

The Lavender Lady

It was Easter time when the Lavender Lady first rose upon the horizon of Lyngates. She came with the dog violets and the ground ivy and the meadow orchises, and several other lovely purple things, at least that was how her advent was always associated in Avelyn's mind. She took the furnished bungalow near the church, lately vacated by the curate, and it was rumoured in the village that she composed music and had published poetry, and that she had come down into the country for a rest.

When Avelyn first saw her she was sitting in the flowery little garden raised above the road. She wore a soft lavender dress and an old lace fichu, and she had dark eyes and eyebrows, and cheeks as pink as the China roses, and fluffy grey-white hair that gleamed like a dove's wing as the sun shone on it. She looked such a picture as she sat there, all unconscious of spectators, against a background of golden wallflowers and violet aubrietias, that Avelyn was obliged just to stand still and gaze. In that thirty seconds she fell in love with the Lavender Lady. It was not a [215] mere mild liking, but a sudden, romantic, absolute, headlong falling in love. It had come all in a minute and overwhelmed her. She crept away softly to dream dreams about the vision she had

seen in the garden. At home there were some beautiful illustrated editions of William Morris's *Earthly Paradise* and of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poems. She took them out and pored over them. The gorgeous pre-Raphaelite pictures had always appealed to her innate artistic sense, and set her nerves athrill with a something she could not analyse. There was not one of them so beautiful as her Lavender Lady among the flowers.

"She's a little like 'The Blessed Damozel', who leaned out 'from the gold bar of heaven'," mused Avelyn. "And then again she's like Gainsborough's picture of 'The Duchess of Devonshire'. I wonder what her name is, and if I shall ever know her? I don't believe I'd dare to speak to her. I'd be too shy."

For a whole week Avelyn, terribly in love, lived in a mystic world in which the Lavender Lady, robed in the glory of the purple night and stars, was as the central sun, and she herself revolved like a planet round her orbit. The family could not understand why she insisted upon choosing heliotrope for her new dress.

"It won't suit you, dear," demurred Mrs. Watson, bewildered by the firmness of her daughter's sudden attitude.

They were sitting round the table, with three boxes of patterns from west-end London firms [216]
spread out temptingly before them.

"You of all people in helio, Ave!" objected Daphne. "It's the one colour you ought never to wear —you're far too much of a brunette for any violet shades. You'd look nice in this biscuit, or this saxe blue. I always liked you in that blue dress you had a couple of years ago."

"There's a perfectly charming stripe here," recommended Mrs. Watson.

"I want the helio, please," said Avelyn doggedly.

"But *why* should you want helio when you know it doesn't suit you?" stormed Daphne. "It's really only pig-headedness, because you've happened to say so. You can't see yourself in your own dress. If you could you'd choose another colour."

"You know nothing about it," retorted Avelyn; and matters nearly grew warm between the two girls.

"There's no need to send the patterns back to-day," interrupted Mrs. Watson, sweeping the whole consignment back into their boxes. "We'll bring them out to-morrow and talk about them."

As a matter of fact she sent for the biscuit shade without consulting Avelyn again, much to the disgust of that damsel, who consoled herself by taking energetically to gardening, and replanting the round border in the middle with wallflowers and purple aubrietias. It was the Easter holidays, so she had time to dream. She made up at least six romances about the Lavender Lady's past; some of them ended happily and some unhappily. She could not decide which was really the more [217]
artistic. She walked past the cottage every evening. Once she threw a bunch of violets over the wall just to the place where the lady had been sitting. Then she ran away frightened at her own daring. Another evening as she passed she heard the strains of a piano and the sound of a rich, sweet contralto voice. She stood and listened spellbound. It was a song she had never heard before—a lovely, crooning song, like a cradle lullaby. She would have liked to stay and listen to more, but the Vicar's wife and daughters were coming down the road, and she fled. Somehow she did not want to be talked to just at that moment.

On Sunday she chivied the family off to church at least ten minutes too soon, and they sat in their pew in stately dignity while the rest of the congregation trickled in. Avelyn, from a post of vantage near the pillar, eyed everyone that entered with increasing disappointment. Then her heart gave a great thump. Her Lady was coming up the aisle—not in lavender this time, but in black and white, with a bunch of violets and a big picture-hat trimmed with silver ribbon, and a white ostrich boa and dainty white kid gloves. The verger was showing her to a seat in front, actually the next pew but one, and Avelyn felt thrills running down her spine. She was so glad the verger had selected a pew in front. If it had been behind, she would have been absolutely obliged to disgrace herself by turning round. After the service she managed to drop her book, and to [218]
fumble for it long enough to delay her family for a few moments and prevent them from leaving before the Lavender Lady. They passed her in the churchyard. She was actually speaking to the Vicar's eldest daughter. Avelyn decided that Barbara Holt had more than her share of luck. At dinner-time, over the joint of roast beef, Mrs. Watson remarked:

"That seems a sweet lady staying at the bungalow. Miss Carrington, I hear, her name is. She comes from London, and Mrs. Holt says she's very musical. I think I shall have to call."

Avelyn went on eating beef and potatoes with a jumping heart but outward composure. It had not struck her that it was possible to pay social calls on Dante Gabriel Rossetti heroines. What if she were to meet the Lavender Lady at close quarters? Even speak to her? The idea seemed to need preparation.

Mrs. Watson had quite made up her mind.

"Daphne and I will go on Tuesday," she said.

It was of course appropriate that Daphne, being the eldest, should go, but Avelyn envied her all the same.

When the momentous afternoon arrived she enquired anxiously what her sister was going to wear. It seemed vitally important that the family should make a good impression.

"You'll put on your grey coat and skirt, won't you?" she said beseechingly.

"I don't think I will. I really don't want to go at all," yawned Daphne.

[219] Not want to go! Avelyn could hardly believe it. She stared at Daphne incredulously.

"Don't you feel well?" she asked.

"Oh yes! it isn't that, but I hate paying calls, and I promised the boys to walk to Fulverton. Captain Harper said he'd meet us and show us a squirrel's nest he's found. Suppose you go and call with Mother instead of me?"

Avelyn gasped. Such unselfishness took away her breath.

"Do you really mean you'll let me go instead of you?"

"With all the pleasure in life, child, if you want to." Daphne's manner was airy and elder-sisterly. "Of course it's nothing to me whether we meet Captain Harper or not, only he made rather a point about it, and perhaps it would seem—well, rude, if I let the boys go without me. He's been very kind to David and Tony, and one doesn't like to hurt his feelings."

Two things swept across Avelyn's bewildered consciousness: first, that Daphne was growing up —growing up most suddenly and unmistakably; and secondly, that she had resigned her privilege, as elder daughter, to call on the Lavender Lady. The first would have to be considered at leisure, in all its bearings and side issues; the second was for the moment uppermost.

"Go and ask Mother what you're to put on," said Daphne, as if the whole question of the exchange were settled.

[220] It was an outwardly calm and self-possessed, but inwardly much-agitated Avelyn who entered, in her mother's wake, into the little drawing-room at the bungalow. One comprehensive glance took in the fact that the room was utterly different from what it had been during the curate's occupation. There were books and flowers, and other pretty things about. The general tone had changed from commonplace to artistic. On the window-sill lay a half-finished sketch of the village. There was music on the open piano. But these details faded into secondary consideration, for the Lavender Lady was entering, in the soft heliotrope gown, with a sprig of wallflower pinned into the lace fichu.

Occasionally in our lives we meet with people whose whole electric atmosphere seems to merge and blend with our own. We feel we are not so much making a new acquaintance as picking up the lost threads of some former soul-friendship. Avelyn experienced thrills as she shook hands. She was far too shy to say much, but she sat and listened rapturously while her mother and Miss Carrington did the talking. For the present it was enough to be in the vicinity of her goddess. The maid brought in tea. There were a dainty, open-hem-stitched Teneriffe cloth, Queen Anne silver teapot and Apostle teaspoons, and scones and honey. A bowl of primroses and forget-me-nots was on the table.

The half-hour's visit passed like a dream.

"You'll come and see me again, dear, won't you?" said Miss Carrington, as she held Avelyn's hand in good-bye.

[221] The hot colour flooded the girl's face. Her eyes shone like stars.

"Oh, may I?" she cried impulsively.

That afternoon marked an epoch. Friendship is a matter more of temperament than of years. That the Lavender Lady was middle-aged, and Avelyn barely sixteen, made not the slightest difference to either of them. Each character dove-tailed comfortably into the other. Miss Carrington had a great sympathy for girls, and she seemed to understand Avelyn at once. As for the latter, she had utterly lost her heart. But for the fear of making herself a nuisance she would have nearly lived at the bungalow. She went there very often by special invitation, and spent glorious, delightful afternoons sitting in the garden, talking about art and books and music, and the foreign places Miss Carrington had visited. It fascinated Avelyn to hear about Venice and Rome and Sicily and Egypt, and made her long to go and see them for herself.

"You shall, some day, when the war's over," said the Lavender Lady confidently.

Sometimes they would go for walks together, or Avelyn would wait with a book while Miss Carrington sketched, or—what she loved immensely—would sit in the twilight while her friend improvised soft dreamy music at the piano. The little volume of poems, *Cameos*, by Lesbia Carrington, she already knew almost by heart; the small, white-and-gold edition, with its signed autograph, was her greatest treasure. To Avelyn it was a most inspiring friendship, that roused [222] dormant hopes and ideals in her nature which promised to make rapid growth afterwards. Her Lavender Lady proved the most delightful of confidantes. It was possible to tell her everything. She never laughed at Avelyn's secrets, though she was merry enough on occasion.

One evening she and Avelyn sat in the little garden, watching the red glow of the setting sun fade away behind the dark boughs of the yew trees. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers;

from the fields came the caw of rooks, as long flights passed homeward to roost. Avelyn squatted on the grass, with her head against the Lavender Lady's knee, and held her hand tight.

"Next week I shall be back at Silverside," she whispered. "I just hate the thought of it!"

"Poor little woman!"

"It isn't as nice there as it ought to be, somehow. Things seem always at sixes and sevens, and it's so horrid."

"What's the trouble?"

"The old school and the new school won't mix. The Silversiders look down on the Hawthorners, and the Hawthorners resent it, of course, and just detest the Silversiders. It's a constant bickering the whole time. I think it's almost worse since Annie and Gladys were made prefects. It's perfectly wretched for me, because I'm between two stools."

"How's that?"

