

FICTION

Angela Brazil

The Fortunes of Philippa

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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"WE RUBBED AWAY THE MOSS AND SPELT OUT THE WORDS"

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BY ANGELA BRAZIL

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The Fortunes of Philippa: A School Story.

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A School Story

BY

ANGELA BRAZIL

Author of "The Luckiest Girl in the School" "The Jolliest Term on Record"
"For the Sake of the School" &c. &c.

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THE FORTUNES OF PHILIPPA

CHAPTER I

MY SOUTHERN HOME

"When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years."

"**M**UST I *really* go?"

"I'm afraid it has come to that, Philippa! I believe I have kept you here too long already. You're ten years old now, growing a tall girl, and not learning half the things you ought to. I feel there's something wrong about you, but I don't know quite how to set it right. After all, I suppose a man can't expect to bring up a girl entirely by himself." My father looked me up and down with a glance of despair which would have been comical if it had not seemed at the same time somewhat pathetic.

"I can do the fifth proposition in Euclid," I objected, "and the Latin Grammar as far as irregular verbs."

My father shook his head.

"That might help you a little if you were a boy in a public school, but it's not all that your mother would have wished. You've not been taught a note of music, you can't speak French or dance a quadrille, and if it came to a question of fine sewing, I'm afraid you'd scarcely know which was the right end of your needle!"

The list of my deficiencies was so dreadfully true that I had no excuse to bring forward, and my father continued.

"Besides, it's absurd to attempt to educate you in this out-of-the-way spot, where you've no opportunity of mixing with cultured people. I wish you to see England, and learn English ways, and to have companions of your own age."

"I think San Carlos is the most beautiful place in the world," I said quickly. "And I don't want any companion but you."

"Which shows me all the more that it's time I sent you away," answered Father. "Though it will strain my heart-strings to part with you, I own. It's such a splendid opportunity, too, when Madame Montpellier is returning to Paris and will take charge of you on the voyage. No, Philippa child, I've quite made up my mind. You're to go to England, and you'll please me best by taking it bravely, and trying to learn all you can in the years we must be apart from each other."

We were sitting on the vine-covered terrace of our beautiful South American home. Below us the bright flowers of our tropical garden shone a blaze of colour against the dark background of the lemon-trees; away to the right stretched the dazzling blue sea, with here and there the dark sail of a native fishing craft; while to the left rose the white houses of the little Spanish town of San Carlos, with its picturesque, Moorish-looking church and campanile, set in a frame of tall palm-trees, which led the eye over the long slopes of the coffee-plantations up the hill-side to where the sharp peaks of the sierras towered like giants against the cloudless sky.

For ten years I had lived here as in paradise, and the thought that I must leave it, and go far away over the sea to strangers and to an unknown land, filled me with dismay.

As an only child, and a motherless one, I suppose I had been spoilt, though to be very dearly loved does not always necessarily mean to be over-indulged. I am sure my father spent many anxious hours over my upbringing, and with him I was accustomed to prompt obedience, though I fear I ruled Juanita, my mulatto nurse, and Tasso, the black bearer, with a rod of iron. Friends of my own age and station I had none; my father was all in all to me, and in his constant companionship I had grown up a somewhat old-fashioned child, learning a few desultory lessons, reading every story-book upon which I could lay my hands, and living in a make-believe world of my own, as different from the actual realities of life as could well be imagined.

It was indeed time for a change, though the transplanting process might be hard to bear. I think many urgent letters from relations in England had helped to form my father's decision, and, his mind once made up, he hurried on the preparations for my journey, in a kind of nervous anxiety lest he should repent, and refuse to part with me after all.

"I suppose your aunt will find your clothes all right," he said, as he watched Juanita pack my cabin trunk. "I've told her to rig you out afresh if she doesn't. We don't go in for Paris modes at San Carlos, so I'm afraid you will hardly be in

the latest fashion! You must be a good girl, and do as you're told. You'll find everything rather different over there, but you'll soon get used to it, and be happy, I hope; though what I'm to do without you here I don't know," he added wistfully. "You're all I've got now!"

And he looked out over the blue waters of the bay to that little plot under the shade of the campanile where my pretty mother lay sleeping so quietly.

I understood him, and it added a fresh pang to my sorrow. Child as I was, I felt I had in some measure helped to fill that vacant place, and the thought that I must leave him so lonely, so very lonely, seemed sometimes to make the parting almost harder than I could bear. I tried my best, however, to be bright and brave for his sake, and I made up my mind that I would do my very utmost to learn all he wished, so that perhaps I might get through the work in quicker time than he expected, and be able to return to him the sooner.

The grief of the coloured portion of our household at the news of my departure was both noisy and vehement. Juanita dropped copious tears into my boxes; Jose, the garden-boy, assured me that England was situated in the midst of a frozen sea, where your fingers fell off with the cold, and you chopped up your breakfast with a hatchet; Pedro, the cook, was doubtful if I should survive a course of English dishes, which he heard were composed chiefly of beef and plum-pudding, while salads and sauces were unknown; and Tasso, after a vain appeal to be allowed to accompany me, drew such appalling pictures of the perils of the seas, that I wondered how even his devotion could have induced him to think of venturing on shipboard. Of all the many friends whom I left behind, I think the one I regretted the most was Tasso. My earliest recollection is that of clinging to his stout black forefinger to toddle down the flagged pathway between the orange-trees which led to the terrace that over-looked the sea. Carried on his broad shoulders, I had made my first acquaintance with the streets of San Carlos. There one might see the funny washerwomen standing like ducks in the river to beat their clothes upon the stones, the long-eared mules with their gay trappings coming down from the mountains laden with bags of coffee-berries, the solemn Indian muleteers with their dark cloaks and fringed leggings, the little black children dancing and singing in the bright sunshine, the open-air restaurants where men of all nations sat chatting, smoking cigarettes, and drinking "eau sucrée" under the palm-trees, or the fashionable carriages of the smart Spanish ladies and gentlemen who thronged the Corso in the late afternoon.

Negro servants, having much of the child in their nature, are wonderfully patient with little children. Tasso humoured me and amused me with untiring zeal, telling me wonderful stories of African magic, singing me long ballads in the half-Spanish half-Indian dialect of the district, catching for me butterflies, green lizards, or the brilliant little humming-birds which flitted about our garden, or picking shells for me upon the beach below.

It was on this shore, just under the windows of our house, that I was once the heroine of a very real adventure, which had almost cost me my life. I think at the time I could not have been more than four years old, but it made such a deep impression on my mind that I can remember every detail as clearly as though it had happened only yesterday. I had been taken by Juanita to play in the cool of the evening on the little strip of silver sand and shingle which lay between our high garden wall and the dashing surf. I had left my doll's cape on the terrace, and I begged Juanita to go and fetch it. For a long time she refused, but on my promising not to stir from the spot where I was playing, she was at last persuaded, and hurried up the steep flight of steps on to the verandah. It had been an intensely hot day, and I was tired, so I thought I would sit down and rest until Juanita returned. Looking round I saw, as I imagined, a nice smooth round stone close by, upon which I settled myself very comfortably, curling my little fat legs under me. But the stone must surely have been an enchanted rock out of one of Tasso's fairy stories, for it suddenly began to move, and, rising up, it put out four flat feet, and marched briskly down the beach towards the sea. The entire unexpectedness of it so utterly terrified me that I could neither cry nor move, only hold on tight with both hands, and wonder what black magic had seized upon me. The turtle, for such in reality my stone proved to be, rapidly gained the water, and it was about to paddle off in a hurry with its strange burden, when Juanita, returning on to the verandah, saw my desperate plight, and by her frantic screams brought Tasso, who dashed down the steps and into the sea, just in time to rescue me before the turtle took a dive into the deeper water.

I do not think Tasso ever quite forgave poor Juanita for this accident, though she beat her breast and lamented in a perfect hail-storm of southern grief. And always after this he would keep an eye upon me when I was in her charge, appearing mysteriously from behind trees, popping his dark head through windows, or peering between the vines of the pergola; coming so suddenly and unexpectedly upon us, that I began to think he had the gift of some of his magic heroes, and could make himself visible and invisible at pleasure.

I like to recall those happy days of my early childhood; days when the sun always shone, and the air was full of the scent of orange-blossom, and my father and I lived a life apart among the flowers in the old terraced garden, where the hum of the little town and the roll of the surf below seemed but a distant echo of the world beyond.

In the summer-time, when the heat at San Carlos grew unbearable, we moved up into the hills, on the verge of the

great forests. It was cooler there, for the wind blew fresh from the snow-capped sierras, and I could run to my heart's content along the narrow paths of our coffee-plantations, or chase Juanita between the cinnamon-trees. Sometimes, as a special treat, my father would take me in front of him on his horse, and ride into the forest. I can remember yet the thrill of those expeditions into that tropical fairyland. The tall trees stretched before our path in a never-ending vista, festooned by gigantic creepers covered with flowers; funny little chattering monkeys looked down from the branches, and scolded us as we passed; gorgeous green parrots rent the air with their screams; while tiny humming-birds and innumerable brilliant insects luxuriated in the wealth of plant life. Sometimes we would see the giant spiders which spin webs so strong that they will often knock an unwary rider's hat from his head; or sometimes a puma or a jaguar would slink away through the dense undergrowth, and I would cling a little closer to my father's arm, and think what would happen to me if I ventured alone into the forest. Of San Carlos and its inhabitants I saw little; though my father was the British Consul, he did not move in the society of the place more than was absolutely necessary, nor, for good reasons of his own, did he wish me to become very friendly with the children of his Spanish neighbours. I rarely, if ever, visited any of the white villas that dotted the hill-sides, and the pretty little dark-eyed Juans or Margaritas who sometimes peeped over the cactus hedges were strangers to me.

On one day only in the year did my father relax his rule. He would allow me to accept an invitation to watch the Carnival from the verandah of the Government House. How immensely I looked forward to those occasions! Juanita would proudly dress me in my best, and I would drive by Father's side down the Corso to the great white house, where we were welcomed by the Governor himself, and shown to a place of honour upon the balcony, where we could see everything that was passing in the street below.

It was a gay sight. First came the priests in their gorgeous vestments, carrying high the gilded images of the Saints; and behind them bands of sweet-faced children dressed as angels, in long white robes, with soft plumed wings fastened on to their shoulders. Carriages followed, garlanded with flowers, in which sat men and women who represented Greek gods, or nymphs, or famous characters from history, attended by tiny boys with gilt wings as Cupids. After these came a mob of masquers, jesters, clowns, harlequins, columbines, peasants of all nations, fishermen, hunters, Indians, or savages; shouting, gesticulating, pushing one another about, and all seeming to try to make as much noise as they possibly could. It was then that the fun began. Piled up in the balcony were baskets full of flowers, confetti, bon-bons, and tiny wax balls full of scented water. We flung these far and wide among the crowd below, some receiving the flowers and bon-bons, and some being hit by the wax balls, which, bursting, scented the victim rather too heavily for his enjoyment. It was all taken, however, with the greatest good-humour, and the merry throng passed on to parade round the town, and end with a dance under the palm-trees in the public gardens.

And so my life in my southern home had passed like a kind of delightful dream, and it was not until my father talked of change that I had ever thought there could be an awakening.

The little time left to me fled all too fast, and brought the much-dreaded day when I must leave everything that had grown so dear. I can never forget our parting. A hurried message had been sent to us that the steamer was to start earlier, and that I must go on board in the evening instead of on the following morning as had been at first arranged. The full moon shone on the waters of the bay, lighting up the vessel which was to take me so far away, and which had steamed out a little from the quay where the launch was waiting. Big girl as I was, my father carried me in his arms down the garden. I held my cheek pressed close against his, and we neither of us spoke, for there are some heart-breaks too great for words. The fireflies were flitting about like living jewels, every blossom looked clear-cut and perfect in the moonlight; I can smell even now the heavy scent of the orange-blossom as we went along the terrace walk, and hear the tremulous call of some night-bird among the mimosa-trees. It was but a short way to the quay, and we were soon in the launch, steaming out over the bay to where the lights of the great ship shone red against the pale moonlight.

"So this is the small passenger I'm waiting for!" said the captain, as my father helped me on deck. "Well, I'm sorry, but I can't allow elaborate leave-takings. We're beyond our time already, the tide's on the turn, and if we don't start at once we sha'n't be able to cross the bar. We've had our steam up since sunset."

"Good-bye, my darling, my darling!" said Father, as he held me close for one long, last kiss. "We shall meet again, God willing, before many years have passed away. Be a good girl, and whatever you do don't forget your poor old daddy, who will be thinking of you always, wherever you may be."

He put me into the friendly arms of Madame Montpellier, who was crying for sympathy, and ran down the companion-ladder as if he were afraid to look back. The little launch drew off, the great screw began to revolve slowly, and the ship started eastward in a train of silvery light, leaving my happy home behind, and taking me to a new and untried world, where my future was all before me.

CHAPTER II

MY COUSINS

"There's a new foot on the floor, my friend,
And a new face at the door, my friend."

I CAME to England with the swallows, and I think I felt as much a bird of passage as they; more so, indeed, for all the young swallows had been reared under northern skies and were but returning home, while I was as yet a stranger in a new land. My uncle met me at Liverpool, where I had a terrible parting from Madame Montpellier, who had been very good to me on the voyage, and who seemed my last link with the past; and we set out at once upon the long journey to London. I liked my uncle, he reminded me much of my father; there was a merry twinkle in his eye, and a kindness in his voice which seemed to call for some response, so I made a desperate effort to check my flowing tears and take an interest in the various things he pointed out to me from the window of the railway-carriage. The green fields and hedgerows, the picturesque villages and churches, the smooth rivers and the quiet pastoral scenery as we steamed through the midlands were all new to my wondering eyes, but to watch them from the fast express, as they appeared to whizz rapidly by, made my head ache, and I had curled myself up in a corner and subsided comfortably to sleep long before London was reached.

I am afraid my arrival must have been a bitter disappointment to my little cousins, of whom the elder ones were waiting in the hall to welcome me when our cab drove up. I was so utterly weary with my journey, and I felt so forlornly shy at the sight of so many strange faces around me, that, forgetting both my manners and my good intentions, I burst into a flood of tears, and refused all comfort.

"Better put her to bed," said my aunt briskly; "she's tired out, and it's no use worrying her. After a thorough night's rest she'll be more ready to make friends with us."

I was so miserable that I did not much care what happened to me, so I submitted with a good grace to be undressed, and to swallow the hot milk which they brought me; then with my father's photograph clasped tightly in my hand, I cried myself to sleep on that my first night in my new home. Somehow with the morning sunshine life seemed to wear a different aspect, and instead of telling Aunt Agatha that I could never be happy in England, and begging her to send me straight back to San Carlos by the very next ship, as I had quite made up my mind to do the night before, I went downstairs to breakfast full of curiosity to make the acquaintance of my cousins. I had heard them for some time, as during the last hour the whole upper story of the house had seemed to be pervaded with the noise of small shrill voices, the stamping of feet, the slamming of doors, and finally the melancholy sound of the minor scales on the piano, the performer appearing to get into complications with the sharps and flats, and occasionally to relapse altogether into the major key.

Aunt Agatha came bustling into my bedroom as I fastened the last button of my dress (the voyage had taught me to dispense with Juanita's help), and she stood and surveyed me with a critical eye. Her first impression of me had been hardly a fair one, so I trust that this morning I presented a more favourable appearance.

"Yes," she said slowly, "you have your father's eyes, but otherwise you're the image of your mother: the same slight build, and the same light hair and colour which I remember so well in my poor sister-in-law. Dear me! how little I thought when I said good-bye to her that I should never see her again! You must try to make yourself at home, my dear, among us all. It's hard, I dare say, to settle down into new ways, but if you'll try your best, we will do our part, and I hope you'll soon like England as well as the country you've left behind. Now come with me, and say good-morning to your cousins."

There were so many of them, and of such various ages, that when I entered the nursery I might have supposed myself for the moment in an infant school. From Lucy, the eldest, who was six months older than I, to the baby in long clothes, they descended in a series of eight little steps, all blue-eyed and auburn-haired, all sturdy of limb and lusty of voice, and all dressed in stout brown holland pinafores, warranted to resist the hardest of wear and tear.

"I'm sure you'll soon become friends," said Aunt Agatha, after Lucy, Mary, Edgar, Donald, Frank, Cuthbert, Dorothy, and the baby had all been duly presented. "You're to have lessons in the school-room from Miss Masterman. I've spoken to her about your work. I believe your father mentioned that you hadn't yet begun either French or music. And, Blair, I should like you to go over her clothes after breakfast. I must arrange for Miss Jenkins to come at once for a few days' sewing. Be sure she drinks plenty of milk with her porridge, and be careful she doesn't get into draughts just at first, as she's accustomed to a warmer climate."

Blair was a power in the household. She managed her nursery with the tactics of a general, reducing small rebels to a state of submission with admirable skill, and keeping order among her noisy little crew with a firm though just hand. She might not always be exactly pleasant, but on the whole her moral atmosphere was like an east wind, bracing, though a little trying at times. She accepted an addition to her numerous charges with grim philosophy.

"You'll soon shake down among the others," she said to me, not unkindly. "It seems queer to you, I dare say, after living in a foreign country, with black servants and outlandish cookery, but there's everything in habit, and with plenty of lessons to keep you busy, you'll have no time to fret."

Just at first I certainly found the shaking-down process rather a rough one. It was all so utterly different from my old life. Accustomed to spend most of my time with my father, I thought it hard to be restricted to the nursery and school-room, and instead of being the centre of my little world, to be only one of a flock who were not favoured with many indulgences.

My aunt, I am sure, did her very best for me according to her lights, and perhaps she thought that I should settle all the sooner if I were left judiciously alone, but, looking back now upon her upbringing, I think she might have shown me more tenderness. She was a tall, handsome woman, with a capable manner, and what she called "sensible" views of life. If she had ever cherished any illusions, they had long ago worn down to the level of strict commonplace. Though she loved her children, in her practical, unsentimental way, they were to her always "the children", to be ruled and reared, clothed and educated, but never in any respect her companions; and a friendship between two people of widely differing ages, such as existed between my father and myself, was a thing she could scarcely understand. There were certain well-arranged regulations for our daily life and conduct, and that any allowance should be made for individual temperament was to her mind neither suitable nor desirable. She treated me as one of her own, and that it was possible for me to need more did not enter into her calculations. But I did need more. I was a child of extremely warm affections, and though I could not have expressed the feeling, my heart felt starved upon the very small amount of love and attention which fell to my share. I tried my best to be brave and not to fret, but sometimes my home-sickness would gain the upper hand, and I have often wet my pillow with bitter tears, longing with a yearning that was almost agony for one kiss from my father before I went to sleep.

With my cousins I was soon a favourite.

"Tell us again about San Carlos, and the forest, and the tree-witches, and the gri-gri man," said Edgar and Mary, who listened spell-bound to my reminiscences of Tasso's marvellous stories; and I would sit in the dusk by the nursery fire, with an audience of eager little faces around me, putting such horrible realism into my narratives that Donald brought Blair from her supper by screaming that the gri-gri man was under his bed, while poor Mary never dared in future to pass the lumber-room door, for fear of seeing a grinning goblin pop his head suddenly out of the darkness.

Though we afterwards became the best of friends, Lucy treated me at first with little airs of superiority and patronage. I am afraid we began our acquaintance with a wordy war.

"You must feel quite glad to be in a proper English house, after living in that queer foreign place," she remarked, by way of opening the conversation.

"No, I'm not," I retorted. "Our house at San Carlos is ever so much nicer than this. It has marble floors, and a terrace, and a pergola."

"I don't know what a pergola is," replied Lucy. "But we have a balcony, and that's quite as good. Your clothes are so funnily made, Blair says she hardly likes to take you out. Mother has sent for Miss Jenkins to make you some new ones. You're going to do lessons with us every day. I wonder if you'll be able to learn with me. Can you speak French?"

"No, but I can speak Spanish."

"Oh, that's no use! Who wants to talk Spanish? Mother said you had learnt it from the servants, and the sooner you forgot it the better."

"I won't forget it. I shall speak it when I go back."

"You're not going back."

"Yes, I am, soon. Father will send for me," I ventured desperately.

"No, not till you're quite grown up. I heard Mother tell Miss Masterman so just now. She said your ways were as queer as your clothes, and you would take a great deal of training before you were fit to be sent to school."

"I *will* go back! I *will* speak Spanish!" I declared in great indignation. "Juanita and Tasso can't speak anything else."

"I wonder you care to talk to negroes," said Lucy, tossing back her hair. "I like white people myself, and I'm sure you needn't boast of having been carried about by an old black man!"

The slight to my dear friends stung me even more than the insult to my clothes and my manners, and I ended in a storm of miserable crying. Next to my father I very truly missed those kind companions of my childhood, and ever to forget them seemed to me the basest ingratitude.

My new English clothes were of sober colours and serviceable materials; they seemed to match my new life, and perhaps my manners changed with them, for I soon settled down into the little daily round which was appointed for me. At first I found the regular lessons somewhat of a trial, as I had never been accustomed either to learn systematically, or really to apply myself. But Miss Masterman, our daily governess, was both a kind and clever teacher, and after a while I grew so interested in my work that I easily caught up Lucy, and even began to outstrip her--a little, I fancy, to her chagrin.

I wrote regularly to my father. I have one of these childish letters by me now, for he treasured them carefully, and to read it brings back so keenly the remembrance of those early days that I shall give it a place in these pages. Here it is, exactly as I wrote it, in my most careful round hand.

CHESTNUT AVENUE,
June 12th.

"My dearest Father,

"I think of you every day of my life. I have put your photo on my dressing-table, and I kiss it good-night and good-morning as if it were really you. I am trying very hard to be happy, but my two troubles are porridge and scales. Porridge is something like the food Tasso used to mix up for the ducks, only you eat it hot. Blair says it will make me grow strong, and I must take what is given me and not find fault, so I gulp it down, though it nearly chokes me. Scales are detestable. Miss Masterman puts pennies on the backs of my hands, but I cannot help jerking my arm when I turn my thumb under, so they always fall on to the floor, and then she is cross.

"I like drawing the best of all my lessons. I have bought a new paint-box with the money you sent me, and I will try and make pictures for you of everything I see. There are no orange-trees or coffee-plantations here. We go walks down long streets with tall houses on both sides, or sometimes into the Park, which I like better, though it is not so nice as the garden at San Carlos, for you may not pick the flowers, and there are sparrows instead of humming-birds. I hope Juanita does not forget to feed the terrapin and the green lizard. Give my love to her, and to Tasso and Pedro and everybody. Aunt Agatha is writing to you herself, and she will put this letter inside hers.

"From your loving little daughter,
"PHILIPPA SEATON."

