

FICTION

Angela Brazil

The Head Girl at the Gables

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THE HEAD GIRL AT THE GABLES

BY ANGELA BRAZIL

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"OH, DO FIND OUT WHERE 'KILMENY' IS," BEGGED LORRAINE

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BY

ANGELA BRAZIL

Author of "For the School Colours"

"The Madcap of the School"
"A Patriotic Schoolgirl"
&c. &c.

Illustrated by Balliol Salmon

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THE HEAD GIRL AT THE GABLES

CHAPTER I

A Momentous Decision

It was exactly ten days before the opening of the autumn term at The Gables. The September sunshine, flooding through the window of the Principal's study, lighted up the bowl of carnations upon the writing-table, and, flashed back from the Chippendale mirror on the wall, caught the book-case with the morocco-bound editions of the poets, showed up the etching of "Dante's Dream" over the mantelpiece, and glowed on Miss Kingsley's ripply brown hair, turning all the silver threads in it to gold. Miss Kingsley, rested and refreshed after the long summer holiday, a touch of pink in her cheeks and a brightness in her eyes, left as a legacy from the breezes of the Cheviot Hills, was seated at her desk with a notebook in front of her and a fountain pen in her hand, making plans for a fresh year's work.

Miss Janet, armed with a stump of pencil and the back of an envelope, ready to jot down suggestions, swayed to and fro in the rocking-chair with her lips drawn into a bunch and the particular little pucker between her eyebrows that always came when she was trying to concentrate her thoughts.

"It really *is* a difficulty, Janet!" said Miss Kingsley. "A suitable head girl makes all the difference to a school, and if we happen to choose the wrong one it may completely spoil the tone. If only Lottie Carson or Helen Stanley had stayed on! Or even Enid Jones or Stella Hardy!"

"It's hard luck to lose all our best senior girls at once!" agreed Miss Janet, biting her stump of pencil abstractedly. "But if they're gone, they're gone."

"Of course!" Miss Kingsley's tone savoured slightly of impatience. "And the urgent matter is to supply their places. It's like making bricks without straw. Haven't you any suggestions? *I do* wish you'd stop rocking, it worries me to hear your chair creak!"

Miss Janet, seasoned by thirty-five years' acquaintance with her sister's nervous temperament, rose and walked to the window, where she stood looking out over the sunlit tennis court to the bank of exotic shrubs that half hid the blue line of the sea. There was a moment's pause, then she said:

"Suppose you read over the list of 'eligibles', and we'll discuss their points each in turn."

Miss Kingsley reached for a certain black-backed shiny exercise-book and opened it. The entries were in her own neat hand.

"There will only be eight girls in the Sixth Form this term," she volunteered. "Taking them in alphabetical order they are: Nellie Appleby, Claire Bardsley, Claudia Castleton, Vivien Forrester, Lorraine Forrester, Audrey Roberts, Dorothy Skipton, and Patricia Sullivan."

Miss Janet smiled.

"First of all you may cross off the last," she suggested.

"Decidedly. Patsie Sullivan as head girl would be about as suitable as--as----"

Miss Kingsley paused for an appropriate simile.

"As making Charlie Chaplin Archbishop of Canterbury!" finished Miss Janet with a chuckle.

"It's unthinkable! Most of the others are soon weeded out too. Nellie Appleby and Claire Bardsley--good stodgy girls, but quite unfit for leadership--Claudia Castleton, a new girl, so of course not eligible; Audrey Roberts--could you imagine silly little Audrey in any post of trust? It really only leaves us the choice between Lorraine Forrester, Vivien Forrester, and Dorothy Skipton."

"In last term's exams these three were fairly equal," commented Miss Janet.

"So equal that I shan't take the results of the exams into consideration. It must be a question of which girl will make the most efficient head. Each has her points and her drawbacks. Take Vivien, now: she's smart and capable, and would revel in exercising authority."

"Too much so. I should be sorry for the school with anyone so domineering as Vivien Forrester at the head of affairs. She's too forward altogether, and inclined to argue and pit her opinion against that of the mistresses. If she were singled out for special office, I believe she'd grow insufferable. Dorothy Skipton, with all her faults, would be preferable

to Vivien."

"And Dorothy *has* faults--very big ones too!" sighed Miss Kingsley. "I never can consider Dorothy to be absolutely straight and square. I've several times caught her cheating or copying, and she's not above telling a fib if she's in a tight place. She's clever, undoubtedly, and decidedly popular, and in that lies the greatest danger, for a popular head girl whose moral attitude is not of the very highest might ruin the tone of the school in a single term. I'm afraid Dorothy is too risky an experiment."

"Then that leaves only Lorraine Forrester?"

"Yes--Lorraine."

Both the sisters paused, with the same look of puzzled doubt on their faces.

"She's a child I never seem to have got to know thoroughly," said Miss Janet. "I must say I've always found her perfectly square and a plodding worker. She has given very little trouble in class."

"Not so brilliant, perhaps, as Vivien, but, on the whole, more satisfactory," commented Miss Kingsley. "I agree with you that we have never really got to know Lorraine. She's a very reserved girl, and hasn't pushed herself forward, but there's great strength of character in her, in my opinion. Those big brown eyes look in earnest over anything she's doing. She's never made a bid for popularity, like Dorothy Skipton, but I've seen her coaching the younger ones at hockey and cricket. She's inclined to go about in a dream, but I believe if she were placed in a post of authority she'd wake up. I really think we could depend on Lorraine. The first quality in a head girl is that she must be conscientious, and she certainly comes out top in that respect."

"If it were put to the general vote----" began Miss Janet, but her sister snapped her up.

"I don't believe in allowing the girls a choice! The popular idol of the school isn't always the one with the best influence. I've quite decided, Janet! Lorraine is far and away the most suitable among the new Sixth. I shall send for her the day before term opens and have a private talk with her. Unless I'm very much mistaken in the girl, we shan't be disappointed."

"I believe you are right!" agreed Miss Janet, sinking into the easy-chair and resuming her rocking, without further remonstrance from her now satisfied sister.

Miss Kingsley and Miss Janet had kept school together at The Gables for the last twelve years. It was not a very large school, but then Porthkeverne was not a very large place--only a little quaint, old-fashioned seaside town, built down the sloping cliffs of a Cornish cove, with its back to the heather-clad moors and its face to the broad Atlantic. Whether you appreciated Porthkeverne or not was entirely a matter of temperament. Strangers, whose pleasure in a summer holiday depended on pier, esplanade, band, and cheap amusements, found it insufferably dull, and left for the more flaring gaieties of St. Jude's or Trewenlock Head. Porthkeverne was glad to get rid of them; it did not cater for such as these. But there were others for whom the little town had a peculiar fascination; its quaint, irregular houses and grey roofs, its narrow streets of steep steps, its archways with glimpses of the sea, its picturesque harbour and red-sailed fishing-boats, its exotic shrubs and early flowers, its yellow sands and great pinnacled crags, the softness of the west wind and the perpetual dull roll of the Atlantic breakers cast a spell over certain natures and compelled them to remain. Visitors would return to it again and again, and some of them, who were free to live where they chose, would take houses and settle down as residents. Over literary and artistic people Porthkeverne seemed to exercise a special charm. Authors and artists had collected there, and, partly attracted by the place and partly by each other's society, had formed an intellectual colony that centred round the Arts Club in the old Guildhall down by the harbour.

Marine painters, and those who sought to immortalize peasant life on their canvases, found ample subjects among the crags and coves and sea-weed-covered rocks where the blue water lapped softly, or the white waves came foaming and churning up; and the fisher-folk, bronzed, blue-eyed, and straight of limb, were models to set the heart of a Millet or a Wilkie on the thrill. To authors the quiet place, with its miles of moorland lying inland from the cliffs, was a ripe field for literary work. Novelists worked out their plots undisturbed by the hooting of motor horns or the whizzing of tram-cars; scientific men, who had spent years of study over the treasures of the British Museum or Kew, came there to sort out their materials for books of reference, and to have leisure for making certain experiments; writers of travels reviewed their notes, and archaeologists scheduled the antiquities of the neighbourhood. To this literary and artistic brotherhood Porthkeverne offered the calm of the country combined with the mental stimulus of intellectual comradeship, and though, in the inevitable march of events, its individual members often changed, the colony remained and flourished, and sent forth work of a character that was of value to the world of art and letters.

Miss Kingsley and her sister, Miss Janet, themselves women of strong literary tastes, had come to the town with the

rising tide of the Arts Settlement, and had established their school chiefly to meet the needs of the new colony. Most of their pupils were the children of painters and authors, though a few of the gentry and professional men of the district also took advantage of such a good local opportunity to educate their daughters. The Gables was a pleasant old-fashioned white house, standing on a narrow terrace of the cliff, with a high rock behind to screen it from the wind, and a view of grey roof-tops leading down to a peep of the harbour. In the sheltered garden grew, according to their season, white arum lilies and rosy tamarisk, aloes and myrtle and oleander and other beautiful half-tropical shrubs, while geraniums, carnations and humbler flowers bloomed in profusion. There was a veranda covered with a wistaria, and most of the class-room windows were framed with sweet-smelling creepers. Long afterwards, when the pupils looked back to their time at The Gables, they would always connect certain lessons with the strong scent of honeysuckle, or the faint odour of tea roses, for the flowers seemed just as much a part of the general culture of the school as were the Botticelli pictures on the library walls, or the weekly recitals of modern music.

This garden, Miss Kingsley's fetish and the joy of Miss Janet's heart, was blooming its best on the particular September afternoon when the autumn term began. Soon after two o'clock its green lawn and shady paths began to fill up with girls. They came at first in twos and threes, and then in larger numbers till the place seemed full of them. There were only about forty altogether, but it was seven weeks since most of them had met one another, and the babel of tongues that ensued would have suggested a hundred children at the least. Six long-legged juniors occupied the garden-seat, with as many more hanging over the back; a dozen of the smaller fry squatted on the grass, some frivolous intermediates cackled over jokes in the corner by the bay tree, and a few enterprising spirits had mounted the wall to watch for new-comers.

"Here's Aileen!"

"And Grace!"

"With her little sister!"

"And Effie after all, though she wasn't sure she'd be back in time!"

"Good old Effie! I'm glad she's come!"

"Where's Marcia, by the by?"

"Gone to the High School at St. Jude's."

"Poor wretch, I'm sorry for her! What a traipse to go by train every morning! Why, here's Doreen, and she's cut her hair short! Oh, I say! Doreen, old sport, I hardly knew you! What a kid you look!"

Doreen shook back her shock of crisp brown hair, conscious of the pleasing fact that it curled at the ends.

"Kid, indeed!" she replied, with an indignant thrill in her voice. "I was thirteen last week!"

"Shouldn't have thought it," twittered Enid. "I was just going to suggest a pair of socks and ankle-band shoes. There's a new teacher for the kindergarten, if that interests you. There, don't get raggy! Perhaps you'll find yourself in the Sixth after all!"

"No, thank you! I've no yearnings to be in the Oxford Room. I suppose we shall all be going up a form, though? Who are the monitresses this year? Have you heard?"

Enid slipped down from her post on the wall, and locking her arm in Doreen's strolled with her towards the house.

"Not a word," she replied. "Until the Great Panjandrum reads out the lists we're utterly and entirely in the dark. Of course, most of those who were in the Fifth last year will have gone up into the Sixth, except, perhaps, Beryl Woodhouse and Moira Stanning, but I've been talking it over with Véra and Pansy, and they both agree it's an absolute toss-up who's to be head girl."

"Why, how extraordinary! I should have said there wasn't any doubt about it. There's only one girl who's in the least likely."

"Which one?"

"Vivien, of course!"

Enid pulled an eloquent face.

"It's not 'of course'. I, for one, heartily hope she *won't* get it. Vivien Forrester, as she is, is quite bad enough, but Vivien Forrester as head of the school would be the absolute limit."

"She'll be chosen all the same, you'll see. There really isn't anybody else. When Lily Anderson left last term, she certainly thought Vivien was going to be her successor. She showed her how to keep all the books of the Clubs and Guilds, so that she could slide into the work easily. And Vivien's such a sport at hockey, too!"

"Um! I don't know. She has such a jolly good opinion of her own cleverness, but the question is whether Miss Kingsley exactly shares it or not. Hello! Hold me up! Here comes the Duchess herself, as large as life!"

The girl who advanced briskly from the rhododendron walk would have been good looking, but she was spoiled by a rather rabbit mouth and large teeth. Her complexion was clear, her brown eyes were bright, and her auburn hair was abundant. She held herself with the confidence of one who has so far found life an unqualified success. In her wake followed a little train of courtiers: Sybil Snow, Nellie Appleby, Mona Parker, Phoebe Gibson, and Adelaide Brookfield, all eager sycophants craving her favour, and doing their utmost to ingratiate themselves.

"I tell you I can't promise anything!" Vivien was saying. "Naturally the head of the school has the power to appoint any secretaries she likes, but it'll be time enough to decide these things afterwards. I wish you wouldn't bother me so! There'll be a proper Committee meeting on Friday to arrange the Societies, and you must just wait till then."

"But if anybody speaks to you about it in the meantime, you'll remember it's the Dramatic I'm keenest on?" urged Phoebe plaintively.

"I tell you again, I can't promise--but--well, I'll do my best for you, at any rate."

"What's this about the Dramatic?" broke in Dorothy Skipton, who, arm in arm with Patsie Sullivan, had joined the group. "Do you mean to say you're arranging the Societies beforehand? Really, Vivien Forrester, of all cool cheek I call this the very limit! Who said *you* were going to be head girl, I should like to know?"

Two red spots flared into Vivien's cheeks.

"Nobody said so!" she retorted. "Certainly *I* didn't, though I dare say I've as good a chance as anybody else. I don't see why you need catch me up like this."

"Little bit tall to be promising posts till you're certain you're top dog!" laughed Patsie. "Old Dorothy may be the lucker instead of you. *Me?* Rather not! I can hardly flatter myself after my career last term that I'd be chosen as pattern pupil and pitchforked into the post of honour to set a good example to the rest of the school. Do I *look* the part, now?"

The others, surveying Patsie's humorous face and twinkling grey eyes, broke into a universal chuckle.

"Well, it's hardly your line, exactly!" admitted Vivien. "Why, if you confiscated surreptitious sweets from the kids, you'd probably eat them before their indignant faces, and give them a tip on how to hide them more carefully in future. I know you!"

"Joking apart, though," said Dorothy, "I suppose somebody'll be made head of this school. Hasn't any one got the least inkling or hint? Lorraine! Lorraine Forrester, come here! We're talking about who's to be head girl. It's a burning question, isn't it? Do you know anything?"

The schoolmate addressed as Lorraine closed with a slam the book she was reading, and advanced somewhat unwillingly. She was a slim, pretty girl of sixteen, with the general effect of an autumn woodland. Everything about her seemed golden brown; her hazel eyes, her creamy complexion, the sunny glint in her rich, dark hair were emphasized by the brown dress she was wearing and the orange carnations pinned in her belt. At the first glance there was a certain likeness to Vivien, for the girls were cousins, yet everything about Lorraine seemed of a slightly superior quality, as if she had been turned out of a finer mould. She flushed as she evaded Dorothy's question.

"I suppose we shall all know when Miss Kingsley tells us," she answered.

"We'd be duffers if we didn't!" mocked Patsie. "In my opinion Dorothy'll have an uncommonly good innings, and I'm getting ready to congratulate her."