"Well, you see, in a way I'm a boarder, but then I'm the only weekly boarder, so the others who [223]
stay there the whole term rub it into me that I'm not quite one of themselves. They can't forget that I used once to go to The Hawthorns, even though it's a long time ago, and they keep bringing it up against me as if I were a sort of traitor in their midst. Then it's quite as awkward for me with the day girls. I like some of them very much; they used to be old chums of mine, and I'd like to go on being friends with them. But if I even speak to them in school, Laura or Janet are down on me like anything, and ask me if I've forgotten I'm a member of the Silverside League."

"What is the League, please?"

"It's a kind of blood-brotherhood among the boarders to keep up Silverside traditions. When the day girls heard of it, they started an 'Old Hawthorners' League' in opposition."

"But surely you're all Silversiders now?"

"We are in name, but nothing else. We still feel two separate schools. The day girls wouldn't play hockey with us in the winter. They got up a club of their own, and wore their old school colours. They won ever so many matches, and the Silverside Club did so badly. Adah was dreadfully sick about it. She thought them so mean to desert."

"Perhaps they felt they wouldn't be welcome."

"That's exactly the point. Instead of pulling together, it's always boarders versus day girls; and as for poor little me, I'm neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring!"

The Lavender Lady smiled, and then looked thoughtful. She stroked Avelyn's hair. [224]

"Poor little woman!" she said again.

"I feel like Mohammed's coffin, slung between earth and heaven."

"Can't something be done to bring these rival factions into harmony? You're one school now, and ought to work together for the common good."

"That's what Miss Thompson says, but it doesn't make any difference."

"Girls often won't listen to teachers. The movement must come from within, not without. It seems to me, Ave, you're the one to set it in motion."

"I?"

Avelyn turned up her face in the greatest amazement to meet the Lavender Lady's calm eyes.

"Yes, *you*, darling! Don't you see you have an absolutely unique opportunity? You're the only girl in the school who is in touch with both sides. You can get at both the boarders and the day girls. The hockey season is over, and I suppose next term you'll be starting tennis and cricket?"

"Yes, so we shall."

"Well, suppose directly you get back to Harlingden you propose a United League of all Silversiders to win credit for the school. You could set about it very tactfully, and sound your principal parties first."

"*I?* But they'd think it such cheek! A Fifth Form girl, and only a weekly boarder."

AVELYN AND THE LAVENDER LADY

"And Gideon said, 'Wherewithal shall I save Israel? I am the least in my father's house'," quoted [225]
Miss Carrington. "On the contrary, I think it's the chance of a lifetime. I believe you're the one girl to do it. It would be something worth accomplishing, wouldn't it, to unite the school?"

"Rather!"

"Is there any public occasion when you could bring forward the suggestion?"

"Yes; there's the School Council on the first Wednesday of term. Anybody is allowed to put things to the meeting, and votes are taken."

"You couldn't have a better opportunity. Talk in private to the girls first, and persuade a number of them from both sides to be ready to back you up. Then state your proposal. By the by, what are the Silverside colours?"

"Pale-blue and navy."

"And the old Hawthorn colours?"

"Navy and pink."

"If you're wise, you'll amalgamate them, and ask Miss Thompson to let you have new badges of pale-blue, pink, and navy. I believe it might just make all the difference to the state of feeling."

"Perhaps you're right. But I still feel afraid—it's a big thing to attempt, and I don't know whether I can screw up the courage. Suppose I fail? Suppose they only laugh at me, and tell me to mind my own business?"

"You won't fail! You mustn't *think* failure! Make up your mind beforehand that you're going to succeed, and that what you say will persuade them. Oh, Ave darling, do try! It would be such a [226]
grand thing. There are those two great streams of girls, each running its own way. They only need a thin barrier removed to make them into one mighty river. Some common purpose should unite them. Perhaps in their heart of hearts they're all secretly longing for union. Who knows? Can't your hands lead them together? You said once you'd do anything for my sake."

"So I did—and I mean it!"

"Then take up this crusade, and be a Red Cross Knight for the School Colours!"

"For the School Colours and for you, dear Lavender Lady!" said Avelyn, kissing the soft hand in token of her vow.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Loyal School League

[227]

Avelyn went back to school in a serious frame of mind. She knew that she had undertaken a big thing, and, though she mentally set her teeth and meant to grapple with it, she felt that her dear Lavender Lady did not—could not—realize all the difficulties that lay in her path. Miss Carrington's supreme faith in her buoyed her up, however; she would try her utmost, and if failure came—— No! the Lavender Lady had said it was fatal even to mention failure, and that she must go about her errand absolutely determined to succeed.

She began by sounding the members of her own dormitory. They received the suggestion with wonderful favour.

"The school's been slack enough at games all the winter!" commented Irma.

"Time it bucked up, certainly!" agreed Janet.

"That Hawthorners' Hockey Club was a scandal!" said Laura.

"Well, if we don't take care they'll be turning it into a tennis club for the summer," warned Avelyn.

"We'd better make some sort of a move," grunted Ethelberga.

[228]

"It's Adah that's at the bottom of all the trouble," said Laura, sitting on the floor with her arms clasped round her knees, and swaying thoughtfully to and fro. "Adah's a thorough old-fashioned Silversider, and hates the new contingent—that's the matter in a nutshell."

"Isobel and Consie and even Joyce would come round directly if Adah would only let them," agreed Irma.

"And Annie and Gladys would meet them half-way," nodded Janet.

"Adah's the most ripping tennis-player I know," ruminated Laura.

"And so's Annie. She won the trophy last year at The Hawthorns."

"The two together would make the best champions any school ever had."

"Well, look here, they've just *got* to go together!"

"I've an idea—a brain wave!" said Avelyn. "The Council Meeting will be to-morrow. Well, this afternoon let us propose a tennis set, 'School versus Mistresses'. Miss Peters and Miss Broadwin are simply A1 at tennis, and everybody knows they are, so we'll insist upon Adah and Annie playing together for the school. They can't refuse when it's put like that. Whether they win or lose, it'll pave the way for what we want to bring forward to-morrow."

"Right you are, O Queen! It's a blossomy idea!"

Avelyn got up, and straightened her tie.

[229]

"I'll go down now to the dressing-room, and catch those day girls as they come in, and have a talk with some of them."

"And I'll go and sound Miss Peters about the set this afternoon. She's in a good temper to-day, because she's had a letter from the front."

Miss Peters and Miss Broadwin, fresh and fit after the holidays, were quite disposed to accept the challenge of the girls and wield rackets on behalf of the mistresses. Universal public opinion fixed upon Adah and Annie as champions for the school, and they submitted, a little bewildered and dismayed, but bowled over by the suddenness of the suggestion. Every girl at Silverside—except three victims who had music lessons and one who had toothache—crowded round the tennis court to watch the exciting contest. Miss Peters and Miss Broadwin were formidable opponents; they had been members of their college clubs, and though slightly out of practice had not forgotten their former skill. The two prefects knew that it would need their utmost ability to fight them. With the whole school looking on, each nerved herself to do her best.

In the first game the Mistresses scored. Miss Peters's serves seemed almost invincible, and as for Miss Broadwin her arms were elastic. Adah and Annie looked at each other grimly. They had begun to take their opponents' measure, and also to estimate each other's play. In the next game they exercised extreme caution, and did not repeat certain mistakes. After an exciting rally the score this time fell to the School.

[230]

"Now for the tussle!" laughed Miss Peters, as she collected balls.

Adah could not help admiring the way Annie played that last game. She kept her nerve splendidly, and her back-hand strokes were magnificent. For an anxious moment or two the luck of the School trembled in the balance, but by a frantic effort on the part of the prefects the set

was secured. The vanquished Mistresses took their defeat sportingly, and congratulated the victors.

"One of the best sets we've ever had at Silverside!" declared Miss Broadwin, pinning up a tail of hair that had strayed down her back in the heat of the combat.

"If you two go on like this you'll be invincible!" laughed Miss Peters. "You need to get a little more accustomed to each other's play, and you'd make splendid champions."

"You were both absolutely topping!" declared the school, crowding round.

Adah took her honours stolidly, but appreciated them none the less. After all, it was pleasant to be congratulated by the day girls; it made up in some slight degree for the humiliation of that afternoon when they had run away rather than witness the dramatic performance.

"We must practise together," she said to Annie; and Annie actually replied:

"I could stay half an hour every day after school, if you like."

This amnesty between the rivals, heard and reported by several listeners, surely seemed to pave the way for tomorrow's proposals. Avelyn's mental barometer stood at "high hopes". [231]

The Council Meeting was always held in the big schoolroom, and, by old-established rule, classes stopped at 3.30 instead of 4, so as to allow extra time for the proceedings. No mistresses were present, and the girls, within certain limits, were allowed to make any arrangements they thought fit for the ensuing term. The prefects took their places on the platform, and Adah, as head girl, acted chairman.

The room was very full. On the front benches sat rows of round-eyed youngsters, bare-legged, in the prevailing fashion for socks, with their hair tied with broad ribbons. Behind them were excitable pig-tailed juniors, wriggling restlessly in their seats, and continually letting their whispers rise to a murmur that called down rebuke from the platform. These were as sheep ready to follow any leader, and did not understand the objects of the meeting. They had come simply because they were told to do so, and because they thought it would be fun. The larger half of the school, girls from twelve to seventeen, were in a state of indecision. It had been rumoured that Annie Broadside intended to turn the Old Hawthorners' Hockey Club into a tennis club for the summer, and there was in certain quarters a strong feeling that they ought to support her. They wondered what was going to happen. Avelyn, with Laura, Janet, Irma, Ethelberga, Pamela, and several other "backers", sat at the end underneath the clock.

Adah began the proceedings by reading a report of the school activities for the previous term. [232] She made the very best of what she had to say, but it was felt to be a poor record. The societies and guilds had been decidedly languishing, and had achieved next to nothing. It was impossible to refer to them with any pride. There was perfunctory clapping, markedly half-hearted.

"Now we've got to decide on what we're going to do this term," continued Adah. "I suppose we shall have our usual societies—the Tennis Club, and the Cricket Club, and the Photographic Union. If anybody wants to make any suggestions, now is the time. This is an open meeting, and everyone who likes is at liberty to speak—in turn, of course. There may be some little points you'd like to bring up. Do so by all means. We prefects are perfectly willing to listen to you, and to discuss them."