If I found my life in London rather hard to bear at times, I am afraid my attempts to relieve the monotony of my existence were not always a success at head-quarters. I had a lively imagination, and my inventive faculty was continually leading me into planning games which my cousins thought only too delightful, but which were set down as either mess or mischief by those in authority. When Aunt Agatha found us tobogganing down the back staircase in a clothes-basket, she knew at once the instigator of the sport, and she easily guessed who had taken the chairs from the best bedroom to form a menagerie in the nursery. It was I who conceived the brilliant idea of making a sea-side resort for the dolls with the aid of the tea-tray full of water and the sand out of the canary's cage, a most interesting and fascinating pastime for us, but looked at in a very different light by Blair, when she returned to find the younger children with sopping pinafores, and my miniature ocean slowly wending its way in trickles over the nursery floor.



MAKING A SEA-SIDE RESORT FOR THE DOLLS

"You get into mischief the moment my back is turned. I'm sure the children never thought of doing such things before you came!" she said severely.

I do not suppose they had, for though they loved a romp, they were not naturally imaginative; but they immensely enjoyed my ideas, and were always ready to fall in with my schemes, from soap slides on the attic-landing to the fairy palace which I constructed in the lumber-room out of old lace curtains hung over towel-rails, or the ogre's den in the housemaid's cupboard under the stairs.

I remember well how, one afternoon, when Blair for a wonder was absent, I seized the golden opportunity to organize a grand game of carnival. The children's pocket-handkerchiefs and silk neckties were collected from the various drawers and hung up as flags on a string fastened from the gas-bracket to the window. All my little cousins were eager to be masquers, and I racked my brains to devise costumes for them out of the very limited materials at my command.

Lucy, in her night-dress, with two sheets of copy-book paper fastened on to her shoulders as wings, made quite a creditable angel. Edgar was an Indian, his face painted in stripes of red and yellow, some feathers plucked from the dusting-broom stuck in his curly locks, and the hearth-brush for a tomahawk. Mary, with my best sash draped artistically over her right shoulder, represented Venus, with Cuthbert for a Cupid; Donald, in Aunt Agatha's furs, stolen

shamelessly from her bedroom, rollicked about as a savage; and, as I really had no clothes left for Dorothy, I blacked her face with a piece of coal, and transformed her into a little negro child. I myself was Father Neptune, with a toasting-fork for a trident, and as we paraded round the nursery, pelting each other with pieces of torn-up paper for confetti, I think we rivalled in noise the wildest carnival I had ever witnessed at San Carlos.

We were in the very height of our excitement, and were scrambling eagerly for pretended bon-bons, which Lucy was flinging from an imaginary balcony, when the door was suddenly opened, and Aunt Agatha entered, ushering in a visitor.

"This is my little flock, Mrs. Winstanley--" she began, then stopped short in utter dismay at the scene of confusion before her.

My aunt's sense of humour was not keen; her orderly nursery and tidy family were her pride, and the sight of the tumbled heads and crumpled pinafores, the clothes strewn hither and thither, and the painted and blackened faces of her ordinarily well-behaved darlings was enough to justify her look of extreme annoyance. She turned at once upon the true offender.

"Philippa, what have you been doing with the children?" she asked sharply.

No culprit caught red-handed could have felt more guilty or discomfited than I. I gasped out something incoherent about "carnival", and burst into tears.

But here the visitor saved the situation.

"It is very kind of the little ones to be *en fete* to welcome us, Mrs. Seaton," she said gently. "My own children often dress up when they wish to give me a treat. I have not seen a carnival since I was last at Nice, and I don't think any of the masquers were so natural as these. So this is little Philippa!" she continued as she sat down, and drew me quietly to her side. "I hope you will learn to love me some day, for your mother was my dearest friend, and I could not pass through London to-day without taking the opportunity of coming to see her only child."

She kissed me with a warmth I had missed since I bade that last good-bye to my father; there were tears in her eyes, and, strangely moved, I clung to her, crying a little, but more comforted than I could have found words to tell.

It was thus that I first made acquaintance with one of the truest friends of my life.

CHAPTER III

I GO TO SCHOOL

"The noises intermixed, which thence resound,
Do learning's little tenement betray."

I HAD now been nearly two years in England, and the keen edge of the remembrance of my southern home was beginning to fade slightly from my mind, though never my love for my father. Spanish I had utterly forgotten, scarcely a word remaining in my memory, and I think the foreign ways which Aunt Agatha had objected to had vanished along with it. It was decided that the time had come to send me to school, and the particular establishment to be chosen was a subject for much discussion between Aunt Agatha and her friends.

Lucy and I were sometimes allowed to have afternoon tea in the drawing-room, "to improve our manners", and on these occasions I found that my education was the main topic of conversation.

"Send her to Fairfield College, my dear," said Mrs. Montgomery, whose own daughters were the champion hockey-players of the neighbourhood. "It is splendid for games. Compulsory cricket, Swedish gymnastics every day, and a thoroughly healthy and active out-of-door existence. Just the life for a rather delicate child."

"Now *I* think they overdo athletics at most schools," said Mrs. Buchanan Smith, the gay widow of an officer. "Give me the French system of education. My Stella is at a convent in Paris. I consider the Sisters teach the most *adorable* manners, and the girls return home with a finish that is very different from the hoydenish ways they learn at *some* of our colleges."

"If you ask me, I have no opinion at all of foreign schools," said Mrs. Northby, the doctor's wife. "My husband says the sanitary arrangements are generally most defective, and that English children, accustomed to plenty of fresh air and ventilation, would be very liable to contract typhoid. I think, too, that the French 'jeune fille' is brought up in an atmosphere of falsehood and deceit, and without any idea of rational enjoyment, and I prefer to send my little girl to a day-school, where she can get a sound education, while I can keep her under my own eye. I do not like the plan of sending children away to boarding-schools just at the time when their health needs most attention, and they are forming their strongest opinions."

"I'm afraid I don't agree with you," said Mrs. Montgomery. "I consider a boarding-school is the world in miniature, and it helps a girl to find her own level. She will learn many other things besides her lessons, and will no doubt make some pleasant friendships; but the school must be a good one, for inferior companions are worse than none."

"It is no question of terms," said Aunt Agatha. "My brother-in-law is anxious for her to have every advantage. It's simply a matter of choosing the best, and I feel the responsibility of my position."

"If you will take my advice, you will send her to The Hollies," said Mrs. (Archdeacon) Carrington, who had listened silently so far to the conversation. "Mrs. Marshall only receives forty pupils, but I consider she turns out the best-informed and best-mannered girls of my acquaintance. She has so many applications, that it is sometimes difficult to secure a vacancy, but I think on *my* recommendation it might be arranged."

The Archdeacon's lady was the leader of society among Aunt Agatha's friends, and her opinion carried weight.

"We all know how particular she is," said Mrs. Buchanan Smith afterwards. "And any school which *she* recommends must be *most* select, both as regards education, and the girls who are there. Indeed, if Stella had not already returned to Paris, I think I should have seriously considered the possibility of sending her to The Hollies."

My aunt was inclined to take the same view, and when on further inquiries it was found that Mrs. Marshall was equally highly thought of in other quarters, and that Mrs. Winstanley's only daughter Catherine was already a pupil at the school, the question was considered settled. I was to be sent after the Easter holidays, and Uncle Herbert determined that Lucy should accompany me. We were full of the importance of our departure.

"We're to learn German and dancing," said Lucy. "And music from an Italian master. Our school clothes won't be made by Miss Jenkins; Mother is going to take us to her own dressmaker. We're each to have a new trunk, and umbrellas with silver tops."

Aunt Agatha escorted us herself to The Hollies, for she had not yet seen either the school or the neighbourhood, though she had had an interview with Mrs. Marshall in London. It seemed a long journey into Derbyshire, and our

pent-up excitement had plenty of time to cool while the train ran through the rather uninteresting scenery of Northampton and Leicester, but it burst out again with renewed vigour when we at length drew up at the little station of Helston Spa.

With what curiosity we viewed every other girl upon the platform, wondering whether she were bound for the same destination as ourselves, and how soon we should get to know her. We looked rather longingly at an omnibus laden with a jolly, laughing crew, who seemed to be in charge of a teacher; but my aunt bustled us into a cab, and we drove away along a white limestone road, bordered with tall crags on the one side and a brawling stream on the other.

The Hollies proved to be an old-fashioned red-brick house with a trim garden, and playing-fields beyond.

"It's a nice open situation, and the air feels bracing," said Aunt Agatha, sniffing the breeze as if to test its quality. "I notice that it faces south, and there's a pretty view over the woods and hills. It ought to be healthy, I'm sure, so far away from London smoke and fog."

Lucy and I looked with delight at the gray hills in the distance, and the line of fresh green trees which fringed the river; after the long, dull streets of our suburban home, it was pleasant to feel that our school was in the country.

Mrs. Marshall received new arrivals in the drawing-room, and when we had bidden a rather hasty good-bye to Aunt Agatha, who was returning to town by the next train, and had unpacked our boxes in the pretty little bedroom which we were to share together, we were ushered down to the play-room by a teacher, to make the acquaintance of our school-fellows. There was a pause in the loud hum of conversation as the door opened, and I caught the words "new girls". Miss Buller, the governess, seemed busy, and not able to waste any time upon us, so she merely announced: "Lucy and Philippa Seaton. I hope you will make them welcome, girls;" and hurried away, leaving us standing shyly by the door, not quite knowing what to do next.

The little group collected round the fire moved slightly so as to make room for us, and a pretty fair-faced girl, with a mop of frizzy pale-gold hair, came forward.

"Come along," she said brightly, "and I'll tell you who we all are. I'm Doris Forbes, and this is my sister Janet, and these are Ellinor Graham, Millicent Holmes, Blanche Greenwood, and Olave and Beatrice Milner," pointing to each as she spoke. "Most of the others are still upstairs unpacking their boxes, and a few of us haven't arrived yet. Now as you're new girls, we want to know all about you. To begin with, which is Lucy, and which is Philippa? Are you sisters, and have you ever been to school before?"

"I'm Philippa," I replied, "and this is my cousin Lucy. We've never been to school before; we had a governess at home."

"All the better for you," put in the tall girl in the blue dress whom the others called Millicent Holmes. "Mrs. Marshall never likes girls who come from other schools. She says she has to teach them everything all over again."

"That's just to make you think her ways are better than anyone else's," said Ellinor Graham. "I've had five music masters, and every one has put me back to the beginning, and told me the others didn't know how to teach."

"Then you'll get put back again this term," laughed Blanche Greenwood. "For Herr Goldschmidt has gone home to Germany, and we're to have an Italian, named Signor Salviati, instead."

"No!" cried the girls with thrilling interest. "Have you seen him? What's he like?"

"Oh, don't excite yourselves! He's not a romantic-looking Italian, with long curls and a twisted moustache; he's a nasty little fat oily kind of a man, with a pointed beard, who looks as if he could be horribly cross if you played wrong notes."

"How disgusting!" cried the others. "Are there any other changes?"

"Miss Buller is to have the fourth class," said Blanche, who seemed to be the general fund of information. "Janet, Beatrice, and Olave are on the early-morning practising list for this month" (groans from Janet, Beatrice, and Olave at the bad news), "the Simpsons have the bedroom at the end of the passage, with the balcony, and Miss Percy is to take the sewing this term."

"What a nuisance!" lamented Janet. "She's *so* particular! I can never make my stitches small enough to satisfy her. I hate poking over sewing. I wish we went to Ecclestone, where our cousins go, it's exactly like a boys' public school; they have a matron to do all the mending, and the girls play football."

"I know they do," said Millicent, "and Mother says it is *most* unladylike. We know several girls who go there, and

they behave so badly, sitting on the edges of the drawing-room tables, and gulping their tea, and bolting their cake, and talking the most atrocious slang."

"My sister goes to St. Chad's," said Ellinor Graham, "and they weigh the girls every time they go back. They won't let them do any work if they're not 'up to standard', and Patty's so thin that she's always 'turned out to grass', as they call it, for at least a fortnight at the beginning of each term. I think she has a lovely time."

"Yes, but you have to wear the school costume at St. Chad's, even in church," put in Doris. "And it's ever so ugly--a blue serge dress with no shape in it, a plaid golf-cape, and a cricket-cap. I shouldn't like that at all!" and she smoothed down her pretty dress with evident satisfaction.

"You haven't yet told us what class you're to be put in," said Blanche Greenwood, turning to Lucy and myself, who had been listening with much interest to the conversation.

"In the fourth, I believe," said Lucy. "Mrs. Marshall said she expected we could both manage the work."

"The fourth! That's to be Miss Buller's. Janet and Olave and I are in the same class, and Catherine Winstanley is to be monitress for the month. By the by, where is Cathy? Has no one seen her?"

"Here!" said a voice from the door, and a slender girl of about thirteen came forward to join the group. She was a pretty girl, with long, curling brown hair, and a very graceful way of holding herself. Her pleasant manner and bright winning smile attracted me to her at once. Her dark eyes seemed familiar, and I wondered where I had seen them before, till in a sudden flash of remembrance I recalled how eyes just the same had looked into mine when Mrs. Winstanley had held me close in her arms, and told me she was my mother's friend. So this was the little daughter of whom she had spoken, and as I watched her I hoped with all my heart that we, too, might become friends. She seemed to be a general favourite, for there were many affectionate greetings between her and the other girls, and numerous interchanges of home and school news, but at length she turned to where Lucy and I were standing.

"I think," she said, speaking to me, "that you must be Philippa Seaton. Mother told me you would be here, and that I was to look out for you. I suppose this is your cousin Lucy. I'm so glad that we're all to be in the same class. I hope your bedroom is near mine. Oh! there's the tea-bell, and we must go, but I shall see you again afterwards."

She walked away, with her arm linked in that of Janet Forbes, and Lucy and I followed the others to the dining-room, where tea was being dispensed in an informal manner by Miss Buller and one of the under teachers. For this first meal there were no special places, and I found myself sitting at table next to a rather stout, rosy-checked girl, perhaps a year older than myself, whose name appeared to be Ernestine Salt.

She moved very grudgingly to make room, but she did not speak to me, nor take any further notice. Lucy and I sat silently watching our thirty companions. It was all new and strange to us--the fresh faces, the school-girl chaff, the jokes and allusions to things of which we as yet knew nothing, and we wondered how long it would be before we could take our part in that lively conversation.

"I never can eat anything the first night," declared one of the girls, mopping her eyes rather ostentatiously with a lace-edged pocket-handkerchief. "I'm always so terribly homesick, and they cut the bread so thick!"

"Nothing spoils my appetite," proclaimed Ernestine Salt. "I'm so frightfully hungry, I shall eat your share. I didn't have half enough sandwiches on the journey, though I bought three oranges and two jam-tarts at the railway-station as well. Where is the bread-and-butter?"

As the plate was within my reach, I handed it to her. She looked me coolly up and down, as if she were taking in every detail of my appearance, but she did not thank me.

"Oh, never mind manners, just help yourself and shove it on," she said carelessly. "We do as we like the first evening. Mrs. Marshall will come down to tea to-morrow, and then it'll have to be prunes and prism."

"Not so loud, Ernestine, I can hear your voice above all the others," said Miss Buller, who seemed trying to check the talk that every now and then threatened to become too uproarious.

A fresh instalment of girls, who had arrived by a later train, and now joined the tea-table, claimed general attention, and the meal at length being over, the whole party trooped away to the play-room. It was a chilly evening, and I stood by the fire warming my hands, while I watched the various girls who were walking about arm in arm, or standing together in select little groups. They were most of them laughing and talking with much excitement, but the loudest and noisiest of them all was Ernestine Salt, who with a few choice spirits had taken possession of the table, where she sat dangling her legs and eating chocolate, the silver paper from which she made into small hard pellets, and fired at unsuspecting passers-by, provoking shrieks of laughter from her companions. So amusing did she evidently find this

occupation, that, the pellets being exhausted, she fished some walnut-shells out of her pocket, and commenced a perfect onslaught on a neighbouring group of girls. They, however, did not take it so peaceably, for, suddenly seizing the table, they tilted it over, sending her ignominiously sprawling upon the floor, while, seating themselves in her vacant place, they announced their intention of holding the fort against all comers.

"I don't care!" said Ernestine, picking herself up, and moving away towards the fire. "It's horribly cold, and I was going to get warm anyhow. You can keep your old table, if you want. Here, get out of my way, you little animal!" and, pushing me rudely aside, she pulled a chair forward and seated herself in the very front of the cheerful blaze.

"I'm not an animal!" I said with some indignation, for I thought her manner most disagreeable, and I was determined to hold my own.

"Mineral, then, if you prefer it!" she returned, with a laugh.

I looked her up and down as coolly as she had surveyed me at the tea-table.

"I should think it is you who are the mineral, if your name is 'Salt,'" I said quietly. "I only wonder they didn't add 'pepper' when they were christening you!"

Her companions tittered.

"You've met your match, Ernestine?" declared one.

"Sharp little thing! Who is she?" whispered another.

"You won't put 'salt' on that bird's tail!" said a third, laughing at her own joke.

Ernestine looked as black as thunder, but for the moment she had no repartee ready, and she was saved from the necessity of a reply by the tinkle of a bell, and the voice of the head-girl, who announced that a general meeting of the various committees of the school sports and games was about to be held, at which everybody was requested to attend.

"I'm glad you stood up to Ernestine Salt," said Janet Forbes, who had been a silent listener. "But I'm afraid she'll hate you ever afterwards, and she can be uncommonly nasty when she likes. You'll be in for the cricket? We all have to play, whether we want to or not. I suppose you didn't bring a bat? The tennis-courts are reserved for the upper forms, but the fourth and fifth classes are getting up a Badminton club, and I advise you to join that. I'll propose you for the archery, too, if you like; it's splendid fun when we have a tournament."

Lucy and I were only too ready to be included in anything that might be going on, and soon found ourselves duly elected members, not only of the Badminton and archery, but also of a croquet club and an athletic society, which was to practise various feats of skill for the annual sports.

"How are you getting on?" said Catherine Winstanley, making her way across the room to us from a quieter group of girls who seemed to have been having a private meeting apart from the others. "I'm glad you're joining all the games. Shall I propose you for the dramatic society? We always get up a piece at the end of the term. Mother told me how you were playing at carnival that time she saw you in London, and how well you had dressed up all your cousins, so I'm sure you must be fond of acting."

"I wish you would," I replied; "I should like to join immensely."

"Then let us go at once; they're just electing the members now. Janet, come here! I'm going to propose Philippa for the dramatic society. Will you second her?"

"Of course I will," answered Janet heartily; and they stepped across to the select committee, who were seated on the top of a long row of lockers at the end of the room.

"I beg to propose Philippa Seaton as an active member of this society," said Cathy, with a little business-like air.

"And I beg to second this proposal," added Janet, pulling me forward to show me to the committee. The president, a tall girl in spectacles, took out her note-book and a well-worn stump of pencil ready to record my name.

"The candidate has been duly proposed and seconded. Has any member any objection to raise?" she enquired.

"I veto the election!" said Ernestine Salt hastily, rising before anyone else had time to reply. "The candidate is a new girl; we don't know yet whether she can act, and we don't want to admit members who can't speak up, and who turn their backs upon the audience!"

"I can answer for it that she wouldn't do that," said Cathy, flushing rather indignantly.

"How do you know? Don't be absurd, Cathy Winstanley! We're not going to spoil the society to oblige you, or anybody else. Besides, ten members are quite enough if we want to give parts to each, and I, for one, sha'n't consent to any more being brought in."

The committee seemed inclined to take Ernestine's view of the matter, and, the bell ringing for prayers, the meeting broke up in confusion.

"I'm so sorry!" said Cathy, squeezing my hand as we went up the stairs together. "I'm sure you can act. I can see it in your face. They would certainly have elected you if it hadn't been for Ernestine. Never mind, you'll get your chance later, and then you must show them what you can do."

Lucy and I went to bed that night feeling as if it were years since we had left home, so much seemed to have happened already in the short time we had been at school.

"There are two things I'm quite certain of," I remarked, as we discussed the day's doings while we brushed and plaited our hair. "I shall dislike Ernestine Salt exceedingly, but I've simply fallen in love with Catherine Winstanley."

CHAPTER IV

THE HOLLIES

"I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days."

I WAS happy at school, though the work was hard and the discipline strict. When I try to recall our system of education, I think it must have been somewhat unique, for it was an endeavour to combine the very best points of a thoroughly modern course of study with the rigid rules and exemplary behaviour of a past generation. We learnt mathematics at The Hollies, but we curtsied to our teachers as we left the room; we had chemistry classes in a well-fitted laboratory, but we were taught the most exquisite darning and the finest of open hem-stitch; we played cricket, hockey, and all modern games, but we used backboards and were made to walk round the school-room balancing books upon our heads, to learn to hold ourselves erect; we had the best of professors for languages and literature, and we were taught to receive visitors graciously, to dispense afternoon tea, arrange flowers, and to write and answer invitations correctly.

It was the summer term. Each morning the great school bell roused us from our slumbers at half-past six, and woe to her who dared to turn over and go to sleep again! At a quarter-past seven we assembled in the hall, where rows of little blue mugs were waiting for us upon the table; then, under the escort of Miss Buller, we all turned out, weather permitting, to go and drink the waters for which Helston Spa was famous. The brisk run through the fields, where the hawthorn was opening, and an occasional bird's nest might be found by those who were skilful enough to lag behind, was inspiring as a beginning to the day. We always entreated for the stile path, and lamented when a wet night made Miss Buller declare the grass too damp, and necessitated a walk along the high-road, where we must file two and two--"in a crocodile," as Janet called it.

"Why a crocodile?" asked Lucy, who was not yet used to school-girl parlance.

"Oh, don't you know?" replied Janet. "Some terribly clever person, I can't remember whether it was Ruskin or Browning or Carlyle or who it was, said he would any day rather meet a crocodile than a ladies' school, so a long row of girls has been called a crocodile ever since."

"It's a stupid old-fashioned custom," said Ellinor, who was generally disposed to grumble. "At St. Chad's the girls have bounds and may go where they please, three together. I hate to be paraded like a file of convicts. We look so foolish carrying our mugs, anyone would take us for a Sunday-school picnic."

Whether we came by field-path or road the well was quite a romantic spot when we reached it, for the water bubbled up in a clear spring from a rocky basin grown round with moss and shaded by ferns. As yet it had not been spoilt by having had a pavilion built over it, but was left in its natural condition, under the care of a homely old woman called Betty, who turned an honest penny by dispensing the waters to visitors, and who stood our school-girl banter with perfect good-humour.

"Good-morning, Mother Shipton! You haven't flown away on your broomstick yet?"

"My broom's too busy sweepin' floors, miss, to be used for anything else."

"What will you do when we've drunk up all the waters, Betty?"

"There's plenty more, miss, where this comes from, so I won't deny you another mugful if you're wantin' it."

"No, thank you, one is enough of such disgusting stuff! What I want now is something to take the taste out of my mouth."