"No, no! It'll be Vivien!" declared Mona.

"Yes, Vivien!" agreed Sybil and Phoebe together.

But at that moment the loud clanging of the bell put a stop to the conversation, and the girls turned in a body, and hurried into the house.



CHAPTER II

The First Day of Term

It was an old-established custom at The Gables that the autumn term should begin on a Tuesday afternoon. There were no lessons: the girls simply gathered together in the gymnasium to listen to a short address from Miss Kingsley, to be told in what forms they were placed for the coming school year, and to be given new text-books, with passages to prepare for the morrow, when serious work would begin at nine o'clock, and the wheels of school life would start to turn in real earnest. This first afternoon was regarded by most as somewhat in the nature of a festival. It was pleasant to meet again and compare notes about the holidays: the general change of forms lent an element of excitement, even the new books were more or less interesting, and many minor details gave variety to the occasion.

The gymnasium, whither all the girls were scuttling, was a moderate-sized wooden building that had been erected, in pre-war days, at the side of the house. It served for many purposes, and was alternately drill-hall, concert-room, play-room, lecture-hall, art gallery or ball-room as the case might be. This afternoon, with a fresh coat of pink distemper, a big bowl of flowers upon the table, and the sunshine coming through the skylight roof and shining on the nicely-polished floor and rows of varnished forms, it looked both business-like and attractive. The girls trooped in and took their seats. There were a few elder ones, but the majority were between eight and fourteen, with perhaps half a dozen kindergarten children on the front bench. Miss Turner, standing near the piano, controlled any excess of conversation, and reduced it to a subdued murmur. As Miss Kingsley, brisk, smiling, and with a "Now we'll get to work!" air about her, mounted the platform and stood to review her school, forty-two pupils rose to their feet, and eighty-four eyes were fixed obediently upon her face. She focused their attention for a moment, then nodding to Miss Paget, who was seated at the piano, she announced:

"We will begin the new term as usual by singing the National Anthem."

Miss Paget struck a few chords, and then the familiar strains of "God Save the King" rang through the room. It made a good commencement, for new girls and even the kindergarten babies could sing it, and thus take their part at once with the school. Forty-two voices, some fresh and clear, and some more or less out of tune, joined heartily in the anthem, and the girls sat down with the consciousness of having made a united effort. Following her precedent of twelve years, Miss Kingsley had something to say to her pupils before she made the ordinary announcements of school arrangements.

"It's always nice to feel we're making a fresh start!" she began cheerfully. "This is a new school year, and I want you all to join in helping to make it the best we've ever had. If there are any girls here who haven't done well before, now is the time for them to turn over a new leaf and show us that they can work. At this crisis in the world's affairs we don't want to bring up 'slackers'. Your fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins have answered their country's call and gone to defend Britain's honour, and you have been proud to see them go. The women of the Empire have played their part as nobly as the men, and it is these brave and splendid women whom you must try to imitate. Do you think they would have been able to give the help they have given to their country unless they had prepared their characters for it beforehand? I'm sure not. It's in the classroom that we train ourselves for what we may do afterwards. Every girl who tries her best in the little world of school is learning her part for the big world afterwards. We hope it is going to be a beautiful world when the war is over, but it can only be so if we remember the sacrifices that have been made, and determine to be worthy of those who gave up everything for us. 'A nation never rises higher than its women.' So you, who are going to be some of its women, must see to it that you raise and not lower the standard. It's a happy, hopeful thought to feel that you're helping to push the world on; and how splendid if we can think that The Gables is a centre from which real helpfulness may radiate! Let us all join in trying to make it so. I'm going to tell you now about some things we shall be busy with this term, and I hope you will throw all your energies into them, and try your utmost to make them a success."

Miss Kingsley passed in rapid review the general scheme of work for the term for both seniors and juniors. It was a full programme, and included a wide range of subjects, from lectures on Greek antiquities to Swedish drill and rhythmic dancing. She was modern in her methods, and wished to cultivate every side of a child's nature till she was old enough to choose her own speciality. Lists of the various forms followed, and then Miss Kingsley turned to what, in the estimation of some of the girls at least, was the most important announcement of the afternoon.

"All members of the Sixth are appointed monitresses, and Lorraine Forrester is head of the school."

A wave of excitement surged instantly through the room. Lorraine! They had not in the least expected her to be chosen. So far she had seemed a rather retiring sort of girl who had not taken a very active part in school affairs. Last

term, when war waged hot and strong between Lottie Carson and Helen Stanley, two of the monitresses, Lorraine had committed herself to neither party, though her form was divided to such an extent of partisanship that Dorothy Skipton and Vivien Forrester nearly had a fight one day on the landing. Lorraine! The matter required thought. The school was so surprised that it could not decide how to take the announcement, and it was with a look of uncertainty on their faces that the girls, dismissed at last by Miss Kingsley, filed into their classrooms to receive their new books and be told their preparation for next day. This necessary business finished, they were free to don hats and coats and go home. In the cloak-room the pent-up conversation bubbled over.

"Well, what d'you think of it?" exploded Dorothy.

Patsie, sitting on the boot-rack, pulling on her shoes, made a round mouth and whistled.

"It's generally the unexpected that happens," she moralized. "Lorraine's a lucker! Cheer up, old Dollie! Don't look so glum! Bother! I've broken my shoe-lace. What a grizzly nuisance! Lorraine's not such a bad sort, after all!"

"I don't say she is--but to be head of the school!"

"Better than Vivien, anyway!" grunted Patsie, busy knotting her broken shoe-lace.

"I agree with you there--*she'd* have turned the place upside down. Here she comes, in a tantrum by the look of her."

Vivien, judging by the way she slammed down her new books, was certainly not pleased with the turn affairs had taken. Though she and Dorothy were generally on terms of flint and steel, she sought her now to air what she considered a common grievance.

"I couldn't have believed it of Miss Kingsley!" she began. "Why Lorraine, of all people in the world? She's two months younger than I am, and her marks weren't as good as yours in the exam, if it hadn't been for that absurd essay that counted extra. How she's ever going to manage to run the societies, I can't imagine! I'm sorry for the school!"

Dorothy was adjusting her attractive hat in front of the mirror. She put in the pins carefully before replying.

"It's a rotten business!" she sighed.

"Disgusting! To have Lorraine set over us, while you and I are just ordinary common monitresses, the same as Audrey Roberts or Nellie Appleby. I'm fed up with it! It's going to be a hateful term; I shan't take an interest in anything! I wish I'd asked Father to send me to a boarding-school. I'm sick of The Gables!"

Patsie, whose shoe-lace was now triumphantly mended, chuckled softly.

"Poor old Gables!" she remarked. "I don't know that you'd find a 'better hole' so easily. It's a very decent kind of school. *I* intend to have some fun here this term, if *you* don't. When's that rhythmic dancing that Kingie talked about going to begin? I saw some in London, and I'm just wild to do it. This is how it goes!"

And Patsie, flinging out her arms and swaying from side to side, made a series of most extraordinary gyrations. Vivien and Dorothy burst out laughing.

"If *that's* what you call rhythmic dancing, give me the good old-fashioned sort!" hinned Vivien. "You look about as graceful as an elephant!"

"And as jerky as a wound-up waxwork!" declared Dorothy uncomplimentarily.

"Well, of course, the movements are done to music; they look quite different when you've got a sort of classic Greek dress on, and somebody's playing a study by Chaminade or Debussy."

"It would need very good music indeed to make *those* antics look anything! I fancy you'll shine more at hockey, Patsie. I wonder what's going to happen to the team. I can't fancy Lorraine taking Lily Anderson's place. It'll be a let-down all round this term with Lorraine----"

"Sh, 'sh! Here's Lorraine herself!"

"Then I'm off! Come along, Dorothy!"

Vivien rammed her hat on anyhow, seized her pile of new books, and bolted from the cloak-room almost as her cousin entered. Patsie, following more leisurely, stopped en route to give the new head girl a hearty smack on the back.

"Cheero, Lorraine!" she remarked. "Just at the moment you look like Atlas shouldering the heavens. Haven't you got over the shock of the announcement yet? Did Kingie spring it on you all at once? Or had she prepared you beforehand

for your laurels?"

"As a matter of fact, she sent for me yesterday and told me," smiled Lorraine.

"And I suppose, like Julius Caesar, you waved away the crown? Or was it Oliver Cromwell, by the by? My history's always shaky!"

"Well, I felt inclined to have a few dozen fits, certainly!"

"I don't say it's exactly a cushy post, but you're a lucker all the same! Old Dolly and the Duchess would have liked to butt in, I can tell you. They're absolutely green, the pair of them!"

Lorraine's face clouded.

"I was afraid Vivien would be disappointed. She thought--and so did I--indeed everybody thought----"

"Then they thought wrong, and a good thing too!" pronounced Patsie. "Take my advice, Lorraine, and don't stand any nonsense with Vivien. Kingie's the right to make anybody head girl she wants, and I'm glad she's chosen you. If the Duchess and old Dollie can't lose in a sporting way, they're blighters. You hold your own, and I'll back you up. You'll have most of the school on your side. Ta-ta, and cheer up, old sport!"

Patsie, jolly, good-natured and slangy, swung out of the cloak-room with what she called a "khaki stride". Lorraine looked after her and laughed. No one took Patsie seriously, but it was pleasant to feel that she was an ally, even though she might not prove a very stout prop to lean upon. That she would need all available help in her new task, Lorraine was well aware. It would be difficult to follow in the footsteps of so capable and energetic a head girl as Lily Anderson; the irrepressible intermediates were likely to prove a handful, and in the ranks of the Sixth itself she foresaw trouble brewing. It was a decidedly thoughtful Lorraine who walked down the school garden, out through the gate, and along the cliff road that led to the western portion of the town. She had reached the wall below the windmill when Monica, her eleven-year old sister, came panting after her.

"Lorraine! Do wait! Why did you go off without me? I hunted for you everywhere, till Ida James told me you'd gone. What a blighter you are to leave me!"

"Sorry, Cuckoo! But you see I thought *you'd* gone, so there we are!" said Lorraine, smiling indulgently at the impetuous little figure that overtook her and seized her arm. "I'd have waited if I'd known."

"I forgive you!" accorded Monica graciously. "Only to-day of all days, of course I wanted to walk home with you. D'you know, Tibbiekins, I'm proud of you! Aren't you bucked? Well, you ought to be. I never got such a surprise in my life as when 'Lorraine Forrester' was read out 'head of the school!' Betty Farmer pinched me so hard that I nearly yelled. But I say, Tibbie, it's a stunt! Didn't you get nerve shock when you heard your name?"

"I knew yesterday what was coming," admitted Lorraine.

"Was that why you went to see Miss Kingsley? And you never told me a word! Well, I think you are the limit!"

"Miss Kingsley made me promise on my honour not to tell a single soul."

"I couldn't have helped telling. Think of having that secret all the evening, and not giving me the least teeny weeny atom of a hint, even! I wonder you could keep it in! The girls are pleased--most of them. Betty says you're a sport, and Mabel King says she feels she's going to worship you, and Nora Hyland said I was a lucker to have you for a sister. Of course a few of them had plumped for Vivien, and let off steam, but they'll soon get over it. Vivien looked like a thunder cloud. She won't forgive you in a hurry! You may look out for squalls in her quarter. Hallo, here's Rosemary come to meet us. I must tell her the news. She knows already? Why, you said it was a secret! Well, you are mean to have told Rosemary and not *me*! I'm not friends with you any more, so there!"

Lorraine answered her sweet-faced elder sister's look of enquiry with a nod of comprehension.

"Yes, it's all *un fait accompli*," she replied, "and on the whole I think the school has borne it beautifully. Come along, Cuckoo, don't pout! Rosemary must have some secrets I can't tell to the family baby. Remember, you score in other ways. It's luck to be born youngest."

The three girls turned in at a gate and walked up a flower-bordered drive to a comfortable ivy-covered house. "Pendlehurst" was a modern house, and in Lorraine's opinion not at all romantic, but, with the exception of herself, the Forrester family was not particularly given to romance. Her father, in choosing a residence, had paid more attention to drains, number of bedrooms and hot-water facilities than to artistic beauty or aesthetic associations. He was a practical man with a bent towards mathematics, and counted the cubic space necessary for the requirements of seven children to

be the matter of most importance. He had an old-established practice as a solicitor in the town, and had lived all his life at Porthkeverne. Of the large family of children only the three youngest remained at home. Richard and Donald were at the front, in the thick of the fighting; Rodney was in training for the Air Force, while Rosemary, anxious also to flutter from the nest and try her wings in the world, was to go to London to study singing at a College of Music. Her term began a little later than Lorraine's, so the two girls had still a few days left to spend together. They ran upstairs now to their joint bedroom, where packing was in progress. A big box stood under the window with a bottom layer of harmony-books and music tightly arranged. To Rosemary it meant the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream. As she looked at it, her imagination skipped three or four years and showed her a golden vision of herself--in a pale pink satin dress with a pearl necklace--standing on a concert platform and bowing repeatedly to the storm of applause which had greeted her song.

"I can't tell you how hard I'm going to work," she confided. "I shall just practise and practise and practise. I know that wretched theory will rather stump me, but I'll wrestle with it. There'll be such a musical atmosphere about the place, it can't help inspiring one."

"The hostel will be fun, too," said Lorraine, going down on her knees to inspect the dainty afternoon tea service that was being rolled up for safety in soft articles of clothing. "I can just picture you in your room, making a cup of cocoa before you go to bed."

"And having in a few friends. It'll be the time of my life! I always wanted to go to boarding school, but this will be even better, because in a way I shall be my own mistress. I never thought I'd work Dad round to it. I've been in a sort of quiver ever since he said 'yes'. Who's there?" (as a loud series of rappings resounded on the door). "Oh, I can't have you children in here just now! Go away!"

"We *must* come in!" urged Monica, following up her words by a forcible entrance. "There! there! Don't get excited! You'll *welcome* us when you know what we've come for! Chips and I have brought you a present. We thought you'd like to pack it now."

Mervyn, otherwise "Chips", an overgrown boy of thirteen, was embracing a large parcel, which he plumped on the floor and unfolded. It contained a fretwork basket, stained brown and still rather sticky with varnish. The corners fitted indifferently, and the handle was slightly askew.

"We've made it between us!" said Mervyn proudly. "It'll either do for a work-basket, or you could plant ferns in it and have it in your window."

"You didn't guess the least little atom what we were doing, did you?" asked Monica anxiously.

"Not a scrap!" said Rosemary, gallantly accepting the embarrassing offering with the enthusiasm it demanded. "You're dears to have made it for me. I can keep all sorts of things in it: cocoa and condensed milk, and bits of string, and everything I'm likely to lose. Thanks ever so! Isn't it a little sticky to pack yet?"

"Not *very*!" said Mervyn, applying a finger as practical demonstration: "I'm glad you like it. It's our first really big bit of work with those fret saws. Now, Cuckoo, if you want to come, there'll be just time to develop those films before tea."

When the children had gone, Rosemary lifted up the rather crooked basket, looked at it critically, and laughed.

"I'm sure it was a labour of love," she commented. "Of course, I shall have to take it with me, though it will be a nuisance to pack. And they're so proud of it! I hope my own first efforts at the College of Music won't be considered equally crude by the authorities!"

"Or mine at The Gables! We're each starting on new lines this term. What heaps and loads we shall have to talk about at Christmas!"