Adah spoke in her usual rather patronizing fashion. Her words were succeeded by a dead hush. Everybody felt that there were not only little points, but very big points which needed to be raised, yet nobody seemed able to voice the general discontent. A whisper passed along some of the forms to the effect that day girls ought to have their rights. Adah watched the heads bent together and the moving lips.

"Speak to the chair, please!" she reminded them.

But at that they sat up silently.

Many of the audience wondered if Annie would take up the cudgels for the day girls and fight the question out upon the platform, but Annie made no sign. Was she thinking of the Old [233] Hawthorners' League, and would she perhaps again call a rival meeting on the common, as she had done in the autumn?

"Am I to take it that you consider former arrangements satisfactory?" asked Adah, frowning at some of the babies, who were playing with a celluloid ball.

Then Avelyn stood up.

"I should like very much to discuss one or two points, if I may," she began.

"Certainly! Go on!"

"Well, first of all I think we ought all to be rather ashamed of the report. For such a big school I certainly think we ought to have far more to show for ourselves."

Several of the prefects nodded, and began to look interested.

"There are nearly a hundred girls here this term, and we may call ourselves the principal school in Harlingden. We ought to take quite a place in the county, and challenge other schools

for matches. We haven't shone very much in games hitherto, have we?"

A discontented murmur replied from the benches. There was an electric thrill in the air. Avelyn took courage. At first her sentences had come hesitatingly; now that she warmed to her subject, her words flowed more easily. She had a sudden feeling that the Lavender Lady was thinking of her and inspiring her; the idea roused the utmost effort of which she was capable. She determined to speak boldly, and not beat about the bush. If she gave offence she could not help it. [234]

"What we want here is a spirit of union. If we all determine to stick together and back one another up at all costs, we might do great things. Don't let us have two parties. Let us forget any old squabbles, and be loyal to the school. I believe we've heaps of talent amongst us if it only gets a chance to come out. Let's remodel our societies on a new basis, and give the best places to whoever will gain the most credit for the school. Why shouldn't we try this year for the County Shield? With two such champions as Adah Gartley and Annie Broadside we ought to have a sporting chance. Just think if we could win the shield for Silverside! Then there's cricket. We can muster up strongly in that respect, too. Joyce Edwards, and Minnie Selburn, and Gladys Wilks, and Maggie Stuart would take a good deal of beating! We could get up a first-rate Eleven, and arrange some topping matches. Think how priceless it would be to go and watch them, and cheer on our own side!"

Avelyn paused for breath. She had spoken warmly, and the excitement had quite carried her away. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining. She had held the attention of the room with a kind of magnetism. All faces had been turned towards her, and her every word had been closely followed.

The girls now burst into a buzz of general conversation. Each wanted to discuss the matter with her neighbour. It was plain that the project was received with approval. Even the prefects were having a few private remarks among themselves. Joyce and Isobel in particular were nodding emphatically as if urging the project upon Adah. Annie whispered to Gladys, and they both spoke to Consie. All were looking expectantly towards Adah. The head girl rang the bell for silence. [235]

"What you say is very true. Silverside ought to take its proper place in games, and I think we all agree that a special effort should be made this summer. As this is a business meeting, will you please put what you wish to suggest in the form of a proposition?"

"Certainly. I beg to propose that we form a 'Loyal School League', the object of which shall be to advance in every way the credit of Silverside. We ought to have a President and several Vice-presidents, and a Committee, with two representatives from each of the upper forms. If any very important question arises we should have a Council Meeting of the whole school, and put the matter to the vote. I also propose that, for the sake of further cementing our unity, we adopt a new badge, and have for our colours pale-blue, pink, and navy. It would be an effective combination, and would mean a good deal to most of us. We would pledge ourselves to do our utmost for the new Silverside Colours."

As Avelyn again stopped, a roar of applause rose from the room. The girls were completely carried away by her idea; the blending of the badges seemed the one thing needed to unite the school. Though a few prejudiced "Old Silversiders", including Adah, looked rather blank, the majority, even among the boarders, were plainly in favour of the suggested change. [236]

"Does anybody second this proposition?" asked the head girl. "We prefects want to hear the view of the school."

A dozen stood up, anxious to speak. Adah nodded to Laura Talbot. Laura had been at Silverside five years, and was a dependable character, not easily carried away by tides of emotion. Her ideas might reasonably be the gauge of average popular opinion.

"I've been thinking for a long time that we ought to do something," said Laura. "It seems to me that a 'Loyal School League' just hits the nail. I believe we'll forge ahead this term and win laurels for our new colours. I have very great pleasure in seconding this proposition."

"Then I put it to the vote. All in favour kindly hold up their hands."

Every arm in the room shot up instantly. Adah looked at the waving show of hands before her, and realized that the general feeling of the school favoured unity. She had the sense to accept the situation in a generous spirit.

"Carried unanimously!" she declared, and turning round, smiled at Annie, who smiled back. The girls cheered, ostensibly at the carrying of the resolution, but partly to see the rival leaders on such affable terms.

"We want a president, and I propose Adah!" shouted Ethelberga. [237]

"And the rest of the prefects as vice-presidents!" amended Janet.

"Hear, hear!" came from the audience.

"And I," said Pamela, jumping up suddenly, "beg to propose that Avelyn, who suggested the whole idea of the League, shall be elected secretary."

"Rather!"

"Good biz!"

"Ave, by all means!"

"Oh, no, please! I don't want to grab any office for myself!" protested Avelyn.

"Nonsense! Brace up, child, for you'll have to do it!" urged Laura. "Why, you've brought about the whole business. Besides, you belong to both parties, so you'll bind us together as nobody else could."

"The missing link, in fact!" hinnied Irma, trying to be funny.

The meeting passed the remaining resolutions in good order, then broke up in a whirl of excited talk. A deputation of prefects visited Miss Thompson's study, and gave her a digest of the afternoon's proceedings. She listened approvingly.

"I'll order the new badges at once, and see about hiring a larger cricket field," she commented.

The Principal did not judge it discreet to say more to the girls, but over cocoa that evening with the mistresses she voiced her satisfaction.

"I knew they'd come round in time if we let them alone. You can't force these things. I suppose [238] it was only natural that the old school and the new should find some difficulty in mingling. Girls are queer creatures, and often very prejudiced. It won't have done them any harm to see what a poor record they made in games when they were striving for rival factions. I consider it an excellent object lesson. I expect they'll all try their best now, and practise away hard at cricket and tennis."

"I hoped it marked a new era when I saw Adah and Annie win that set at tennis," nodded Miss Peters.

"They're both excellent girls in their way, and should do great things for the school, if they'll only pull together," agreed Miss Hopkins.

Avelyn spent her half-hour of leisure that evening in writing to Miss Carrington.

"Darling Lavender Lady,

"I have actually done it! Or rather, *you* have done it, for it was entirely your idea. I can scarcely believe it is true, but the League is an accomplished fact, and the new colours, and all your dear jinky suggestions. I don't know how I had the cheek to stand on my legs and make the proposal before the whole school, but I thought of my promise to you, and I did it somehow. I hardly remember what I said. The girls are tremendously keen on the League; they say it's a topping notion. Can you believe it, darling? they've made me [239] secretary. Little me! I shall have to write the letters to other schools, challenging them to matches! I shall use the lovely new blotter you gave me.

"Good-bye, and thank you a hundred thousand times for everything you are to me!

"With love from
"Your devoted
Avelyn."

---

[240]

CHAPTER XIX

The Surprise Tree

Having once made up their minds to concentrate their united energies on establishing a record at games, the girls at Silverside set to work in dead earnest. They organized definite and systematic practice both at cricket and tennis, and tried to bring their play to a higher standard. They found much help in this respect from Miss Peters and Miss Leslie, who had come as new mistresses in September, and were keen on tennis and cricket. During the winter there had been no opportunity for them to display their talents, but now they proved invaluable as coaches. Both had been in large schools and thoroughly understood what was required. They encouraged the girls to arrange matches.

"It's worth it even if you're beaten," said Miss Leslie. "You see other people's play and learn to make a good fight. You can often pick up most valuable hints from your opponents. Some of the

best tips I ever had I got from a girl who invariably beat me."

[241] It was quite a novel state of affairs at Silverside for day pupils to stay after four o'clock and join the boarders in tennis court or cricket field, but after the first week the latter got used to the invasion of their privileges, and decided that the improvement in the general play was ample compensation. The new badges soon arrived, and everybody decided that the combination of pink, pale-blue, and navy was highly satisfactory. The Loyal School League seemed likely to forge ahead. Avelyn made a capital secretary; she was prompt and business-like, and, though she did not push herself forward unduly, she was always ready with helpful suggestions. At one of the committee meetings she started the idea of the Romp Day. It was the Lavender Lady who really thought of it—she inspired all Avelyn's best schemes. They had talked it over and planned it out in the little garden at Lyngates, where roses were now blooming instead of the wallflowers and aubrietia.

"I'm glad the League's prospering," she had said. "It's splendid how you're all working together now and coaching each other. It's a pity, though, if all this new spirit of helpfulness spends itself entirely on the school. It ought to find a wider outlet. You're having jolly times in the playing fields this term. Can't you pass on some of the fun to others who never get a chance to play games for themselves? I mean the little cripple children. There's a branch of the 'Poor Brave Things' Society in Harlingden. If Miss Thompson would let you give them an afternoon's outing they'd have the time of their lives. Could you possibly suggest it, do you think? I really believe it's [242] the sort of thing Silverside would enjoy."

The League and Miss Thompson justified the Lavender Lady's good opinion of them. They took up the idea with enthusiasm, and decided to organize a "Romp Day" for the crippled children. They communicated with the secretary of the "Poor Brave Things" Society, with the result that invitations were sent out to thirty little invalids to come to a picnic party in the garden at Silverside and be entertained. A special half-holiday was given for the occasion, and all the school was asked to unite in making the affair a success. Miss Thompson wished the day girls to stay to tea that afternoon, but catering was a difficulty. It was utterly impossible for her to provide a meal for a hundred and thirty children. The Food Controller rationed the school according to the number of its boarders. The Principal was inventive, however, and hit on an excellent solution of the problem. She asked each day girl to bring enough tea, sugar, milk, buns, and cake for her own consumption and for half the allowance for one guest, and in this way provided ample for everybody, without anyone being asked to give more than a very small contribution of food.

"Before the war I should have been horrified at the idea of inviting you to come to a party and bring your own provisions," said Miss Thompson. "In these days of semi-famine, however, we have to do many new and strange things. It's wonderful what we can get used to when we try."