Betty drove a brisk but illicit trade with us in toffee. She kept a basket concealed under her chair, in which was a species of mint-rock very dear to our souls. We were not supposed to be allowed to buy any such luxuries at The Hollies, but at this point of the proceedings Miss Buller would kindly turn her back and pretend to take a deep interest in the surrounding landscape, thinking perhaps that the nastiness of the waters deserved some recompense. In my own case, I am certain the combined flavours completely spoilt my breakfast. I was growing fast, and was inclined to be a little fastidious about my food. Mrs. Marshall held to the old-fashioned principle that we must finish everything that was put upon our plates; a trying rule for me, for, like many children, I had a horror of fat, and to have eaten it would, I think, almost have choked me. Very fortunately I sat at table next to a girl named Marion Burns, whose appetite was large and indiscriminate. The portions which I viewed with dismay were to her insufficient, so I hit upon the happy

expedient of slipping a part of my dinner each day upon her plate, and, like Jack Spratt and his wife, I was thus able to "leave the platter clean". Strange to say my little manoeuvre was never discovered, even by the watchful eyes of Miss Percy.

Miss Percy was Mrs. Marshall's right hand in all matters of discipline. She was a lady of uncertain age, and even more uncertain temper; though, as Cathy said, "It's not uncertain, because you may be quite sure it's going to be disagreeable". She seemed to regard school-girls with perpetual suspicion, and to have a perfect genius for pouncing down upon us on the most inopportune occasions. Were we indiscreet enough to talk in bed, Miss Percy was sure to be passing the door at the identical moment; were we late for prayers, hoping to scuffle in unnoticed among the servants, she was certain to be waiting for us in the hall. She had a very lynx eye for missing buttons or untied shoelaces, her long thin nose smelled out directly the chestnuts we endeavoured to roast by the school-room fire, and she could catch the lowest whisper in the preparation hour.

"I think she must have eyes in the back of her head, and second sight as well," said Janet, who was a frequent sufferer.

In spite of the strict rules I enjoyed my new life; the variety of the school work, the excitement of the games, and the companionship of so many girls of my own age, were far pleasanter to me than the quiet humdrum of our daily round at Aunt Agatha's.

I got on well with my school-fellows, and I think I was a favourite with most of my class. I am sure, too, I honestly tried to share in that "give and take" which is the essence of school-girl conduct.

The one flaw in my happiness was Ernestine Salt. Since the day of my arrival she had taken a dislike to me, which she seemed to lose no opportunity of showing. There are many ways in which a girl can make herself unpleasant without giving any actual cause of complaint, and I found that I was subjected to a number of petty annoyances, too small for comment, but which stung all the same. When we met in the ladies'-chain at dancing, she would squeeze my unfortunate hand till I almost cried out with the pain; was it her turn to distribute the clubs at calisthenics, she would take care that I received the one with the split handle. She would try to leave me out in the games, and scoffed at my efforts at croquet, rejoicing openly when my opponents won and making light of my best strokes. If I were unlucky enough to sit next her at tea-time, she would nudge my elbow as if by accident at the very moment when I was raising my cup to my lips, and would profess the deepest concern for the spill which followed. She nicknamed me "Tow-head" in allusion to my light hair, and had always some clever remark to make at my expense. I kept out of her way as much as possible, for I was of a peaceable disposition and disliked quarrelling; but every now and then some little occasion would arise when I was obliged to stand up for myself, and a battle would follow, in which, with her sharp tongue and ruthless witticisms, she generally managed to get the best of it.

As a compensation for this trouble, I had the great delight of my growing friendship with Catherine Winstanley. She had taken me into her bedroom on the day after our arrival, and had shown me her various treasures--the water-colour picture of her home which hung over the chimney-piece ("painted by my mother", she explained), the photographs of her family, and snap-shots of various horses, dogs, and other pets "taken by the boys".

"That's George on Lady. Edward snapped them just as they were leaping the fence. That's Dick bowling; he looks as if he were scowling horribly, but it's only the sun in his eyes. That's Edward asleep under the apple-tree. I took that myself, and he was so indignant when he found it out he wanted to tear up the photo, but I wouldn't let him. That's Father, with his fishing-rod, proudly holding up a good catch; and that is Mother pouring out tea on the lawn, with Zelica on her knee."

"Is it a rabbit?" I enquired.

"No, it's a Persian cat. Uncle Bertram brought her home really from Persia, so we christened her out of 'Lalla Rookh'. Are you fond of pets?"

"We haven't any at Aunt Agatha's, but I used to keep a few when I was at home. I had two green parrots, a monkey, and a terrapin; and once Tasso brought me a tiny baby puma from the forest. It was the sweetest little thing, with soft yellow fur, and it purred just like a kitten. But Father wouldn't let me keep it; he thought it would be so dangerous when it grew up. So he sent it to the Zoo at Monte Video."

"Tell me all about your life in South America. It is so interesting. I want to hear what your house was like, and your black servants, and the forest and the queer animals. Have you no pictures of them all?"

I had not, but I wrote at once to my father, who sent me a charming series of views of the neighbourhood, and enough pocket-money with them for me to be lavish in the matter of frames, so my walls were soon hung with

remembrances of my old home.

Our bedrooms at The Hollies were rather a feature of the school. They were so arranged that the two little beds and the washstand could be screened off by a curtain, leaving the rest as a sitting-room. A table and two chairs stood in the window, and during the summer term we were allowed to prepare our lessons here instead of in the school-room, a privilege we much appreciated, but which was at once forfeited if we were caught talking during the study hours. It was a point of honour for each girl to make her bedroom as pretty as possible, and we vied with one another in the way of photo-frames, artistic table-covers, book-shelves, mats, and china ornaments. We were allowed to buy flowers on Saturday mornings for our vases, and must have been quite a source of income to the funny old man at a certain stall in the market, who kept us plentifully supplied according to the season.

"What was you wantin'? Don't know 'em, leastways by that name," as I enquired for lilacs. "Oh, ay, *loylacs*! Here you have 'em, purple and white, and no charge extry for smell. Roses? I can bring 'em next week, both Glory Johns and Jack Minnots" (he meant Gloire de Dijon and Jacqueminots!). "Sweet peas is gettin' on gradely, and Fair Maids o' France, just ready for the fair maids who buy 'em!" with an attempt at a compliment which was severely repressed by Miss Percy, who whisked us away in a hurry lest the old man should become "too familiar".

But to return to Cathy. Whenever possible I sat next her in school, I was her partner when we walked out "in crocodile", and she kindly initiated me into the mysteries of cricket, Badminton, archery, and croquet, in all of which I had hitherto been profoundly ignorant. She was a most stimulating companion. A little older than myself, and brought up among a family of brothers, she had all the frank open ways of a boy, with the pretty attractive manners which often mark a much-thought-of only daughter. To hear her talk took me into a new world. Instead of the ordinary topics common among school-girls, the lessons, the games, the chances for the next prize, or grumbles at Miss Percy's tiresome rules, she would tell me about her home, and the delightful round of hobbies and interests which seemed to make up their life at Marshlands. I did not know before that people pressed ferns, collected shells and sea-weeds, painted studies of birds and flowers, scoured the hills in search of antiquities, and held classes for wood-carving among the village boys. At my aunt's I had heard of none of these things. I had lived almost entirely in the nursery and school-room, and on the few occasions when I had been allowed to come down to the drawing-room the conversation was certainly far from intellectual.

"But do your father and mother go out to picnics, and hunt for shells, and help you to paste sea-weeds in books?" I asked, almost incredulously.

"Why, of course! They enjoy it as much as we do. Father is tremendously keen on butterflies, and Mother is making a collection of mosses and lichens. It wouldn't be half the fun unless they did everything with us. Just wait until you come to stay at Marshlands and then you'll see for yourself. Mother means to ask you, I know."

I very much hoped she would, as I could imagine no greater treat than a visit to Cathy's home. I longed to see all the places she had described, and to meet the people of whom she had spoken, and to share in the many tempting projects which she seemed to be planning. I was proud of her friendship, for she was popular at school, and could have taken her choice of playmates among girls who were both older and cleverer than myself. To be thus singled out as her special companion seemed an honour of which I felt scarcely worthy, and my letters to my father were mainly filled with ecstatic praises of my new friend.

CHAPTER V

THE WINSTANLEYS

"Thus fortune's pleasant fruits by friends increased be;
The bitter, sharp, and sour by friends allay'd to thee,
That when thou dost rejoice, then doubled is thy joy;
And eke in cause of care, the less is thy annoy."

I SPENT my first holidays at Marshlands, and my joy knew no bounds. To have Cathy all to myself for seven long glorious weeks seemed the absolute summit of earthly bliss. Mrs. Winstanley received me like a second daughter, and the bluff jolly squire patted me on the head with kindly welcome.

"We must show her something of English country life," he declared. "Can she sit a pony? We don't grow oranges and bananas here, but the gooseberries are ripe in the kitchen-garden, and they take a good deal of beating, in my opinion."

I thought Marshlands was the most delightful spot I had ever seen. The long, low gray stone house, with its mullioned windows and flagged passages, stood just above the little village of Everton, on the verge of the moors, where one could catch a glint of the distant sea and the peaks of the Cumberland mountains. Behind lay the home-farm, with the granaries and stables and orchards, and in front was a sweet old-fashioned garden, with archways of climbing roses and borders of closely-clipped box.

"I see the roof of the arbour has fallen in," said Cathy, as we wandered round on a tour of exploration after breakfast the first morning. "Edward will be dreadfully disappointed about it. He made it himself last holidays, and I thought at the time it wasn't strong enough, for we have such high winds here. Dick's badger has escaped. Caxton stupidly left the stable-door open, and, of course, it took the opportunity to run away, and is probably back in the woods by now. I don't know how we shall break the news to him."

It seemed that the boys were expected home that afternoon, so at Cathy's suggestion we set to work to make a few preparations for their arrival.

"We had better clean out all the animals, and brush their coats," she said. "I'm afraid the ferret has got terribly savage again. George begged Caxton to be sure and handle it every day, so that it should keep tame, but he says he is afraid to touch it. Don't you try, Philippa dear. Look at it now!"

I certainly did not feel inclined to put in my hand and fondle the creature, its sharp red eyes gleamed so viciously at me from among the straw; and I much preferred the black Angola rabbit, with fur as soft as silk, which submitted to caresses with the utmost stolidity and impassiveness.

"I expect George will bring his white mice home with him," continued Cathy. "He has eight of them at school. He kept them in a box behind the window-curtains in his bedroom, and the other boys had twelve brown ones and a dormouse. It was a dead secret for weeks, but at last the second master discovered it. He said they smelled, and he hunted all round the bedroom until he found them. At first he threatened to drown them, but afterwards he repented and said the boys might keep them in a shed outside until the end of the term, and then they must take them home and never bring them back to school again. George kept a newt once, too. He had it in his water-jug for several days, till it escaped and he couldn't find it anywhere. It turned up in one of the other boys' beds, when the housemaid was doing the rooms, and frightened her nearly into a fit, for she thought it was a serpent."

"Does Dick have pets?" I asked.

"Not of that kind. He generally has heaps of caterpillars and chrysalides, which are turning into moths and butterflies for his collection. He likes birds' eggs, too, but such a dreadful accident happened last holidays that he'll have to begin all over again."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, they were all in a splendid big box with little divisions, which he had made on purpose. He put the box inside the lid, and laid it on the top of the school-room book-case. Then he forgot he had left it in that way, and thought the box was lying shut, only upside down. So he reached up and turned it over, and all the eggs came tumbling out, and more than half of them were smashed. It will take him a long time to get so many together again."

"Does Edward collect?"

"Oh, stamps and post-cards and that kind of thing. He's fond of reading, and it's dreadfully hard to get him away from a book. We have to pinch him sometimes before he will listen. Shall we wash the dogs, and take them down to the station to meet the boys?"

I was willing to assist in any project, so we spent the rest of the morning in a moist and exciting struggle with a Pomeranian, a fox-terrier, and two poodle pups. They looked beautiful as the result of our efforts, and as we stood that afternoon on the station platform, holding them by their leashes, we felt they made a most impressive array.

"There goes the signal, and here comes the train!" said Cathy. "Keep Max tight, Phil. We'll stay by the ticket-office, where they can see us first thing."

But we had not calculated upon the joy of the dogs at seeing their masters again. The moment they appeared there was a wild rush, all the strings seemed to get mixed together, and we greeted the boys in the midst of a medley of barking, whining, and yelping which resembled Bedlam.

"Oh, I say! Keep those beasts off!" drawled Edward. "They wear a fellow out."

We dragged the dogs away, and I saw a tall boy of sixteen, much too smart for a school-boy, who brushed the marks of the Pomeranian's paws from his coat-sleeve with tender consideration. At that stage of his existence Edward was a dandy. He "fiddled" over his neck-tie, his collars were never altogether to his satisfaction, he was particular about the cut of his coat and the fit of his boots, and affected an air of general boredom and "used-up-ness" which he fondly imagined to be the height of manly dignity.

"We've lost our luggage," announced Dick cheerfully (he was a jolly, merry-looking boy of fourteen). "But I've got a glorious specimen of the Poplar Hawk-moth. It was actually blown in through the carriage window, and I caught it on the back of the Babe's neck. Would you like to see it?"

George, otherwise "the Babe", as he was nicknamed by his brothers, appeared to be the youngest of the family. He had the eight white mice loose in one pocket, and a box containing two hermit crabs in the other, which seemed to cause him some anxiety.

"They're such beggars for fighting," he explained. "And I don't want them to kill each other before I get them home to the aquarium."

He enquired tenderly about the ferret.

"Beastly shame they've let it get savage," he said. "But one of our fellows is going to send me a fox cub, if the governor will only let me keep it. Where's the mater? Hasn't she come down to the station?"

I had never lived before among a family of school-boys, and their rollicking ways, their slang, their endless chaff, their jokes, and the thrilling stories they told of their numerous adventures, were altogether a new experience for me. Being a visitor, they treated me at first with a certain amount of ceremony, but finding that I was ready to climb fences, play hare-and-hounds, ride, fish, or tramp miles over the heathery moors, they voted me "a jolly sort of girl", and included me in the bosom of the family circle.

"We thought, as you'd lived abroad, you'd perhaps go about shaking out your skirts, and holding up a parasol, and shriek if you saw a cow," said George, who had tested my courage by springing at me from behind corners, letting a bat loose in my bedroom, and locking me into the dark jam-cupboard, all of which ordeals I had borne with heroism.

"She can't be troubled with nerves if she can stand the Babe's little diversions. It makes a fellow quite limp to look at him this hot weather. Why don't you give her a book and a deck-chair in the garden, and leave her in peace?" said Edward, his suggestions for my entertainment being based on his own ideals of enjoyment.

With Dick I soon won golden opinions, as I took an interest in the birds' eggs, and would consent to carry the wriggling caterpillars and slimy snails which he collected on our walks, or to fill my pockets with stones and other specimens for the museum. This museum was a large cabinet with glass doors, which filled one entire end of the school-room at Marshlands. It held a very miscellaneous assortment of treasures, to which both Cathy and the boys were constantly adding, sometimes with rather more zeal than discretion. I shall never forget how Dick put the hornet's nest there.

"I've smoked it thoroughly with brown paper," he said, "and the grubs are as dead as door-nails, so you needn't be at all afraid of it."

But I fear the brown paper could not have been strong enough after all. A few days afterwards we were sitting at tea in the school-room, when a peculiarly irritated buzzing noise began to resound from the region of the cabinet, and Edward, who was giving us an imitation of his classical master's stately style on speech-day, suddenly ducked his head in a most undignified fashion, and, seizing the bread-knife, made a frantic cut into the air.

"It's a hornet!" he exclaimed. "Just see the size of it! Take care, Cathy, the brute's going into your hair! Look out! If there isn't another of them!"

We jumped up in a hurry; there was not only another, but more and more and more, and, like the oysters in the ballad of the walrus and the carpenter, they came up so thick and fast that for the moment it seemed to us as if the whole room were full of yellow stripes and buzzing wings. I am not brave where wasps are concerned, and I am afraid my strong-mindedness went to the winds, and I shrieked like any bread-and-butter miss, at least George assured me so afterwards. Cathy had the presence of mind to fling her dress over her head, while the boys made a valiant though fruitless effort to slay those within immediate reach.

"Oh, I say!" cried Edward. "This is no joke! They're all pouring out of the museum. We'd better cut, or there'll be damage done!"

And we beat an ignominious retreat, leaving our tea cooling upon the table, and the hornets in clear possession of the school-room. The question of how to get rid of them presented some difficulty, it being an unequal match to war with wasps; but in the end a tray full of burning sulphur was thrust through the door, and allowed to smoulder for some hours, after which we were at length able to enter in safety, and sweep up the bodies of our victims in triumph from the floor.

Somehow poor Dick's experiments did not always turn out very happily, in spite of the best intentions on his part. Fired by an article in a boys' magazine, he once volunteered to stuff a dead bullfinch which Cathy had found in the garden, and after a long operation of skinning and drying, he produced it in the school-room with great pride.

"Doesn't it look a little fatter on one side than on the other?" suggested Cathy, doubtfully surveying the bullfinch, which was wired upon a twig as no bird in real life had ever perched.

"Nonsense!" said Dick, pinching his specimen to send the stuffing straight. "It's just exactly as if it were pecking at a bud. Look at its eyes! I made them out of two black-headed pins I took from the mater's bonnet."

"I don't think its tail looks quite natural," said Cathy. "It seems somehow to stick up like a wren's."

"Well, if you're going to find fault," answered Dick indignantly, "just try and do one yourself, that's all. It's jolly difficult, I can tell you, and I've taken no end of trouble over it."

"Oh, I'm not finding fault!" said Cathy hastily. "I think it's ever so nice, and you're a dear boy to do it for me. We might bend the tail down a little--so! That's better. Now it looks splendid, and we'll give it a front place in the collection."

"All right!" said Dick, somewhat mollified. "But you girls seem to think these things are as easy as eating cakes. It takes practice even to skin a sparrow, as you'd soon find out if you'd ever tried your hand at it."

The bullfinch was duly placed in the museum, where it really looked very well. Not long after, however, we began to notice a most peculiar odour in the school-room.

"It's the flowers!" said Cathy, sniffing at a vase, and throwing the water out of the window. "They always get nasty if you leave them too long."

"It smells to me more like a dead mouse," I declared. "Perhaps one may have had a funeral inside the wall;" and, dropping on my knees, I crept round the room, scenting the skirting-boards like a pointer. In spite of my efforts I was not able to fix the spot, and as Cathy turned out a potful of sour paste which we had forgotten in the cupboard, and found a pile of stale mushrooms in the pocket of George's coat, which was hanging behind the door, we came to the conclusion that it might be either of these.

But the odour did not improve, and by the next day it had become almost unbearable. Even the boys perceived it, and that is saying something. We all went round the room, sniffing in every corner, and trying to find the cause of offence, till at length Edward flung open the door of the cabinet.

"It's your beastly bullfinch!" he declared. "Take the wretched thing away! It's only half-cured, and smells like a tannard! Whew!"

Poor Dick was rather crest-fallen, especially as Edward made it a subject of chaff for many days; and he grew so huffy about it, that for some time we did not dare to mention either birds or the collection in his presence. He came home one day, however, bubbling over with laughter.

"I've a ripping museum joke for you!" he said. "Beats your old bullfinch into fits!"

"What's that?" we enquired.

"Why, I was down the village with the governor this morning, and we dropped into old Mrs. Grainger's. I was telling her a yarn or two about the Babe's crocodile's egg, and so on, and she turned round to a drawer, and fished out a piece of pink coral. 'If you like things from furrin' parts,' says she, 'I'll give you this. My sailor son brought it home from Singapore on his last voyage. I've heard as coral is all full of insects, but I've boiled this piece well in a saucepan, so I reckon it'll be clean enough now!'"

"*Boiled!*" we exclaimed.

"Yes, boiled! To kill the insects, don't you see?"

"Your imaginative faculties, my dear fellow, are considerable," said Edward. "But you won't get me to swallow that!"

"Fact, all the same!" said Dick. "You ask the governor. You're jealous, old chap, because you can't glean up humour yourself in the village. The yokels are so taken up with staring at your last new tie, or your immaculate collar, that you don't get a word out of them. There was old Jacob Linkfield, now, who----"

But at this point of the story Edward went for Dick, and chased him out of the house and down to the stack-yard. He could occasionally stir his long legs when he considered the "cheek" of the younger ones grew beyond bounds, and, once he was moved, they deemed it prudent to flee before him.

You must not think, however, that we spent the whole of our time at Marshlands with the boys. They were frequently out with their father upon some shooting or fishing expedition, and Cathy and I would potter about the garden or in the fields with "the mater", only too delighted to have the chance of getting her quite to ourselves. A sweeter or truer gentlewoman than dear Mrs. Winstanley it has never been my good fortune to meet. She took me to her kind heart at once, and gave me for the first time in my life that "mothering" which I had so sadly lacked. I have hinted that my aunt did not make too much of me; even her own children did not run to her with their joys and sorrows, and I had never been accustomed to think of her as in any sense a possible companion. Mrs. Winstanley, on the other hand, was the most delightful of comrades. She had not forgotten in the very least what it felt like to be young; she could sympathize in all our amusements, indeed I think she enjoyed a picnic tea in the woods, or a scramble for blackberries, fully as much as we did ourselves; but she contrived at the same time to make us interested in those intellectual pleasures which were the great resource of her life. Under her guiding hand I made my first efforts at sketching; she taught me the names of the trees and the flowers, of which before I was lamentably ignorant; and a walk to see a cromlech or a stone circle upon the moors was an opportunity for such delightful stories about the early dwellers in our lands, that I became a lover of "antiquities" on the spot. I feel I can never be grateful enough to her for giving me in my childhood that taste for natural history which has been such a joy to me in my after-life. She taught us to use our eyes, and to see the beauty in each leaf and flower and every common thing around us. At her suggestion Cathy and I each began a "Nature Note-Book", in which we recorded all the plants, birds, animals, or insects we met with during our rambles, drawing and painting as many of them as we could.

"It will form a kind of naturalists' calendar," she said. "You must put the dates to all your finds, and in years to come the books will prove very interesting. Never mind whether the sketches are good or bad. Persevere, and you will soon begin to improve, and the very effort to copy a flower or a butterfly will impress its shape and colour upon your minds in a way which nothing else could do."

We waxed very enthusiastic over these note-books, and there was quite a keen competition between us as to which should contain the most records. As we kept them for several years, we naturally had different entries during the holidays we spent apart; and while I was able to sketch gorgeous sea-anemones and madrepores which I found upon the shores of south-country watering-places, Cathy would exult over the coral cups or birds'-nest fungi for which she searched the woods in winter.

Somehow, after my friendship with the Winstanleys I realized that in some subtle way the bond between my father and myself grew and strengthened. In the years which I had spent at my aunt's, though I had never ceased to love him, we had seemed in a very slight degree to have drifted apart, but since my visit to Marshlands all the old spirit of comradeship returned, and I felt he was even more to me than he had ever been before. I think I must have unconsciously expressed this feeling in my letters, for in his, too, I began to notice a change. He wrote back to me more

fully and freely, not as to a child, but as to a friend, telling me his hopes and his difficulties, and the little details of his lonely days, and asking almost wistfully for a full record of all my doings. His gratitude to my kind friends knew no limit, yet I think all the same he felt it hard that he should miss those years of my life when I was receiving my most vivid impressions, and that he must leave to others the care he would so gladly have bestowed upon me himself.