CHAPTER III

New Brooms

A week later, Rosemary, trailing clouds of glory in the family estimation, departed for the classic precincts of the College of Music, and Lorraine, left behind, shook off the atmosphere of detachment which always pervades an exodus, and focused her full mind and energies upon The Gables. It was no light thing to be chosen as head girl. Miss Kingsley, in that private talk in the study, had urged the responsibility as well as the honour of the office. Lorraine did not mean to disappoint her if she could help it. She set to work at once to wrestle with the problem of an autumn programme for the school. In virtue of her office she was president of all the various existing guilds and societies, and had the power to enlarge, curtail, or reorganize at her discretion. Although in a sense she was supreme referee, she had no desire to ride rough-shod over the general wishes, so, as a preliminary to any proposed changes, she called a monitresses' meeting.

The seven girls who, with herself, made up the Sixth Form, assembled in the class-room after school, interested and, on the whole, ready for business. Audrey, to be sure, was giggling as usual. Patsie was pulling an absurd face of mock dignity, but Nellie and Claire were pleased with their new importance. Vivien, rather sulky, though submitting perforce to play second fiddle, had patched up a temporary truce with Dorothy, and the pair settled side by side. Claudia, the fresh addition to the form, strolled in late and sat crocheting while the others talked. Lorraine, her lap full of minutes books, bristled with ideas.

Lily Anderson, the former head girl, had been energetic and enterprising to an extent that was really worthy of a wider sphere. Her standard had soared so high that the school had been quite unable to live up to it. In her excess of zeal she had founded too many societies, and with such strict and arduous rules that they would have tried the spirit of a candidate for initiation into some mystic Brotherhood. Urged on by her enthusiasm, the members had made a desperate first spurt, and then had slacked lamentably. The records of their brief successes and subsequent fallings-off were chronicled in certain marbled-cover exercise-books. Lorraine, fresh from a perusal of these annals, began the meeting with a drastic suggestion.

"As things stand at present," she said, "the school seems over-weighted with societies. This is an exact list of them: 'The Research Society', 'The Poker-work Guild', 'The Debating Society', 'The Sketching Club', 'The Stamp Collectors' Union', 'The Post Card Guild', 'The Home Reading Circle', 'The Jack Tar Club', 'The Entertainments Guild', 'The Musical Union', 'The Hockey Club', 'The Cricket Club', 'The Tennis Club', 'The Badminton Club', 'The Basket-ball Club', 'The Natural History League', 'The Elocution Guild', 'The Needlecraft Society', and 'The Home Arts Guild'."

"Nineteen in all!" commented Patsie, who had been checking off the items on her fingers.

"Rather stiff for a school of forty girls!" nodded Dorothy sagely.

"There are far too many to keep up properly," urged Lorraine. "Every hobby we've ever had has been turned into a society. If we'd had no lessons to do, we could scarcely have managed them all, but when they must come out of our spare time it gets quite a tax. I think we mustn't be quite so ambitious this year. Suppose we let some of them drop, and concentrate on just a few."

"I'm your man!" agreed Patsie. "I always thought such heaps of societies were a grizzly nuisance. It got the limit when two or three girls couldn't even compare post cards without being turned into a guild. Those kids in the Second Form actually had a society for collecting stumps of lead pencil, and used to steal them shamelessly from any boxes that were left about in the gym. The 'guild habit' has grown into a perfect mania with the school."

"Best whittle them down," said Vivien, who had herself suffered at the hands of the too enthusiastic Lily Anderson.

"Which do you propose to shelve and which to keep?" asked Dorothy.

Lorraine opened the biggest and fattest exercise book.

"This is 'The Gables Guild'," she explained, "a sort of foundation society that includes all the others as branches. Miss Kingsley is the patron, and she has written on the first page:

'A UNION FOR SELF-CULTURE AND
PHILANTHROPY
Motto:--BEING AND DOING!'"

"Oh, goodness! What does that mean? I'm a duffer at long words," protested Audrey. "Can't you put it into English?"

"Well, it means we've got to do something for ourselves and something for other people too."

"That's simpler."

"We've plenty to choose from out of nineteen branches," said Nellie.

"Don't you think it would hit the mark if we had a Games Club to include hockey, cricket, and tennis, an Entertainments Club to get up plays and concerts, and a Nature Study Union that could absorb the Research Society and the Natural History League both together. These would be for ourselves. Then for the 'Philanthropy' side, we could keep on the Jack Tar Club, and let the Needlework Society and the Home Arts Guild send anything they make to that."

"What's the 'Jack Tar Club', please?" asked Claudia, looking up from her crochet.

"It's to give Christmas presents to the sailors and their wives and children. We packed off a huge big box to Portsmouth last year. Lily Anderson and Lottie Watson and Helen Stanley made some gorgeous things, and revelled in doing them."

"And the rest of us toiled and groaned and grumbled, and ended by borrowing and begging from our long-suffering relations," twinkled Patsie. "Don't think you'll keep that crochet edging for yourself, Dame Claudia! It'll be commandeered to go round a tray-cloth for a Mrs. Jack Tar!"

"I shall probably never finish enough of it even to edge a d'oyley," admitted Claudia calmly.

"Look here, this is side-tracking!" said Lorraine, rapping her pencil on the desk. "Please to remember that this is a Committee Meeting, and you must speak to the Chair. Won't anybody make a proposition?"

"I propose that we have what you've just suggested, then: a 'Games Club', an 'Entertainments Club', a 'Nature Study Union' and the 'Jack Tar Club'," said Dorothy.

"And quite enough, too," murmured Patsie.

"I'll second it!" declared Nellie.

"I'd like to add an amendment," said Lorraine. "I want to suggest that we have a School Social every month, where we can show specimens and drawings and photos."

Vivien pulled a face of discouragement.

"We've got enough on," she urged. "Leave us our Saturdays."

"We needn't have them on Saturdays. They could be from four to five on Wednesdays. I think it's just what is wanted at The Gables. Day girls never get an opportunity of meeting and comparing notes, and having fun together like girls do at boarding schools. It would be a sort of party every time."

"I think it sounds ripping!" said Claire. "Stick it in with the proposition, as far as I'm concerned."

"Hands up for the amendment, then!"

Five hands went up promptly, two doubtfully, and Vivien's hands remained on her lap--not that she really objected very much to the idea of "Socials", but she was not disposed to give in too readily to all her cousin's suggestions. The feeling that she herself ought to have occupied the presidential chair still rankled.

Carried by a majority, however, the new scheme became law, and the committee, with an eye on the clock, and tea-time looming near, hurriedly settled minor details, appointed Wednesday fortnight for the first "Social", subject to the approval of "the powers that be"; and, having triumphantly concluded their business, stamped downstairs with more noise than was absolutely consistent with the dignity of monitresses--but then, the juniors had gone home, and were not there to hear.

Lorraine, highly satisfied with the results of the meeting, was determined to make the first "Social" a success. She had always felt strongly that there was not a sufficient bond of union among the girls at The Gables. She remembered her own days as a junior, when the seniors had seemed distant and unapproachable beings, whose doings were a mystery.

"I used to long to see their collections and drawings and things," she ruminated, "but, if I ever tried to butt in, I got a

jolly good snub for my pains. It's going to be different now. Those youngsters shall have a chance. They can't learn unless we show them how. I don't call it sporting for the Sixth to do good work and hide it under a bushel. We'll have a nice jinky little exhibition, and encourage everybody to try and make it a bigger one next time. It'll spur the juniors on to see some of our attempts. I'll put the screw on Vivien to bring her butterflies, though I know she hates moving the cases."

Miss Kingsley heartily approved of the idea of the social gathering, and smoothed the way for its adoption by allowing school to be suspended at half-past three instead of four o'clock on those special Wednesday afternoons. She promised to provide tables in the gymnasium for the display of specimens, and to do anything else in her power to help matters forward.

"It will give you a splendid opportunity for getting to know the younger girls," she assured Lorraine. "I'm very glad you thought of it."

Determined to make the first exhibition as representative as possible, its enthusiastic originator divided it into sections, and put up notices inviting contributions of all sorts from all quarters. At home she held a review of her own possible exhibits and Monica's, and shook her head over them.

"I don't call ourselves a really clever family!" she acknowledged. "We plod along in our own way, but we don't blaze out into leather work or ribbon embroidery or hand-made lace."

"What about my fretwork basket for Rosemary?" demanded Monica, rather nettled.

"Mervyn made the best half of it, and it was crooked at that," returned Lorraine frankly. "I shouldn't have cared to show it as a specimen of Forrester handicraft. I don't think any of our efforts are much of a credit to us. I vote you and I go in for Natural History instead. Let's make a collection of all the ferns in the neighbourhood. Dorothy's bringing pressed flowers, and Vivien her butterflies, but I haven't heard of anybody taking up the ferns. We'll rummage round on Saturday afternoon, and get all the kinds we can, and plant them in that tin dish that's under the greenhouse shelf."

"Is it to be your collection or mine?" asked Monica doubtfully.

"Don't be nasty! We'll each have one if you like. You may have the tin for yours, and I'll use that big photographic developing dish for mine. Will that content you, you spoilt baby?"

"Right oh!" conceded Monica magnanimously. "But if I do any more fretwork before the exhibition, I'm going to show it. It'll be as nice as Jill's or Greta's, you bet!"

Having decided upon a representative collection of ferns as their *piece de resistance* for the social gathering, the next and most important step was to get the specimens. Armed with baskets and trowels, Lorraine and Monica made several expeditions into the country lanes, and came home burdened with spoils. To identify their treasures was a harder task. Lorraine pored over the illustrations in Sowerby's *British Ferns*, and got horribly mixed between *Lastrea dilatata* and *Athyrium Felix-foemina*.

"I know I shall put all the names wrong," she declared, "but I'll make a shot at them, anyway."

"If you want ferns," said Mervyn, who came whistling into the breakfast-room where the girls were sitting, "I know a place where there are just heaps and heaps of them--all sorts and kinds. They're top-hole!"

"Oh! Where?" exclaimed Lorraine and Monica in an excited duet.

"Down the railway cutting. They're all growing round the mouth of the tunnel. I've seen them lots of times, but I never took any notice of them before. If you like, I'll show you. There'll be just time before it gets dark."

"We'll come now," said Lorraine, running to fetch hat and coat. "You're a mascot, Mervyn!"

She had never thought of the railway cutting, for it was quite in the town, and seemed a most unlikely place in which to go botanizing. They walked down through the narrow streets by the harbour, then up the steep road past the chapel and above the station, till they came to the high palings that overlooked the line. Below them lay the entrance to the tunnel, and growing in the crevices of the stone wall on either side of the archway was a crop of ferns luxuriant enough amply to justify Mervyn's enthusiastic description.

"How absolutely topping!" exclaimed Lorraine, scaling the palings with scant consideration for her skirt and less for her fingers. "Shall I help you, Cuckoo? Look out for splinters!"

But Monica's long legs already dangled on the far side, and she dropped successfully if painfully into a clump of thistles, and followed her brother down the bank.

There was no doubt about the excellence of the ferns, but they had one disadvantage; like most botanical specimens of any value, the best and finest grew out of reach. There was nothing for it but to climb the wall. They had all three mounted up some distance, and were busily pulling at roots, when a stern voice suddenly sounded in their ears.

"What are you doing up there? Get down at once!"

Lorraine was so startled that she lost her footing, and descended with more speed than elegance, tumbling indeed almost into the arms of their indignant questioner. He eyed her suspiciously, and turned to Mervyn and Monica, who had come down with greater caution.

"Now you three've got to give an account of yourselves," he proclaimed. "I'm a special constable, and I want to know what you're doing on the railway line at the mouth of a tunnel."

"We were doing no harm," answered Mervyn, "only getting a few ferns."

"Oh, I dare say! And what else? This is a military area, and trespassing on the railway line, and especially loitering in the vicinity of a tunnel, comes under the heading of an offence against the realm. I shall have to report it. Give me your names and addresses."

The three young Forresters looked at one another in dismay.

"This is absurd!" burst out Lorraine. "We came to get a few ferns, that's all. They're wild, and surely taking a root or two isn't an offence against the realm?"

"You've been found in a forbidden area in a military zone," returned the special constable pompously. "I'm stationed here to guard the tunnel, and I shall report you. If you don't give me your names and addresses, I shall have to arrest you."

Very unwillingly the Forresters complied, and watched the incriminating details being jotted down in an official notebook.

"Our father is a town councillor," ventured Lorraine, hoping for vicarious favour.

"That makes it so much the worse, for you ought to know better," was the uncompromising reply. "Take yourselves off at once, and mind you never come trespassing here again!"

Crestfallen, but trying to preserve the family dignity, the Forresters beat a retreat. They scorned to run, and walked leisurely up the bank, while the special constable covered them with his eye. Monica had an uneasy suspicion that they might also be covered with a revolver, and, though she would not for worlds have shown a qualm of fear before Mervyn, she was nevertheless considerably relieved when she found herself upon the safe side of the fence.

"Strafe the old chap and his jaw-wag!" exploded Mervyn. "A nice mess he's got us into with his fussy interference!"

"Do you think he'll really report us?" asked Lorraine anxiously.

Her spirits were down at zero. Her father was strict, and would be very angry with them for getting into trouble. A scene at home loomed large on the horizon. In imagination she saw the affair reported in the local newspaper. A nice position truly for the head girl at The Gables to begin the new term by covering herself with disgrace.

Mervyn strode along whistling with amused sang-froid, but inwardly absorbed in unpleasant contemplation. Monica clutched the fern basket half-defiantly.

Rounding a corner suddenly, they nearly collided with a thin little gentleman who was coming uphill at top speed.

"So sorry!" apologized Lorraine. "Why, it's Uncle Barton! Where are you going, Uncle?"

"On special constable duty, worse luck, for it's a damp evening, and I've a bad cold in the head," he replied. "But I've got to relieve somebody else."

An inspiration struck Lorraine.

"Are you going to the railway cutting? Oh, Uncle! We've just had such a hullabaloo down there. Could you possibly help us out of it?"

Mr. Barton Forrester listened with a twinkle in his eye to his niece's graphic account of their adventure, and promised his moral support.

"It's Winston-Jones on duty there," he commented. "I know him, so I'll do my best to convince him that none of you

are German spies or dangerous incendiaries. Cheer up! They won't hale you off to prison this time. I expect I can put matters straight, and you'll hear no more about it. But remember the railway is taboo for the future. We can't allow even botanists to be straying about near tunnels in a military zone."

"We won't so much as lean over the palings. Thanks most immensely, Uncle! You're an absolute angel!"

"I wish I had wings to waft me up the hill. I'm deficient in leg power to-night," coughed Mr. Barton Forrester. "No, I won't kiss you, Monica--you'd catch my cold. Good-bye, all three of you! I'll have a talk with Winston-Jones, and persuade him to wipe off that black score against your names."

"I always said Uncle Barton was a trump," murmured Monica, as the three sinners, vastly relieved, went on their way.

"He's an absolute sport," agreed Mervyn with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IV

Greets Claudia

By dint of urging on the part of the new monitresses the school made a special effort for the social gathering. The idea of an exhibition had frightened the juniors at first, but when they grew used to it it appealed to them. They were rather pleased to bring specimens of their best drawings, photos, plasticine models, or other pieces of handiwork, and, though their efforts might be somewhat crude, Lorraine on the first occasion rejected nothing, thinking that comparison with better work was the surest means of raising the standard for next time. She and her fellow-monitresses certainly made merry in private over Vera Chambers' lopsided plasticine duck, Opal Clarke's extraordinary original illustrations, and the cat-stitches in Jessie Lovell's tea-cloth, but they kept their mirth to their own circle and allowed no hint of it to leak into the lower school.