[243] The girls themselves thought it was immense fun each to bring a little basket to make the feast.

"It's like an American tea," said Gladys Wilks. "I'm going to make some scones myself. We've got a quarter of a pound of sultanas hoarded up. We've been saving them for some great occasion; Mother said they'd do for my birthday cake, so I know she'll let me use them for this instead. I've got a topping recipe, if they only turn out as it says."

"Guess they'll be jolly nice. Bags me one if the cripples don't want them all!" declared Maggie. "You shall have a piece of my sandwich-cake instead."

"Look here," interrupted Gertrude; "this business isn't to be all tea and buns. We've got to give these kiddies a real good time. Suggestions, please! Don't all speak at once!"

"We're going to sing to them."

"And the Juniors are to do a dance."

"How about some gym display?"

"Um—tolerable! But my idea is that they won't want to sit and watch us perform the whole time. There ought to be something specially for themselves. Stop a minute! I've a brain wave! Don't speak to me! My mind's working."

The girls grinned expectantly, while Gertrude stood with finger uplifted for silence.

"Got it!" she proclaimed at last. "We'll have a Surprise Tree."

"What's that?"

[244] "Well, you can't exactly have a Christmas tree at this time of year, but we'll rig up something very like it. You know that little monkey-puzzler near the summer-house? We'll decorate it with streamers of paper and ornaments, and hang presents on with coloured ribbons. There must be one for each crippled child, or two if possible. Every girl in this school has got to bring a present."

Once the idea of providing suitable entertainment for their invalid guests was mooted, many suggestions were forthcoming. Vivian Roy, who was the lucky owner of a Shetland pony and a tiny basket cart, offered to bring these to school and take relays of children for drives round the garden. Sybil Beaumont undertook to lend a very superior gramophone; the mother of one of the Juniors promised to send oranges. Violet Parker told her aunt, the Mayoress, about the party, and that kind-hearted lady arranged to allow the use of her carriage for the afternoon, to carry some

of the children from their homes to the school and back. As means of conveyance were a real difficulty, several other parents followed her example and sent governess cars or hired cabs. It was a form of help for which the secretary of the "Poor Brave Things" was particularly grateful.

"You've no idea what trouble it is for their friends to bring them," she explained. "Unless they possess, or can borrow, some kind of invalid carriage it's an impossibility. Also many of them can't spare the time to do it. In the days of petrol plenty we used to have an annual outing for the children, and people lent their cars, but of course that is all stopped now." [245]

On the afternoon in question the numerous hostesses were waiting about in the garden long before their visitors were due. Each day girl had duly brought her basket, the contents of which were to be pooled for general consumption. The gramophone had been placed on a table outside, and the Shetland pony and cart were in readiness near the door.

"I expect there's been a terrific amount of washing and dressing and hair-curling going on," laughed Annie. "I hope the children will survive your scones, Gladys!"

"Don't be insulting! My scones are delicious! I've tasted them, so I know."

"You greedy thing!"

"Certainly not. I couldn't bring them without seeing whether they were fit to eat."

"I heroically didn't touch even a crumb of mine!"

"More goose you!"

"Don't spar," interrupted Gertrude. "Here comes the first contingent!"

It was the Mayoress's carriage, and it had brought six guests—such pathetic little people! Some of them had crutches, and could manage to walk, but others had to be wheeled up the drive in a Bath chair, which was waiting on purpose. A special corner of the garden, with couches and cosy seats, had been arranged for them, and each child as it arrived was taken there, two special hostesses being told off to look after it for the afternoon and make it happy. Avelyn, together with Laura, found herself in charge of a mite of a girl who looked about eight, but declared she was nearly thirteen. [246]

"It's the first time I've been out for ten weeks, miss," she said shyly. "I lie on my back most days."

"What do you do? Can you read?" asked Avelyn.

"Yes, when I get any books. Our District Visitor lends me some."

"Have you ever been to school?"

"Not since I was nine. It was at school I fell and hurt my back. It's been bad ever since."

The little visitors were evidently prepared to enjoy every moment of their party. They were given tea almost immediately, and did full justice to the various cakes and buns which the girls had brought for them. They listened smiling while the gramophone blared forth selections, and clapped their hands when the Juniors danced for their amusement. Those who could bear the jolting went for short drives in Vivian's pony carriage, but most of them were obliged to sit very still. One little fellow—the cheeriest of all—lay flat on a rug, with a cushion under his head.

As it would have been impossible to move all the children from one place to another, their special corner had been arranged round the Surprise Tree. The little monkey-puzzler presented a very gay appearance, for it had been decorated with Christmas-tree ornaments, coloured balls, and glass birds, crackers, oranges, and bags of sweets. Underneath were piled sixty interesting-looking parcels tied up with ribbons. Mabel Collinson, one of the Juniors, dressed as a fairy and attended by two Brownies, suddenly made her appearance among the bushes, and going up to the tree, began to strip its branches and hand sweets and crackers and oranges to the expectant children. The parcels came next. There were two apiece for them; and so well had the girls responded to the appeal for presents that gasps of astonishment and delight followed the unwrapping of the packages. "Oh's" and "Ah's" resounded on all sides. [247]

"It's too lovely, miss!" beamed Avelyn's little protégée, hugging a story-book in one arm and a work-basket in the other.

Her neighbour was rejoicing over a writing-case and a drawing-slate, and the tiny girl on the couch was kissing a doll. It was a pretty sight to see the poor little helpless creatures happy for one afternoon—pretty, but so pathetic that the tears swam in Miss Thompson's eyes. The contrast between these crippled children and her own sturdy girls seemed so acute.

"Please, m'm," volunteered one little boy, "Lizzie over there says she can say a piece of poetry if you'd like to hear her."

"By all means. We shall be only too pleased," returned Miss Thompson, going across to the small reciter and asking her to begin.

Lizzie was a diminutive, white-faced specimen of ten, with a crooked spine and big bright eyes. There was a large soul in the little body, and it showed when she began to speak. Her piece was a patriotic one, and she said it well. The Silverside girls who were near enough to hear her [248]

applauded heartily, and those who were too far off to catch a word clapped too, out of sympathy. Finding that everyone was interested, Miss Thompson asked some of the other children to recite. Most of them were too bashful, but one or two consented, and shyly murmured a few verses. None, however, had the fire and spirit of Lizzie, who was quite the star of the company. She departed, beaming with pride at having distinguished herself, and clasping a poetry book which Miss Peters had hurriedly fetched from her bedroom and presented to her.

"It was the nicest party we've ever had at the school," said Laura, watching as the last of the little guests was lifted into a Bath chair to be wheeled home. "There was no mistake about their enjoying themselves at any rate."

"They've had the time of their lives, bless 'em!" agreed Janet.

There was much to tell the Lavender Lady when Friday came round again. Lately she had grown to be the centre of all Avelyn's actions. She was always so ready to take a sympathetic interest in things, and Daphne—Daphne, who of yore was the recipient of innumerable confidences—had somehow been growing self-absorbed. She would sit and stitch with a far-away look in her eyes, while Avelyn poured out school news, and her occasional comments showed that [249] she was not really listening.

"She's getting so horribly grown-up!" complained her injured sister. "She's not the same girl she used to be. I feel as if she had drifted miles away in the last few months. Quite suddenly she seems ten years older than David and Tony and me. I don't like it!"

"You must let Daphne have her innings," said Mrs. Watson. "You'll have your own some day. She can't remain a child always. I think on the whole she's very good to you younger ones. It's only natural she should begin to like the society of older people now. Her life is just opening out. You mustn't expect her to give up her whole time to yourself and the boys. Do be nice about it, Ave! Be proud that you've got such a pretty sister, and glad for her to enjoy herself."

That was certainly a different way of looking at it. Avelyn felt self-reproachful. She remembered that she had not troubled to listen when Daphne consulted her as to whether a pink or a mauve voile blouse would look best with her new costume; just at the moment school affairs had seemed so much more interesting than her sister's clothes.

"I suppose I'm a selfish beast!" she said to herself. "The next time Daphne's going out to tea anywhere I'll sit in her bedroom while she dresses and hold hairpins for her, or anything else she wants. The worst of it is, though, she doesn't always want me! Just at present I believe she'd any [250] time rather have Jimmy!"

Jimmy was Daphne's little fox terrier. That is to say, he was hers temporarily, for he really belonged to Captain Harper. She had mentioned one day that she would like a small dog of her very own, and the young officer had looked thoughtful. The next week he had turned up, accompanied by Jimmy.

"I wish you'd accept him!" he said. "He's my dog, but I can't keep him at the Camp. I've had him boarded out in Starbury since I've been stationed here, and yesterday I went over and fetched him."

"I'll have him as a loan and take care of him till you want him again," agreed Daphne, "but I won't take him right away from you. It wouldn't be fair."

"Yes, it would, if I wanted to give him. He's the best little chap out. You'll find him a kind of epitome of the Catechism combined with all the cardinal virtues. Jimmy, make your bow!"

The little fox terrier, which sat up and saluted at its master's word of command, seemed a sharp and intelligent specimen of the canine race, and when it snuggled its nose in Daphne's hand it completely conquered her heart.

"Won't he want to run back to his master?" she asked.

"No, he has his orders and understands perfectly. I've explained the situation to him, and you'll find he won't attempt to leave you. He's prepared to carry a stick or an umbrella, mount guard [251] over coats, bark at tramps, worry rats, or demolish burglars."

Jimmy's subsequent behaviour certainly justified the character Captain Harper had given him. Having been solemnly made over by his master, he seemed to realize his responsibilities, and attached himself to Daphne with all the strength of his doggy nature. His manners were excellent. He would lie curled up on the rug at meal-times, and did not beg until he had received express permission, only winking an occasional pathetic eye in the direction of the table.

"I'm sure he understands every single word I say to him," said Daphne, who idolized her new possession. "I don't know how I should get along without him now."

"What will you do if you have to give him back?" asked Avelyn.

"It hasn't come to giving him back yet," evaded Daphne.

But on the very Saturday after the Surprise Tree party the question cropped up. Captain Harper had come over to Walden to fulfil a promise of making a fresh door for one of the chicken coops. He had taken possession of the carpentry room in the cottage, and was working away at the joiner's bench. Daphne held the wire steady, and Avelyn—with a strong sense that she was not wanted—handed the nails. Jimmy lay at his ease upon the shavings and yawned. His attitude of complete comfort attracted attention.