CHAPTER VI

MISCHIEF

"When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war."

THE celebrated Dr. Johnson is said to have advocated the theory, "When you meet a boy, beat him! For either he has been in mischief, or he is at present in mischief, or he is about to get into mischief!" In the case of the two younger Winstanley boys, I fear this axiom was only too true, since they sometimes allowed their love of fun to lead them into rather questionable undertakings, and I do not think their neighbours altogether appreciated the many jokes and escapades with which they sought to enliven the holidays.

There resided in the village High Street a certain elderly bachelor, a retired sea-captain, of somewhat autocratic manners and a very great idea of his own importance. Dick and George had once ventured into his garden in quest of a runaway puppy, and had been met with such a storm of wrath from the fiery old gentleman, who threatened to prosecute them for trespassing, that they had carried on a kind of feud with him ever since. On the captain's side, I have no doubt, there were many reasonable grounds of complaint, but the boys, on the other hand, considered themselves to have just cause of grievance. Their enemy had been seen deliberately to wipe off the treacling mixture which they had smeared upon the trees to attract moths, though the said trees were situated on the public highway, and not on his private property; he had put an impassable fence of barbed wire round the particular field where specimens of the Clifden Blue might occasionally be captured, and he had clipped his brambly hedge, allowing the prickles purposely to fall and remain in the cinder-path below, though he knew it was the short cut by which they bicycled from Marshlands to the railway-station.

"Hoped we should puncture our tyres, no doubt!" said Dick indignantly. "By sheer good luck I saw them in time, and we carried our machines the whole length of the lane. But it was a sneaking trick to play, and we'll be even with him. We owe him a good long score now, and I have it in my mind to just jolly well pay him out."

Needless to say, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Winstanley were aware of these fell designs against old Captain Vernon, with whom they had always managed to keep on excellent terms of neighbourly good-will, and, knowing full well that their schemes would be promptly forbidden if they ventured to divulge them, the boys seized the opportunity when "the mater" and "the governor" were out at a dinner-party to carry into execution their plan of revenge.

Edward declined altogether to be a party to the deed.

"Beastly bad form, I call it!" he yawned. "You don't catch me leaving a decent arm-chair to go ragging an antiquated old fossil of a sea-captain. As for you two girls, I suppose you can do as you like, but don't let the mater catch you at it, that's all!"

And, stretching out his long legs on a second chair, he took up a copy of Punch, and resigned himself to ease and comfort.

"That's all jolly well for the fifth form," said Dick, "but it's a little too good for us chaps. We're off now, and if Cathy and Phil like to join the show, they can, and if they don't, they may stop at home and hemdusters."

It was extremely naughty of us, but we wanted so much to see what happened; so we thought if we followed the boys at a discreet distance we should not be exactly aiding and abetting, and yet we should come in for a full share of all that went on.

It was a dark evening, with only a fitful gleam from a watery moon which occasionally showed itself behind the driving clouds, and the unlighted village street seemed quiet and deserted.

The captain lived in the end house of an old-fashioned red-brick terrace. Though he had a good garden at the side and back, his front-door and the bow-window of his dining-room were flush with the road, and by flattening our noses against the glass, we were able to peep through a crevice in the red curtains and watch him, as he sat in a particularly easy arm-chair, with a cigar between his lips and a newspaper in his hand.

"Looks much too comfortable!" muttered Dick. "Just wait till I'm ready and we'll make him sit up!"

He had been cautiously fastening a piece of cobblers' wax to the centre of the window-frame. This wax had a hole in it, through which a long piece of string was threaded, having a button at the end, and it was so arranged that the button should hang down over the glass, while Dick, standing under cover of the trees on the opposite side of the

road, held the other end of the string in his hand.

"Are you well out of sight?" he whispered. "Don't give the thing away by flapping your skirts about and giggling. Now! Mum's the word, and you'll see some sport!"

He pulled the string, and the button tapped smartly upon the window. It evidently had some effect, for the red curtains were drawn aside, and the captain peered out enquiringly into the darkness.

"Unearthed!" whispered George, but Dick gave him a severe pinch for silence, and pulled the cord again. "Rap! Tap!" sounded the button on the pane. This time our foe threw open the sash, and, thrusting out his head, glanced up and down the street, muttering something we could not catch. We could see him very plainly, his red face and long white whiskers outlined against the lamp-light of the room behind, and we could hear his peculiar husky wheeze as he fumbled with the curtain, and thrust aside a small table which stood in his way.

"I hope he won't catch cold!" I whispered to Cathy, feeling just a little compunction when I heard the old man's cough. Perhaps she did, too, for she squeezed my hand; but we were in for it now, as we did not dare to move an inch for fear of betraying the boys.

Not finding anybody outside, the captain evidently thought he must be mistaken. He closed the window again, carefully drew the red curtains, and no doubt returned once more to the enjoyment of his paper and his cigar. Loosing his string, Dick crept across the road, and, giving a sudden sharp bang on the window-frame, he at the same moment dropped a number of pieces of glass which he had brought with him, and which fell on the pavement with a resounding crash. Thinking, no doubt, that his panes were smashed to atoms, Captain Vernon appeared again, in great wrath and utter mystification when he found that after all no visible damage had been done. He opened the front door this time, and came a few steps into the street, narrowly missing Dick, who had rushed back to his point of vantage opposite. He picked up a piece of the broken glass, examined it by the aid of his hall lamp, peered up and down once more into the darkness, and finally went in, slamming the door after him.

"It's my turn now," whispered George. "Just watch me bait the badger!"

"Haven't you done enough?" whispered Cathy. "It seems rather too bad, and the poor old man is getting so cross!"

"Oh, do stop, George!" I implored. "I know you'll be caught!"

"We're not half quits yet," returned George grimly. "You girls always want to spoil things by hanging back. I wish we had left you at home with Edward. Keep quiet now you're here, at any rate."

He had a coil of rope with him, and, moving with extreme caution, he fastened one end of it to the captain's door-handle, and the other end to the door-handle of the next house, which was only a few feet lower down the street. Then, seizing the knockers, he beat a terrific tattoo on both doors and fled. He had hardly gained our sheltering trees before the captain appeared on the threshold, uttering some very uncomplimentary remarks, varied by perfect explosions of coughing. As the rope had been allowed to hang rather loosely, he was just able to open his door, but at that identical instant his neighbour also desired to investigate matters, with the effect that no sooner did he open *his* door, than it drew the rope so tightly that the captain's door was banged to with great violence. In a fury of rage he pulled it open again, which had the result of shutting his neighbour's, and for a few moments the two doors opened and closed as if they were worked by a wire. It really looked very funny, and in spite of our guilty consciences we nearly choked ourselves with trying to laugh noiselessly. I think a faint giggle must have escaped us, or perhaps the victims of our practical joke suspected that somebody was trying to play a trick upon them, at any rate both doors were hastily slammed hard, and all was silence.

"Good old Babe!" whispered Dick, when he had recovered his breath. "Your dodge went even better than mine! But I say, we can't leave our apparatus over there! We must manage to fetch it somehow!"

They slipped across the road again, Dick to remove his lump of bees'-wax and the button, and George to untie the rope; but they had counted without their host. The captain had evidently scented the plot, and was waiting for them, for from the bedroom casement above descended a perfect deluge of water, as though the whole contents of a bath had been suddenly emptied on to the pavement below. Almost blinded for the moment, and drenched to the skin, the boys beat a gasping retreat, while such extraordinary sounds of mixed chuckling and coughing proceeded from the open window, as to lead us to suppose that the old man was exulting in his triumph.

We kept this adventure a dead secret. Cathy and I felt rather ashamed of ourselves, and, as Edward had hinted, we knew Mrs. Winstanley would have been greatly annoyed if she had discovered that we had made use of her absence to play such very questionable pranks, especially in the village, where we might so easily have been seen and recognized. Whether the captain suspected us, we could not tell; if he did, he said nothing to the squire, probably thinking that on

the whole he had had the best of it, and that as he could not prove us to be the culprits, it was wiser not to push his advantage too far.

The next event in the feud was really a very innocent one on our part. Even the boys on this occasion were quite guiltless of any evil intent, and I think the fault lay with the old captain's hot temper. It was a most lovely September afternoon, and we decided that nothing would be nicer than to take our kettle and tea-things, and after a ramble round in search of blackberries, to picnic in any suitable spot where we might happen to find ourselves when the pangs of hunger assailed us.

"Always allowing that George doesn't insist upon getting hungry before four o'clock!" said Cathy. "He'll have to wait if he does. And don't let him carry that basket, or you'll find the cake half gone! You take it, Philippa dear, and give him the kettle instead."

"Fibs!" said George. "I wouldn't touch the tuck. I'll carry them both if you like, and Cathy's satchel as well. Here, sling it over my back! Now I call this returning good for evil, Madame Catherine, when you've just been slanging me so hard!"

"Poor old Babe!" said Cathy soothingly. "You see, when people earn a bad name, it is apt to stick. But to console you, we'll let you choose where we shall go this afternoon; only make up your mind quickly, for we are all ready and waiting."

"All right!" said George promptly. "Up the common, and round by the oak-wood; there's a stream there where we can get water for the kettle, and I know a place to camp in that's just A1."

We set off without further delay, and scrambled up the hill-side on to the heathery common, where the blackberries were already ripening fast on the low brambles. It took a considerable time to fill the large milk-can which we had brought for the purpose, although there were four pairs of hands hard at work; and I don't really think a very great many had gone into our mouths, in spite of the suspicious stains round George's lips.

"Hullo, it's after half-past three!" cried Dick at last, looking at his watch. "If we want to get to the oak-wood, and then light a fire and boil the kettle, it will take us all our time to get tea by four o'clock, I can tell you!"

So, mounting the stile into the lane, we set off in the other direction down the hill, and by climbing a steep wall found ourselves at last in a pretty little wood, carpeted with soft green grass, and with a clear stream running through the midst.

"Here's the place!" said George, pointing to a kind of natural arbour, formed partly by the bank, and partly by the roots of a huge oak-tree, the branches of which stretched far overhead, and made a green roof with their interlacing leaves. "I found it out once when I came here alone, and I put these logs inside for seats. It makes a ripping summer-house, and I made up my mind we would have tea here some day. Well, what do you say to it?"

We were all enthusiastic in our approval, and Cathy and I set to work at once to lay out the tea, while the boys collected sticks for the fire, and filled the kettle at the brook. The thought that we were trespassing never entered into our heads. The Winstanleys knew all the farmers and the land-owners about Everton, and were accustomed to go where they pleased without thinking of asking leave. Being country bred they could be trusted not to trample on springing crops, disturb young pheasants, or in any way do injury to other people's property. We were quite unaware, also, that the plantation belonged to old Captain Vernon (I am not sure whether the knowledge would not have added a zest to our enjoyment!); and though we knew he owned a considerable amount of land in the district, we imagined this particular wood to be part of the preserve of a neighbouring squire, with whom the boys were on very friendly terms, and who had often taken them for a day's grouse-shooting on the moors. Cathy and I arranged the tea-cups most artistically, laying flowers and fronds of fern between them, with the cakes and the bread-and-butter piled up in graceful pyramids in the centre. It looked very tempting, and we all waited with some impatience for the kettle to boil; but it was a case of the watched pot, for the sticks being rather damp, the fire gave out more smoke than heat, in spite of Dick's desperate efforts to fan it with a piece of newspaper.

"I'll fetch some bracken. They've been cutting it lower down," he declared. "That'll be dry enough at any rate, and ought to help it a little. Get up, George, you lazy-bones, and bestir yourself, or we sha'n't have any tea to-night!"

The boys were not long in bringing back a large pile of withered ferns, and stoked the fire to such good purpose that the kettle was soon boiling briskly. Cathy had the tea ready in the pot, and Dick was in the very act of pouring in the water, when we suddenly heard a tremendous crashing a little higher up in the wood, and whom should we see bearing down furiously upon us, his red face redder than ever with rage, and his long white whiskers waving in the wind, but--the captain, followed by his equally crusty old gardener!

"What are you doing here, you young scoundrels?" he roared, flourishing his riding-whip as he ran, and interspersing his words with gusts of coughing. "I'll teach you to trespass on my property! Burning my wood and spoiling my grass! Boys or girls, you're one as bad as another, and I'll spare none of you! Come on, Johnson, we'll give them a lesson!"

Whether he would actually have done so, or whether he only meant to frighten us, I cannot tell; but he did not get the opportunity, for, dropping the kettle, Dick seized my hand, and dragged me down the hill at such a breakneck speed that I could scarcely keep on my feet, while George and Cathy raced behind as if they were possessed of seven-leagued boots. With the old captain's angry shouts ringing in our ears, we scrambled somehow over the fence at the bottom of the wood, and never stopped running till we were quite a long way up the high-road, and within a safe distance of Marshlands again.



"DICK SEIZED MY HAND AND DRAGGED ME DOWN THE HILL"

"Of course we weren't in the very least in a funk for ourselves," explained Dick afterwards. "If it had only been the

Babe and myself, we'd have stayed and tackled them both, and enjoyed the fun, but I thought the old madman was going for you girls, and the best thing to do was to clear out of his way as quick as we could. Is he gorging on our tea and cakes, I wonder? It would be like his cheek. Perhaps he'll annex the tea-cups, too, while he's about it."

But the captain was honest as regarded our property. That same evening the old gardener arrived at the back-door, and with an imperturbable countenance handed our baskets to the astonished cook, stalking away without uttering a word, in spite of the many questions she hurled at his head.

After this the boys declared it was war to the knife. They had not intended to do any harm in the wood, and therefore, they argued, the captain's action was quite unjustifiable; and as he had shown intentions of not confining the use of his riding-whip to his own sex, he had forfeited all claim to be treated as a gentleman, and his conduct must be repaid with interest.

This time they did not take Cathy and me into their confidence beforehand, though from various dark hints we imagined they must have some scheme of revenge brewing in their minds.

They came home one evening brimming over with satisfaction.

"Done him at last!" chuckled Dick. "It was the Babe's idea, too, not mine, so I won't take the credit of it. You know the old duffer has a gorgeous pear-tree at the end of his garden; well, we just stood in the lane outside with our catapults, and shot pellets into the pears as hard as we could go. We've been wiring into them all the afternoon. Fancy they'll taste a little gritty when he comes to eat them! Too bad? Not at all! Serves the old beggar right!"

Cathy and I, however, felt somewhat uneasy, thinking the boys had gone rather too far.

"If the captain finds out who has done it," said Cathy, "and complains to Father, they'll get into the most dreadful row. He can be terribly angry over some of their scrapes."

We waited rather anxiously for further developments, and they were not long in coming. On the very next day a large basket of pears was delivered at Marshlands by the old gardener, "with Captain Vernon's compliments".

"How very kind of him!" said unsuspecting Mrs. Winstanley. "He has never sent us a present before. They are finer than anything we have been able to grow for ourselves."

The pears were brought in at dessert, and remarkably ripe and luscious they appeared. I thought the boys looked a little conscious when they saw them placed upon the table, but they hid their feelings under a mask of would-be unconcern.

"These are some of Captain Vernon's pears, my dear," said Mrs. Winstanley, passing the dish to the squire. "He sent such a polite message, saying he thought we should like to taste them."

"They must be his early Bergamots," said Mr. Winstanley, choosing a particularly fine one, and slicing it. "I know he's very proud of them, and boasts that he can beat all the gardens round. Hullo! What's this? It looks as if the pear were riddled with shot!"

"Perhaps they're the seeds, they often look black when they're ripe!" suggested George hastily. He and Dick were eating apples, and Cathy and I had also declined the offered delicacy.

"Seeds! You don't find pips made of lead! I tell you they're pellets, though how they came inside the pear, I can't imagine. Hand me the dish, and I'll try another."

The next was in like condition, and Mrs. Winstanley's and Edward's plates told the same story.

"There's something queer about this!" said the squire, cutting into his third pear. Then, suddenly catching sight of the air of elaborate nonchalance which the boys were rather overdoing, "You young rascals!" he roared. "I verily believe this is your handiwork!"

I will draw a veil over the explanations which followed. To Dick and George they proved extremely unpleasant, as Mr. Winstanley was really angry. He had little patience with practical jokes, and especially disliked to give any cause of offence to his neighbours, so he insisted upon marching both the boys off then and there to make their apologies to Captain Vernon.

"And if he likes to horse-whip you, he may do so," he declared. "And I'll stand by and watch it done, and say you deserve it for a couple of mischievous young jackanapes!"

To the great surprise of all concerned, however, the old captain "turned up trumps". Bursting into a roar of laughter,

he declared he had had the best of the joke, shook the boys warmly by the hand, and proclaimed an amnesty. He even did more. Next day he sent us a beautiful basketful of his best wall-apricots as a peace-offering, and permission to pick blackberries in his fields if we chose.

"It's ever so decent of the old chap," said George. "We certainly did rag him rather hard. But I've promised to catch the moles in his garden--I'm a capital hand at setting mole-traps--and he says if I like to come and scare the birds from his autumn peas, he'll lend me an air-gun, and I can blaze away all day if I want."

It was a very satisfactory conclusion to the feud, and I think the boys were glad it had ended thus; for by the next holidays the poor old captain's cough no longer resounded through the village, his garden knew him no more, and other and younger faces looked out from his red-curtained windows.

CHAPTER VII

TIT FOR TAT

"All in the nick
To play some trick
And frolic it with Ho! ho! ho!"

THOUGH the natural-history portion of the Marshlands Museum grew so rapidly that it threatened to overflow the cabinet, there were very few antiquities in the collection, a Roman lamp, an Egyptian scarab, a few old coins, and a Georgian snuff-box making up the whole of the scanty store.

"I wish we could get a few really ancient things," said Cathy one day, as she dusted and tidied the shelves. "Arrow-heads, I mean, and spindle-whorls, and bronze brooches, and all those delightful finds you hear of people digging up out of barrows. I'm sure there ought to be some on these moors if we only knew where to look for them."

"Go and dig, then," suggested Dick. "You don't know what you might come across."

"Why shouldn't I?" said Cathy. "There's a little round green mound just in the corner of the field near the stone bridge that, I always think, looks as if it ought to have something inside it. I shall certainly try some day, when I have time."

Cathy generally carried out her intentions, so one afternoon about a week later she came from the tool-house carrying two small garden spades in her hand.

"Come along, Phil," she said. "We'll go and dig on the moors. It's a good opportunity while the boys are out fishing. They always make such fun of us. It will be quite time to tell them about it if we find anything."

I was more than willing, so we started briskly up the steep stony road towards the moors. It was a glorious autumn afternoon, with larks singing overhead, and the heather a glow of soft purple below. Flocks of plovers scared at our approach flew off with warning cries, and a sea-gull or two, which had been feeding with them, flapped majestically away towards the silvery line of the sea in the far distance. We followed the course of the noisy brook for about a mile, till we reached the little rough stone bridge which spanned the rapid, rushing water.

"Why do they make the bridge so much wider than the stream?" I asked, as I looked down at the narrow channel under the arch.

"The water is low now," answered Cathy. "But you should see it when there has been a storm upon the hills. It comes raging down in a great foaming torrent, and it's so wide that sometimes you can scarcely get on to the bridge. It looks grand then. I often think the country is even more beautiful in winter than in summer, yet how few people who live in towns ever dream of taking a Christmas holiday to see what the moors are like in December!"

"They would find it dull, I expect," I suggested, for I could not imagine Aunt Agatha or any of her friends leaving the diversions of London to seek nature's solitudes in mid-winter.

"They don't know how to enjoy themselves," said Cathy, who had a fine scorn for town-dwellers. "I would rather have a ramble over the fells in the snow, or a scamper on Lady after the hounds, than all the parties and pantomimes you could offer me."

The mound proved to be a small green hillock in the corner of a very stony field close to the bridge.

"It's just the kind of place the prehistoric people used to bury their chiefs under," declared Cathy. "Don't you remember the pictures I showed you in Mother's book? There ought to be a skeleton in the middle, and all the drinking-vessels and ornaments and things which they put in the grave with him. If we pull a few of these stones away I think we shall be able to dig; the soil seems fairly light."

"It's very soft here," I said, putting in my spade as I spoke and turning up the turf without much difficulty.

"So it is. Perhaps a rabbit has burrowed there and loosened the earth. We'll go on here, as it seems an easy place."

We had not dug more than a foot deep when Cathy's spade struck upon something hard.

"Stop, Philippa! Be careful!" she cried. "If there's really anything here we mustn't spoil it on any account."

She went down on her knees, and, putting her hand into the hole we had dug, began to feel about cautiously.

"There is! There actually is!" she exclaimed, and with eyes shining with delight she drew forth a small round vessel fashioned somewhat in the shape of an urn. It appeared to be made of baked clay, and was broken and crumbling round the top and stained with darkish marks below.

"It must be two thousand years old or more," said Cathy, in a voice of rapture. "And there's something inside it too!"

She turned it carefully upside down, and out fell a few little bones and five worn and rusty-looking coins.

"Now, this *is* a discovery," she continued. "No doubt it was a Celtic chief who was buried here. They would burn his body first, and put his bones in the urn along with a few Roman coins. You can't see the marks on them, can you? Never mind, we'll rub them up when we go home. What an addition to the collection! *Sha'n't* we crow over the boys, just!"

We filled up the hole in the mound again, and went home elated with pride, feeling that the British Museum itself might justly envy us our possession. The boys were hanging about the gate as though they were waiting for our return, though they certainly could not have known where we had been that afternoon.

"Hullo! What have you got there?" they cried, as Cathy produced her treasure.

"Don't ever dare to chaff me again about antiquities," she announced. "What do you say to this?"

It might have been fancy, but I certainly thought I saw a wink pass between Dick and Edward. Perhaps, however, I was mistaken, since they all seemed duly impressed.

"Looks a real mouldy, crumbly, museum old kind of a performance," said Edward.

"Must be genuine if you dug it up yourself," remarked Dick.

"You'll have to write about it to the newspaper," put in George. "What sport for you to see your name in print!"

"Go and ask Evans for a box of metal-polish," said Cathy. "I must certainly find out what the coins are, they'll fix the date of the mound."

Dick went with a readiness which might have aroused our suspicions, and hung over her shoulder while she rubbed vigorously away at the worn-looking specimens.

"It's certainly coming off!" she cried with enthusiasm. "Oh, look! There is a mark like a head, and some writing, and--it looks like--why--why----!"

She held the coin up critically, and her face fell; as well it might, for when the dirt was cleaned away, there appeared the unmistakable profile of Queen Victoria, while on the other side was the familiar figure of Britannia and the remains of the words "Half Penny"!

"Dick!" cried Cathy with sudden enlightenment.

But the boys were doubled up in such convulsions of jubilant mirth that it was a few moments before they could gasp out any remarks.

"Done you, old girl, for once!" spluttered George.

"Oh! I really didn't think you'd be taken in by such an easy fake!" shrieked Edward.