On the eventful day of the "Social" the closing bell rang at 3.35 instead of at four o'clock, and forty-two delighted girls promptly put away their books, closed their desks, and trooped into the gymnasium. The monitresses, aided and abetted by Miss Janet, had spent a busy but successful time in preparation, and the room looked quite festive. Flags decorated the platforms, and Chinese lanterns were suspended from the beams of the roof. Round the wooden walls hung a show of sketches, drawings, maps, illuminations and photographs, fastened up with tacks and drawing pins, and on the tables was spread forth quite a goodly display of moths, butterflies, beetles, shells, sea-weeds, pressed wild flowers, fretwork, pokerwork, and needlework. All specimens were labelled with their owners' names, so it was excitement to walk round and compare notes. Lorraine, listening critically, judged the mental barometer of the school from the juniors' remarks, which, if slangy, were certainly complimentary.

"Peggie! You paragon! What a perfectly chubby little bag! I couldn't have made it if I'd tried till Doomsday!"

"I should cock-a-doodle, Jill, if *I'd* done that illumination!"

"Is this sketch really *yours*, Mabel? Hold me up! I feel weak."

"Wonders will never cease! Here's old Florrie made a collection of shells."

"I think this show is a stunt!"

"Absolutely topping!"

"Keep out of my way, you blue-bottle! I can't see!"

"All right, old thing! Don't get raggy!"

When the exhibits had been duly admired and notes compared as to their respective merits, a few of the best musical stars performed on the piano, then some round games were played, and the proceedings closed by the whole school forming a wide circle and singing "Auld Lang Syne" in the orthodox fashion with crossed hands.

The girls went unwillingly, and would have stayed for another half-hour if Miss Janet had not insisted upon their departure. Lorraine, putting on her boots in the cloak-room, decided that her first effort had been an unqualified success. It had certainly seemed to draw the school together in a bond of union, so far as she could judge. She could not resist a purr of satisfaction to Dorothy, whose coat hung next to hers. Dorothy's congratulations were, however, half-hearted.

"I suppose they enjoyed it," she admitted grudgingly, "though I dare say some of them felt it a bore to be obliged to stay after four o'clock. Vivien said you'd got the whole thing up to show off your own specimens."

The hot colour flamed to Lorraine's cheeks.

"Oh, what a shame! I *didn't*! I hardly showed any specimens myself, only a few ferns and photos, and one drawing. You *know* it wasn't for my own glorification!"

Dorothy straightened her collar outside her coat as if its arrangement were the main object in life.

"Oh, *I'm* not saying so!" she remarked carelessly. "I'm only telling you what I heard Vivien say. Effie Swan wondered you never asked *her* to play when you asked Theresa Dawson."

"I couldn't ask them all--it wasn't a concert."

"She's very offended, though. I don't think she's going to come to the next social."

"Let her stay at home, then!" snapped Lorraine, thoroughly exasperated.

Dorothy consulted her watch.

"It's frightfully late!" she sighed. "I shan't have time to do my practising. We're going out to a concert to-night."

She sauntered away, having lodged several very unpleasant shafts, and leaving them to rankle.

For Lorraine, all the satisfaction of the afternoon had faded. Nothing hurts so much as the confidences of a so-called friend who tells you the disagreeable things that other people say about you. It is a particularly mean form of sincerity, for the remarks were probably never intended to be repeated. The mischief it often causes is incalculable. Lorraine walked home, feeling that there was a barrier between herself and her cousin.

"I knew Vivien would be annoyed at my being head girl, but I didn't think she'd be so spiteful as that!" she ruminated. "Well, I don't care! I shall go on with the 'socials' all the same, and with any other schemes that crop up. But it is horrid of her, because she might have been such a help to me!"

As the term went on, Lorraine began to see only too clearly that her two great obstacles in the school were Dorothy and Vivien. They did not openly thwart her, but there was a continual undercurrent of opposition, not marked enough for comment, but sufficiently galling. No matter what she proposed, they had always some objection to offer, and, though in the end they might hold up their hands with the rest, it was with an air of concession more than of whole-hearted agreement. They were the cleverest girls in the form, so it was hard to have to count them as opponents, rather than as allies, in her work. The other members of the Sixth, who had passed up the school with her, she knew from experience would give scant help. Patsie was a good-natured rattle-trap, Audrey an amiable little goose; Nellie and Claire were very stodgy, ordinary girls, without an original idea between them, and not much notion of the responsibilities of monitors.

"I want somebody to back me up, and act as lieutenant," thought Lorraine.

It was at this juncture that she discovered the capacities of Claudia.

She had, so far, taken very little notice of the newcomer, except by vaguely appreciating the fact of her extreme prettiness. Claudia had not pushed herself, and the intimacy which now sprang up between the two girls came of a mere chance. Miss Kingsley had asked the school to collect fruit-stones and nuts, to be sent to headquarters for use in the manufacture of gas-masks for the army. It was a point of patriotism for everyone to bring as many as possible.

Lorraine, strolling out one Saturday on this errand, did not find it an easy matter to fill her basket. The appeal was a universal one in the town, and the Council School children had been on the common before her, picking up the beech-mast and acorns. As for hazel-nuts, there seemed not a solitary one left in the hedges. She was wandering disconsolately along, foraging with small success, when she happened to meet Claudia. Lorraine held out her quarter-filled basket for sympathy.

"That's all I've been able to find, and if there are any more to be had, I'm sure I don't know where they are!"

"There are heaps of horse-chestnuts in the fields above our house," replied Claudia. "I'm going home now, and, if you care to come with me, I'll help you to get some."

Lorraine jumped at the offer, and the girls set off together up the road, chatting briskly.

The Castletons had only come lately to Porthkeverne. Mr. Castleton was an artist, and, attracted by the quaint streets, picturesque harbour, and the glorious cliffs and sea in the neighbourhood, he had taken Windy Howe, an empty farmhouse on a hill some way above the town, converting a big barn into a studio, and establishing himself there with easels, paint-boxes, and a huge pile of immense canvases.

A critic had once described Mr. Castleton as a genius who had just missed fire, and the simile was an apt one. His large pictures were good, but not always good enough to hit the public taste. He was constantly changing his style, and one year would astonish the exhibitions by misty impressionism, and the next would return to pre-Raphaelite methods. He had dabbled in sculpture, illustration, frescoes, and miniature painting, and had published two volumes of minor poems, which, unfortunately, had never commanded a good sale. He was a handsome, interesting man, utterly unpractical and irrational, delightful to talk to, but exasperating in the extreme to those with whom he had business. The quaint, old-fashioned homestead on the hill, with its low-ceiled bedrooms, panelled parlours, black-beamed kitchen, ivied porch, thick hedge of fuchsias, and view over a stretch of heath and the dancing waters of the bay, satisfied his artistic temperament, and provided a suitable background for the new ideas which he was constantly evolving.

Moreover--though this was quite a secondary consideration--it afforded sufficient accommodation for his family.

Lorraine's first impression of the Castletons was that they went in for both quality and quantity. They numbered nine, and all had the same nicely-shaped noses, Cupid mouths, irreproachable complexions, neat teeth, dark-fringed blue eyes, and shining sunlit hair. They were a veritable gold-mine to artists, and their portraits had been painted constantly by their father and his friends. Pictures of them in various costumes and poses had appeared as coloured supplements to annuals or as frontispieces in magazines; they had figured in the Academy, and had been bought for permanent collections in local art galleries. The features of Morland, Claudia, Landry, Beata, Romola, and Madox had for years been familiar to frequenters of provincial exhibitions, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, and sometimes with the lovely mother, whose profile was considered a near approach to that of the classic statue of Ceres.

Five years before this story opens, pretty, impetuous, blue-eyed Mrs. Castleton had suddenly resigned all the sad and glad things that make up the puzzle we call life, and passed on to sample the ways of a wider world. For the first six months her husband had mourned for her distractedly, and had written quite a little volume of poems in her memory; for the next eight months he was attractively pensive, and then--all in a few weeks--he fell in love again and married his model, a girl of barely seventeen, with a beautiful Burne-Jones face and a Cockney accent. In the following few years three more carnation-cheeked, golden-haired little Castletons--Constable, Lilith, and Perugia--had tumbled into this planet to form a second nursery, and were already learning to sit for their portraits in various attractive studio poses.

Claudia, running into the house to fetch an extra basket for the horse-chestnuts, introduced Lorraine to a few members of the family who happened to be straying about, showed her a row of pictures in the dining-room, and escorted her through the gap at the bottom of the garden into the fields at the back of the barn.

Sitting on the farther gate, whittling a stick, was a boy of seventeen, with the unmistakable Castleton features and sunlit hair.

"Hallo, Morland!" cried Claudia. "We're going to get chestnuts. Do come and help; there's a sport! This is Lorraine Forrester."

Morland would no doubt have performed the orthodox ceremony of lifting his cap, but, being bareheaded, he grinned and shook hands instead.

"Don't advise you to eat them--they're beastly!" he vouchsafed.

"We're not going to--they're for the soldiers!"

"Then I pity the poor beggars, that's all."

"They're not to be eaten, they're to be made into gas-masks. I told you all about it, Morland," declared Claudia.

"I've a shocking memory," he demurred. "But whatever they're for I'll help you get some. Here, give me this to carry," and he took Lorraine's basket and hung it over his arm.

There were plenty of chestnuts lying on the ground under the trees, and more hanging on the branches which could be dislodged by a well-aimed stone. The young people spent a profitable half-hour, and filled their handkerchiefs as well as their baskets.

"I shall have heaps now!" exulted Lorraine. "You two are trumps to have helped me!"

"I'd nothing else to do," said Morland.

"Wouldn't Violet let you practise?" asked Claudia quickly.

"No, she said it woke up Perugia!"

Claudia shrugged her shoulders eloquently.

"It's always the way!" she replied.

"Are you fond of music?" asked Lorraine.

"Love it! It's the only thing I *do* care about. I'd play all day and night if Violet didn't turn me out. She locks the piano sometimes."

"Is she your sister?"

Morland and Claudia both laughed and looked at each other, and the latter explained:

"No, she's our stepmother, but she's so young that all of us call her Violet. She's not such a bad sort on the whole, but we have squalls sometimes, don't we, Morland?"

"Rather!" nodded the boy.

"Constable and Lilith used to sleep through anything and everything," added Claudia, "but Perugia's a fidgety child, and she wakes up and yells when she hears the piano."

"I play the violin a little," admitted Lorraine modestly. "I wonder if you two would come down some day and try a few things over with me. I've nobody to play my accompaniments since Rosemary went away. I know Mother would be pleased to see you."

"We'd just love it! You bet we'll come!"

Lorraine, pouring out the account of her adventures when she reached home, sought confirmation from her mother for the invitation she had given to the young Castletons.

"They're the *most* fascinating family! I saw them all as Claudia was taking me back through the garden. I think each one's more perfectly beautiful than the others. They're absolutely romantic. You *will* let me ask Morland and Claudia to tea, won't you, Muvvie?"

"I will in this case, because I know something of Mr. Castleton from the Lorrimers, but you mustn't go giving broadcast invitations again without consulting me first."

"I won't! I won't! You're a darling to let me have them. Muvvie, I'm so thankful you're not our stepmother!"

"So am I," returned Mrs. Forrester humorously. "I find my own family quite a sufficient handful, and what I should have done with another woman's in addition, I don't know. It would have been quite too big a burden."

"We can play the piano here," said Lorraine, "because there isn't any baby to wake up and cry."

"If there were, you'd have to reckon with me, for I shouldn't let it be disturbed when I'd successfully hushed it to sleep. I haven't forgotten my own struggles with you and Richard. You were the naughtiest babies of the whole tribe."

After this rather unconventional introduction, Lorraine's attraction to the Castletons ripened fast into intimate friendship. They were such an unusual family, so clever and interesting, yet with Bohemian ways that were different from those of any one she had yet known.

In the case of Morland and Claudia their father's artistic talent had cropped out in the form of music. Claudia cared nothing for painting, but was just beginning to discover that she had a voice. Morland, hopeless as far as school work was concerned, had learned to play the piano almost by instinct. He was a handsome, careless, good-tempered boy, decidedly weak in character, who drifted aimlessly along without even an ambition in life. He was seventeen and a half, and for nearly a year had been lounging about at home, doing nothing in particular. Spasmodically his father would realize his existence and say: "I must really do something with Morland." Then he would get absorbed in a fresh picture, and his good intentions on his son's behalf would fade to vanishing point. In another six months the lad would be liable for military service, so until the war should be over it seemed scarcely worth while to start him in any special career. Doing nothing, however, is a bad training, and even Mr. Castleton's artistic friends--not prone as a rule to proffer good advice--tendered the occasional comment that Morland was "running to seed". Morland himself was perfectly happy if he was left alone and allowed to sit and improvise at the piano; he never troubled his head about his future career, and was as unconcerned as the ravens regarding the sources of food and raiment.

He played Lorraine's accompaniments easily at sight, with a delicacy of touch and an artistic rendering such as Rosemary had never put into them. It inspired Lorraine, and yet half humiliated her; she was a painstaking but not a very clever student of the violin; no touch of genius ever flowed from her fingers. To listen to Morland was to gain a glimpse of a new musical world in which he flew on wings and she stumbled on crutches. She sighed as she threw down her violin, for she had all the ambition that he unfortunately lacked.

CHAPTER V

A Question of Discipline

At school Claudia rapidly became one of Lorraine's best allies. She made no undue fuss, but she could always be depended upon for support. Being a new girl, she was more ready to take up new ways than were the other monitresses, who remembered the regime of Lily Anderson, and were inclined to judge everything by former standards. The chief bone of contention was the bar between seniors and juniors. Hitherto it had not been etiquette for the upper and lower school to mix more than was absolutely necessary; the elder girls had held themselves aloof, and even in the too numerous guilds and societies had insisted upon senior and junior branches.

Having broken the ice with the social gathering, at which every one alike showed exhibits, Lorraine began to run all her organizations on more popular lines. She persuaded a few volunteers to superintend the little girls' games; she set aside two special pages for their efforts in the manuscript magazine, and allowed them to vote for their own captain in their basket-ball club. These fresh departures did not pass without opposition. Some of her colleagues hinted broadly that Lorraine was making a bid for popularity.

"Monitresses should be loyal to the Sixth!" sniffed Vivien. "We don't want to mix with Dick, Tom and Harry!"

"Don't you?" laughed Patsie, who never could resist a shot at Vivien. "I should have thought it was just Dick, Tom and Harry you wanted to mix with, and you're disgusted because it's only Maud, Gertie and Florrie! Honestly, you'd be far happier in a boys' school. You'd better get your mother to send you to one!"

"There's such a thing as co-education!" retorted Vivien.

"So there is!" chuckled Patsie.

She chuckled thoughtfully, for Vivien's remark had given her an idea. She confided it to Audrey, who was rather a chum of hers.

"I'm a little fed up with the Duchess," she remarked, "and I want to play a rag on her. I *must* play a rag on somebody, for things have been *so* dull lately, and the school wants livening up. She said something about co-education."