"If you're really sent back to Starbury next month you'll have to take him with you," commented [252] Daphne.

"I never take back a present I've once given," answered the Captain firmly. "We've argued that out before."

"But for Jimmy's sake? He loves you far the best still. I'm only a makeshift."

"I assure you he doesn't."

"Then how can we tell his preference?"

"Let him decide for himself. You stand over there and I'll stand here, and we'll both call him at once and see which he runs to."

Poor Jimmy, a much-perplexed and agitated dog, rose from his bed of shavings and remained in the middle of the floor, whimpering and looking with indecision towards the master who had brought him up from puppyhood, and the sweet young mistress who had won his heart. Then he made a rush towards the former, and, seizing him by the trouser, hauled him across the room in the direction of Daphne.

"Jimmy has solved the matter!" said Captain Harper. "He wants us both to own him!"

And at that point Avelyn felt that her presence grew so very *de trop*, that she murmured some excuse about finishing her lessons, and made her exit from the cottage, leaving her sister and Captain Harper to settle the disputed question of ownership in their own fashion.

"I suppose this is growing up," ruminated Avelyn, as she crossed the yard and went into the [253] orchard. "Daphne seems to enjoy it, and I'll give her her innings by all manner of means. How funny it would be to have a brother-in-law! It'll come to that some day if I'm not mistaken. No, thanks! I don't want to grow up just yet myself. Perhaps I'll change my mind later on, but at the present time I'd ever so much rather be a schoolgirl!"

---

[254]

CHAPTER XX

Pamela's Secret

In her love-making with the Lavender Lady Avelyn had, truth to tell, rather neglected Pamela. Their friendship had always been more or less of a spasmodic character. They often met on the road on Monday mornings, and travelled in the same compartment of the train, and they would return from Harlingden together on Friday afternoons. Generally they talked the ordinary schoolgirl chatter about Silverside doings. Pamela rarely mentioned her own concerns. Very occasionally she would make some reference to past adventures in America, but about her present home she was extremely reserved. She seemed to shut up and freeze at once at the slightest allusion to Moss Cottage.

Though she had accepted several invitations to Walden, she had never asked Avelyn to tea for a return visit. There was an air of mystery about her that increased rather than diminished with their further acquaintance. To Avelyn she always seemed like a disinherited princess. She was sure that Pamela brooded over the fact that the Lyngates estate should have been hers. Her [255] uncle's name was never mentioned between them.

Since the evening when he had tried to cut down the barrier over the brook at Walden, the Watsons had seen little of Mr. Hockheimer. He had not again attempted to interfere with their property. He seemed to spend a good deal of his time in London, but made flying visits every week to the Hall. People in the neighbourhood gave him the cold shoulder. Though he was generous in subscribing to local charities, he was certainly not popular. The general feeling was one of mistrust. Nothing certain had ever been brought against him, but the fact of his German nationality remained. It was whispered that but for influence in high quarters he would have been interned.

Whether Mr. Hockheimer was or was not aware of the rumours that were being circulated in his disfavour it was impossible to tell. He never came to church, seldom appeared in the village. He was more strict than ever against trespassing in his woods, though other landlords in the district had been lax in that respect since the beginning of the war. The Watsons disliked him so

much that they avoided him whenever possible; if they saw him walking along the village street they would dive down a side lane or run up into the churchyard. They thoroughly pitied Pamela for being dependent upon him.

Since the memorable morning when she had climbed over the palings into the garden, and had hidden inside the stable, Avelyn had never visited Moss Cottage. She was sure that she had then [256] almost surprised some secret. Pamela, indeed, had been on the very verge of telling her. Her friend's confidential mood had passed, however, and a wall of reserve had taken its place.

One Saturday Avelyn, taking out her home work, made the horrible discovery that she had left her history in her locker at school. To go to Miss Thompson's class with an unprepared lesson meant trouble. The only way out of the difficulty was to walk over and borrow from Pamela, who, though in a lower form, used the same textbook for history.

This time she did not venture to climb over the palings, but knocked at the door in orthodox fashion. It was opened by Pamela herself, who beamed a welcome.

"Come in! I'm all alone. Mother's gone to the station. I was just getting horribly tired of being by myself. It's perfectly lovely to see you! My history? Yes, you shall have it, certainly. I've learnt my lesson. But come in and have a chat. I was sitting in the garden. Shall we go out there?"

Avelyn much preferred the garden to the rather dark little sitting-room. The girls went to a shady corner under a tree, where Pamela had spread a rug and cushions. They settled themselves down leisurely and began to talk.

"What's this you've got here?" asked Avelyn presently, taking up a Prayer Book that was lying on the rug, opened at the last page. "Are you studying the Table of Articles? You surely don't [257] have to learn that in your Scripture lesson? We did the 'Book of Common Prayer' last term, but we didn't take the Articles."

"I'm not looking at those," said Pamela. "I'm looking at the Table of Kindred and Affinity. I want to find out whom a man may marry and whom he mayn't. He mustn't marry his wife's daughter's daughter, or his brother's son's wife, or his mother's brother's wife, but may he marry his deceased wife's deceased brother's wife?"

"Goodness, child, I'm sure I don't know! Why do you ask?"

Pamela shut the Prayer Book with a bang.

"It's Uncle!" she said vehemently. "He's behaving in such an extraordinary way! Oh, Ave! Do you know, I believe he's trying to make up to Mother! Don't look so incredulous! I mean it! I must tell somebody, or I shall burst! I've kept it all in long enough. Too long! Ave, did the boys ever tell you about that letter they found inside the Latin dictionary? I can see by your face that they did. Well, I brought it home and laid it on the table, and, before Mother had time to look at it, it disappeared. Uncle had been here, and I *know* he took it! He must certainly have done so."

"He did! I can tell you that," returned Avelyn, and she confided to her friend what her brothers had witnessed in the wood, how Mr. Hockheimer had been on the point of burning the paper when Spring-heeled Jack had appeared and run away with it. Pamela listened with intense eagerness.

"That explains so much!" she gasped. "I don't know what was in the letter, but I imagine it may [258] have been my grandfather's will. If it was, and he left the estate to Daddy, no wonder Uncle Fritz tried to burn it. He didn't quite succeed, and this bogy-spectre-highwayman, or whatever he is, has scooted off with it. Uncle knows it's still in existence, and that any day it might be produced, and he might be turned out of the Hall. He's trying to guard against that, and he's playing a very deep game. He thinks that if he were to marry Mother, as he married poor Aunt Dora, he'd secure the estate to himself a second time."

"Does your Mother like him?"

"Not really. I believe she's frightened of him. He makes her do anything he tells her. You don't know how dreadfully worried I am about it. If I had him for a stepfather I should run away. I'd rather join the gipsies than live with him. Oh, if we could only get on the track of that paper! Has nothing more been heard of Spring-heeled Jack?"

"Nothing at all since the autumn. He appeared just for a short time, and then vanished again."

"And no one ever knew who he was?"

"Not a soul."

Pamela gave a long sigh.

"He has the secret—whatever it is. Who knows whether I'll ever find it. Ave," here Pamela lowered her voice, "I've got a secret too! I've been longing and yearning to tell it to you—a dozen times I've had it on the tip of my tongue, and then I've felt afraid and stopped. I kept waiting, hoping to find out more, but I can't find out by myself. I want help." [259]

"What do you mean?"

"Come, and I'll show you. We have the place to ourselves to-day. Uncle is in town. I saw him

going to the station this morning, so he's not likely to burst in and interrupt us."

Pamela rose and led the way down the garden to the stable where Avelyn had surprised her before. It was locked, but she took a key from a hiding-place under a stone, and undid the padlock. She motioned her friend to go up the ladder, and followed her. The room above was a bare loft. It was not quite empty, however, for in the corner stood a small table, with an object on it that looked like the receiver of a telephone.

"Come here!" said Pamela.

She took up the instrument and placed it on her friend's head. It had a band which fitted across the forehead, and a receiver for each ear. A cord connected it with the wall.

"Do you hear anything?" asked Pamela.

"Yes, a sort of humming."

Pamela smiled significantly, and put back the instrument on the table.

"What is it?" breathed Avelyn, rather awed.

"Wireless messages. Uncle spends hours here."

"Do you mean to say this is a wireless station?"

Pamela nodded.

"But they're not allowed."

"I know that perfectly well."

"If it were found out he could be arrested."

"He deserves to be. Sometimes I wish he were." [260]

"Does your mother know?"

"No, I'm sure she doesn't. She never comes to the stable, and if she did she wouldn't climb the ladder. Sometimes Uncle is very keen about the messages. He makes me stay here, with the receiver on my head, listening for them, while he sits in the cottage talking to Mother, and drinking brandy which he brings in a flask. When I hear that humming noise I have to go and tell him, and he flies down to the stable."

"Can you understand the messages?"

"No. It's something like ordinary telegraphy, I suppose, and I don't know the code. I wish I did."

"I can't imagine how this wireless apparatus hasn't been discovered!"

"It's so well hidden. The poles go right up among the boughs of the tree."

"I don't think you ought to keep this secret any longer, Pam."

"No more do I, but I've never dared to tell it to a soul before. Uncle would kill me if he knew I'd brought you in here to-day. What must I do?"

Avelyn hesitated.

"I'd like to ask somebody. Could you come home with me this afternoon? Can you leave the house?"

"I'd lock the door and put the key under a stone, where Mother would find it if she gets back first. Ave, I'm just about desperate! I'd do anything to end the life I'm living now. There's treachery of some sort going on, I believe, and I'm being wound up in it without my knowledge [261] and against my will. My father gave his life for his country. Is his daughter to help to betray it? Never! Never in this world! I'd suffer torture first. Oh, I wish I were braver! Sometimes I'm a terrible coward, and I feel so horribly afraid of Uncle Fritz. You don't know how he frightens me. My nerves are all on edge."

"Come home with me, dear," said Avelyn soothingly. "If you'll let me ask Mother, I believe she'd know what we ought to do."

Pamela was very much upset, and seemed almost hysterical. Her hands trembled, and she wiped tell-tale drops from her eyes. She climbed down the ladder, padlocked the stable door again, went into the house for her hat and the history book, locked the front door, hid the key in the rockery, and pronounced herself ready to start.

Avelyn was glad to have persuaded her so easily. Her own mind was in a whirl. To have found a wireless telegraphy installation in the old stable was indeed a discovery which would very seriously implicate Mr. Hockheimer. The responsibility of the knowledge was too great to be borne only by two schoolgirls; it must be shared by some older and wiser person.