"Made it ourselves," explained Dick, between bursts of chuckles. "We modelled it in clay, after the pattern of those pictures in the mater's antiquarian book, and baked it in the oven. Then we crumbled the top away, and stained the bottom with iron-water, and filled it with pigs' bones and all the oldest coppers we could muster. We didn't bury it too deep, because we knew you'd never fag to dig half the mound away. I dare say the place *was* soft! No doubt a rabbit *had* been burrowing there! Oh, I say! I feel quite weak with laughing!"

Cathy and I bore our chaffing with the best grace we could.

"It was really rather clever of them," said Cathy. "Of course it's a dreadful sell, but we might find something genuine some day; only the next time we mean to go hunting for antiquities we won't tell the boys beforehand!"

All the same the affair rankled in our minds, and we came to the conclusion that if we could possibly seize an opportunity we should like to play a trick upon these determined practical jokers, so as to pay them back to some extent in their own coin. It was rather difficult to hit upon anything fresh, Cathy scorning such stale devices as apple-pie beds

or stitched-up trousers.

"Those are as old as the hills," she said. "And would scarcely amuse them. I want to find something quite out of the common, and if possible to give them a good fright into the bargain."

"Ghosts," I suggested.

"Um! No. It's rather hard to get up a clever ghost, they find it out directly. You see they've done it so often themselves to scare the servants. Stop! I have it! Oh, I've thought of a most glorious idea! Didn't you hear Edward reading out an account from the newspaper this morning of a robbery at Thistleton Hall? Why shouldn't we have a sham burglar, and rouse them all in the middle of the night? It would make a splendid sensation."

Mr. and Mrs. Winstanley were away from home, spending a week in Scotland, and Edward considered himself to be the head and safeguard of the establishment during their absence, so the scheme really seemed very feasible.

"We can dress up the figure of a burglar with some of Father's old clothes stuffed with straw," said Cathy, "and let it down through the trap-door in the end bedroom. But first of all we must pave the way. Suppose we were to write a letter to Edward, as if it came from some poor person, warning him that there's going to be an attack on the house? It would make them ever so excited about it first, and then they'd fall quite easily into the trap, and be ready to believe that someone was really breaking in. Can you keep the secret, Phil, absolutely tight and safe? We mustn't betray even by a look what we're meditating."

"I think I can," I replied. "I'm rather clever at hiding my feelings. I didn't let George guess last night that I knew where Dick had put his cricket-cap, though I helped him to look for it everywhere except in the right place."

We set to work at once so that we might have time to carry out our plans before the squire and Mrs. Winstanley returned home. Cathy's letter was a product of genius. It was written on the thinnest of village note-paper, with the vilest and scratchiest of pens; the handwriting was unformed and scrawling, and the tails of the letters were occasionally smeared, as if a large and dirty finger had industriously and laboriously pursued its way along the page. It ran thus, being guiltless of stops--

"honered sir

"i take up my pen to tel you wot as bin on my mind and i ope you wil not consider it a liburty but Honored Sir i feel it is ony rite to warn you as your pa and ma is away and you the squire as is to be and i dont like to split on my pals but there is some as will ope to find your ouse not two well looked arfter at nite and i can tel you no more at present for i dont want to get into no trubble

"this is from
"one oo knows"

She addressed the envelope on the extreme top to--

"Mister edward winstanly
marchelands
near evverton",

put the stamp on upside down at the bottom, smeared the letter with her thumb previously rubbed in the dust-pan, and dropped the epistle herself into the village post-box.

It was extremely difficult to keep our faces the next morning when Edward opened this strange communication, especially when we saw that he took it in all seriousness.

"I say, Dick, look here!" he said, drawing his brother aside. "Just read this, and see what you make of it. It appears to me there's going to be an attempt to break into the house, and someone has written to warn us. Whom could it possibly be from? There's no name or address on it."

Dick turned the dirty sheet of paper over and over in his hand, and examined the envelope closely, but it was evident he could make no more of it than Edward had done.

"What's the matter?" asked Cathy innocently. "What are you two putting your heads together about?"

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you girls," said Edward in his most fatherly manner. "I'm afraid you'll be scared out of your senses. But after all perhaps it's wiser to let you know, for you're both pretty plucky on the whole. Here, you may read the letter."

We seized it as if we had never seen it in our lives before, and looked at each other with much apparent consternation.

"It's certainly meant for a warning," I said gravely.

"If I were you, Edward," remarked Cathy, "I should put it into the hands of the village constable."

"Put it into the hands of the village fiddle-stick!" growled Edward. "What help would poor old Gaskell be, I should like to know? He'd run away if he saw the very tail of a burglar. I dare say he's all right to lock up a drunken man on fair-day, or to slip the handcuffs on poachers when the gamekeepers are holding them tight, but he'd be of no earthly use in a case of this sort. Just you leave it to me. Dick and I will undertake to look after the house. You girls had better lock your bedroom door to-night; and be sure you don't let the servants get a hint of it, or we shall have them all in hysterics."

So far our hoax had answered admirably, and Cathy and I retired upstairs after breakfast in fits of delighted laughter.

"He looked so solemn over it," chuckled Cathy; "that touch about his being the future squire was most effective. He feels he's quite a man and must defend the family property."

"I nearly exploded when Dick sniffed the letter, and said he could tell it was written by a clodhopper, because it smelled of their abominable tobacco!" said I.

"We'd better get on with our burglar," said Cathy. "I have Father's old tweed suit and his fishing-boots here, and I brought up a whole sackful of hay yesterday, it's underneath my bed. Have you locked the door? No one must come in on any account."

We first securely stitched the coat and trousers together, fastened the trousers firmly into the fishing-boots, sewed a pair of gloves on to the ends of the sleeves to represent hands, and then stuffed the whole figure tightly with hay. The head was a little more difficult to manage. We tried at first to make it out of a sponge-bag, but that did not seem to answer at all; so in the end Cathy fetched a large mangold out of the field, which had a warty protuberance on one side very much resembling a human nose, and by the aid of two shoe-buttons stuck in with hair-pins for eyes, and a slit cut with a penknife for a mouth, we really made a very creditable burglar countenance. We mounted it on a sharpened stick, which we rammed down into the body, crowned it with a soft felt hat, tied a silk handkerchief round its neck to cover up deficiencies, and then sat down and rejoiced over our handiwork.

"Doesn't he look a splendid Bill Sykes?" cried Cathy. "In the dark I'm sure anyone would think he was real. Those fishing-boots look very clumping and murderous."

"He's not very heavy either," I said, lifting the figure easily in my arms, "I think you'll be able to manage him."

The place where we intended to spring our surprise on the boys was a large unoccupied bedroom at the end of the passage, generally called the "north room". It had a trap-door in the ceiling which opened out on to a flat roof, and by climbing upon the edge of Cathy's balcony it was extremely easy to step on to this roof; indeed we had often done so to watch the sunset, or to get a good view of the surrounding country. We arranged that about midnight Cathy should mount up here, I should then hand the burglar to her, and after opening the trap-door she should allow his legs to dangle through it as though he were in the very act of forcing an entrance into the room. When she was ready I was to give the alarm, and we trusted that in the faint moonlight the boys would not readily discover the imposture. We hid "Bill Sykes" safely away under the bed, and went downstairs again, feeling all impatience for the evening to arrive.

Edward was extremely particular about locking up that night--he examined every bolt and bar, closed all the shutters, put a screw in the back-kitchen window and a wedge in the cellar door, and finally went round the whole establishment with a lantern, peeping into pantries and china-closets, and even the housemaid's cupboard under the stairs, to make quite sure that nobody was concealed there with nefarious intent. He retired to bed at last with a revolver under his pillow; Dick took the air-gun, which he had borrowed from Captain Vernon, while George, not being able to obtain any firearms (the squire having wisely locked up his gun cupboard and taken the key away with him), was obliged to content himself with the garden syringe well charged with water, with which he could certainly give anyone a decidedly cold reception. It was past ten o'clock before we were all in our rooms, and Cathy and I decided that we would not go to bed, as we were much too excited to feel sleepy; so we sat eating apples and reading to pass the time, as we did not dare to talk much for fear the boys should overhear us. At ten minutes to twelve we opened our window and looked out. It was a beautiful moonlight night, just bright enough to make the room rather light without showing any object too plainly, and nothing could be more fortunate for the success of our plot.

Cathy climbed cautiously on to the roof, and I managed to hand up the burglar--with some difficulty, I own, for if he were not heavy he was decidedly bulky. She had tied a rope under his arms so that she might dangle him more securely,

and she very soon unfastened the trap-door and let his legs down through the opening.

"Are you ready?" I called under my breath, as I watched her from the balcony.

"Hush! Yes, just got him right!" she whispered; "you may go now. Remember, Edward first!"

It was an exciting moment. I ran down the passage, and tapped softly at Edward's door.

"Oh, do come quick!" I said in a low voice, which I am sure must have sounded most agitated. "We've heard such strange noises, and we can't help thinking that someone's trying to break into the north room!"

Edward appeared in an instant, fully dressed, and armed with his revolver. I am sure that even if he had lain down on his bed, he had neither removed his clothes nor closed his eyes. He looked rather white, but I must say very determined and self-possessed.

"Have you roused the others?" he whispered. "Don't make any noise, and perhaps we may be able to catch him. You'd better go back to Cathy, and both of you stay in your room. This thing's not fit for girls, and you might get hurt."

Dick and George, who slept in the adjoining bedroom, arrived on the scene with equal promptitude, and the three crept silently down the passage, while I, after pretending to retire, followed at a little distance to watch the fun. Arrived at the north room they noiselessly opened the door, and sprang back for a moment, looking rather aghast, for dangling through the opening in the roof appeared the large fishing-boots of our burglar, moving about in such a natural and lifelike manner, that it was no wonder the boys were deceived.

"Hullo! Who's that?" cried Edward in a firm tone, levelling his revolver at the figure.

The legs twitched, and came slightly lower, so that a portion of the body might be seen through the trap-door.

"Stop, or I'll fire!" declared Dick, with a suspicious little quaver in his voice.

"If you move an inch, I'll kill you!" roared valiant George, though his weapon was certainly the least deadly of the three.

Cathy let the burglar down a good piece, so that his head and his felt hat now appeared, while his arms seemed to be waving about in a wild demonstration of defiance. Bang! went both revolver and air-gun at the same instant, while the syringe discharged its contents freely over the room, George in his agitation having somewhat miscalculated his aim. Cathy loosed the rope, and "Bill Sykes" dropped with a heavy plump on to the floor below, his mangold head striking the bed-post with great violence. A dead silence followed.

"Have we done for him, or is he only foxing?" whispered George.

Cathy from above uttered a low groan.

"He's still alive!" gasped Dick.

"Ay, but he's hurt," said Edward. "We'd better see what damage is done. Be ready, Dick, to hold his legs, in case he should jump up suddenly."

They advanced with extreme caution towards the figure, which lay stretched out in a most natural manner, face downwards, in the patch of moonlight which fell through the window. Dick seized the fishing-boots, and held them securely while Edward made a firm grasp at the arm. Perhaps something in its consistency felt unusual, for with a cry he turned the burglar over. The sudden movement loosened the mangold head, which we had not been able to fasten on very securely, and, rolling off with a bound, it fell at the feet of the astounded George.

A yell of disgusted wrath arose from the indignant boys, and I could not forbear to run into the room, clapping my hands in my glee, while Cathy peered down through the trap-door in rejoicing triumph.

"Done you this time, old fellows!" cried Cathy.

"Oh, I didn't think you'd be taken in by such an easy fake!" I echoed.

"Made it ourselves!" exploded Cathy from above. "Only Father's old suit stuffed with hay! And you thought you had done for him! I think I could tell you who sent that letter if you were to ask me!"

"Come down, you young wretch!" said Edward. "If you let yourself drop, I'll catch you. Well, of all the sells I've ever had in my life, this is about the biggest. So you wrote that precious letter, did you? It was uncommonly smartly done, too! And as for this countenance, it's simply ripping!"

And he burst into a roar as he picked up the head of our decapitated house-breaker.

I really think the boys laughed as much as we did, for they were good-natured enough not to mind a joke at their own expense.

"You've jolly well taken us in for once," said Dick. "And I give you the credit for it. I didn't think you girls could have got it all up so neatly. You've scored no end, and I suppose now you'll be satisfied, and cry quits about the antiquities."

CHAPTER VIII

A BREAKING-UP PARTY

"What has this day deserved? What hath it done
That it in golden letters should be set
Among the high tides in the kalendar?"

CATHY and I went back to school with much regret. After the freedom of our life at Marshlands it seemed difficult to settle down again to the strict discipline of The Hollies, with Miss Percy's manifold rules and regulations. It was exciting, nevertheless, to meet our friends once more, and to hear the accounts of their holiday rambles and sea-side adventures. We made quite a little round amongst the various bedrooms, admiring Janet's new pictures, helping to arrange Olave's books, partaking of Blanche's hospitable offers of cheese-cakes and chocolate, bewailing the lengthened hours of the time-table, and all chattering like a flock of sparrows.

In her quiet, undemonstrative way, Lucy was glad to see me again. I think she had found the holidays a little dull without me, and she listened rather wistfully to my rapturous accounts of my visit to Marshlands. She told me all the home news--how the baby had already learnt to walk, Frank had gone to school, and Cuthbert was in knickerbockers; how the old baby had been shorn of his curls, and Dorothy had begun lessons. My little porcelain tea-service had, alas! been broken (Blair ought not to have allowed the children to play with it), there was a new carpet in the school-room, and Mary was learning the violin. We talked in whispers for a long time after we were in bed, till Miss Percy, overhearing us, bounced in with such dire threats of penalties to be worked out on the following Saturday afternoon, that we were obliged to defer our interesting conversation until the morning.

I found the winter term at "The Hollies" differed in many respects from the summer one. We no longer drank the waters at the pretty little well, and I greatly missed the morning run over the fields. It was now too cold to study in our bedrooms, and evening preparation was held in the school-room under the strict eyes of Miss Percy. When the weather permitted we played hockey, but there were many days when it was considered too wet for us to go out, and we were obliged to take what exercises we could in the play-room. A new feature of our school-life with which we had not hitherto been acquainted consisted of the Saturday receptions, which were held during the winter evenings to supply the place of the weekly cricket matches we had enjoyed in the summer-time. It was part of Mrs. Marshall's system to form our manners and fit us for good society, therefore these "At Homes" were very solemn affairs, conducted with all the ceremony of a genuine party, though none of the enjoyment. At half-past six o'clock, attired in white frocks and our best hair-ribbons, we were received in state in the drawing-room, each girl being duly announced in her turn by the parlour-maid. How I have shivered with nervousness when "Miss Philippa Seaton" was called out, and I was bound to advance with becoming grace, and shake hands elegantly with Mrs. Marshall, her critical eye upon my demeanour, and her censorious tongue ready with comment if my unlucky elbows protruded, or my hand did not give the exact warmth of pressure required!

When we were all seated, Mrs. Marshall would start a general conversation upon some topic, notice of which had been given out previously, and we were each supposed to come primed with some intelligent remarks upon it. It was horribly difficult to think of anything new and original to say, especially as your best ideas were liable to be anticipated by someone else airing them first, leaving you racking your brains for any observation to contribute, however stale and commonplace. I remember upon one occasion the subject was botany. Most of the girls said something pretty about flowers and gardens. Janet quoted Wordsworth, and Cathy scored by mentioning exogens and endogens with an air of much knowledge. Mrs. Marshall at length turned to me.

"Cannot you give a fresh direction to the conversation, Philippa?" she asked. "We have spoken so much already of blossoms in spring-time, of pressed wild-flowers, hot-houses, and the beauties of Kew Gardens. It is surely possible to treat the subject from a different stand-point."

There seemed to be nothing left. The topic, to my mind, was plainly exhausted, but I was bound to hazard some remark. In my desperation I ventured:

"Botany Bay is a place in New South Wales where criminals used to be sent. Many of the principal families of Australia are descended from them."

A shudder ran through the room. Though I did not know it at the time, Mrs. Marshall had been born in Australia, and I could not have uttered a more deliberate insult. She flushed a little, and glanced at me keenly. I think she either realized my complete ignorance, or thought it wiser to ignore the allusion.

"Not quite to the point, my dear," she replied with dignity. "It is well to keep strictly to our subject. I had thought you would have been ready with some remark upon the orchids of your South American forests, or the orange plantations which I have heard you mention. But here comes the coffee. Doris, it is your turn to pour out to-night!"

To hand and receive the cups prettily, and to sit drinking them in graceful attitudes, was part of our evening discipline; and to us a very severe one, for Mrs. Marshall was hard to satisfy, and to clink your tea-spoon or to flop into a chair was a desperate offence. She herself was a tall, elegant woman, erect and stately, with a habit of swimming into the room, and a measured way of speaking, as if each word had been prepared beforehand. The abrupt school-girl type of conversation she would not tolerate, and our sentences must be as carefully chosen as her own. A girl who had spoken slang in her presence would, I believe, almost have been threatened with expulsion. I sometimes think her training made our manners too studied and artificial, but her system was a reaction against the free-and-easy and often ungracious style which was current in many other large schools of the day. After coffee, Mrs. Marshall would ask for a little music, and we were obliged to take it in turns to play, the lot falling to each girl about once a month. How I hated the pieces which I solemnly practised for these weekly evenings, and in what an agony of nervousness my trembling fingers stumbled through the performance! If I could have bidden the company leave the room, I think I might have acquitted myself better, but to discourse sweet strains with Mrs. Marshall's eye upon me, my music-mistress sitting close by, and an audience of critical school-mates listening, was an ordeal from which many a girl might shrink. The programme was varied by a few songs and recitations, and at half past-eight we all filed out, each in her turn saying good-bye, and thanking Mrs. Marshall for a pleasant evening, a courtesy which I always felt to be most insincere, since I was sure that neither she nor ourselves had enjoyed it in the least.

At the end of the term a large *conversazione* was held, to which many friends interested in the school were invited, and when we were expected to put into practice those lessons in manners and deportment which were drilled into us during the Saturday evening "At Homes". We tried our honest best to be pleasant little hostesses, and the visitors were indulgent, but I often think we must have afforded them much amusement by our "improving conversation".

"It always makes me feel so bad, I want to scream, or do something outlandishly improper," said Janet. "Mrs. Marshall set me to talk to old Canon Wavertree, and I simply longed to ask him if his waistcoat buttoned at the back, and whether he could fasten the middle button himself, and how he managed to shave into the creases of such a very double chin. Instead of that, I had to look polite and proper while he talked about butter-making. It was such an absurd subject for him to choose, and the worst of it was I thought he said 'batter', instead of 'butter', and so we got completely at cross purposes. I declared we always put eggs in it at home, and he seemed to think I was half an idiot!"

"I got on much better," said Lucy. "I had to talk to Mrs. Graveson, and by sheer good luck she began on church work. You remember it was the 'topic' we had three weeks ago, so I was well primed, and brought out all Miss Percy's best remarks. I heard her tell Mrs. Marshall afterwards that she had rarely met a more intelligent girl, and she thought I should make an ideal clergyman's wife!"

"I had the doctor," I said; "and he's so jolly, he just made fun all the time, and I enjoyed myself immensely. He asked me a riddle he said he'd made up himself: 'Why are school-girls like bottles of medicine? Because they are meant to be shaken.' It's not very good, but of course I had to smile."

"I had Judge Saunders," said Cathy. "He started upon the weather, but I didn't think that was classical enough, so I tried to bring the conversation round to poetry and Shakespeare. But he shook his head and laughed. 'It's no use, my dear,' he said, 'I used to be thrashed at school for my defective Latin verses, and I have preferred plain prose ever since. Now you have done your duty, and you will please me better by telling me how you are going to spend your holidays.' So I began about home and the boys, and I'm afraid I didn't remember to 'choose my sentences' or 'keep to the subject', but he patted my shoulder, and said he would tell me a secret, and then he whispered: 'Just forget all your conversation lessons, and be your natural little self; it's ever so much nicer. Only don't let Mrs. Marshall know I said so!'"

If we regarded the *conversazione* as somewhat of an ordeal, we all thoroughly enjoyed the breaking-up party which took place on the last day before the holidays. It was quite an informal affair, to which no visitors were invited, and we were not expected to keep up such a severe standard of ceremonious behaviour. Indeed, on that day all rules were relaxed—we talked in our bedrooms, we sang in the passages, we sat on the school-room desks, and lolled about in easy attitudes under Miss Percy's very nose. During half the term the members of the dramatic society had held secret rehearsals in the small class-room, from which outsiders were rigidly excluded, for they were to contribute part of the evening's entertainment, and were busily preparing for the event. It had been a great disappointment to me that I was not permitted to join the society. I had been so successful in the elocution class, that many of the girls would have been willing to include me, but Ernestine Salt, who seemed no more friendly towards me than before, had always exerted her influence very strongly against it, and as she was an older girl than myself, and had also been longer in the school, she was able to carry her point. They had arranged to act the casket scene from the "Merchant of Venice", and

Cathy, who was one of their brightest members, had been chosen for the role of Portia. As she had no secrets from me, I helped her every day to study her part, and we went over it so often and so constantly, that in the end I knew it as well as she did herself. She was to wear a dress of rose-coloured sateen, with a crimson sash and lace collar, and gold ornaments in her hair, and to carry a large fan of peacocks' feathers in her hand. Mrs. Winstanley had sent the costume from Marshlands, and we unpacked the large cardboard box in much curiosity and excitement.

"Let me see it on you, Philippa dear," said Cathy, as, after a private rehearsal in her bedroom to try the effect, I helped her to remove the gorgeous gown. "I can tell much better what it looks like on someone else. Ah! it fits you exactly! I knew it would! And the sequins twist so prettily in your hair! Will you go through the scene just as you are? and I'll take Bassanio's speeches. Real actresses always have an under-study, I believe, so I'm going to pretend that you're mine."

The acting, however, was only a part of the excitement of the breaking-up day. The results of the examinations were to be read out, and, as a special encouragement to the literature classes, Mrs. Marshall had offered a prize for the best original poem contributed by any girl in the school. We had written essays on various subjects, and even short stories, but verses made quite a new departure, and to most of our companions it seemed an almost impossible competition.

"It's not the slightest use my trying," said Janet. "I'm a plain, prosy, matter-of-fact kind of a person. I couldn't even compose a nursery rhyme if my life depended upon it. You and Cathy are the poetical geniuses of the school, and we shall expect to hear something very inspired."

I was fond of scribbling, and had always had rather a turn for versifying, so I thought I should like to compete for the prize. It did not seem very easy to choose a suitable subject, and I covered sheets of exercise-paper with my effusions, varying from sentimental to humorous, according to my frame of mind. I tried to keep my secret, but the other girls suspected my efforts, and I came in for a good deal of chaff.

"Is Pegasus pretty strong on the wing, Philippa?"

"Of course he is! Can't you see her eye with fervid fancy rolling?"

"She's burning the midnight oil. That's why her cheeks are so pale!"

"Look here, Phil, a poetess shouldn't eat so much bread-and-butter. You ought to live on odes and sonnets!"