"What's co-education?" asked Audrey vaguely.

"Why, boys and girls going to school together. I believe they do it in America, and at just two or three places in England. I'm going to pretend that Miss Kingsley's taken it up, and that some boys are coming here. Vivien would be so *fearfully* excited. Oh! and I'll tell you what"--Patsie's eyes danced--"the most topping notion's just come to me! Let me whisper it!"

Audrey bent a wavy brown head with a pale pink hair ribbon to receive the communication, then exploded into ripples of laughter.

"Gracie and Sybil! They've got short hair!" she hinned. "Oh, it will be an absolute stunt!"

The confederates did not publish their plans beforehand. Patsie was an experienced joker, and knew that the point would be lost if any hint were to leak out. It was noticeable, however, that in recreation time she paraded round the gymnasium arm-in-arm with Gracie Tatham and Sybil Snow, two tall Fifth Form girls. The fact was commented upon by Vivien herself.

"Another of Patsie's sudden friendships!" she remarked. "She doesn't generally have two going at the same time. What's come to her?"

"She's weighed down by her responsibility as a monitress, and is trying to spread culture through the school," explained Audrey, with a grave mouth, but an irrepressible twinkle in her eyes.

"Culture! Great Minerva! I'm sorry for the school if it takes Patsie as a model!"

Vivien, like most of us, was a mixture of faults and virtues. One of her strong points was punctuality, and on this Patsie counted. She was nearly always one of the first to enter the cloak-room in the mornings. She liked to look over her lessons and set her books in order. On the following Thursday she turned up as usual at about a quarter to nine, and found, to her surprise, that Patsie and Audrey had already taken off their hats, and were tidying their hair in front of the mirror.

"You here! Wonders will never cease! What's brought you out so early? Dear me, there's a large amount of titivating going on! Is all that for Miss Turner's benefit?"

Patsie deliberately fluffed out her hair, twisted a kiss-curl round her finger, and readjusted her slide before she answered:

"Haven't you heard the news?" she said abstractedly, pushing aside Audrey, who was trying to edge her from the mirror.

"What news?"

"Miss Kingsley's trying a new venture. I think you'll get a surprise when you go into our class-room!"

"Of course some boys' schools have really had to be given up for lack of masters, so what else can be done while the war's on?" added Audrey.

"What d'you mean?"

"I won't exactly tell you, but I can give you a hint. Look over there!" and Patsie nodded in the direction of the window.

Hanging on hooks were two boys' overcoats and caps. Vivien gazed at them as if thunderstruck.

"Not co-education!" she gasped.

"I don't know what you call it," said Audrey, "but I think it will be rather a stunt. Come along, Patsie, and have first innings!"

As the chums ran from the room, Vivien hurriedly buttoned her shoes and tore after them.

"Where are they?" she asked excitedly, catching Audrey by the arm, "What are their names?"

"I don't know any more than yourself yet."

"We'll soon find out," volunteered Patsie flinging open the door of the Sixth Form room.

An unusual spectacle certainly greeted them: unusual at any rate in a ladies' school. Sitting on the desks with their backs to the door were two masculine figures, engaged in the pleasing occupation of pelting each other with exercise-books.

Apparently they did not hear the girls' entrance, for they continued their conversation.

"Rather a blossomy stunt to be here!"

"Great Judkins, yes! Guess we'll make things hum! I'm nuts on the girls!"

"Hope they're a decent-looking set!"

"Oh, right enough on the whole! But, old chap, let me tell you there's one--her name's Vivien----"

Here, to prevent awkward revelations, Vivien interrupted with a judicious cough. The long, trouser-clad legs slid from the desks, and the two manly voices ejaculated:

"Hallo! Our new school mates! How d'ye do?"

"Charmed to meet you, I'm sure!"

Quite in a flutter, Vivien advanced, looked, gasped, and spluttered out:

"Gracie and Sybil; you wretches!"

The masculine figures, unmindful of manners, collapsed on to the nearest seats, and sobbed with laughter.

"Took you in this time, old sport! Don't we make killing boys? I believe you were just gone on us both! Oh, how it hurts to laugh! I feel weak!"

"I think you're a pair of idiots!" retorted Vivien. "I don't see anything funny in it."

"We do, though!" cackled Patsie. "Oh, Vivien, you looked so interested and excited! It gave me spasms! There, don't get ratty over it! Brace up!"

"It was a jinky joke!" burred Audrey. "I say, you two, you'd better scoot quick and do some lightning changing! If Miss Janet comes in there'll be squalls! She's not quite ready yet for co-education here. Stick on your waterproofs again! There, bolt before you're caught!"

"A nice monitress *you* are, Patsie Sullivan!" exploded the outraged Vivien. "Where's our authority to go to, I should like to know, if you and Audrey put Fifth Form girls up to such tricks? I wonder you condescend to it! If *I* were head girl, I can tell you I'd have something to say to you! But with these new slack ways there'll be no respect for us left. The school's going to the dogs, in my opinion!"

Patsie and Audrey beat a hurried retreat, for they knew that there was a certain amount of justice in Vivien's remarks. Their escapade, a report of which would, of course, be circulated through the school, would in no way enhance the authority of the Sixth. They hoped Lorraine would not hear about it, though it seemed inevitable that it must come to her ears. As a matter of fact, Lorraine learnt the whole story before she had taken off her boots. She made little comment, but went into class with a cloud on her face.

The head girl was going through the difficult experience, shared by all who are suddenly placed in authority, of trying to hold the reins so as to satisfy everybody. To keep slackers up to the mark without gaining for herself the unenviable reputation of "a Tartar", to be pleasant with the juniors without loss of dignity, to preserve old standards while adopting new ones, called for all the tact she possessed. She often felt her cousin a great impediment. Vivien was one of those people who love to give good advice, and to say what they would do in certain circumstances, urging on others drastic measures which they would probably never enforce themselves if they happened to be in authority. Sometimes, however, the objections were just, and this was a case in point. The matter floated in Lorraine's mind all the morning, as a kind of background to English literature and mathematics. She called a monitresses' meeting for four o'clock that very day.

When afternoon school was over, and Miss Janet, with the big volume of Milton, had taken her departure, Lorraine assembled her committee, intercepting Patsie and Audrey, who were trying to sneak from the room.

"Look here, you've *got* to stop!" she assured them.

"I've to call at the dressmaker's; I've brought my bicycle on purpose!" objected Audrey.

"Then the dressmaker will have to wait ten minutes."

"And I'm due at the dentist's," declared Patsie.

"The dentist can wait too! It's most important for us all to be at this meeting. I can't possibly let any one off it."

Rather sulkily, Audrey and Patsie went back to their desks. Possibly they might have rebelled, but public opinion was plainly against them. Vivien was looking virtuous, and Dorothy made some pointed remarks about duty before pleasure.

"If you think going to the dentist's and having that horrible drill whirling round and round inside your tooth is a pleasure, I wish you'd go instead of me," retorted Patsie, flinging her books back into her desk and banging the lid hard. "You'd be only too welcome to take my place."

"Don't be shrill, child. Business is business, and the sooner we get it over the better. I want to go home myself."

"I won't keep you all more than a few minutes," interposed Lorraine. "What I want to say is this, that though I have openly rather held a brief for the juniors in some ways, I don't mean our authority over them to be in the least lessened. Please don't misunderstand me about it. We must thoroughly uphold our dignity as monitresses," (turning a reproachful eye on Patsie and Audrey) "and enforce the rules as much as ever."

"Hear! hear! It doesn't do to grow slack," said Vivien pointedly.

"We're certainly not going to grow slack. I put it to every monitress to make it a point of honour to keep up discipline. There must be no truckling even with Fifth Form girls. Rules are rules!"

"Right you are, O Queen!"

"We'll be a regular set of dragons!"

"No giving in on our part!"

"Those juniors have been trying it on lately!"

"They're the limit sometimes!"

"Well, I'm glad we're all agreed," remarked Lorraine. "Whatever happens, we must support one another. I need not keep you any longer now. Patsie wants to get away to her dentist."

"Ugh! I don't feel in such a hurry to go and be tortured when it comes to the point," shuddered Patsie.

"But I'm keen on the dressmaker. She's making me the sweetest coat-frock you ever saw--in brown velveteen with braid trimming!" purred Audrey.

Having decided to keep a tight hand over the turbulent juniors, the monitresses proceeded to live up to their resolution. They inspected the cloak-room, sternly repressed giggling and talking on the stairs, and insisted upon an orderly queue for the issue of library books. Even Patsie turned the twinkle in her eye into a glance of reproof. The lower forms, who had certainly been trying how far they could go, were disposed to rebel, and gave trouble on one or two occasions, but the slightest attempt at mutiny was met with instant firmness.

"Don't let them master you for a minute," counselled Lorraine. "If anything very flagrant happens, report to me, and we'll deal with it in Committee."

It was only a few days after this, at twenty minutes past two by the big clock in the hall, that Vivien turned into the Sixth Form room, where most of her fellow-monitresses were assembled. Her cheeks were scarlet, and her eyes flashed sparks.

"I've been having *such* a row with those wretched kids!" she exploded. "What do you think a lot of them were doing? Why, they'd actually gone into the gym, where everything had been placed ready for senior drill, and were racketing about with the clubs and dumb-bells. The second they saw me they bolted, and made a dash through the far door and out into the garden, leaving clubs and dumb-bells lying just anywhere. You never saw such a mess as the gym. was in! I had to send Effie Swan and Theresa Dawson to put things in order again. Then I went round to the cloak-room, and asked every single girl if she had been in the gym. Some of them owned up quite frankly, but one told me a deliberate lie."

"A lie! Good gracious! Are you perfectly certain?"

"Absolutely sure. Couldn't be mistaken. I saw her myself in the gym. She was the very last to run out."

"The mean little sneak! Lying is the absolute limit!" frowned Lorraine. "We can't stand that kind of thing--we shall just have to make an example of her. Which kiddie was it?"

"I'm frightfully sorry to have to say it--but it was Monica."

There was dead silence for a moment. Lorraine's face was grim.

"Are you perfectly sure, Vivien?" asked Claudia.

"If you saw her, there's no more to be said," declared Lorraine emphatically. "Monica must report herself here after four o'clock, and we'll deal with the case as it deserves. Nellie, will you please take her this message," rapidly scribbling the summons on a piece of exercise-paper, "and tell her she's to come before going to the cloak-room. Dorothy, would you mind fetching me the Guilds Register? I'm going to cross off Monica's name. We can't have a liar in any of the societies."

"Oh, Lorraine, stop! Don't condemn her unheard!" pleaded Claudia. "She may have some excuse to offer."

"Qui s'excuse s'accuse!" returned Lorraine bitterly. "I'm afraid it's only too plain."

"But *do* let me try to find out! Don't be in such a dreadful hurry! Wait a bit!"

"What's the use of waiting? It had better be done now!"

And Lorraine, with a firm hand, drew a thick ink line through the name of Monica Forrester.

All through afternoon school Lorraine's head was in a whirl. The fact that Monica was her sister made her the more ready to punish her severely. No one should say that she showed favour to her own family. After the crusade she had made for discipline, it was necessary to be stern. And yet--Monica! She could not credit the child with telling a lie. Naughty and wilful she had often been, but deceitful and untruthful never. It was indeed a hard blow to be obliged to convict her of such sneaking behaviour. Yet duty was duty, and Lorraine set her teeth. Just before four o'clock Claudia asked permission from the mistress to leave a few minutes earlier, and made her exit while Patsie was collecting the essay books. Lorraine looked at her reproachfully, but of course could make no comment before Miss Turner. Directly the latter had taken her departure, there came a timid tap at the door, and Monica entered, a white-faced little figure with

big puzzled eyes.

"You sent for me?" she faltered.

"Yes, I did send for you," replied Lorraine grimly. "I want to ask you, before all the monitresses, whether you were in the gym. this afternoon. Give a straight answer, Monica!"

"I've told Vivien I wasn't."

"Do you stick to that?"

"Yes."

"But Vivien saw you!"

"So she says. Can't *you* believe me, Lorraine?"

Monica's grey eyes were fixed full on her sister's face. There was a quiver in her voice. Lorraine steeled her heart and looked away.

"The word of a monitress is sufficient. I have been obliged to strike your name off the Guilds Register, Monica. For this term, at any rate, you won't have the privilege of belonging to any of the societies. I want you juniors to understand once and for all that you can't break rules and tell untruths. If you'd only confess!"



LORRAINE

"I can't confess what I've not done!"

"But it's been proved against you, so it's no use persisting in denying it. I----"

"Stop a moment, Lorraine!" cried Claudia, bursting suddenly into the room. "It's quite a mistake! It wasn't Monica, after all! I ran downstairs and caught those juniors as they came out. I watched their backs, and Irene Holt has just the same blue serge and buttons as Monica, and the same coloured hair ribbon. They aren't alike in front, but their back views are absolute twins. I took Irene by the shoulders, and told her I *knew* she was guilty, and letting the blame fall on Monica, and she threw up the sponge at once, literally howled, and acknowledged it was she who had been in the gym. I told her to go and wait in her own form room, and she's sitting there, boo-hooing for all she's worth."

"Irene! The little sneak! I'm awfully sorry, Monica!" apologized Vivien.

Lorraine's face cleared like sunlight bursting through a cloud. Her relief at the turn events had taken was intense.

"Shall I bring up the wretched kid?" asked Claudia.

"Oh, do please forgive her!" pleaded Monica. "She's such a scared rabbit! She never knows what she's saying!"

"Well, I call that sporting of you!" said Vivien, smacking Monica heartily on the back. "I vote we just say no more about the whole business. Let Irene scoot off and mop her eyes at home. She's been punished enough, I dare say."

"Right you are!" agreed the others readily.

"I'll tell her she may go, then," said Claudia. "Lorraine, for goodness' sake take a penknife and scratch out that score you made through Monica's name in the Guilds Register. I told you to wait, but you were in such a precious hurry to execute vengeance."

"I'll be only too glad to restore the honour of the family," smiled Lorraine.

CHAPTER VI

The Sea-nymphs' Grotto

To make amends to Monica for having doubted her word, Lorraine took her on Saturday afternoon to see the Castletons. They found all the younger members of that interesting family amusing themselves in the garden, digging their war plots and sweeping up dead leaves. They were warm-hearted, friendly children, and adopted Monica immediately. By the end of ten minutes she was seated on the dead leaves inside the wheel-barrow, nursing Perugia, with Madox squatting at her feet, Beata and Romola chattering one on each side, while Lilith and Constable brought dilapidated toys for her inspection. As she seemed to be perfectly happy and to be thoroughly enjoying herself, Lorraine suggested leaving her there for a while.

"I thought perhaps you'd like to come and walk with me?" she said to Claudia.

"I'd love it above everything. May Morland and Landry go too?"

"Why, of course, if they care to!"

"You won't mind Landry?" Claudia hesitated and blushed rosy pink. "You know he's not quite the same as other boys. You mustn't expect too much from him. But he's very affectionate, and he likes to come with us."

"Oh, please bring him! I quite understand!"