The friends walked silently along the road. At the corner by the oak wood they met David and Anthony. At sight of them the boys came running forward in much excitement.

"We've just seen Spring-heeled Jack again!" they cried.

This was indeed a piece of news. Spring-heeled Jack, who had vanished from the neighbourhood since the autumn! For the moment it even threw wireless telegraphy into the shade. [262]

"Where? When?" exclaimed the girls eagerly.

"Just a minute ago. We were up the bank there after a butterfly, and he came bounding past and jumped into the wood."

"Which way did he go?"

Anthony pointed a stumpy finger to indicate the direction. Pamela set her teeth.

"I'm going after him," she announced.

The Watsons stared at her amazed. Spring-heeled Jack had been the terror of the village, and Pamela was not altogether conspicuous for courage.

"I must find him! I must!" she continued. "It's the only chance of getting that lost paper!" And climbing over the palings she scrambled into the wood among the bracken.

The Watsons were not a family to desert a chum. David and Anthony were after her in half a second, and Avelyn followed as quickly as her feminine skirts allowed. Her heart was beating violently. Whether the object of their search was human or spectral he was equally a cause for alarm. They could hear sounds higher up the wood. Pamela was running fast and so were the boys.

There was a sudden, unearthly yell, and a dark, masked figure came bounding towards them in a series of wild leaps. Man, monkey, or bogy, it jumped with incredible speed. The boys set up a shout and dashed towards it, but it gave an enormous leap and sprang past them. It would have [263] got clean away but for a tangled bramble bush that broke its course. The next moment it was sprawling among the bracken. The boys rushed upon it, and while David pinned it down Anthony tore off the black mask. To their utter amazement it revealed the well-known features of their friend, Captain Harper.

At the sight of their blank faces he burst out laughing.

"The game's up at last!" he hinnied. "I saw it was you kids, and I couldn't resist giving you a scare. I don't know that I meant to let you find me out, though. If I hadn't tumbled I'd have got off. What have I been masquerading like this for?" He suddenly looked grave. "That's a little business of my own. I wanted to find out something, and I thought I'd raise a rumour that might keep the woods clear of ordinary trespassers. How did I do it? Easy enough, some theatrical togs I had by me, and springs on my heels."

"We've seen you before in this rig-out," volunteered Anthony.

"When?"

"When you pounced on Mr. Hockheimer and stopped him burning a letter."

"We were there watching," echoed David.

"Oh, have you got the paper still? It was mine!" cried Pamela breathlessly.

It was Captain Harper's turn to be astonished.

"Yours! What had it to do with you?" he asked sharply.

Pamela and Avelyn explained between them. He took a cigarette from his pocket and lighted it [264] as he listened.

"This is quite another development," he commented. "Part of the paper was burnt. I couldn't understand the drift of it."

"Have you got it still?" besought Pamela.

"No, I gave it to my superior officer. But if it is of such importance as you say I could get it examined on your behalf. I'll speak to my Colonel about it. It's worth investigating."

"Pam!" said Avelyn impulsively, bending her head and whispering in her friend's ear, "do you know, I believe it would be the best thing in the world to tell Captain Harper what you've told me this afternoon. He'd know better even than Mother what you ought to do."

"You tell him—I daren't," faltered Pamela.

If Captain Harper had been astonished before, he was doubly amazed now.

"Great Scott! It's the very thing I've been on the scent of for this six months!" he ejaculated. "We guessed there was a wireless somewhere over here, but never could locate it. And to think I owe it to you kids! Pamela, you're a true loyal little Englishwoman! I think you'll find you'll pretty soon be rid of that precious uncle of yours."

"What must I do about it?" asked Pamela, who was half crying.

Captain Harper did not at once reply. He seemed cogitating. Then his face cleared.

"Nothing at present," he replied. "I pledge you all on your word of honour to mention this [265] business to nobody. We'll leave the wireless where it is, and get the messages if possible—that's our game! Pamela, could you manage to learn the Morse code if I taught you?"

"I'd try."

"I'll undertake you'd soon learn it. Then what you've got to do is to listen at the receiver and report to us. I can tell you, you may be working an uncommonly important little bit of business. Don't cry, child! The fellow is only your uncle by marriage. He's no blood relation of yours. Think of your father! You're doing your duty by your country as every true-born Britisher ought."

---

[266]

CHAPTER XXI

Pamela's Night Walk

Pamela went back to Moss Cottage with new courage. The secret, which had almost overwhelmed her when she had tried to bear it alone, assumed a different aspect now she shared it with her friends. Captain Harper had taken the full responsibility of the affair, and as one of His Majesty's officers she knew he could be trusted. She placed herself entirely in his hands, and followed his directions implicitly. To keep watch without arousing her uncle's suspicions was to be her present rôle. Under cover of going to tea with the Watsons, she met Captain Harper at Walden, and learnt from him the Morse code. Once she had mastered that, she was able to write down some of the wireless messages. To her they were absolutely unintelligible, for they were in cipher, but she made a faithful record of what she heard through the receiver, and sent it by David or Anthony to the young officer.

For the moment Captain Harper acknowledged himself baffled.

"We have the keys to a number of ciphers, but there's one here we don't understand. It's solely for this reason we're allowing this wireless apparatus at Moss Cottage to remain where it is. [267] Pamela must use all her ingenuity to discover the key to the cipher. She's the only person who has the opportunity of doing so. If we were to arrest Mr. Hockheimer at once we might or might not find treasonable papers upon him. It is doubtful if we should learn his secret."

To David and Anthony the affair was of the supremest interest. They envied Pamela her unique chance of serving her country. They were glad enough to be employed as carriers, and would take the notes from her when they met her in the morning, and, according to arrangement, convey them to Captain Harper. Sometimes they took them direct to the Camp, after they returned from school, and sometimes they handed them to an orderly who would be strolling about near the station. As for Pamela, she lived from day to day in a ferment of expectation, waiting and watching for her opportunity. And one evening she found it. Mr. Hockheimer had come, as was his custom, to Moss Cottage, and had set his niece to listen for messages while he took his ease in the house. For an hour or more Pamela had sat with the receiver to her ears, but had heard nothing. At last came the familiar humming. She jotted down the letters, put the paper safely in her pocket, and ran up the garden to warn her uncle. That night he had been drinking more heavily than usual. He lurched in his walk as he approached the stable, and it was with difficulty that he climbed the ladder. Pamela followed him nervously. His hands shook as he fitted on the receiver, but he nevertheless took down the message. Then he paused, and seemed to be [268] calculating something out on the paper. She crept a little nearer. He was too muddled to realize her approach. She peeped over his shoulder unnoticed. In his half-drunken condition he was working out the cipher and writing it down. She copied it word by word. It was in German.

"U-boot auf Aermelmeere heute Abend. Zeigen Licht auf Berry Head."

Pamela backed away cautiously towards the ladder. Just as she reached it her uncle turned round and called to her.

"Give me a hand, Pam! Don't feel—very well to-night," he stammered thickly. "Got to go out, too. Must go home and get the car. Little store of petrol they don't know about! And I shan't tell them either!" (He hinnied at his own joke.) "Give me your hand."

He leaned heavily on his niece, and she helped him down the ladder. She watched him as he stumbled along the narrow path in the darkness. He called to her, but she did not follow him to the cottage. Instead, she went to the palings and scrambled over into the high road. She surmised that she had surprised a most important secret, one which she felt must be communicated at once to head-quarters. It was absolutely necessary that Captain Harper should know of this. By warning him in time she might prevent some great disaster. She must get to the Camp as quickly as possible. It was late, long past eleven o'clock (Mr. Hockheimer had had no [269] compunction in keeping his niece out of bed to mind his business), and the night was moonless. Pamela shuddered as she thought of the long, lonely walk before her. Could she find the Camp in

the dark? A sudden inspiration struck her. She would hurry to the Watsons instead and ask one of the boys to go on a bicycle. She ran almost all the way along the familiar road to Walden. She found the house shut up and the family gone to bed, but she made a rat-tat with the knocker that soon roused them.

"What is it?" cried David out of the window.

"It's I—Pamela! I've brought news!" she gasped.

The Watsons were downstairs directly. They listened breathlessly to the story she had to tell. David and Anthony hurried to the outhouse for their bicycles, and set off at once for the Camp to find Captain Harper. Who could say how much might depend on their speed?

Pamela watched them go with a feeling of intense relief. Her part of the business was finished; she had now set the machinery in motion that would accomplish the rest. The reaction after the intense strain was so great that she burst into tears.

"I must go home!" she sobbed. "Mother will think I am lost!"

"Daphne and I will go with you. I can't let you walk back alone at this time of night," said Mrs. Watson kindly. "If you'll take my advice, dear, you'll tell your mother everything now. She ought to know."

Pamela's friends escorted her to the door of Moss Cottage and left her there. What explanation [270]
she gave to her mother they never knew. They feared there was great unpleasantness in store for the Reynolds, for Mr. Hockheimer was sure to be arrested, and the fact that it must be through his niece's instrumentality only seemed to make matters worse. David and Anthony returned with the news that they had roused Captain Harper at the Camp, and that after reading the message he had ridden off immediately upon his motor bicycle. They went to bed wondering what would be happening while they slept.

The boys looked out for Pamela next morning on the road to the station, but she was not there. The train for once went without her. They spent an agitated day at school and hurried back from Netherton that afternoon at topmost speed. They found Captain Harper in the garden at Walden. He looked very grave.

"Do you know what that message was you brought me?" he asked. "Translated into English it meant, 'U-boat in Channel to-night. Show light on Berry Head.' I hear a certain important vessel had an extremely narrow escape last night. The wireless apparatus at Moss Cottage has been taken down already. The police went up there this morning."

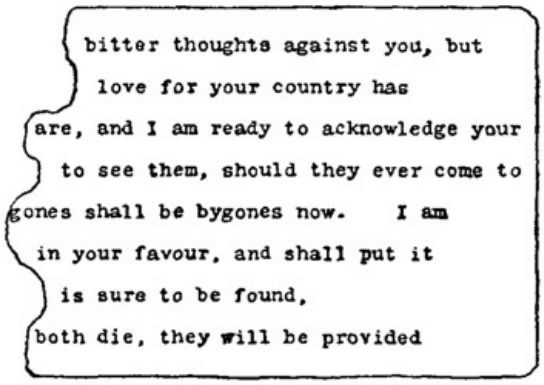
"And Mr. Hockheimer?"