Though I did not exactly burn the midnight oil, I certainly composed my poem in bed. I suppose the darkness and the quiet were inspiring, for all my best ideas came to me when the lights had been turned out, and only the sound of Lucy's regular breathing broke the silence.

I had tried at first to model my style on Spenser, with very indifferent success; I fared no better with the heroic couplets of Dryden or Pope; so, abandoning these ambitious efforts, I finally contented myself with a humble imitation of the cavalier poets, a period which we had just been studying in our literature class. I copied it out clearly, and with many qualms I dropped my contribution into Mrs. Marshall's letter-box. It was to be a point of honour not to let anyone read the poems beforehand, so even Cathy did not see my manuscript, nor did she show me hers, though I divined from her abstracted manner that she, too, had been engaged in all the agonies of composition.

The much-longed-for day arrived at last. At six o'clock we all assembled in the large school-room, Mrs. Marshall and the teachers taking their places on the platform. First came the examination lists. To my delight I was head of my class in French; Cathy carried all before her in both ancient and modern history; while Blanche and Janet divided the honours in geography and mathematics. It was now the turn of the poems, and I felt little cold shivers of nervousness running down my back as Mrs. Marshall rose to read out the result of the competition. Would she think mine very bad, I wondered, and perhaps even cite it as an example of faulty composition? For one wild moment I devoutly wished I had consigned it to the flames with the rest of my efforts.

"On the whole," began Mrs. Marshall, "I have had some extremely satisfactory results from our literary contest, a very fair number of poems having been received. I regret that some of the contributors do not seem to have mastered even the elementary rules of metre, and their verses cannot be made to scan, but the average standard is higher than I had expected; and I have two here which I think are certainly deserving of praise, and of such equal merit that I have decided to divide the prize between them. They are 'The Ballad of Fair Fiona', by Catherine Winstanley, and 'When Celia Passes', by Philippa Seaton. As I am sure you will all wish to hear them, I shall read them aloud:

"THE BALLAD OF FAIR FIONA

When the daylight gilds the sky,
Fair Fiona sits and weeps;

When the evening star is high,
Lonely still her vigil keeps.

'Rise, Fiona sweet, arise!
Don your robe of brightest hue.
Tears are but for aged eyes,
Love and pleasure wait for you!"

'Love for me has long been dead,
Pleasure followed in his train;
Bring the willow wreath instead,
Leave me to my tears again.'

Knight and squire and dame are there
Priests beside the altar wait,
Frets and fumes the bridegroom fair.
Wherefore is the bride so late?

Sought they far and sought they wide
Where the river seeks the west;
Floating on its flowing tide,
Fair Fiona is at rest."

"WHEN CELIA PASSES

When Celia passes through the grove
And down the verdant alleys,
The lily droops her envious head,
The rose for jealous anger's red
As in the shade she dallies.
And when her dainty footsteps rove
Over the meadow grasses,
The flowers all weep in sheer despair
To think they are not half so fair
When Celia passes.

When Celia passes through the grove,
Under the bay and laurel,
The nightingale forgets to sing,
And silent sits with quivering wing
To hear her artless carol.
When cherry blooms their treasure-trove
Rain down in fragrant masses,
My heart leaps high to think perchance
I yet may catch one kindly glance
When Celia passes."

Cathy gripped my hand, and I gripped hers. We had each secretly hoped that the other would win the prize, so to share it between us was a satisfaction to us both. The girls clapped vigorously, and Janet started a cheer.

"That will do!" said Mrs. Marshall. "Catherine and Philippa have done well, but we must not turn their heads by overpraising them. They are not Mrs. Brownings yet, by any means! It is encouraging, however, to find that the literature classes have been of some help in teaching you the rules of poetical composition, and you will appreciate real poetry all the more after your attempts to frame verses for yourselves. I have much pleasure in presenting Catherine Winstanley with a copy of *Moore's Irish Melodies*, and Philippa Seaton with a volume of *Extracts from Byron*."

We went up together to receive our prizes, which Mrs. Marshall handed to us with a kind word of approval and encouragement, and then the girls were allowed to disperse, as the platform was required next by the dramatic society, and the actors withdrew to dress themselves as rapidly as possible for their parts.

I was sitting among the audience, waiting for the play to begin, when Doris, who was stage-manager, entered quietly, and drew me aside, with a troubled face.

"I wish you would come upstairs to Cathy's bedroom," she said. "She seems quite ill and is asking for you. We can't think what is the matter with her."

I flew upstairs in a panic. Cathy was lying on her bed, covered with a down quilt, and a group of anxious girls, half-dressed in various costumes, hovered around her with bottles of eau de Cologne and smelling-salts.

She raised her head languidly when I entered.

"I feel so queer, Phil," she whispered. "I don't believe I can act in the play, after all."

"Let me fetch Mrs. Marshall," I gasped.

"No! No! Not on any account! I shall be all right. I only need quiet. Phil, I want you to take Portia! You know the part as well as I do myself, and the dress fits you. Will you do it to please me?"

"But I cannot leave you if you are ill, Cathy! I can't indeed!"

"You must, you must! I don't want anyone here. I would rather be left quite alone. Millicent has promised to dress you. Oh, go all of you, please! It's getting so late, and the audience will be waiting."

"Someone must take Portia," said Doris. "We certainly can't leave her out. Philippa, you will have to try."

"I don't believe she can do it," said Ernestine, who was to act the part of Lorenzo. "It's a shame to spoil the play. Put it off for half an hour, and perhaps Cathy will be better. I declare I won't act with anyone who has not rehearsed with us beforehand."

"Don't be nasty, Ernestine! Of course you'll be obliged to act with her. How can we put it off? They've been waiting twenty minutes or more already. Come along, girls, we're terribly late! I'm so sorry, Cathy! We'll turn the light low, and you must try to go to sleep;" and Doris drove us from the room into the studio where we were to dress, and hurriedly helped the others to arrange their finishing touches.

Millicent hustled me into the pink costume, and twisted the gold ornaments into my hair with nervous fingers.

"Do you know the cues?" she asked anxiously. "Oh, I hope you'll be able to remember the part! The prompter is to stand behind the right wing, so back that way if you feel in any danger of forgetting."

The girls were waxing impatient, to judge from the clapping, which we could hear as we hurried down to the school-room.

"Is she ready?" said Doris. "Then draw up the curtain, and begin."

My head was in a whirl. It had all happened so quickly, that I had scarcely time to realize what I was doing. One little thought came to me as I walked on to the stage: "Perhaps Portia herself was equally anxious and nervous as she watched her lover making the choice upon which all her happiness depended", and I began "I pray you tarry, pause a day or two", with an eagerness that fitted in well with the part. I needed no prompting, the words seemed to come without any effort of memory. My delight at Bassanio's success, my grief at Antonio's letter, and my anxiety that they should go at once to his relief, were at the time only the expression of my natural feelings. I was living in the part, and the heroine's joys and sorrows were my own.

We were called before the curtain at the end of the performance, and the audience broke into ringing cheers for Portia. I stood upon the platform like one in a dream; my success and the shouting girls were nothing to me, I saw only one face in the room, for there, by the doorway, clapping and cheering louder than anyone else, her dear cheeks flushed and her dark eyes shining with generous triumph was--Cathy!

"You did it on purpose!" I declared afterwards. "Cathy, I don't believe you were ill at all!"

"Of course I wasn't!" she replied, laughing. "I wanted to give you a chance to show them what you could do, and it seemed the only way possible. I thought of it from the first, and that was why I went over my part so often with you, and made you rehearse it with me. It was splendid, Philippa, simply splendid! I couldn't have done it half so well myself. Now the whole school knows that you can act, and even Ernestine Salt can't deny you the right to become a member of the Dramatic Society."

CHAPTER IX

A HARD TIME

"I have not that alacrity of spirit
Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have."

TIME seemed to pass very rapidly away, and I could scarcely realize it when I found I had been more than a year at The Hollies. I was now a tall girl of thirteen, with a considerable idea of the dignity of my age, and much resented anyone alluding to me as "a child". My aunt thought me greatly improved, and spoke in warm praise of Mrs. Marshall's system of education; while as for me, my life at San Carlos seemed such a past tale that it was difficult to believe I had ever been the forlorn little stranger who had landed in England with so many doubts and fears only three years ago. You must not think, however, that I had entirely forgotten my home and the dear old friends of my childhood. I still sent warm messages to Juanita and Tasso and the other members of our household, though I could no longer speak their language; and I liked to hear accounts of them in my father's letters, while I believe on their part they all looked forward to seeing their little *signorina* one day in their midst again. It was perhaps only natural after all that my new life should in some measure erase the old one from my mind; it was what my father had desired, and if I were beginning to think that England was far more to me than the country I had left, he would be the first to rejoice over my altered views. So far from feeling any danger of my affection for him being weakened, he knew that my change of opinions only tightened the bond between us, since the older and wiser I grew, so much the more would I be able to appreciate him and enjoy his companionship when we should meet again.

I was now in the third form at school, as I had been moved up with Blanche, Janet, and Cathy, and found myself the youngest in a class which had a reputation both for quick wits and hard work. Miss Percy was our teacher, and, though in many respects an excellent one, she was a woman of narrow sympathies and strict discipline; very different from kindly Miss Buller, who had always tried to make the rough paths of learning as smooth as possible for our stumbling feet. Another disagreeable point of my promotion was that I had Ernestine Salt for a class-mate, and however much I might dislike her I must perforce be thrown continually into her society. As you may imagine, she did not welcome my advent, giving me to understand that she considered me an intruder among girls who were all older than myself, and that my advancement was only due to Mrs. Marshall's partiality. Lucy had remained behind in the upper fourth. Never a very clever girl, she had little ambition, and was quite content if she could scrape along without incurring any specially severe reproof from her teachers. Though I loved her as my cousin, I felt she occupied quite a different place in my heart from my darling Cathy. It is perhaps only possible to have one very dearest friend, and while Cathy seemed to win all my love and admiration, and to appeal to everything that was highest and best in me, Lucy's tastes were based so much on the lines of Aunt Agatha that I found we had little in common. I saw less of her now than ever, for, Mary having come to The Hollies this term, Mrs. Marshall had arranged for the sisters to sleep together, while to my great delight I was allowed to share a vacant bedroom with Cathy. We moved our household goods into our new quarters with much noise and chattering. My case of South American butterflies was accorded the place of honour over the chimney-piece, together with the portrait of my father; the brush which Cathy had won at the Everton Meet hung proudly over her wash-stand; my views of San Carlos were distributed about the walls; while photos of Marshlands and the Winstanley family in every conceivable position adorned our chests-of-drawers and dressing-table.

"I feel as if we were relations now you have come to share my room," said Cathy. "I've always longed for a younger sister, so I'm going to adopt you, Philippa dear, and try to believe that you're really and truly mine. You haven't any mother of your own, so I shall put *my* mother's photo in the middle of the dressing-table that she may belong to us both. She has always called you her second little daughter."

I found the work in my new class taxed my exertions to the uttermost. Mrs. Marshall had a very high standard as to what should be required from girls of our age, and it was only with the greatest difficulty I was able to keep up to it. Without Cathy's help I must most certainly have failed. She was a true friend in need. She would patiently go over my preparation with me, explaining difficult rules, repeating dates and vocabularies again and again to fix them in my memory, or showing me so clearly and concisely the reasons for the various problems in mathematics, that I felt I could learn more easily from her than from our teachers. My one haunting fear was that Mrs. Marshall should consider me below the level of the class and should send me down again into the fourth, for to be thus banished from Cathy seemed the worst that fate could hold in store for me. Never very robust I worked far beyond my strength, and the continual strain began at last to tell upon my health. I grew thin and pale, I was troubled with a perpetual headache, and I sometimes indulged in unreasonable fits of crying, which incurred the severe reproof of Miss Percy, who had no sympathy with "nerves".

"I can't help it--I can't, indeed!" I confided to Cathy after one of these outbreaks. "My head feels so chock full of facts I sometimes think it won't hold any more. When I look at my book the letters seem to dance before my eyes, and I mix up mathematics with history and want to talk German in the French class."

"Tell Mrs. Marshall, and ask her to knock something off," suggested Cathy.

"No, no! She would only say the class was too difficult for me, and send me down, and unless I can stay up here with you and Janet life simply isn't worth living. Never mind, I'll manage to worry on somehow, if only Miss Percy would let me alone!"

Unfortunately that was exactly what Miss Percy would not do. She had taken it into her head that I was hysterical, and that my whims and fancies must not on any account be humoured. I dare say she thought she was only doing her duty, but she harried me continually. An untied hair-ribbon, a blot on my exercise, an ink-stain on my finger, or an awkward attitude in class, were occasions for instant and severe fault-finding. No doubt they were all little defects which called for amendment, but she made the mistake of dealing with them too hardly. I believe, if people would only realize it, that overwork and ill-health are often responsible for many tiresome habits in growing girls. It was certainly so in my case; I sat crooked because my back ached, I lolled on my desk because I was really tired, I fidgeted from sheer nervousness when I felt Miss Percy's eye upon me, and when, having brought down all the vials of her wrath upon my head, I ended by bursting into tears, it was hard to be accused of temper or sullenness when I felt I would have given the whole world for a kind word.

I think we all suffered much from the deadly sameness of our life. In the summer-time we were allowed a considerable amount of leisure, which we spent in the garden at croquet, tennis, or archery, but during the winter months the play hours were greatly curtailed and extra classes added, while the only exercise we took was a short daily "crocodile" walk, with hockey for an hour on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Girls who are not boarders do not feel this lack of variety. The walk to and from school, and, above all, the different subjects which are discussed at home, make a change of thought and a wholesome break; but the monotony of spending week after week meeting no one except teachers and companions, discussing nothing but school topics, never seeing a newspaper or a magazine or hearing what is going on in the outside world, is apt to have a rather depressing influence upon some dispositions. The teachers, seeing us all day long, were inclined to worry too much over our small faults, while we on our side, having little else to distract our minds, were wont to magnify our woes out of all just proportion. Miss Percy's nagging only seemed to make my faults the worse.

"I never seem able to please her," I grumbled one day at breakfast-time. "If I say my lessons correctly she tells me I'm twitching my hands or wrinkling my forehead; and then if I try to think about my hands and my forehead the lessons go right out of my mind, so I'm wrong either way. It seems no use trying."

"She's horribly mean," sighed Janet, who suffered at times herself. "My exercise was quite right yesterday, but she made me copy it all out again, just because I had four mistakes in spelling. It was really too bad."

"I could forgive her the exercises," said Millicent, "if she'd only make stronger coffee. This cup of mine is simply dish-water. I wish Mrs. Marshall would come down again at breakfast-time, it used to be ever so much better when she poured out."

"Let us get up a round robin and beg her to come!" laughed Cathy. "We could say we'd missed her charming conversation."

"Quietly! Quietly!" said Miss Percy from the other end of the table, for Cathy had raised her voice above the low undertone in which we had been speaking.

"We might ask her to give 'coffee' as the next conversation topic," said Janet, "and then Millicent could announce that she liked it strong, as her intelligent remark."

"It's the chicory I object to," said Millicent; "I loathe the smell of it. I'm sure it oughtn't to have any in. Ought it, Phil?"

"Certainly not," I replied. "I wish you could have tasted the coffee we used to have at San Carlos. You'd never forget it. It came from our own plantations, and Pedro used to roast it and grind it just before he poured the water on. I've often watched him make it. That was really worth calling coffee."

"Pity we can't import him over here to give the cook a lesson," said Janet. "But I expect there's something in the quality, and how much you put in the pot. Will you have another cup, Milly?"

"No, thank you! One is enough of this brew. Here comes the bread-and-butter plate. I hope it'll all be finished before

it comes to me, for I don't want any more."

Among many rules at The Hollies there was a law that nothing must be left upon the table, and the bread-and-butter was always severely passed round till the plate was empty. On this particular day I was not hungry, and when the last piece was offered to me I promptly declined it. Cathy quickly and quietly handed it on to Janet, who was in the very act of taking it when Miss Percy's voice bade her pause.

"Did I notice you refuse that piece of bread-and-butter, Philippa Seaton?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Percy," I replied.

"And why?"

"I'm not hungry," I said nervously.

"But you know the rule?"

"I suppose I do."

"Then why did you not take it?"

"I've had enough, Miss Percy," I blurted out. "I simply can't eat any more!"

She looked at me with infinite scorn.

"Cannot eat any more! Then you *must* have been greedy if you find it absolutely impossible to finish even this little piece. I will not urge you after such a plea, but I think you may well be ashamed of your excuse."

I felt keenly the injustice of the suggestion, but I was powerless to retort. It was but a sample of her methods of training us, and to have "answered back" would have been an offence liable to be visited with heavy punishment. So far from over-eating myself I had generally little appetite for breakfast, and made the merest apology for a meal. As a result of this, by eleven-o'clock recreation I would find I was wildly hungry, but as we had no lunch at The Hollies I was obliged to wait until the one-o'clock dinner, by which time I was almost faint for want of food. How often have I evaded Miss Percy's sharp eye, and, dodging down the back-staircase, have begged a piece of bread or a hot potato from the sympathetic cook, to be eaten surreptitiously behind my pocket-handkerchief in the playground! I have even bribed the housemaid to buy me biscuits and smuggle them into my locker, incurring thereby both the risk of her dismissal and my own disgrace, for it was one of the strictest rules of the school that the girls should obtain no private supplies.

It is, I suppose, almost impossible for any mistress, however conscientious, to give to forty different pupils the same care and attention as they would receive at home. I am sure Mrs. Marshall thought she took every precaution to secure our health, and if I had been definitely ill or in pain she would have been kindness itself; but it is so difficult sometimes to tell whether a girl is really ailing or only shirking her work, that unless we complained of special symptoms no notice was taken of our general condition, so my pale cheeks and increased lassitude passed without comment. I felt the meaning of the old adage: "A sound mind in a sound body". I found myself worrying most absurdly over trifles which would not have distressed me to nearly such an extent if I had been able to distract my thoughts. After all, school is one's little world, and a bad mark, an unjust reproof, or a quarrel with a companion at the time, seem as overwhelming troubles as any we may encounter in after-life.

Matters went on from bad to worse. In my struggles to keep up to the standard of my class I began the foolish habit of smuggling my books into my bedroom, that I might take a last glance at my lessons before I got into bed, and I would lie repeating French verbs or German grammatical rules to myself long after the gas in the passage had been turned out. It was but a natural consequence that I could not sleep. Night after night I have tossed and turned, trying first one side of my pillow and then the other to cool my burning head, counting the strokes as the clock struck midnight, and feeling as if the dead silence of the house grew almost unbearable. There is perhaps nothing so lonely as to lie awake while others sleep; the darkness of the room oppressed me, it was terrible to open my eyes and see nothing but blackness around me, out of which my imagination would conjure up ghostly figures stealing around my bed. Had I dared I would have begged for a night-light, but I knew full well that such fancies would meet with scant sympathy at Miss Percy's ears. The sound of Cathy's quiet breathing made me feel as though she were miles away, but I was not selfish enough to wake her up to console me in my misery, and after tossing about for hours I would at last fall asleep, to find the unwelcome bell ringing in my ears before I seemed out of my first troubled dream.

I woke up one morning, after a restless night such as this, feeling limp and irritable, and very unable to cope with the world in general. There was a tiresome rule at The Hollies that before we left our rooms we must take each sheet and blanket separately off our beds, fold them, and place them in a neat pile upon a chair.

"It's a stupid custom," said Cathy, grumbling for the hundredth time as she struggled to get the four corners of her coverlet even. "I can't imagine why we shouldn't turn the clothes over the end of the bed as we do at home. They would air just as well, or better. There's the bell ringing now, and I haven't my collar on! Be quick, Phil, let me help you to tie your hair. We must simply fly or we shall both be late."

I had absolutely no time to arrange my bed. I seized the sheets and blankets all together, and, rolling them in one untidy bundle, I flung them upon a chair. I did not even look to see if the room were in order, but, buttoning my dress as I went, I tore down the passage, just in time to slip into the dining-room behind Cathy, as Mrs. Marshall opened the Bible to read prayers. We began lessons immediately after breakfast. The whole school assembled first in the large class-room for call-over, and I had taken my place and was arranging my books in order, giving a last desperate glance at the dates in my history and the troublesome genealogy of the House of Stuart. We rose and curtsied when Miss Percy entered, and she bowed and wished us good-morning, in accordance with the formal etiquette which we practised at The Hollies, but instead of seating herself as usual, she placed a few things which I could not see upon the chair, and advanced a little forward with an air of more than usual gravity upon her face.

"Philippa Seaton," she said impressively, "I feel that I have borne long enough with your careless and shiftless ways. For some time now I have made every effort to help you to cure yourself of many bad habits, but instead of seeing any improvement it appears to me that you allow yourself to neglect even the ordinary rules of the school. This morning I visited your bedroom. I found your bed-clothes in utter confusion upon a chair, your nail-brush evidently unused, your comb left full of hairs upon the dressing-table, a pair of boots, a slipper, and a shoe-horn lying upon the floor, while this bag full of cotton reels was flung under your wash-stand. I am determined that for once I will teach you a lesson, and I shall pin these articles on to your back, in the hope that by showing your disgrace to the whole school I may help you to remember to be more neat and orderly in the future. Come here!"

In much fear and trembling I approached her. She turned to the chair, where (it would have been ludicrous if it had not all been so horribly solemn) my comb, my boots, my slipper, my shoe-horn, and my bag of cottons lay piled in a tragic little heap. She fastened them securely on to my dress with safety-pins, till I looked like a gipsy pedlar or an old clotheswoman, and bade me return to my place. Burning with indignation I sat down. All my pride was wounded and the tears came swimming into my eyes. I felt she had no right to treat me thus. There were certain fair and recognized penalties for neglected duties at which I should not have rebelled, but to be made a laughing-stock for the whole school was out of all proportion to my offence. I could see the amused smile with which Ernestine Salt nudged her companion, and knew how unmercifully she would tease me afterwards, and the thought that I must spend the entire morning with these absurd things dangling on my back was almost more than my spirit could brook. I gulped back my tears sufficiently to answer "present" when my name was called, and sat, fighting with my face and trying not to feel that every girl in the room was looking at me. There was a slight tug at my dress behind, and Cathy cautiously thrust a tiny scrap of paper into my hand. I managed to read it unobserved: "She's the hatefullest thing that ever was," it ran. "But never mind; don't let her think you care." I scrunched up the paper and held up my head. After all, why should I care? I had committed no very desperate sin, and I knew that nearly everyone must be secretly in sympathy with me. I would brave it out, and show Miss Percy that though she might inflict any punishment she chose she was not able to crush my spirit entirely. As to Ernestine Salt, I would defy her, sneer as she might. It was unfortunate for me that my first lesson of the day should be with Miss Percy. With the wretched boots and bobbins sticking into me whenever I attempted to lean back in my seat, I felt in anything but a docile or tractable frame of mind, and, though she certainly would not have allowed it, I do not think she herself was in the best of tempers. She corrected Janet sharply for stooping, reduced Millicent to the very verge of tears, and even found fault with Cathy's beautifully neat and tidy exercise. We were learning the geography of India, a large map of which hung over the black-board, and in the course of the lesson we were each required in turn to indicate the positions of certain rivers and cities of the Punjaub. I was sitting in class next to Ernestine Salt, and as I rose hastily up to step forward and take the pointer, she suddenly put out her foot, as if by chance, exactly at the moment when I passed her. I tripped, made a desperate effort to save myself, caught wildly at the easel, and fell, sending black-board, map, pegs, pointer, and all with a horrible crash on to the floor.