Lorraine had indeed seen at once, without any explanation from Claudia, that poor Landry, in spite of his fourteen years, was more childish than Madox. He was a fine well-grown boy, in features perhaps the most beautiful of all the handsome family, with china blue eyes and pale gold hair that curled from the roots, and a mouth that would have done credit to one of Botticelli's cherubs. In mind, however, Landry had never advanced beyond the age of seven. He was quiet and inoffensive, spoke little, and seemed to live in a sort of dream world of his own. He was devoted to Claudia, and quite happy and contented if he might follow her about and be near her. With the rest of the family, and especially with his stepmother, he was sometimes fractious, but Claudia could always manage him and calm him down. Her invariable kindness to him was one of the nicest features in her character. He clung to her arm now as the four young people set off across the moor.

"He's been having rather a blow-up with Violet," explained Claudia. "It's your own fault this time, Landry, you know! Still, it's just as well to take a walk and let the atmosphere clear before we come back. Violet easily fizzes over, but she doesn't keep it up long. Where shall we go, Lorraine? You know the walks here better than we do."

"Suppose we go past Pettington Church and along the cliffs to Tangy Point?"

"Right you are! Anything you like will suit us," agreed Morland easily.

So they turned through the farmyard and down the steep lane that led to the small church whose square grey tower and carved Norman doorway looked out across the green cliff-side to the sea.

"Father was sketching here yesterday," volunteered Claudia, pausing to peep in at the gateway.

"What was he painting?" asked Lorraine, stopping also to look and admire, for the mellow October sunshine glinting on the grey walls and the autumn-clad trees and the gleaming sea made a picture all in russet and pearl.

"It's one of a series of illustrations for Matthew Arnold's poem, 'The Forsaken Merman'. You know it, don't you? Well, this is 'the little grey church on the windy hill', where Margaret came to say her prayers. You remember she left her merman husband and her children in 'the clear green sea' because--

"T will be Easter time in the world--ah me!
And I lose my poor soul, Merman, here with thee."

She promised to come back to them all, but she never came, so they went to look for her.

'From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers,
But we stood without in the cold-blowing airs.
We climbed on the graves, on the stones, worn with rains,
And we gazed up the aisle through the small leaded panes.
She sate by the pillar; we saw her clear:

"Margaret, hist! come quick, we are here."

"That's the part Daddy's drawing--just where they're peeping in through the windows. He sketched Lilith this morning for the youngest mermaid; he's given her a little fish's tail, and she looks such a darling! And Beata and Romola are bigger ones, leaning on a gravestone with their arms round each other's neck, and garlands of shells in their hair, and Constable is holding up a great trail of sea-weed. Father's going to draw me as Margaret for one illustration; I'm to be sitting at my wheel 'in the humming town'. He's just bought a ducky little spinning-wheel on purpose!"

"What fun to be put in a picture!"

"No, it isn't! We all think it a horrid nuisance to have to be Daddy's models and sit still for hours just when we want to do something else. But you'll like the merman picture, especially Lilith. She's really sweet!"

"You've seen the mermaid carved on the chancel bench inside?" asked Lorraine.

"No, I haven't. I've not been to the church on week-days."

"I go sometimes. Mr. Jacques lets me practise on the organ," said Morland. "But I've never noticed any mermaid there."

"Oh, come in and look at her, then! She's worth seeing."

The church was open, so they stepped from the sunshine outside into the soft diffused golden light glowing on sandstone pillars, oak-beamed roof, and saint-filled windows. It was newly decorated for harvest festival--great clumps of Michaelmas daisies hid the font, scarlet bryony berries trailed from the lectern, and chrysanthemums screened the pulpit. The air was sweet with the scent of flowers. Lorraine led the way to the chancel, and, moving aside some torch lilies, disclosed to view the end of a choir-bench, where, on the ancient black oak, was roughly carved the figure of a mermaid, with comb and glass in hand.

"There's a story about her," said Lorraine. "There was a young fisherman who sang in the choir. He had such a lovely voice that it was more beautiful even than her own, and she fell in love with him. She used to come on Sunday evenings and sit outside the church to listen to him singing. Then, one day when he was out in his boat, she rose up from the waves and beckoned to him. He rowed close to her, and she suddenly clasped him in her arms and carried him down into the sea. He was never seen again; and the villagers carved the picture of the mermaid in the church to remind people of what had happened."

"What a most amazing story! I must tell Daddy. Perhaps he'll like to draw that too," said Claudia. "By the by, where's Landry?" looking round anxiously after her charge.

"He's all right," Morland assured her. "He's gone up those dusty stairs into a little musty, cobwebby gallery. He always goes and sits there while I'm practising the organ. Can't think why he should like it; but he doesn't do any harm, so I let him. Look! You can see him."

Morland pointed upwards, where, at the west end of the church, ran a small gallery. Over its carved oak balustrade leaned Landry, like a cherub on a Jacobean monument. The sunlight, glinting through the window above, turned his golden curls into a halo.

"He's waiting for me to play," continued Morland.

"Oh, do!" cried Lorraine.

The organ was unlocked, so Morland seated himself and began to improvise slow, dreamy, haunting music, that rose and fell through the little church like the murmur of the sea. Whatever faults of character the boy might have, his face was rapt when he played, and to Lorraine it seemed as if the very saints and angels in the stained-glass windows were looking and listening. Landry sat with parted lips and far-away blue eyes.

"He's always quiet when Morland is playing," whispered Claudia. "He loves music. I wish we could teach him. I've tried, but it's absolutely hopeless. He'd sit there all the afternoon, and I verily believe Morland would too, once he's started on that organ. We shall have to stop him if we want to go on with our walk. Morland! We're keeping Lorraine waiting!"

Morland came back from the clouds and closed the organ, Claudia beckoned Landry down from the gallery, and they stepped out again into the sunshine and the fresh salt breeze that blew up from the shore.

It was a beautiful path to Tangy Point, all along the edge of the cliffs, with great rugged rocks below, and the sea lapping gently on the shingle. Gulls flashed white wings against the autumn blue of the sky, and linnets twittered

among the gorse bushes; here and there a few wild flowers lingered, and Claudia picked quite a summer-looking bouquet. The Point was a narrow spit of land crowned with a cairn, and here the young people climbed to get the view over the western sea.

"I believe all here under the water is the lost land of Lyonesse!" said Lorraine. "In King Arthur's days it was a prosperous place with cornfields and villages, and then the sea came and swallowed it all up. Fishermen say there's a castle and a church under the waves still, and that sometimes they can hear the bells ringing, but of course that's just imagination."

"Perhaps the mermaids live there!" laughed Claudia.

"You'd better send Lilith to look!"

"I say," said Morland, "there's a sort of a path down here. Are you game to come and explore?"

"Of course we are! It will be topping down on those sands. Leave your flowers here, Claudia; you can get them when we come back."

The path down to the sands was a scramble, but not particularly difficult for agile young limbs. It led them on to a belt of rocks, where ghost-like little fishes were darting across silvery pools, and small crabs were scuttling among tangled masses of sodden, salt-scented sea-weed, and sea-anemones spread scarlet tentacles in the clear water. The wall-like, reddish-brown cliff rose almost sheer above, with gulls and puffins and guillemots and cormorants perched on its rugged crags, or rising to circle screaming in the air.

"Looks like the entrance to a cave over there!" said Morland. "Bet you six cigarettes to six chocolates I'm right!"

"You oughtn't to bet, you naughty boy!" returned Claudia. "Besides, we can't get any chocolates nowadays. We'll go and see, though, if it really is a cave. I love exploring."

To reach the place Morland had pointed out, they were obliged to struggle through jungles of brown sea-weed, and to slip down little precipices slimy with green sea-grass, and to scramble over rough projecting points of rock, honey-combed into queer shapes by the action of the tide. A jump across a crevice and a climb up a few feet of sheer precipice landed them at the entrance of the cave. Morland scrambled in front, and gave a hand to the others.

They found themselves in a large, rounded grotto, the walls of which shelved gently in a series of natural ledges; the floor was dry, and covered with fine silvery sand, and at the far end lay a pile of timber, washed in perhaps from some wreck by an abnormally high tide. The afternoon sun shone through the entrance and gleamed on little bits of mica and spar in the walls, making them glitter like diamonds.

"What an adorable place!" exclaimed Claudia with enthusiasm.

"Topping!" agreed Morland.

"A regular sea-nymphs' grotto!" exulted Lorraine, and Landry, who was not given to words, smiled, and pulling out a piece of timber sat down upon it.

"A good idea!" said Lorraine, following suit. "Look here, I've just had a brain wave. Let's appropriate the cave, and call it ours. Except just in the August holidays, I don't suppose anybody ever comes here, so we should have it quite to ourselves. It shall be a real sea-nymphs' grotto. We'll get shells from the shore, and make lovely patterns with them all along those ledges, and hang sea-weeds about, and make some seats with those pieces of wood, and we'll come out here on Saturdays sometimes, and bring our lunch. What votes?"

"A! I'm your man, or rather your merman!" grinned Morland. "Any good recipe for growing a fish's tail, please? A diet of whelks and winkles not welcome, for my digestion's delicate."

"It's a chubby idea!" beamed Claudia. "I'd love it, only I *do* bargain we keep it to ourselves. I don't want the whole tribe trailing after us every time we come. The little ones mustn't know anything about it."

"I shan't tell them, you bet!" declared Morland.

"It isn't a suitable place to bring children," agreed Lorraine. "I won't say anything to Monica, or even to Mervyn, because he'd be sure to blurt it out to her. It shall be just our own secret."

"I expect it has been a sort of secret place," said Morland. "Those ledges look literally made for smugglers. No doubt they kept kegs of brandy there, and chests of tea, and bales of silk and lace in the good old days."

"Why shouldn't we keep a few things here?" suggested Claudia. "A kettle, and a tin of cocoa and milk, and some

matches, and a box of biscuits. Then we could light a fire and have a little feast any time when we came."

"A ripping notion. I'll make a sort of cupboard with some of that wood to keep the things in. We'll bring cups and saucers as well as a kettle."

"And a frying pan in case we catch flukes down in the pools," put in Lorraine eagerly.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Morland, quite roused to enthusiasm. "I'll come over on Monday and bring a saw with me, and a hammer and nails, and see what I can knock together in the shape of a cupboard and seats. Then next Saturday we'll tramp over and have our picnic."

"Splendiferous!"

"We'll have to come in the morning, because of the tide."

"Right you are! I guess we'd better be getting back now. I haven't grown my merman's tail enough yet to swim with, and I've no wish to stop here all night."

Morland kept his word, and went on Monday to the cave, armed with various useful tools. He could work well enough at anything that took his fancy, and, though he never knocked in a nail at home, he toiled here in a way that would have amazed his family if they could have seen him. Landry went also, and helped in a fashion. He could not do much, but he held pieces of wood steady while his brother hammered, and he collected whole pocketfuls of shells from the beach.

Morland whistled cheerily as he worked. He wanted to give the girls a surprise, and, as they were busy at school all the week, he had the field to himself until Saturday. His artistic temperament found scope in the decoration of the cavern; fresh ideas kept occurring to him, and he enjoyed carrying them out. He felt like a kind of combination of Robinson Crusoe and the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, with a spice of poetry running through it all.

Next Saturday Lorraine, having obtained permission from her mother to go to a picnic with the Castletons, started off, basket in hand, resisting the agonized entreaties of Monica, who implored to be allowed to accompany her.

"Sorry I can't take you to-day, Cuckoo! But you see they didn't ask you--only me. Beata and Romola aren't going either."

"But why shouldn't we *all* go, and Madox too?" wailed Monica the spoilt.

"It's too far. Look here, I'll ask Mother to let you have some of the Castleton children to tea one day. Would that content you?"

"Ye--es!" conceded Monica doubtfully. "But it doesn't make up for this morning. I think you're *ever* so mean, Lorraine!"

"Poor old Cuckoo! But you know you couldn't really have come in any case, for you're to be at the dentist's by eleven."

"Strafe the old dentist! I wish he were at the bottom of the sea!" declared the youngest of the Forrester family, with temper.

Lorraine ran away at last, and pelted up the hill to the Castletons' house, meeting Morland, Claudia, and Landry in the lane, whither they had fled to avoid a contingent of younger ones. They were laden with a cargo of miscellaneous articles--a kettle, a pan, some plates, and various tins.

"It's like a young removal," said Claudia.

"Or emigrating to the wilds of Canada," laughed Lorraine. "I've brought an enamelled mug, because it doesn't break like a teacup, and a little old Britannia metal teapot that I prigged from the attic. It was only going to be sent to a rummage sale, so we may just as well have it."

"Do mermaids drink tea, please?"

"No doubt they do when they can get it. Perhaps the smugglers taught them how."

Morland had intended to give the girls a surprise, and when they entered the grotto their amazement quite came up to his expectations. The cave seemed truly transformed into a sea-nymphs' palace. Landry had worked untiringly all the week picking up shells, and these were arranged in patterns, with long pieces of sea-weed draped artistically here and there. Fragments of wreckage had been neatly sawn and nailed together to form a cupboard, a table, and some seats,

and just inside the entrance, in white pebbles, was the word "Welcome".

Landry, in his own way as pleased as his brother, stood beaming. Morland, though inwardly proud, affected nonchalance.

"Couldn't make it look much, of course," he apologized.

"Much? Why, it's topping!"

"It's like a fairy-tale! However did you find time to do all this?"

"Oh! I just worked a bit," murmured Morland modestly.

The first picnic in the grotto was a huge success. To be sure the table was unsteady, and had a decided lop to one end, and the benches felt slightly insecure, but the girls said that added an element of adventure, for you never knew when you might be suddenly precipitated on to the floor. They put the cocoa, biscuits, and matches in tins, and stowed them away inside the new cupboard which Morland had placed in an angle of the rocky shelf, then, fearing that the rising tide would cover the shore below and cut off their retreat, they bade a regretful farewell to all their arrangements, promising themselves the pleasure of coming often again.

It seemed too early to go straight home, so they spent the afternoon rambling about the cliffs, watching the sea-birds or the waves that were dashing below. Time flew apace, and when they came down the hill again from Tangy Point the sky was golden with sunset. The warm evening light flooded the common, where brown bracken grew like a forest, and goldfinches flitted about among a grove of thistles. Lorraine, who had an eye for colour, picked a large wand-like sheaf of yellow ragwort, and, holding it over her shoulder, trudged through the thistles, sending showers of down to float in the breeze, and dispersing the goldfinches from their feast. With her eyes on the horizon instead of on the ground in front, she nearly walked into an easel that was stationed among the bracken. Its owner sprang up to save it, and Lorraine, stopping just in time, paused with her russet dress and flying brown hair a dark mass against the gold of the sky and the thistle-down background. There was a second of silence as a pair of clear hazel eyes grasped the picturesque impression and registered it; then a mellow voice murmured: "Kilmeny!"

CHAPTER VII

Kilmeny

"I'm dreadfully sorry!" apologized Lorraine.

"It doesn't matter at all. You did no damage."

"But I nearly knocked over your picture!"

"A miss is as good as a mile!"

"Why, it's Miss Lindsay!" exclaimed Claudia, coming up. "I thought you were still in Scotland."

"I've been back a week and am quite settled down again at Porthkeverne, and hope to stay here all the winter. Tell your father I'm coming up to see his pictures one day. I hear he's painting in pastel now. I've been going in for tempera. How are the babies? And Madox? He's a special friend of mine. I've brought them a box of real shortbread from Edinburgh. Yes, I'm making a sketch of this piece of the common. It appeals to me in the sunset."

"What a charming lady! *Who* is she?" whispered Lorraine as their party passed on.

"She's an artist--Miss Lindsay. We knew her in London, and it was she who advised Father to come and live at Porthkeverne. I'm glad she did, for we all like it just heaps better than Kensington."