Captain Harper knocked the end off his cigarette before he answered.

"Mr. Hockheimer has gone to settle his great account. He and his car were found in the river at
Chadwick this morning. The road turns at a very sharp angle there on to the bridge, and it is [271]
thought that in the darkness he missed his way and went over the bank. There is not a shadow of doubt that he was going to give signals to the enemy. We had long suspected him as a spy, and part of my business down here had been to watch him. In the circumstances this has been the most merciful thing that could have happened. For the sake of the Reynolds we are hushing the matter up. There is no need for it to be bruited about the neighbourhood. Your family are the only people who have any knowledge of the affair. I can trust you to keep it from going further."

"On our honour!" the boys assured him.

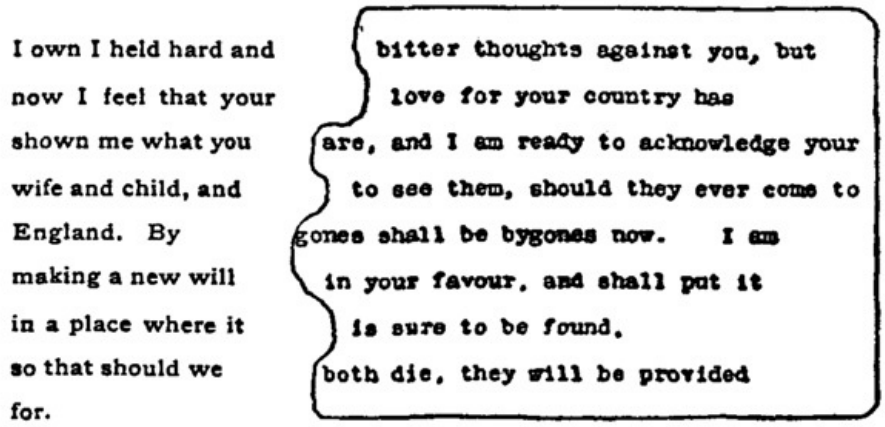
The "sad fatality at Chadwick Bridge" made a sensation in the local newspapers. An inquest was held on Mr. Hockheimer, and a verdict of "Death from misadventure" returned. Though many people in the neighbourhood may have had their suspicions as to the nature of his errand on that dark night, no evidence of an incriminating nature was brought before the coroner. He was buried at Lyngates in the Reynolds's family vault, where his wife had been carried two years before. He had left no will, and the question of who was to inherit the Lyngates property might be a matter for Chancery to settle. By the advice of the old solicitor who had managed the estate for many years, Mrs. Reynolds and Pamela took temporary possession of the Hall until a claim could be set up on their behalf. At the time of Squire Reynolds's death it had been the current gossip of
the village that some later will than the one proved must be in existence. If such a will had been [272]
made, however, it had never been found. The only possible clue seemed to be the letter that David and Anthony had found inside the Latin dictionary, which had fallen into the hands of Mr. Hockheimer, and had been so strangely rescued from destruction by Captain Harper when masquerading as Spring-heeled Jack. The latter reported that at the time he had examined the half-burnt sheet, anticipating that it might contain treasonable correspondence, but had been unable to make sense of it. In accordance with instructions he had handed it over to his Colonel, and he supposed it would now be filed in the Secret Service Department. Red tape might prevent repossession of the original, but he was using his influence to obtain a copy. After considerable delay a reply came from the War Office to the effect that the paper in question appeared to have been partially burnt, but that the remaining fragment ran as follows:—


bitter thoughts against you, but
love for your country has
are, and I am ready to acknowledge your
to see them, should they ever come to
gones shall be bygones now. I am
in your favour, and shall put it
is sure to be found,
both die, they will be provided

bitter thoughts against you, but
love for your country has
are, and I am ready to acknowledge your
to see them, should they ever come to
gones shall be bygones now. I am
in your favour, and shall put it
is sure to be found,
both die, they will be provided

WHO COULD SAY HOW MUCH MIGHT DEPEND ON THEIR SPEED?

"I'm afraid it's no use in a court of law, Pamela," said Captain Harper, as he showed her the copy of the paper. "It's the merest scrap. By imagining the missing words we might make it into something like this; but imagination won't give it legal value. Here's what I fancy it may have been:" [273]



I own I held hard and bitter thoughts against you, but
now I feel that your love for your country has
shown me what you are, and I am ready to acknowledge your
wife and child, and to see them, should they ever come to
England. By gones shall be bygones now. I am
making a new will in your favour, and shall put it
in a place where it is sure to be found,
so that should we both die, they will be provided
for.

"If this surmise is correct," continued Captain Harper, "and there really was a new will, it may possibly be hidden somewhere at the Hall."

"We've searched everywhere," said Pamela sadly. "Two lawyer's clerks have been here and gone through every morsel of paper in the house, and turned out every drawer and cupboard. I think myself that perhaps Uncle Fritz may have found it and destroyed it. Mother and I spend all our spare time looking, but we never have any luck. I don't think we're lucky people. We seem just to have misfortune after misfortune. It has always been like this all our lives."

"Cheer up! It's a long lane that has no turning," comforted Captain Harper. "I advise you to [274] show this paper to your solicitor, though I'm afraid it's nothing to go by."

Pamela's affairs did indeed seem to have reached a crisis. Her fortunes were much discussed in the neighbourhood, and general opinion decided that she would have difficulty in establishing legally her right to what undoubtedly ought to be hers. Several naturalized German relations of Mr. Hockheimer had put in counter-claims for the estate. There was likely to be a long and expensive lawsuit before the case was settled.

Then one day a wonderful thing occurred—an utterly unexpected and marvellous thing, but one that—thank God!—has happened in other families since the war began. The postwoman who delivered the letter did not know that it differed from other letters; she popped it through the slit in the front door and rang the bell as usual, and went on her way, all unsuspecting what news she had left behind her. Yet when Mrs. Reynolds saw the handwriting on the envelope she gave a little sharp cry and fainted away. Pamela did not go to school that day nor the next. She wrote to Avelyn to explain her absence. The latter read the letter twice before her amazed brain could really grasp its contents.

"My dear Ave,

"I hardly know how to tell you our good luck. Daddy is alive! He wasn't killed at Mons after all. He was taken prisoner and never reported. He was kept most fearfully strictly in a fortress and allowed no news of the outside world. [275] He and a companion spent eighteen months making a tunnel out of their cell, and after simply thrilling adventures they escaped, and swam a river and got into Swiss territory. He's coming home, and Mother and I are going up to London to meet him. We're almost off our heads!

"Will you please tell Miss Thompson this is why I'm not at school? We start for town to-morrow morning.

"Much love from
"Pam."

It was indeed a most happy ending to all the troubles of poor Mrs. Reynolds and Pamela. By the will which had already been proved, Captain Reynolds inherited his father's estate, which had

only passed to the daughter Dora in default of a male heir. He was soon able to settle up the legal side of the matter and to obtain formal possession of the whole property.

"I've made my own will now, and left everything safely tied up for you and your Mother before I go out to the front again," he told his daughter.

"Oh, Daddy! must you leave us and go back to France?" wailed Pamela.

"Every hour I spent in that fortress, Pam, made me all the more resolved to help to fight this war to the finish. Would you want me to shirk and fail my country? I know you better than that. Tell me again what you told me in 1914."

And Pamela stood up straight, and with a light in her eyes repeated: [276]

"Though it tear and break my heart
I let you go.
When the Motherland is calling,
Be it so!
Let my own poor need and grief
Be set aside,
That justice and the right
May now abide.

"God put courage and true might
In your arm!
May His mercy keep your life
Safe from harm!
Every hour my earnest prayer
Shall be this:
May we meet and greet again
With a kiss."

---

[277]

CHAPTER XXII

The Lecture Hall is Dedicated

Ever since the laying of the foundation stone in January the new Lecture Hall had been in process of construction. Owing to the war, and the scarcity of labour, it made slow progress. Sometimes the building went on with a spurt, and sometimes for weeks nothing at all was done. Those optimists who had prophesied that it would be in readiness after the Easter holidays found themselves much mistaken. After innumerable delays and disappointments, however, the place was finished by the end of the summer term, and Miss Thompson decided to combine its opening with the annual prize-giving.

The double function marked a great occasion in the annals of the school. The increased accommodation would allow a large gathering, and many invitations were sent forth. It was even whispered that the chair was to be taken by the local Member of Parliament.

"Silverside's coming on no end!" said Consie Arkwright. "We never used to have such grandees down. Miss Thompson used to be content with some ordinary clergyman or elderly professor, to [278] give the prizes, and now she won't look at anybody below a bishop, or a mayor, or an M.P."

"She loves these functions!" chuckled Joyce. "She's perfectly happy when she has on her best dress and her company smile, and is showing off the school to an admiring crowd of visitors. I won't say that I don't rather enjoy it myself. It makes one feel in the world somehow. It's jolly nice to think that Silverside is of so much importance in the town."

"Bet we'll make a good show-up on Dedication Day!" commented Laura, who had drifted into the conversation. "Hopscotch was saying something about the whole school in white dresses and our badges. By the by, Miss Thompson's got a little surprise for us. She's been having some beautiful ribbon, in the school colours, specially woven for Silverside. She showed it to Adah and me this morning in the study, and I can tell you it's topping! We're each to have a piece of it for our hair, and wear it on the great day, so that we all look alike. She's having new hat bands woven, too, for next term. I think they'll be rather smart."

"I begin to wish I wasn't leaving," said Isobel almost mournfully. "Really, Silverside has been much jollier lately than it used to be. It would have been ripping fun to stop another year and work up the hockey, as we've done the cricket and tennis."

"There'll be something to read out in the Games Report this time!" purred Joyce.

"It'll be precious!" agreed Consie.

The Principal was naturally anxious that her pupils should make a good display on so important [279]
an occasion. She arranged a very carefully-thought-out programme of the ceremony. There were to be speeches by local magnates, the School Report must be read, the hall dedicated, and the prizes distributed. She decided that her pupils ought to sing one or two suitable songs, and she came in to the singing class one morning to discuss the matter with Miss Webster, and hear the girls run through a few glees. She found it difficult to make a choice.

"They're nice in their way, but not altogether what is needed. I should have liked something really appropriate to a Dedication. In fact, I'm afraid I want what I am not at all likely to get—a special song composed for Silverside."