There was dead silence in the room as I picked myself up. Miss Percy raised the fallen easel and the torn map, and looked at me with white lips.

"What is the meaning of this, Philippa Seaton?" she asked.

"I couldn't help it," I answered, rather sullenly I am afraid. "I--I believe I tripped."

"No other girl has tripped. You are either irredeemably awkward or have caused this accident by deliberate intention. I very much fear it is the latter."

"You've no right to say so!" I burst out defiantly, roused out of all discipline by her tone. "I've told you I couldn't help it, and if you can't believe my word I should like you to take me to Mrs. Marshall."

"You shall certainly go to Mrs. Marshall when she is at liberty," replied Miss Percy in freezing tones. "But in the meantime I am not going to interrupt the lesson on your behalf. You will stand there by the door, holding the broken pointer in your hand, till the class is over."

I do not think Miss Percy was altogether happy at that moment, but I am sure she was not so miserable as I. I knew well I had done wrong to answer her so rudely, and the sense of my own shortcomings, added to the feeling of hot wrath against her injustice and unkindness, made it the most horribly difficult thing in the world to stand there, the target for all eyes. My head ached as if it would burst, and I rested my weary weight first on one foot and then on another. Each minute felt hours to me as the lesson slowly dragged along. I pressed my trembling hands together, and tried with a desperate effort to keep my eyes steadily fixed on the clock over the chimney-piece; but somehow the figures all seemed at once to be mixed together, the room swam before me in a kind of blur, I heard Miss Percy's voice as if it were a very long way off asking me something I could not hear, and then all was utter darkness.

When I came to myself I was lying on the sofa in the library. Mrs. Marshall was bending over me, bathing my head with eau de Cologne, and Miss Buller was fanning me with a palm-leaf screen.

"Are you better, my dear?" asked Mrs. Marshall anxiously. "Don't try to get up. Drink this glass of water and lie down again."

"What happened?" I asked. "How did I come here?"

"You fainted in the class-room, but you must not talk about it now. I wish you to rest for a while, and then Miss Buller shall bring you some beef-tea."

"I don't want any, thank you!" I said, trying to raise myself a little, but my head swam so strangely and I felt so giddy and queer that I was glad to sink back again upon the sofa cushions.

"I think we had better put you to bed," said Mrs. Marshall, adding in an undertone to Miss Buller: "If she is not better by this evening, I shall certainly send for the doctor."

I was not better by the evening; my hands were burning hot, and my head felt so unusually light that I could scarcely recognize the many people who seemed to come in and out of my room. I knew that when I asked for water Miss Buller was always ready with the glass in her hand, I thought once that Cathy was sobbing quietly behind the curtain of my bed, and I am certain that Mrs. Marshall never left me all night.

"It is a decided case of nervous breakdown, due to overwork," I heard the doctor saying. "You must keep her very quiet, and I will see her again in the morning."

There were no more lessons for me that term. As soon as I was well enough to travel Aunt Agatha took me herself for a fortnight to Brighton, where the restful uneventful days and the invigorating sea-breezes soon brought back the roses to my cheeks, and gave me untroubled sleep and peaceful dreams at night. I think this episode, and something which the doctor had said, must have caused Mrs. Marshall seriously to reconsider the rules of the school and the hours of our work. She was a sensible woman, most conscientious over our well-being, and ever ready to adopt new ideas if she believed them to be better than the old ones. When I returned to school at the beginning of the next term, I found that our time-table was completely changed. The hours of work were considerably relaxed, and instead of the stupid walks up and down the high-road, we were taken almost daily rambles over the hills or in the beautiful woods by the river. Miss Percy had mysteriously disappeared, and her place was filled by a new teacher who was fond of natural history, and who encouraged us to find specimens of stones, leaves, or flowers, explaining them with so much enthusiasm that the stupidest girl could not fail to be interested. The new scheme answered well; the extra time given to outdoor recreation was not wasted, for we went back to our books with fresh zeal; and I think we really got through as much work as we had done before, if not in the actual number of pages learnt, at any rate in the amount we remembered afterwards.

CHAPTER X

A PICNIC AND AN ADVENTURE

Beneath the trees we'll have one day
Of frolicsome employment,
And birds shall sing and winds shall blow
To help us to enjoyment."

THE changed conditions at The Hollies, added to my long Christmas holiday, had completely brought me back to my usual health and high spirits, and I soon found the ordinary work of the class to be well within my capacities. Now that Miss Percy's continual nagging was removed I felt a different girl, and began to enjoy thoroughly my school-life once more. Miss Hope, our new mistress, was one of those bright sunny souls who seem able to bring the very best out of all those who are near them. She made few rules, trusting much to our sense of honour and good feeling, and so well did we respond to her kindness that there was soon quite a different tone in the class, for the thought of grieving her would deter us from wrong-doing far more easily than all Miss Percy's threats of punishment. She had no favourites, but I think that Cathy and I, as being more interested than the others in the botany and natural history, which were her special subjects, came in for an extra share of her affection, and I know we both worshipped her with that depth of devotion which school-girls are ever ready to offer to a teacher whom they really respect and love.

As the summer came on, with the long light days, we were taken out more frequently for expeditions over the delightful Derbyshire moors. These Saturday-afternoon rambles were looked forward to throughout the whole week, and we would return from them with such red cheeks and hearty appetites that I think Mrs. Marshall was amply satisfied with the result of her new regulations. We all felt it a decided innovation when she proposed a picnic instead of the usual mild garden-party with which we had been accustomed to celebrate her birthday on the first of June.

"It's to be a real, genuine, grown-up kind of picnic too," said Janet. "Not just going for a walk and taking milk and biscuits with you. There are to be five wagonettes, and we're to drive all the way to Redburn and have tea at a farm on the side of the scar."

"There's a glorious little wood there," said Cathy, "where lilies-of-the-valley grow wild. Miss Hope says she believes they'll just be in flower. It will be perfectly delightful if we find them."

"Mrs. Thompson at the farm makes the most splendid girdle-cakes," put in Millicent. "I know, because I went there once before when Mother took her Sunday-school treat, and they were absolutely delicious. You eat them hot out of the oven, with loads of honey."

"I hope it will be fine to-morrow," I said. "I suppose we shall go another day if it rains, but a thing never seems quite the same if it is put off."

"Fine? Of course it will be fine!" said Janet. "The sky is as clear as it can be, and the moon is new, and the little soldier is standing at his door in the barometer in my bedroom, and the cattle are grazing uphill, and the pimpernel is out by the gate, and Miss Buller's hair is in curl, and the midges are biting horribly, so if you can prophesy rain after that, Miss Philippa, you don't know the English climate, that's all I can say."

"I never prophesy till I know," I replied, laughing. "But I think after such a list of good omens the weather could hardly, for shame, disappoint us, though I can't give the English climate much of a character, after all."

Janet was right, for the first of June proved to be a glorious day, bright and clear, with a cloudless sky, and a fresh wind blowing down from the moors. Punctually at half-past one the wagonettes drove up to the door, and with much excitement we packed ourselves into them, Cathy and I, after a scramble with Janet, securing the coveted seats next to our dear Miss Hope. It was an eight-mile drive through the most charming scenery. The white limestone road first followed the river bank amid beautiful woods, green with all the wealth of early summer foliage and literally carpeted with bluebells, while on the far side of the river rose steep cliffs covered from base to summit with oak-trees, the pinky brown of their opening leaves making a rich contrast to the dark pines which interspersed them here and there. Leaving the woods behind us we wound slowly up the steep slope, between rough stone walls or banks of grass and furze, the great bare rolling hills stretched out before us, where the sheep were cropping the short sweet grass that grew between the clumps of sedge and rushes, and the larks were singing loudly and joyfully as they rose from their nests among the heather. Redburn proved to be a quaint little old-world gray-stone village, set in a dip amongst the moors, where it might receive some slight shelter from the bitter north wind which blew from the hills in winter-time. We rattled through

its steep cobbled streets, making a brief pause at the church, where some ancient stone coffins and carved choir stalls were to be seen, and then on again, over the mountain-side, till we finally drew up in the farmyard of Ingledew Grange, where Mrs. Thompson, the farmer's wife, in a clean print dress and snowy apron, was waiting to receive us with many smiles and words of welcome.

"I'm fain glad it's turned out a fine day for ye, that I am," she said. "Ye'll be nigh clemmed after your drive, I take it, and more than ready for your teas. I won't be above a few minutes in mashin' the pots, but if ye care to take a turn round the garden whilst the cakes is a-gettin' out of the oven ye can go where ye like."

We certainly agreed with her that the fresh moorland air had given a keen edge to our appetites, and she hastened to finish her preparations, while we prowled about the sweet old garden, where the little June roses hung white over the rustic porch, and the peacocks on the lawn below were spreading their glorious tails to the sunshine.

We had tea at long tables in a great farm-kitchen, the high roof of which had black oak rafters arched like those of a church, while the flagged floor was strewn with the finest white sand. Everything was as neat and clean as constant scrubbing and scouring could make it; the oak furniture shone with polishing, on a fine old dresser was spread out a goodly array of blue willow-pattern china, while the brightest of copper sauce-pans and pewter pots adorned the plain, whitewashed walls.

Millicent had certainly not overstated the quality of the cakes, nor the freshness of the large brown eggs, nor the sweetness of the honey with its delicious flavour of moorland heather, nor the dark barley bread, nor the rich cream which Mrs. Marshall poured into our tea-cups with a lavish hand. It was a real old-fashioned farmhouse tea, and we did justice to it with such ample country appetites, that I think even Mrs. Thompson was satisfied that we had enjoyed ourselves. We dispersed afterwards in little groups for a ramble round the fields, and in the pretty shady wood which lay at the foot of the dell.

"Lilies-of-the-valley?" said Mrs. Thompson, in response to our eager enquiries. "Ay, there's a many of them down in yon clough. We call 'em 'snow-bobs' about here. Ye can pluck till ye're tired if ye've a mind."

"Come along, Phil!" cried Cathy; and we started down the path between the springing corn, running for pure joy of the fresh air and sunshine, and snatching as we passed at the lacy flowers of the wild cornel which hung over the hedgerow like masses of snow. A broad brook flowed through the little glade, and on either side, under the shade of the overhanging trees, grew the lilies-of-the-valley in such sweet profusion that the whole air seemed full of their delicious perfume. We ran here and there half wild with delight, burying our noses in the fragrant blossoms, and picking until our hands were full.

"Aren't they glorious?" said I.

"Simply perfect!" said Cathy.

"I want to sniff them all up!" said Janet, who with a few other girls had followed us.

"The fourth class are coming down the hill," said Ernestine. "They'll have to be quick, or they won't find any left."

"There are plenty on the other side of the water," I said, "if we could only manage to get over. I should like to pick a particularly nice bunch for Mrs. Marshall"; and I looked doubtfully at the trunk of a tree which had been laid across the brook to serve as a rough kind of bridge. There had been some attempt at a handrail, for a long pole swung from two ropes tied to the trees on either side, but it was of such a very shaky and insecure description that it would be barely sufficient to steady one's self by in the crossing.

"It doesn't look at all safe," declared Janet. "You won't catch me trying such a perilous path for all the flowers in the world."

"I think I shall venture," I said, "the lilies look so much finer over there. Only mind you don't shake the pole while I'm crossing; it's unsteady enough as it is."

The round tree-trunk did not make a very firm foothold, and the swinging handrail felt the most insecure of supports when I started on to the bridge. I went along with great caution, one step at a time, trying to balance myself steadily and not to think of the rushing water below.

"Very good! Very good indeed!" called Cathy from the bank.

"Don't hurry. Keep steady. You're half-way over!" cried Janet.

"It looks easy enough, I shall come too," exclaimed Ernestine. She seized the handrail as if to follow me, but the

sudden touch on the shaking pole was too much for my frail balance--the rail swayed violently and swung away out of my clutching grasp, my foot slipped, and with a shriek of terror I found myself flung into the stream below. Luckily it was neither deep nor dangerous, but even half a yard of water is quite enough to get very wet in, and I was a moist and draggled object by the time I had struggled back to dry land.



"I FOUND MYSELF FLUNG INTO THE STREAM BELOW"

"It's all your fault, Ernestine!" I cried wrathfully as I regained the bank. "I told you not to shake the handrail, and you knew it would upset me!"

"You're the meanest thing in the world, Ernestine Salt!" declared Cathy, her cheeks crimson with indignation as she tried to wring the water from my dripping skirts. "Don't speak to me; I never intend to be friends with you again."

"You did it on purpose," began Janet. "I know you did. You're always playing sneaking tricks on Philippa when you think no one will find you out."

"You needn't think you're going to stay here with us," said Blanche Greenwood, hotly. "Because we don't want you. We didn't ask you to come, and you may go away and walk by yourself."

"I've no wish to stay with you, I'm sure," replied Ernestine with equal temper. "I would rather have your room than your company. I've picked all the lilies I want, so you're welcome to any that are left, so far as I'm concerned, if that's why you wish to get rid of me."

And with this parting shot, she took her flowers and walked slowly away in the opposite direction to that in which we had come, by a small path that led from the wood up on to the moor beyond.

"You're terribly wet, Phil; your boots are simply squelching with water. I don't know what Mrs. Marshall will say!" said Cathy, as she hurried me back to the farm as fast as possible, to be dried.

Somewhat to my relief, neither Mrs. Marshall nor any of the teachers was there. Like ourselves they were all trying to make the best of the fine afternoon out-of-doors.

"Deary me! Who'd have thought of you falling into that bit of a brook?" said Mrs. Thompson, aghast, as I walked into the kitchen in my moist skirts. "We must get you out of those wet things, honey. I've some clothes of my Lizzie's as would fit you while your own is at the fire."

Lizzie's skirt was decidedly too short for me, and Lizzie's boots were equally large and roomy; her stockings, moreover, were of thick, home-knitted worsted, very hot and uncomfortable; but I was grateful for anything in the circumstances, and would, I believe, have worn a pair of sabots if they had been offered to me.

"We shall just have time for a walk, Cathy, after all," I said. "It can't be very late yet, and we don't start home until six o'clock. Let us go up that path through the glen that led on to the moors."

"Nay! Don't go there!" called out Mrs. Thompson, who happened to overhear my remark just as we left the house. "There's a bull up on yon moor as isn't safe at all. It do run folks sometimes. I thought ye had been with the rest when I warned ye all. Keep in our own fields, and ye'll be right enough, but don't go roamin' far away."

"Never mind," said Cathy. "We'll go back to the wood, at any rate, and pick some more lilies, if there are any left."

We wandered slowly down the lane, gathering the dog-violets from the banks, and having an unsuccessful hunt for birds' nests in the hedge. The girls were all gone from the glen, only a few dropped flowers remaining to show where they had been, and Cathy and I sauntered to the little bridge to take a look at the scene of my catastrophe.

"You see how the handrail shakes about," I said, as I swung it out with a touch. "And directly Ernestine took hold of it--- Oh, Cathy! I never thought of Ernestine before! Don't you remember she went up the path towards the moors? She can't know that the bull is there, and she's gone quite alone!"

"Let us run after her," said Cathy. "Perhaps, after all, she mayn't have walked very far, and we shall be in time to warn her."

"Quick! quick!" I cried. "Mrs. Thompson said the bull was so dangerous. Oh! we *must* stop her!"

We raced as fast as my heavy country boots would allow along the narrow path through the wood, and over the stile into the meadow beyond, calling "Ernestine" as we ran, but hearing no reply to our shouts. Among the deep clover and up the steep hill-side we panted, following the plain direction of the path, till, clambering over the irregular steps which led across the high stone wall, we found ourselves on the open moor at last.

"Oh, look! look!" cried Cathy, grasping my arm. "There it is!"

And she pointed as she spoke to the summit of a small hill close by, where, outlined against the blue sky beyond, rose the enormous form of the great black bull, which stood there pawing the ground impatiently, and tossing his giant horns as though he were warning trespassers to beware of venturing upon his domains. Slightly lower down among the furze and the heather, and only about three hundred yards away from us, we could distinguish Ernestine's blue dress, and the flutter of the red ribbon in her hat. She was walking slowly along, stooping every now and then to pick a flower, or pausing to look at the scene around her, and evidently utterly unconscious of the huge monster which was grazing on the hill-side above her. We called wildly to her, but the wind was in the opposite direction, and she could not hear us.

"We *must* save her, Cathy!" I cried. "Perhaps the bull won't see us. Let us follow her quietly, and tell her to come back before it's too late."

But the bull had seen her already, and with a low roaring noise it began to move slowly down the side of the hill,

snuffing the air as it went. Roused at last by the sound, Ernestine turned round. For one moment she stood almost fixed to the spot with horror, then with a wild shriek of fear she flung down her flowers, and ran back as fast as she could in the direction of the stile over the wall.

"Stop! Stop! Don't run! It will be sure to follow you!" shouted Cathy; but even if Ernestine heard her, I doubt if she would have had the self-control to stay her flying footsteps. It was too late, for with a loud bellow the great animal was rushing madly after her down the slope. It seemed impossible that she could reach the wall in time. There was only a moment in which to save her, but I had read in books that a bull always charges blindly, and quick as thought I pulled off my jacket, and dashed forward.

"Run, Ernestine! Run!" I cried. "Run, Cathy! The stile! The stile!"

It was almost upon her, but even as it put down its head to charge, I flung my jacket over its horns, and, taking advantage of the few seconds of delay thus gained, I fled on wings of terror after the others to the stile. How I scrambled over, I can never remember; I know I fell on Cathy and Ernestine at the bottom. We all lay there for a few moments nearly dead with fright, imagining that the bull would leap after us, but the wall was high, and the stile very steep, and though we could hear its angry mutterings within a few feet of us, it was not able to clear so great an obstacle.

"Let us get away!" cried Ernestine. "Oh! it's terrible, terrible to think that dreadful beast is still so near us!"

She made an effort to rise; then, groaning with pain, she sank back on to the ground, and buried her face in her hands.

"I can't walk!" she moaned, "I've broken my foot. Go, girls, and leave me! If I have to die, I must."

"What nonsense!" said Cathy. "You're not going to die yet. I expect you twisted your ankle when you fell. You're quite safe here, for the bull can't leap a six-foot wall, or climb up crooked stone steps. We'll go for help, and Mr. Thompson and one of the men must come to carry you back to the farm."

"You go, Cathy," I said, "and I'll stay with Ernestine. She'd feel dreadfully frightened to be left here all alone, with the bull close by, although it can't get at us now. If you run all the way, you'll very soon be back with help."

Cathy started off at once at a brisk trot, and we watched her as she hurried down the clover-field and the meadow, and disappeared into the wood below.

I turned to Ernestine, who still sat under the wall where she had fallen, white to the lips, and trembling all over with pain.

"I'm afraid your foot's hurting you very much," I said. "Let me take your boot off, and I'll get some water to bathe it for you."

I was obliged to cut both her boot-lace and her stocking with my penknife, for her ankle was already so swollen that she could scarcely bear to have it touched. I soaked my handkerchief in a little pool of water, and bound up the foot as carefully as I could.

"Don't cry!" I said. "They'll soon be here with help, and you can lie on the carriage-seat and keep your foot up all the way home. Does it hurt you very dreadfully?"

"It does hurt, but it isn't that!" sobbed Ernestine. "You've saved my life, Philippa, and--I've been so horribly nasty to you, ever since you came to school! I *meant* to shake that handrail to-day, and send you into the brook; it wasn't an accident at all!"

I stroked her hand softly.

"I don't think you'd do it again," I said. "It's all right about the bull. Don't let us talk of it now. I want to put another bandage on your poor foot."

"But I will talk of it!" she said. "I've been most disgustingly mean. I'll be very different to you afterwards, if you'll be friends with me. Will you?"

"Of course I will," I said heartily; and I put my arms round her neck, and kissed her.

Mr. Thompson soon arrived with a couple of strong farm-men, and between them they carried my poor groaning school-mate back to the farm, where Mrs. Marshall was waiting, full of alarm at the chapter of accidents which had happened. It was a painful journey home for Ernestine, and it was many weeks before her sprained ankle would allow

her to walk, or take any part in our school games again. I think I was able to make the dull hours she had perforce to spend on her sofa pass a little more brightly for her, and she was grateful to me beyond words.

"No, don't!" I said, when she tried once to stammer out her thanks. "We've forgotten all that old time. It's no use remembering by-gones. We're going to start afresh now, and we'll all give you ever such a jolly welcome when you're well enough to come into school again."

And so my last trouble at The Hollies had passed away, for Miss Percy's hard discipline had resolved itself into the genial sway of Miss Hope, and Ernestine Salt, who had been the one stormy element in my class, now wrote herself upon the list of my friends.

CHAPTER XI

AT MARSHLANDS AGAIN

"Each year to ancient friendships adds a ring,
As to an oak, and precious more and more,
Without deservingness, or help of ours
They grow, and, silent, wider spread each year
Their unbought ring of shelter or of shade."

I HAD so many visits to pay to various friends and relations of my father, who took a kindly interest in my welfare, that it was not until the following Easter-time that I was able to accept Mrs. Winstanley's oft-repeated invitation that I should spend a second holiday at Marshlands. How familiar the dear little station looked as Cathy and I turned out our numerous bags and packages upon the platform at Everton! The very porter knew me again, and greeted me with a grin of welcome; and every house, and tree, and bend of the road as we drove home through the village, felt to me like an old friend.

"Well, Miss Humming-bird, you have grown out of all knowledge!" said the squire. "The gray pony is still at your service, and there's a nice light little rod-and-line we could soon teach you to whip the stream with. We'll make a sportswoman of you yet, I declare!"

Mrs. Winstanley welcomed me home equally with Cathy.

"I'm longing to see your Nature Note-Book," she said. "You must have made many additions since last we met. The wild daffodils are out in the Wyngates meadows, the herons are building in the wood by Carnton Fell, and I have found the remains of another stone circle on the moors, so we shall have plenty of objects for our walks."

To revisit all our old haunts was an immense delight. The rose-tree which I had planted by Edward's arbour had grown into quite a large bush, the tempestuous poodle puppies had settled down into sober, steady-going, well-conducted dogs, which regarded with much disfavour the harum-scarum ways of a youthful Skye terrier, which was the latest favourite. Cathy had a fresh pony, a beautiful little chestnut called Selim, which ran with Lady in the new phaeton, and the rock garden which we had made at the end of the shrubbery was flourishing in the most satisfactory manner.