"Does she live here?"

"She has rooms in the town and a studio down by the harbour, but she goes about to a great many places sketching. You'd love her pictures."

"I wish I could see them."

"Perhaps she'd let me take you some day to her studio."

"Oh! do you think she really would? Do you know I've never been inside a studio!"

Claudia laughed.

"You wouldn't want to if you'd had to sit as a model as often as I have! Would she, Morland?"

"Rather not. As a family I reckon we're fed up with studios," returned Morland. "Thank goodness I'm beyond the Bubbles' stage of beauty. It's Madox's turn for that!"

"Don't congratulate yourself too soon. I heard Father say the other day that you'd make an absolutely perfect study for 'Sir Galahad', and that Violet must tell Lizzie to clean that suit of armour, for he meant to begin it as soon as he'd finished 'Endymion'."

"Oh, strafe Sir Galahad!" groaned Morland. "The armour's the most beastly uncomfortable hot stuff to wear you can imagine. I wish I had a turned-up nose and freckles."

Lorraine, living in a modern unromantic house in the residents' suburbs of Porthkeverne, had hitherto had little or no acquaintance with the artist population of the town. They mostly lived in the old quarter, and had studios close to the harbour, their colony being centred round the Arts Club in the Guildhall. She had often watched them painting at their easels in the narrow picturesque streets, and had longed for a more intimate acquaintance. Their delightful Bohemian way of life had a fascination for her. She sometimes wished her father were an artist instead of a lawyer. It was so much more romantic to paint pictures than to make people's wills or transfer their property.

"Dad's utterly practical," she confided to Claudia. "He's busy all day at the office, and he prides himself on not being sentimental. He's about as artistic as that cow!"

"I'd swap dads with you," said Claudia. "I wish mine went to an office every day instead of to his studio."

"You won't forget about Miss Lindsay?"

"No, I'll try to take you, if you're really so keen about going."

Claudia was as good as her word, and one day came to school armed with a special invitation for herself and

Lorraine. The latter, much excited, begged permission at home to accept.

"I think she's lovely, Mummie! Miss Lindsay, I mean. And I've never seen a studio, and Claudia says I'll *adore* her pictures, so you *will* let me go, won't you?"

"If it won't interfere with your home lessons and practising. It's extremely kind of her to ask you, I'm sure."

"I'll just *swat* at my lessons when I get back, to make up, and I'll do my practising before breakfast."

"Very well, but don't stay later than half-past five. The evenings are beginning to get dark so soon now."

"Oh, thanks most immensely!"

To Lorraine, brought up in a little world consisting mostly of her own family and a circle of cousins, it was really quite an event to pay this visit into the *terra incognita* of the Art Colony. She came to school in her best dress that afternoon, with the chain of amber beads that Donald had sent her from Italy. They were at present the only artistic things she possessed, and therefore the most suitable for the occasion.

She and Claudia hurried away as speedily as possible after four o'clock, and were soon tramping down the hill from The Gables and treading the narrow, quaint streets that led towards the sea. The harbour at Porthkeverne was a picturesque place that had figured over and over again on the walls of the Academy. Its green waters this afternoon sheltered a fleet of red-sailed fishing-boats, whose owners were busy making ready to put out into the bay. Over the beach and round about the breakwater flew hundreds of sea-birds, flapping in and out of the water, and pecking among the sea-weed on the rocks. Some venturesome urchins, scrambling after crabs, screamed almost as lustily as the gulls.

Along the quay, behind the barrels and upturned boats and baskets and old timber, was a row of irregular buildings that had once served as sailmakers' warehouses or boat builders' workshops. The artistic colony had joyfully seized upon these, and had turned them from their original use into a set of studios. Large glass windows fronted the bay, and twisting flights of steps and painted railings led up to the doors on which were brass plates with names well known both in London and provincial exhibitions.

Claudia led the way along the quay, crossing the gangway where the little river flowed down, and passing the "Sailors' Rest" where a few blue-jacketed old salts were reading the newspapers, then stopped at a particular flight of wooden steps that were painted pale sea-green. Up these she ran, and tapped at a half-open door.

"Come in!" said a voice, and the girls entered.

To Lorraine it was like a sudden peep into fairyland. The rough wooden walls of the studio had been covered with a soft brown embossed paper, that served as a background for sketches, framed and unframed, which were hung there. Pieces of tapestry and oriental curtains were draped between, and large blue-and-white willow-pattern plates made a frieze above. A rare walnut cabinet, a Japanese screen, a gate-legged table, some Chippendale chairs, and a carved oak cupboard composed the furniture of the room; and there were scattered about a large number of artistic "properties"--bright scarves, shells, beads, pottery, vases, pewter, and standing on the floor a huge brass jar filled with branches of flaming autumn leaves.

From the low arm-chair by the fire-place rose Miss Lindsay, a fitting centre for her beautiful surroundings. She was one of those people who seem neither old nor young, for her intense personality quite overmastered any ravages time might have made in her appearance. The passing years, while they had brought a grey thread or two among the brown of the hair, had mellowed her expression; and the shining hazel eyes seemed as the windows of a soul behind, noble, tender, and full of sympathy. They were merry eyes, too, and they danced as their owner welcomed her guests.

"I've been expecting you, and the kettle's boiling! Sit here, Claudia, and you here, Kilmeny! Lorraine is her name? Never mind, I shall call her what I like. I hope you're fond of potato cake? And shortbread? It's the real kind from Edinburgh. You'd rather begin with plain bread and butter? What well brought-up girls!"

Seated on a round, silk cushion-footstool by the cheery wood fire, drinking tea from a cup covered with little pink roses, with the scent of late carnations wafted from a vase on the table, and her elbow almost touching the delicate blue-green velvet of Miss Lindsay's artistic dress, Lorraine looked round the studio, fascinated. She thought she had never seen such a delightful place. It appealed intensely to her romantic side, and with its bright draperies and cosy corners seemed like the opening scene of a novel. She was glad that the tea gave her some excuse for silence. She was too much interested in gazing about to find words for conversation.

Their hostess, wise in her generation, left her to herself until potato cakes and Scotch shortbread should thaw the ice and loose her tongue, and meantime discussed mutual friends with Claudia.

"We mustn't waste the precious daylight if you really want to see my pictures," she said after a while. "Come to the window and sit here on these chairs, and I'll put the sketches on the easel. They are a series I'm doing for a children's magazine in America. They're to be reproduced in colour."

Miss Lindsay's sketches were charming, and full of a quaint fancy. They were rendered in a medium of her own invention, a combination of pencil, paint, and crayon, which gave the soft effect of a pastel with the permanence of a water-colour. The first depicted a nurse holding by the hand a tiny child, who turned with wondering eyes to look at delicate little fairies which the grown-up person evidently did not see. In another a little boy sat in the forest playing with butterfly-winged elves who danced among the bright scarlet toadstools. A third showed a brownie in a tree-top, nestling by the side of a baby owl, and a fourth the pixies sporting under a starlit sky. There were many others, dainty, imaginative and ethereal, some illustrating poems or books, and some telling their own story, all painted with the same clever touch and light, brilliant colouring.

"These are my favourites, so I've shown them first, while the light lasts," said Miss Lindsay, "but I've heaps of other studies, landscapes mostly, sketches of Scotland I took this summer. I'll go on putting them on the easel, and when you're really bored stiff you must cry mercy, and I'll stop."

"Bored!" said Lorraine, with a sigh of intense satisfaction, "they're too lovely for anything! I'd give the world if I could paint like that!"

So they looked through piles of fascinating sketches till the short daylight had faded, and the logs on the fire began to throw queer shadows round the studio.

"We must go!" said Claudia at last. "I've some shopping to do for Violet on my way back, and she'll be raggy if I don't turn up soon. I rather believe the things are wanted for supper," she added casually.

"Then you must hurry," smiled Miss Lindsay, who was well acquainted with the Bohemian ways of the Castleton family. "Even artists don't like to be kept waiting for their meals, however absorbed they get in their pictures." Then, turning to Lorraine, "I'm going to ask you to do something for me, Kilmeny. Will you come to the common with me one day this week at sunset, in the same brown dress you wore last Saturday, and let me sketch you among the thistles and bracken?"

Lorraine flushed with pleasure. She had never stood as model in her life, and, though the experience might be stale and wearisome to Claudia, to her it had all the charm of novelty.

"Of course I will. Would you like me to come to-morrow?" she murmured delightedly. "And--I hope you don't mind my asking--but I *should* like to know why you call me 'Kilmeny'?"

"Because you *looked* Kilmeny. Don't you know the poem? She was stolen away by the fairies, and brought up in the place that George Macdonald calls *At the Back of the North Wind*. Then:

"When seven long years were gone and fled,
When grief was forgotten and hope was dead,
And scarce was remembered Kilmeny's name:
Late, late in the gloaming Kilmeny home came'.

Well, you see, I'm going to paint you just coming home, in the evening glow with the yellow light behind, and the thistles and brown bracken. The sheaf of golden ragwort will be like a wand, and you'll still have the spell of fairyland in your face. I'm not sure if I shan't put in a few half-transparent fairies escorting you back; they'd blend among the thistledown. I can see it all in my mind's eye, if I can only manage to paint it. You'll be sure to come in the brown dress?"

"Of course I will, though it's a terribly old one I keep for scramble walks."

"That doesn't matter in the least. It's the colour I want. The whole scheme was a harmony in brown."

Lorraine went twice to stand for Miss Lindsay on the common, and several times afterwards to her studio to be sketched with more detail. Her new friend made three or four separate studies for the picture, intending to work from them afterwards in oils.

"I've sent for quite a decent-sized canvas," she said. "And I'm going to try one or two experiments. I'm not often pleased with my own work, but I like these studies, and feel inspired to do a three by two-and-a-half. Kilmeny, I believe you're going to prove my mascot!"

When Lorraine tried to analyse afterwards why she had at once taken such an extreme liking for Miss Lindsay, she

decided that the attraction lay in her voice. On some sensitive temperaments the quality of a voice has as much effect as personal beauty. A rasping, sharp, fretful or uncompromising tone may be as disagreeable as a wrong accent, but the harps of our spirits, finely and delicately strung, vibrate and thrill to kindly, cheerfully spoken words. The friendship between the two progressed apace. Mrs. Forrester, finding that Lorraine showed such a suddenly awakened interest in art, arranged for her to take a course of painting lessons from Miss Lindsay, and she trotted off every Saturday morning to the studio by the harbour.

The drawing classes at The Gables had been the only weak spot in an otherwise excellent scheme of education, so Lorraine simply revelled in her new lessons. She had genuine talent, and was quick in catching up ideas. The artistic atmosphere exactly suited her. So far she had lacked inspiration in her life. She had never been able to feel the enthusiasm which Rosemary threw into music, and though she worked steadily at school, the prospect of college, dangled sometimes by Miss Kingsley, rather repelled than tempted her. She had drifted aimlessly along, without any specially strong tastes or ambitions, till this fresh, wonderful, fascinating world of art suddenly rose up and claimed her for its own. It was a delirious sensation, and very stimulating. She could sympathize now with Rosemary's keenness for the College of Music. Perhaps--who knew?--some day she might prevail on Father to let her go away to London and study painting. The bigness of such a prospect took her breath away.

There could not have been a better pilot in these untried waters than Margaret Lindsay. She proved a veritable fairy godmother, not in painting alone, but in other matters as well. Lorraine had reached that stage of girlhood when she badly needed a new impulse and a different mental atmosphere. It is so difficult sometimes for parents to realize that their children are growing up, and require treating from a revised standpoint. Unconsciously, and out of sheer custom, they rule them *de haut en bas*, and then wonder why the little confidences of the budding womanhood are given instead to sisters or friends.

Though she was old enough in some ways, in others Miss Lindsay was that most delightful of persons, "a chronic child". On occasion she could seem as young as, or even younger than, Lorraine, and enjoyed herself like a veritable schoolgirl. The two had royal times together, painting in the studio, making tea by the wood fire, rambling on the cliffs, or wandering through the picturesque fishermen's quarter of the town, a hitherto almost unexplored territory to Lorraine. Under her friend's leadership she began to take up various side branches of art; she dabbled in gesso, relief stamping, leather embossing, stencilling and illuminating. New visions of birthday presents dawned on her horizon, and she intended to astonish the family at Christmas. Her only regret was the very scant time which she had to devote to these delightful occupations. Her position as head girl at The Gables permitted no slacking in the way of lessons, and her mother had made an express proviso that her work at the studio must not be allowed to interfere with her school preparation.

"Lucky you!" wrote Lorraine to Rosemary. "You're able to spend your whole day over the thing you love best. If I'd my choice, I'd never look at maths, or chemistry again, I'd just paint, paint, paint, from morning till night!"

CHAPTER VIII

Vivien Makes Terms

Mr. George Forrester and Mr. Barton Forrester were brothers, and partners in the old-established firm of solicitors, Deane and Forrester. The Barton Forresters lived at the opposite side of Porthkeverne, on the road to St. Cyr, in an old-fashioned red brick Queen Anne house named The Firs, with a Greek portico and iron balconies outside the windows. The George Forresters always decided that the house was the exact epitome of Aunt Carrie. It was stately, and stood on its dignity, making you feel that it had a position to keep up, and extended hospitality as in duty bound, but with no special enthusiasm. Houses are largely a reflection of their owners, and five minutes in a drawing-room will often suffice to give you the correct mental atmosphere of a family. If the picturesque general disorder of Windy Howe suggested art run riot, the well-kept but tasteless precision of The Firs expressed a totally opposite temperament. No one could accuse Aunt Carrie of being artistic: her rooms were handsome and spotlessly neat, but they gave you the sense of being furnished, not arranged, and their lack of beauty struck a chill to aesthetic souls.

Aunt Carrie herself was big, and bustling, and overbearing, with well-cut features, a high colour, and a determined voice. She is described first, because she was so decidedly the head of the family. Uncle Barton only came in second. He was a gentle, pleasant little man, with kindly wrinkles round his eyes, and a habit of whistling under his breath when things grew stormy at home. In early days of matrimony he made a struggle for his own way, but abandoned it later in favour of a peace-at-any-price policy. He was a town councillor, and vicar's warden at the parish church, as well as a special constable. In his spare time he lived for golf. Lindon, his only son, was exactly like him, even to the habit of whistling and the propensity for golf. With Lindon, however, shells at the present were doing the whistling, and the trenches took the place of bunkers. His photograph in khaki stood in a silver frame on the drawing-room mantelpiece.

The three girls--Elsie, Betty, and Vivien--were shaded varieties of their mother. When Lorraine counted up her blessings, she always placed Rosemary and Monica as special items. She did not get on with her cousins.

"I like Uncle Barton and Lindon," she decided. "You never hear them say a nasty thing about anybody. It's the girls who pick holes in everyone and everything."

The attitude of the female portion of the family at The Firs was fiercely critical. It might be amusing to themselves, but it was uncomfortable for other people. Lorraine, visiting there in a new dress, literally squirmed when she felt eyes of inspection directed upon it. It was the same with accomplishments. Both she and Rosemary dreaded to play or sing at The Firs. The chilly "Thank you!" at the end of the performance hurt more than brickbats. The Barton Forresters were always urging on the George Forresters. They started on the assumption that, as a family, they were more clever, capable, and up-to-date, and therefore in a position to give good advice. Elsie, recently engaged to a naval officer, considered that she had scored over Rosemary, who was six months older and still unappropriated. Betty rubbed in her indispensable work at the Red Cross Hospital with comments on those slackers who shirked giving their fair share of help. Vivien's sharp tongue was Lorraine's chief thorn in the flesh at The Gables.