"Could we adapt anything?" suggested Miss Webster, rapidly turning over a pile of music, while the class, deeply interested, sat listening to the discussion.

"Not much use without new words. Pity we have no poet in the school! If there had been time, I'd have written to a music publisher and asked if it would be possible to have a song composed for us. It's too late now. I wish I'd thought of it sooner!"

"Oh, Miss Thompson," said Avelyn, suddenly springing to her feet and blushing hotly at her own temerity, "I know a lady who writes songs! She's very much interested in Silverside—I've told her so much about it. I really believe if I asked her she'd make up just what you want. She's quite [280]
clever enough to do it."

Miss Thompson's convex glasses were focused on Avelyn in a stare of astonished gratification. She literally jumped at the idea.

"If you think your friend would really be so kind," she assented, "we should be most grateful to her. Where does she live? At Lyngates? Then write to her this afternoon, and see if you can persuade her to take pity on us. I suppose she would know the sort of thing we want?"

"I'll explain exactly," promised Avelyn, sitting down, conscious that in the eyes of the class she had covered herself with glory. She was excused "English language" that afternoon for the purpose of writing her letter to Miss Carrington, and sat with her blotter—an object of much envy —while the remainder of the form wrestled with Anglo-Saxon derivations.

"I don't think my Lavender Lady will fail me!" she murmured as she stamped her envelope. "I believe it's just the sort of thing she'll like doing."

Avelyn's trust in her friend was amply justified. She received by return of post a card bearing the words: "Highly honoured. Will do my best."

"I knew she would—the dear, clever darling!" rejoiced Avelyn, waving her post card in triumph as she ran down to the study to communicate the good news to Miss Thompson.

On Friday evening, when Avelyn called at the bungalow, the Lavender Lady had a neat music manuscript ready for her.

"I hope it will do," she said. "It's as far as possible what you asked me for. I've tried to express a [281]
spirit of school patriotism and union in the words, which seems to be the principal thing to aim at just now, and I've arranged the music for three voices. You'll have to make copies of it at school."

"Miss Peters will do that with the duplicator," beamed Avelyn. "I do think you're just the most absolutely lovely and clever and delicious person that I've ever met, or ever shall meet, in all this wide world! How do you manage to think of things? I couldn't compose a song to save my life!"

"Why, I really don't know! The ideas just float into my head somehow," laughed the Lavender Lady. "As a matter of fact, this tune came to me in bed, at about half-past two in the morning, and I was obliged to get up and go downstairs to the piano to try it over and jot it down on paper before I forgot it. I knew that if I went to sleep again it would escape me. There's nothing so elusive as music. Yes, I'll try it over for you if you like. It'll sound much better, though, in three parts. I hope your first sopranos can reach A sharp? If not, I must set it in a lower key, but I like it best in this."

"They've got to get A sharp if they crack their voices!" decided Avelyn firmly.

The dedication and prize giving were to be held on the last afternoon of the term, and guests were invited for 2.30 prompt. The girls, resplendent in white dresses and the new hair ribbons, [282]
made a brave show, and all were sitting discreetly in their places when the distinguished visitors were ushered on to the platform.

During the last six months a better tone and discipline had pervaded the school, and there had been no repetition of the disorderly scene that had preceded the laying of the foundation stone. Every pupil of Silverside now prided herself upon her manners. It had become a matter of *noblesse oblige*.

Mr. Robson, the Member of Parliament for Harlingden, was a short, stout man, with a bald head and a big moustache, and some gift of oratory. He fulfilled with dignity his duties as chairman, and made a capital speech, bringing in his views about education, and wishing Silverside every success. A hundred and ten youthful pairs of hands clapped obediently, though some of the most junior heads had not altogether grasped the drift of the remarks.

It was now the turn of the School Report. Miss Thompson, typed papers in hand, was standing

up and clearing her throat preparatory to reading it aloud.

Avelyn, in the fifth row from the front, turned her head and took a comprehensive glance round the room. It was certainly a hall to be proud of, looking both stately and festive with its decorations of flowers and flags and its large palms upon the platform. She was glad that the Lavender Lady should see it. Miss Carrington had come to the gathering with Mrs. Watson and Daphne; Captain Harper and Captain and Mrs. Reynolds were sitting next to them. They caught [283] Avelyn's eye, and smiled as she looked across, then concentrated their attention on the platform, where Miss Thompson was beginning to read the report.

The Principal first of all described the general work of the school, what successes had been gained in public examinations, and what record each Form could show. The average of marks was high, and both mistresses and pupils might be congratulated on their efforts during the year. After commenting on the improvement which had also been made in music, part singing, drawing, and painting, Miss Thompson passed to the subject of games.

"I am very glad to say," so ran the report, "that on its athletic as well as its intellectual side the school is now holding its own. During the winter season little was done in that respect, but with the spring a great games revival took place, and the 'Loyal School League' was instituted, the object of which was to win honours for Silverside. I heartily congratulate the League both on the spirit of union and school patriotism which it has fostered and on the successes which it has won. The cricket throughout has been most spirited, and great thanks are due to Miss Leslie and Miss Kennedy for their admirable help in coaching. Out of six matches the school scored four victories, a very creditable record for a first season. In tennis also we are beginning to take our place. The improvement of the general play is most marked, and we hope to have established a new [284] standard of energy and efficiency. Our champions were successful in defeating Pendlebury Ladies' College and Westfield High School; a match was also played with the Clifford Girls' Grammar School, which resulted in a draw. As we consider games to be an extremely important item in our curriculum, we hope that this term's strenuous effort has established a precedent in this respect, and that the League will go on to greater triumphs in the future."

After the report came the distribution of prizes and Form trophies. VA won a beautiful picture for a wild-flower competition; IVB gained the cup for general improvement; and the Sixth the shield for knowledge of contemporary events; while among individual successes Adah Gartley, Annie Broadside, Maggie Stuart, Laura Talbot, and Irma Ridley were called up to receive rewards of books.

"I am asked to announce," said the chairman, "that Miss Thompson and the mistresses have presented a new gift to the school. This beautiful silver cup is to be awarded annually to the girl who is considered to have performed the greatest service for Silverside during the year. The first to win it is Avelyn Watson, to whose enterprise and energy in initiating the 'Loyal School League' much of the present success in games may fairly be credited. I congratulate you," beaming at Avelyn as he handed her the trophy, "that yours is the first name to be engraved upon the cup."

Avelyn walked back to her place almost overwhelmed by the unexpected honour. It was a [285] complete surprise, for the mistresses had kept their secret well, and had allowed no word of it to leak out beforehand. The storm of clapping from the girls showed that the trophy, and the choice of its winner, were equally appreciated. There could be no mistake about the genuine cordiality of the applause.

"May I say, in conclusion," finished Mr. Robson, "that the part song which will now be rendered by the singing class has been composed specially for this occasion by a well-known musician, and that henceforward it will take its place as what we might call the national anthem of Silverside, to be sung at all school functions."

Miss Webster struck a chord on the piano, and the singing class rose. The sunlight flooding through the window shone on their white dresses and the colours that tied their hair. There were a few bars of prelude, then, to a swinging, rousing, and most original tune, they sang:

"Girls of Silverside!
Hear us as we sing:
With the praises of our school
Let the rafters ring.
Loyal hearts and true
Bring we here to-day,
Chanting as our battle-cry,
'Silverside for aye!'
So join your hands and join your
hearts,
And form a circle wide,
Let Silverside be all your pride,
Girls of Silverside! [286]

"Girls of Silverside!
True you are and leal,
Each must strive her noble
best
For the common weal.

Banish thoughts of self,
Make your interests
wide,
Be the glory that you gain
All for Silverside.
So join your hands and join your
hearts,
And form a circle wide,
Let Silverside be all your pride,
Girls of Silverside!

"Girls of Silverside!
For the good and right,
Here and in the wider world
Let us all unite.
To your strenuous care
Our honour we confide,
Let your lives be such as
bring
Praise to Silverside.
So join your hands and join your
hearts,
And form a circle wide,
Let Silverside be all your pride,
Girls of Silverside!"

When the function was over, and mistresses, visitors, and girls streamed out of the new Lecture Hall, Avelyn's steps gravitated at once towards her Lavender Lady.

"Your song was beautiful," she whispered. "Everybody says it's the best tune they've heard for ages—it haunts us, we can't get it out of our heads for a minute! Miss Webster says she could play it in her sleep. It was just what we wanted—something specially for Silverside!"

"I'm glad it went off all right. Let me look at your cup. You lucky girl! Just to think that 'Avelyn Watson' is the very first name to be engraved upon it! Where are you going to keep such a treasure?" [287]

"I shall take it home for the holidays, and then have it in our form room next term. If you don't mind, I'd like it to spend a week at the bungalow. I feel it was you who really won it, not I. The League was your idea entirely. Even if I'd thought of it I should never have had the courage to propose it, if it hadn't been for you. You inspired it all! May the cup stand on your mantelpiece for a whole week?"

"Only on one condition—that you come and stay with me to take care of it!"

"Oh! may I? I'd love to stay with you and have you all to myself." Avelyn's eyes were shining.

"Hallo, old sport!" said Laura, coming rollicking up with Irma, Janet, Mona, and a few other congenial spirits. "Congratulations! We didn't know Miss Thompson had this cup up her sleeve, did we? Jolly decent of her and the mistresses, I must say! We ought to subscribe and buy a bracket to put it on. Won't it look fine when it's up, rather! Some of the old girls are here to-day, and Miss Thompson's been telling them about the League. They think it's topping!"

"And they say our hair ribbons are just too jinky for anything," added Janet.

"Glad to hear they like them," said Avelyn, twisting round her plait and readjusting the broad bow of pink, blue, and navy. "Yes, on the whole, I really think it's rather priceless to have our hair tied with the school colours." [288]

"It stands for so much," put in the Lavender Lady gently.

"Right you are! We're all hall-marked safe and sound now for a united Silverside," agreed Laura. "Next term our school will just forge ahead and break the record."

PRINTED AND BOUND IN GREAT BRITAIN
By Blackie & Son, Limited, Glasgow

Transcriber's Note:

Hyphenation has been retained as it appears in the original publication. Punctuation has been made consistent.

On page 41,
and an upper story containing *has been changed to*
and an upper storey containing

On page 157,
I wonder we've not see you *has been changed to*
I wonder we've not seen you

On page 171,
four girls were busy packing *has been changed to*
five girls were busy packing

Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing

Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.