I found the boys much changed. Edward was very tall, and had begun to speak meditatively of Oxford. He still drawled a little, and fussed over his clothes, but he had taken keenly to politics, and aired socialistic theories which he argued hotly with the squire. Dick had grown quite polite, comparatively speaking, and offered to teach me golf, but we had so many other occupations on hand that I never found time to learn. George had got over the stage of keeping white mice in his pockets, and talked mostly about cricket; he was still at his preparatory school, but he was to leave soon for a training-college for the Navy. They were all as full of fun and chaff as ever, and laughed yet over the remembrance of our joke with the burglar.

Marshlands looked beautiful in the spring-time. The cherry orchards were in full blossom, the woods were tinged with the faintest of tender greens, and we found violets in every hedgerow. It was early April, and the distant fells were capped with snow, while the air had enough of a northern chill in it to make quick walking a pleasure. We were close to the lake country, on the borders of that mountain district where crag and moorland, pine-wood and tarn combine to make some of the most glorious scenery in the British Isles. I have always had an extreme love for the hills, whether they were the rocky sierras of my childhood, or the rugged peaks of Cumberland. Once up on the slopes, with the fresh wind blowing on your cheek, and the valley spread out like a map below, you feel as if you had left the cares of the world behind, and were in a different moral as well as physical atmosphere. If it is true that our surroundings really have an effect upon our characters, I think that those who live on a mountain can never be quite so petty and mean-minded as the dwellers in the plain beneath; something in the majesty of those peaks must surely draw them up, and lift their thoughts towards that other world that is higher than ours.

The days were not half long enough for all our delightful projects. Mr. Winstanley had fulfilled his promise of teaching me to fish, and, armed with the light rod-and-line, I industriously and laboriously whipped the stream; but I fear I was anything but a "compleat angler", for very few of my contributions went to fill the baskets of silvery trout which the boys seemed to catch so cleverly.

"I'm afraid a fisherman is something like a poet, 'born, not made'," I sighed, as I watched Dick choose a fresh fly and

secure a catch in the very pool where I had tried for half an hour in vain.

"Oh, it's partly practice!" said Dick, "you'll get into it in time. It's rather slow work, though, and I'm jolly savage myself, sometimes, when I can't get a bite, and feel inclined to agree with Dr. Johnson that a fisherman is 'a worm at one end, and a fool at the other'. That old chap knew life! I'll tell you what; if the governor's willing, we'll get him to take us over for a day to Craigdale, and we'll have a boat and try some sea-fishing. I dare say you'll get on better with the flukes and haddock."

Good-natured Mr. Winstanley proved to be more than willing, so one sunny morning we packed ourselves into the phaeton and dog-cart, and started off on the nine-mile drive to the little fishing-village which was our nearest point on the sea-coast. Craigdale seemed to be a mere handful of whitewashed cottages set in the midst of a sandy marsh, where hardy sea-flowers were springing up and blooming on the wind-swept ridges, and terns and sand-pipers were darting here and there at the edge of the waves, in chase of some detached limpet or scuttling crab. We put up the traps at a small inn called the "Mermaid Arms", the sign-board of which was adorned with a most remarkable painting of a sea-maiden with fish's tail, comb and looking-glass, all complete, ready no doubt to bewitch too venturesome sailors to their doom. The stout, bustling landlady readily agreed to provide us with the best she could muster at so short a notice, and in a very brief time she had produced a smoking dish of ham and eggs, which with brown bread and Cumberland cream cheese we thought a fare not at all to be despised. We made quick work of our lunch, however, being anxious to start off in the boat which was waiting for us down by the jetty, where a bluff, jolly old fisherman was ready with bait and sea-lines. Strange to say, it was the first time I had ever been out in a rowing-boat. Although I had paid several visits to the sea-side with Aunt Agatha and my cousins, we had generally kept to the pier and promenade, and had never ventured upon the briny deep in anything of less size than an Isle of Wight steamer. It was a delightful novelty to find myself so close to the waves that I could hold my hand in the rushing water, and could almost catch the long trails of sea-weed and the great jelly-fishes which floated every now and then past our boat. We rowed out a short distance into the bay, and then cast anchor, as our boatmen assured us that it was a good spot to let down the lines, and we should be certain of having plenty of bites. There was a stiff breeze blowing, and the white caps on the distant waves looked like wild sea-horses chasing each other over the foam; the tide was coming in fast, and our boat swayed to and fro like a cork upon the heavy swell.

"Isn't it jolly?" said George; "I like to be 'rocked in the cradle of the deep'. I mean to be a sailor when I grow up; there's no life like 'a life on the ocean wave'. Hullo, Phil! You don't seem as though you were enjoying yourself! Just look at her, Mater! Her face is the colour of a boiled turnip!"

I certainly was *not* enjoying myself, for the horrible swinging motion had brought on that peculiar complaint which the French call "mal de mer", and I could only gasp out an entreaty to be taken back anywhere so that I might find my feet upon dry land again.

"Bless the child! I didn't think such a little would upset her!" said the squire, whose own family were all excellent sailors. "Wind up the lines, and we'll row back to the jetty and land her. She'll have to amuse herself on the beach as best she can."

"You'll never make a fisherwoman after all!" laughed Dick, as he helped me to jump out on to the narrow landing-place. "I vowed you should catch at least ten flukes this afternoon, and you've given in before you've had a single bite!"

"I don't care if I never see a fish again!" I said. "You're welcome to my share of them all, and can eat them too, if you like. I'm only too glad to be on terra firma once more, and I wouldn't stay in that little wobbling cockle-shell any longer if you were to offer me a five-pound note for every fish I caught."

But though my fishing efforts had turned out such a disastrous failure, I found I got on much better with riding. Sometimes Cathy and I would go out on Selim and Lady, with the squire or one of the boys on Captain, and then I thought nothing could equal the joy of the brisk canter over the moors, with the dogs racing behind us, and the screaming sea-birds flying away in front. It was delightful to feel the quick motion of the pony under me, as we rapidly covered the ground; and I improved so much that Mr. Winstanley declared he would make a horsewoman of me in the end, and that I should follow the hounds next time I came in the hunting season.

Perhaps of all our expeditions I enjoyed our walks the most. To ramble about the lanes and fields in search of nests or wild flowers was to me always an endless pleasure. Finding that I had never picked wild daffodils before, Cathy suggested one morning that we should walk to Wyngates, where they grew so lavishly that the marshy meadows were literally yellow with them. So with our baskets on our arms, and the new Skye terrier for company, we started off in high spirits. Our way led up a steep lane, the sloping banks of which were spangled with primroses and celandine, while the rough-built walls at the top gave a hold to trailing honeysuckle, ivy, and hazel bushes. It was a grand place for birds'

nests, and we made very slow progress as we poked about, peering into every likely-looking spot. Cathy, through long experience, was much more clever at discovering them than I, and while she found three thrushes', a wren's, and two chaffinches', my efforts were only rewarded by a solitary hedge-sparrow's. I had had a kodak for my last birthday present, and I was very anxious to take some snap-shots of the young birds in their nests, fired thereto by the beautiful nature photographs I had seen in the illustrated papers. With a good deal of climbing and difficulty I managed to secure various views of Mrs. Thrush at home, Mrs. Chaffinch's nursery, and the five Miss Hedge-sparrows clamouring for a meal. I used a whole spool of films over them, only to find, when with Dick's assistance I developed them afterwards, that my little camera was not intended for such near distances, and my pictures were so hopelessly out of focus that they were utterly spoilt.

"It's an awful sell, and you've wasted a dozen films," said Dick. "I believe you ought to have a special lens for these nature dodges. Your kodak won't take nearer than seven feet off. Never mind, the ones of the Mater and the house and the village are stunning, and you'll get some good snap-shots when we go over Camton Fell to the sheep-counting."

But to return to our walk. Leaving the lane and the birds' nests behind, we were soon on the open moor, with the brown of last year's heather around us, and the gorse in brilliant patches of gold scenting the air with its faint peachy smell. Innumerable little mountain springs crossed our path, cutting channels through the peat, and overhung with lady-fern and sedges, and here and there among the furze the shoots of the young bracken were springing green. We cut down a deep gorge into the valley, following the course of a swift stream which was descending with much noise to join the river, and found ourselves at last on a kind of rushy marshland, where deep dykes and high banks told a tale of flooded meadows in winter. It might aptly have been called "The Field of the Cloth of Gold", for the daffodils were growing in such endless profusion that one could have picked for a week without stopping. I filled my basket with infinite satisfaction, and sat down on an old poplar stump to wait for Cathy, who thought she had discovered some new snail-shells in the brook.

"What's that house up there?" I asked, pointing to a gray old Tudor building which stood on the side of the crag above, looking down over the valley towards the dim line of the distant sea.

"Oh, that's Wyngates," said Cathy, pulling herself up the bank with her hands full of treasures. "It's such a dear old place! Would you like to go and see it? Nobody lives there now, and I know the care-taker. I always think it is such fun to explore an empty house."

I had not been over an untenanted home before, so I jumped at the opportunity, and we climbed up the hill-side again to a little iron gate which opened through the hedge from the fields. We found ourselves in an old-world garden such as I had never even imagined. The tall yew hedges had been clipped smooth, with here and there a small window cut in them through which the distant landscape appeared like a picture set in a frame. At either end the trees were fashioned into quaint shapes--peacocks with spreading tails, cocked hats, or ramping lions, all getting a little straggling and untended, but adding a very picturesque feature to the scene. There was a long flagged terrace, with dandelions pushing up between the stones, and roses, grown almost wild, climbing in glorious profusion over the balustrade, while a flight of steps led down to the ladies' pleasaunce, where the narrow grass walks were bordered with box-edgings, and pink daisies and forget-me-nots were trying to struggle through the weeds in the neglected beds. In the centre was a sun-dial with twisted shaft, and an inscription round the capital. We rubbed away the moss which covered the worn letters, and spelt out the words, written in old English characters:

"nescies + quā + hora + vigila",

which we were not Latin scholars enough at the time to be able to translate, but which I afterwards learnt meant "Thou knowest not at what hour. Watch!" I wondered, as I looked, how many footsteps, in the centuries that had fled, had passed up and down that terraced walk, and how many quaint little maidens as young and gay as we, had come to tell the time by that dial, and had read that same motto, "wrought in dead days by men a long while dead". The blossom from the almond-tree above fell on us like pink snow, and a thrush in the lilac bush was ruffling every feather on his little throat in the rapture of his spring song.

"If I could choose any spot in the world I wished, I think I should come to live here," I said, with a long sigh of content as I looked over the sweet-brier fence down the valley to where in the distance gleamed the bay, a faint gray streak against a patch of yellow sand, with the outline of the fells rising up misty and blue behind. Cathy smiled.

"You haven't seen the house yet," she said. "You couldn't live only in a garden."

"I should like to," I replied. "I'd any time rather have a cottage with a beautiful garden, than the most splendid mansion without one. I think out-of-doors is so much nicer than indoors. Perhaps it's my bringing up. In San Carlos we lived mostly in the verandah and on the terrace."

The house proved to be a quaint old stone manor, not large, and quite unpretentious, the kind of dwelling that was built in days gone by for the younger sons of gentry, who farmed a little land, and rode to hounds. Cathy begged the key from the care-taker at the lodge, and we wandered round the panelled rooms, wondering at the black oak beams of the ceilings, and the delightful ingle-nooks of the wide old-fashioned fireplaces.

"How splendid they would look full of blazing logs!" said Cathy. "These old walls ought to be hung with garlands of holly and mistletoe. It would just be the place for a Christmas party."

One room especially fascinated me. It was a small chamber half-way up the stairs, built above the porch, with a large mullioned window from which one looked out over the garden to the very limit of the horizon. The chimney-piece was richly carved, and panelled with coats of arms, but the central panel was occupied by a small oil-painting of a laughing girl, with lace ruffles and flowered bodice, whose fair hair fell in loose curls over her neck and shoulders. So lifelike was the portrait, that for a moment I felt as if the parted red lips were about to speak, and almost waited for the words, while the bright eyes seemed to look out from the wall as if they were following us round the room. In the extreme right-hand corner of the picture was painted the name: "Philippa Lovell".

"Who is she?" said Cathy, in response to my eager enquiries. "Why, the Lovells were a very old family who lived here in the time of the civil wars. Her father was for the King, but her only brother had declared for Cromwell and the Parliament. They met in battle at Naseby, and both fell, each fighting bravely for his own opinions. So the girl was the last of the race. She was a ward of Charles II, and he married her to one of his favourites, who cared for nothing but her lands and her money. She was miserable and ill at the London court, and at last she got leave to return to Cumberland; but it was too late, for she only came home to die. You can see her monument in the church, next to that of her father and brother; the Lovell coat of arms hangs over them all, and the words 'Sic transit gloria mundi'."

So this was the story of my poor little namesake. Her smiles had indeed soon been changed into tears, and very sad eyes must have looked out from the mullioned window to the distant sea. I felt as if the room were still occupied by her memory, and I closed the door almost reverently as I went out, murmuring to myself those lines from Longfellow:--

"We have no title-deeds to house or lands;
Owners and occupants of earlier dates
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty hands,
And hold in mortmain still their old estates".

CHAPTER XII

THE *IGNACIA*

"These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing bell."

MY long separation from my father was at length drawing to a close. He spoke hopefully of his return to England, and even named the vessel in which he intended to take his passage. "Shall I find my girl much altered, I wonder?" he wrote. "Taller, no doubt, and I hope wiser, but in heart just the same as when she left me, and with as tender a corner as ever for her poor old dad." I made so many plans for Father's return. All my best sketches and collections were put by to show to him, and I toiled hard at music, so that he might not be disappointed with my playing. I thought how I would introduce Cathy to him, and how much he would admire her, and how perhaps we could go and stay somewhere near Marshlands in the holidays, so that he could see all the Winstanleys together. I imagined him coming to our Mid-summer breaking-up party, and how proud and happy I should be to have him there. It was an annual occasion to which the parents and friends of the girls were invited, and I had often felt, with a little pang, when I saw the warm greetings between others, that it seemed hard to have no one there to love me specially above everyone else. At last I was to have my own dear one all to myself, and I counted the days till his return, crossing each off on the calendar when I went to bed at night, and thinking that I was one day nearer to our meeting. Now that his arrival seemed so close, I was full of impatience, and felt that the time would scarcely pass, and I wondered sometimes how I had managed to live through those five long years without him.

He was to sail in the *Ignacia*, a Spanish vessel bound for London, and the steamer was cabled to have started on her voyage. Each night I thought of Father tossing on the ocean, and each morning when I awoke, I pictured him a little nearer to me than when I had fallen asleep. I was so excited I could scarcely attend to my lessons, and the teachers, knowing my story, did not press me too hard. And so the weeks passed by, and the great day of my happiness drew near.

I was sitting one afternoon at my drawing class. It was early June, and the windows were wide open, letting in the fragrant scent of the lilac and hawthorn from the garden below, and the imperative song of a chaffinch to his mate in the elm-tree close by. Sometimes, in memory of greater events, little incidents make a great impression upon one's mind. I can recall every line of the Italian boy's head which I was copying, and the sound of the scratch of Janet's pencil, as she laboriously shaded a chalk study. I felt unusually restless and disinclined to apply myself to my work. The air was heavy and still, there was a grumble of thunder in the distance, and the silence of the room broken only by an occasional criticism from the master, as he corrected our drawings, grew almost unbearable. Gathering clouds were already darkening the sky, and threatened a storm, and a vague foreboding of evil seemed to come over my mind, dulling the keen edge of my happiness. Does some subtle instinct, as yet neither known nor understood, warn us when those we hold dear are in peril? Does our love set in motion unseen waves of sympathy, so that the heart feels the message which has not yet been told in words? I think so; for when the door opened and Miss Wilton entered, I knew before she spoke that she had come for me. There was an unwonted pity and kindness in her voice as she quietly ordered me to leave my drawing, and come to Mrs. Marshall. With trembling fingers I put away my pencils and obeyed. She took my hand, and led me silently downstairs. There was a sound of voices in the drawing-room, and Aunt Agatha was there, seated on the sofa. She had been crying, and she rose quickly when I entered. Mrs. Marshall put her arm round my neck and kissed me, but said nothing.

"Phillippa dear," said my aunt, with more tenderness than I had ever given her credit for, "can you bear me to tell you some very bad news?"

I could not speak. A great fear rose in my heart, and almost choked me. My speechless lips framed the one question: "Father?"

"He is not come yet. He will be a long time coming. Oh! my poor child, he will *never* come! The *Ignacia* has gone down with all hands on board."

I would pass over the first outbreak of my grief, for it is so black a remembrance, such a thickness of utter darkness and despair, that the very memory of it hurts. I begged to be allowed to remain at school. Many kind friends wished me to visit them, but I felt that to plunge myself more than ever into my lessons and the coming examinations was the only

way to dull the keen edge of the sorrow that was wounding me so sorely. Mrs. Marshall agreed with me, and by keeping my time most fully occupied did me the truest kindness that in the circumstances she was able to perform. A kind of dull passiveness came over me, which they mistook for resignation. They thought I was beginning to forget, but there are some sorrows which never really die, however deeply we may seek to bury them, and every now and then my grief would awaken with renewed force. The summer term dragged on towards its close. How I dreaded the breaking-up party, with all its festivities! I wished I could go away before it, though I did not like to ask to do so. The examinations were over, and I stood high in my class, but my success gave me no pleasure. What was the use of doing well, I thought bitterly, when my father was not there to rejoice over it! I felt so unutterably solitary and alone in the world, and even Cathy's love and the many thoughtful kindnesses of my friends could not make up to me for that greatest of all losses.

The day of the party at last arrived. How different from anything I had planned! I set out my white dress and black sash with a sigh. Cathy, who was watching me with anxious eyes, tried to talk about home, for I was returning to Marshlands with her for part of the holidays, and Janet, too, did her best to give the conversation a hopeful turn.

"This visitor's arriving early," said Millicent, who was leaning out of my window, looking down the drive, as a cab drew up at the front-door. "It's a gentleman," she announced, standing back a little behind the curtain, so as not to be seen, "I don't know who he is. One of Mrs. Marshall's friends, I suppose. Do you want to peep, Phil?"

I felt no interest in the guests of the evening, however, and I had not even the curiosity to look out. We heard a slight bustle of arrival downstairs, and I did not give the matter another thought. But a short time afterwards Lucy came running into our bedroom with a look of peculiar excitement on her face.

"You're wanted, Philippa, in the drawing-room," she said. Then, putting her hand over her mouth, as though to stop herself from saying more, she darted suddenly away. It was so unusual, and so utterly unlike Lucy's ordinary behaviour, that I was completely puzzled. I went down to the drawing-room with a beating heart. It somehow made me think of that other time when I had been summoned there. Mrs. Marshall was standing near the window with a newspaper in her hand. She looked strangely moved.

"Philippa," she said slowly, "the newspapers are not always correct, after all. We should be very careful before we believe everything they tell us." I looked full into her eyes, to learn the sequel. "Sometimes," she continued, "they give us good news which is never fulfilled, and sometimes they tell us of bad news which has not really occurred. It occasionally happens that when a ship goes down, all do not perish. A few manage to escape in boats, and are picked up by chance steamers, and then they come home again to those who love them. There was a vessel called the *Ignacia*----

But here my patience broke down, and I gasped out: "Oh, Mrs. Marshall, tell me quick! quick! Is he----?" I did not dare to ask the question outright. My very life seemed to depend upon the reply.

The door of the conservatory suddenly opened, a tall bronzed figure rushed into the room, and the next moment I was clasped close in my father's arms. Mrs. Marshall went out very softly, and left us together.

Father told me his story afterwards. How a terrible storm had driven the *Ignacia* many hundreds of miles north of her course; how the ship had sprung a leak, and how he and a few others had escaped in one of the boats. What a fearful time they had had tossing for days and days on a rough sea, without food and water; and how, just when they were giving up hope, they had been rescued by a whaling vessel, bound for the north of Greenland, which had been obliged to continue its voyage, and had not touched at any port where he could telegraph until it finally arrived at Glasgow! Then he had come straight to The Hollies, to bring me the good news himself.

Oh, what a breaking-up party it was for me! With what a different heart I put on the white dress (with a pink sash instead of a black one), and stood by Father's side in the reception-room! He kissed Lucy and Mary and my dear Cathy, who was nearly crying for joy, and had a hearty hand-shake for each of my companions.

"I know them all from your letters," he said. "And I should like to thank them for being so good to my little girl. We're very happy and grateful to-night, and not the least part of it is to see so many friends ready to share in our rejoicing."

The visitors soon learned the story, and nearly every one had a kind word for me, even Miss Percy, who had come as a guest, kissed me warmly on the cheek, and wished me joy.

"You won't go back to San Carlos, Father?" I cried, when at last I had him all to myself.

"Never again, my darling. We sha'n't be parted any more. I've resigned the consulate, and sold the plantations, and mean to settle down in Old England now, with you for my little housekeeper in course of time. After all, there's no country like one's own, and whatever attractions one finds abroad, one is always longing for a whiff of one's native

air."

As I write these last lines I look out through the mullioned window over the quaint old-world garden to a line of golden sand and a distant streak of silver sea, for my wildest dreams are realized: Father has taken Wyngates, and the deserted house, where Cathy and I wandered on that spring morning, is now my home. The large fireplaces blaze with the most hospitable of log fires; the clipped yew hedges are neatly trimmed; the beds are gay with flowers, and I have planted a border of white lilies round the sun-dial in the ladies' pleasaunce. Philippa Lovell's room is my special sanctum, where I keep my books and my work, and her laughing face smiles down upon me as if she were glad that young life has returned to the old place once more. The Winstanleys are our dearest friends, and very few days pass without a meeting between us. Cathy and I have just left school, and I am settling down in dead earnest to master the mysteries of housekeeping, and to supply to my father that dear place which my mother left empty long ago. We do not want to fritter away our lives in that aimless fashion which girls sometimes do when school-days are over, and we have many plans for our own and the village improvement. Strange to say, Edward, just through college, is here at one with us. He has forgotten his dandy ways, and his drawl, and is the foremost in organizing a Boys' Brigade, or running a reading-room, qualifying, as Dick irreverently puts it, for a "thorough-going out-and-out kind of a parson chap". George is at sea, and, from the accounts of his adventures, the ringleader of a lively crew of harum-scarum middies, whose escapades outrival even the pranks which he and Dick played long ago. His great desire seems to be that a war should break out to give him an opportunity of displaying his courage.

I love Wyngates with my whole heart; no spot on earth seems more beautiful to me, and I would not change its hills and its fresh breezes for all the brightness of southern skies. Our old home and all its associations are not forgotten, however, for Juanita, now married to Pedro, sends us kindly messages from her orange-farm on the sierras, and Tasso, whose devotion to my father led him to follow him over the seas, is with us now, the most faithful of servants and the staunchest of friends.

With those I hold dearest near me, my cup of happiness seems full, and my father says that the little foreign plant which he sent over so long ago to harden in our gray northern clime has taken root, and changed from a tropical blossom into an English rose.