The fact that Vivien was her cousin made things extremely difficult for Lorraine. She could have done battle royal with a stranger, and fought things out in the lists at school and have finished with them. But to quarrel with Vivien was another matter. It meant also quarrelling with Aunt Carrie, Elsie, and Betty, who would take affairs to the tribunal of Pendlehurst and raise a domestic sandstorm.

Long before, when they were quite children, the two girls had quarrelled, and Aunt Carrie had solemnly, and quite unjustifiably, complained to her brother-in-law about Lorraine's conduct. Lorraine had never forgiven her father for not taking her part more firmly on that occasion. The remembrance of the ready ear he had lent to the enemy's side of the question had prevented any future appeal to intervention. Matters with Vivien went on in a species of guerrilla warfare.

As head girl, Lorraine had, of course, the whip hand at The Gables, but in every fresh scheme she found her cousin a dead weight and an impediment. Vivien always suggested something different. At committee meetings she invariably started an opposition to every resolution. Nothing could be carried without bickering. In her capacity of mistress Vivien was not a favourite. She was far too high-handed and domineering to win any measure of popularity among the juniors. Surging discontent sometimes broke out into rebellion. It is a delicate task for a general whose aide-de-camp is too officious. Lorraine, with a feeling that she was treading on eggs, brought up the subject of discipline at the next committee meeting.

"We must see that rules are kept, naturally," she conceded, "but I think perhaps lately some of us have just a little exceeded our authority. We don't want to get snubbed by Miss Kingsley, and told to mind our own business!"

"If you mean me," retorted Vivien, "I wish you'd say so straight out and have done with it! I hate innuendoes. I consider that the kids want keeping in order, and I'm there to do it, whether they like it or whether they don't."

"We must, of course, keep order; but if we can do it pleasantly, it makes a far nicer feeling in the school. Some of those babes will do anything for a monitress they like."

"Oh, it's all very well to go about fishing for popularity, like some people we know!"

"I suppose you mean *me*?" said Patsie quickly.

"If the cap fits, put it on."

Nellie and Claire began to giggle at the prospect of a spar between Patsie and Vivien. Dorothy was fiddling with her pencil and frowning.

"I don't let the kiddies take liberties with me," she vouchsafed; "yet they escort me home in relays every day."

"A monitress ought surely to be *liked*!" said Audrey plaintively.

"What I feel is, that we ought to work more in harmony," explained Lorraine. "It doesn't do for one monitress to allow a thing, and another to forbid it. The juniors don't know where they are."

"Yes, we can't each run the show on our own," agreed Patsie.

"Couldn't we draw up a sort of general list to go upon?"

"A black-list?"

"Well, I mean some general guiding rules."

"It's quite unnecessary," demurred Vivien. "My advice is to keep the kids in their places, and there'll be no more bother with them. It's that sloppy sentimental truckling to them that's at the bottom of all the trouble. I've got to go home now. You may make any rules you like, but I shan't promise to keep them."

Vivien scraped back her chair and clumped noisily from the room, leaving the majority of the committee indignant. They consulted together, and by general consent drew up a short code for the use of monitresses. They handed a copy of it to Vivien next morning. She glanced at it casually, and flung it into the waste-paper basket.

"I'm a monitress as much as the rest of you," she remarked, "and I have my authority from Miss Kingsley. I can't see that I'm answerable to anyone else."

Among the juniors, Vivien's reputation was not pleasant. Naturally, they talked over the monitresses among themselves. Juniors are sharp-eyed little mortals, and they had a very good idea of how matters stood.

"Vivien loves to boss," said Nan Carson. "She's wild because she's not head, and she takes it out of us in exchange."

"I don't see why she should order us about so."

"She's not a mistress!"

"No, only a monitress."

"It's not fair."

"I shall tell her so, some day."

"She's a mean old thing!"

"Why should we obey her?"

So matters jogged along till one day they reached a crisis. Vivien happened to be passing the door of Form II at about ten minutes to nine. It was, of course, before the official school hour, and Miss Poole had not yet entered to take the call-over. Some of the children were getting out books, some were making a last effort to learn lessons, and a few were talking, laughing, and throwing paper pellets at one another. They were not making very much noise, and most monitresses would have just walked past the door and taken no notice. Not so Vivien. She bustled in, and commanded order.

"Marjorie, sit down! Connie, shut your desk! Doris, stop talking! Effie, pick up those pieces of paper at once! You ought all to be quietly in your places."

"It's only ten minutes to nine," grumbled the girls.

"I don't care what time it is. If you're here at half-past eight you'll have to behave yourselves. I shall come in again in a few minutes, and if any girl is talking I shall put her name down."

Vivien stalked away, leaving mutiny behind her.

"No one's ever told us before that we weren't to talk before Miss Poole came into the room."

"It's absurd nonsense!"

"*Everybody* talks before nine!"

"You bet Vivien does herself!"

"I'm not going to sit still," piped Effie.

"Remember Vivien's coming back," warned Marjorie.

"She won't come back for a few minutes!" grinned Effie, hopping between the desks, "and I don't care if she does, either! I'm not afraid of Vivien! She may jaw away as much as she likes. It amuses her, and it doesn't hurt me. So there we are. See?"

Some of the girls sniggered, and Effie, encouraged by popular approbation, waxed more reckless still. She danced to the blackboard, seized the chalk, and began to draw.

"Here's Vivien's portrait," she announced. "This is her long nose, and this is her mouth, and this is her hair."

"Oh, it *is* like her!" chirruped Gracie.

"The very image!" hinned Doris.

"Shut up, Effie, and rub it off, you silly cockchafer," recommended Marjorie, giggling in spite of herself.

"No, no! I haven't finished. I must put her blouse and swanky tie. Wait a sec!" cried the artist, drawing in those details and adding a large balloon issuing from the mouth of her model, and containing the words: "No talking, girls!"

"You'll be caught," urged Marjorie, seizing the duster to clean the blackboard. Effie snatched it out of her hand.

"All right, Grannie. Half a sec. more! I've just time!"

And she scrawled hastily over the top of the portrait: "This is old Vivien."

The last half second was the undoing of Effie, for at that very same instant the mistress reentered the room. Effie wiped the blackboard with frantic speed, but not before Vivien had caught a clear view of her portrait. She glared first at Effie, who had skipped back to her place, then at the nine other conscious faces. Finally she announced:

"You'll every one of you report yourselves to me at four o'clock this afternoon. I shall expect you in the handicraft room, and you'll each bring a poetry book with you. I shall stay here now until Miss Poole comes. I'm not going to have this form a bear-garden."

The mistress, entering almost immediately, looked rather astonished to see Vivien standing by her desk. Her enquiring glance asked an explanation.

"It was necessary for someone to come in here and keep order, Miss Poole," vouchsafed Vivien.

The mistress turned a reproachful eye on her flock.

"I thought I could have trusted you, girls! I'm sorry to hear you've not been behaving yourselves."

The form focused indignant glances at Vivien, but dared not utter a protest. Their wrath, overflowed, however, at the earliest opportunity for conversation.

"Sneak!"

"Tell-tale-tit!"

"Mean thing!"

"And we've actually got to report ourselves to her at four o'clock."

"It's the limit!"

Though the juniors might rage, the established tradition of The Gables compelled them to comply with the monitress's orders. They grumbled, but obeyed. Directly afternoon school was over, ten sullen and sulky girls presented themselves at the door of the handicraft room. This was situated at the opposite end of the playground, and was, in fact, the old coach-house converted into a sort of joiner's shop. The school, in relays, learned wood-carving here, and carpentry, and clay modelling, and any other crafts which made too much mess inside the form rooms or the gymnasium.

Vivien was busy at the bench, planing a piece of wood. She greeted the victims grimly.

"If you can't remember to behave yourselves in school, you'll have to have something to remind you," she remarked. "You may all sit down there. Have you brought your poetry books? Very well, turn to page sixteen and learn the first three verses of Lochinvar. You'll stay here till you know them."

As a matter of fact, Vivien was entirely exceeding her authority. Miss Kingsley had never given the monitresses leave to keep girls in, or give them punishment lessons. Such privileges belonged to mistresses only. The form, however, was not aware of this, and supposed that she had received instructions from head-quarters. They took their places like martyrs, and opened their poetry books, outwardly submissive, but with black rebellion raging in their hearts.

Vivien, going on with her carpentering, kept a strict eye upon them, and said "Hush!" if any one attempted to con her task even in a whisper. She heard each child recite her verses separately, and would not let any of them go till all had said their portions perfectly. By the time they had completely finished it was a quarter to five.

"You may trot home now if you like," allowed the monitress. "And just let this be a lesson to you for the future. Go in order and close the door after you."

The martyrs made a decent exit, but once outside they stood and pulled faces at the closed door.

"She's an absolute beast!"

"It's abominable!"

"To keep us all this time!"

"And learning hateful poetry!"

"And we hadn't done anything to deserve it, either!"

"What can we do to pay her out?"

"I know," said Effie. "Hush!"

She held up a warning hand and ran back to the coach-house door. The key was on the outside, in the lock. She stood and listened for a moment, then turned it and fled across the playground, followed by the rest of the form. Instead of going home, however, they stayed in the cloak-room, giggling over their achievement.

"If she's so fond of the handicraft room, she may stay there!"

"She shall just be kept in herself, to see what it feels like."

"*Won't* she just be savage!"

"Serve her right!"

Vivien, having finished to her satisfaction the particular little bit of carpentering upon which she had been engaged, put away her tools at last, and turned to leave. She was very much surprised to find that she could not open the door. She rattled the handle, thinking it had stuck. Then she suddenly realized that it was locked, and that she was a prisoner. She hammered till her knuckles were sore, and shouted, but nobody came. It struck her that she was in an exceedingly awkward position. The handicraft room was some little distance from the house. It was improbable that Miss Kingsley, Miss Janet or the maids would hear her. The window was nailed up, and would not open, so escape that way was impossible. Had those wretched juniors locked her in on purpose, and scooted off home? She stamped with wrath at the idea. Yet it seemed only too probable. If so, would she have to spend the night here? The prospect was appalling. She made a last despairing assault on the door. To her immense relief a voice on the other side responded. It was a deep, gruff, evidently feigned voice, and it said:

"Hullo, there!"

"Hullo! Let me out!" shouted Vivien.

"No, thanks! You're better where you are!"

"Let me out, I tell you!"

"Gently! Gently! Don't show temper!"

Vivien seized the handle again, and rattled lustily, but with no effect. She thought she heard a noise like suppressed chuckling.

"*Will* you unlock this door and let me out?"

"If we do, will you promise not to boss so hard again?"

"I shan't promise anything of the sort!"

"Right oh! Ta-ta!"

The little wretches surely were not going?

"Here! Come back!" Vivien shouted.

She was allowed a moment or two for reflection, then the gruff voice again began to parley.

"Will you promise?"

"I shall do my duty as a monitress."

"But you won't *exceed* it?"

"All right!" rather sulkily.

"Honour bright, and no bunkum?"

"I've told you so."

The bottom of the door did not fit closely to the step, and presently through this small aperture the key was pushed. There was a sound of pelting footsteps. By the time Vivien had managed to unlock the door, nobody was in sight. She had the wisdom not to report the matter at head-quarters. She knew that she had exceeded her authority in keeping the children in, and doubted whether Miss Kingsley would back her up. It was too humiliating an experience to relate to her fellow-monitresses, so she kept it to herself. She utterly ignored it when she met the members of Form II next morning. Several of them blushed so consciously that she easily guessed who had been the ringleaders, but she judged it discreet to take no more notice. The sinners, giggling over the joke among themselves, decided that they were now quits with Vivien.

CHAPTER IX

White Elephants

It was Patsie's stroke of genius that originated the White Elephant Sale. The school was racking its brains to raise a little money for the Prisoners of War Fund, and had swept aside as impossible such schemes as a bazaar, a pound day, or self-denial boxes.

"Lily tried it on last term, and it was no go," said Vivien; "couldn't make the kids shell out."

"Well, they *are* only kids," qualified Nellie; "and, of course, they haven't much pocket-money, so what can you expect?"

"We mustn't aim too high," said Claire. "If we plan something too big we scare them, and they won't do anything at all--say their mothers object, and all the rest of the usual excuses."

"Well, everyone *is* rather fed up with appeals," admitted Audrey, lazily stretching her arms; "they come in by the dozen with the morning's post."

"And are generally chucked into the waste-paper basket," commented Lorraine. "*That* doesn't help the prisoners of war. Suggestions, please, quick!"

"Best put an advertisement in the newspapers: 'Wanted, a new way of raising money without taking it out of the pockets of subscribers!'" chuckled Dorothy.

"Look here!" said Lorraine. "Joking apart, I think everybody's prepared either to give or spend just a little--even the kids. They've money enough for chinks, pencils, and all the rubbish they fill their pockets with."

"And swop in the cloak-room," added Claudia.

"Yes, they *do* swop," exclaimed Patsie. "That's exactly what they love beyond everything. Claudia Castleton, you've given me a brain wave! We'll have a 'White Elephant' sale. Don't look so staggered! A 'white elephant' is a thing you don't want yourself, but which someone else might like very much. We must all of us have got heaps of such things at home. Well, we'll bring them to school, and let them go as bargains--cheap. They ought to go like wildfire, and if there are any left, we'll have an auction. It would be prime fun!"

"Patsie Sullivan, I should like to shake hands with you!" declared Lorraine. "When women go into Parliament, I believe you'll become a distinguished member of the House of Commons! Brains like yours ought to be devoted to the service of their country!"

"I think it *is* rather a cute idea," admitted Patsie modestly.

"We'll get to work upon it at once."

The next day, Lorraine pinned up in the cloak-room a large hand-printed poster which ran as follows:

WHAT PRICE WHITE ELEPHANTS?

Have you anything at home you don't want?
Then bring it to the school and sell it!
Do you wish to buy nice things cheap?
Come to our WHITE ELEPHANT SALE!
Bargains will be flying!
You will go home all smiles!

Remember, everything you buy helps to feed a British
Prisoner of War!

"Flatter myself it's rather telling!" she confessed, as she watched the juniors crowd round to look. "There's nothing like a bargain to appeal to people!"

"I reckon it's going to catch on!" chuckled Patsie.

It did catch on. The juniors decided that the idea was "topping", and readily promised contributions.

"We shall want cash too," Lorraine reminded them. "Remember, you've to buy somebody else's things as well as give your own."

"Right you are! We'll make a half-crown league, if you like."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that! It might be rough on some of the kids. Give what you can, that's all."

The next step in the proceedings was to hunt at home for white elephants. Lorraine and Monica turned out drawers and cupboards in search of any articles with which they could dispense.

"It's not a rummage sale, so we mustn't send rubbish," decreed Lorraine. "It's got to be something somebody will take a fancy to. I wonder if Rosemary wants this book of songs? I believe Vivien would buy them."

"Then put them in the sale and ask Rosemary afterwards," counselled Monica, rapidly running through the contents of an Indian box, and contributing two chains of Eastern beads and some bangles. "I've a pile of old story books I've done with. I expect those First Form kids would like them. And I've some chalks and a drawing slate."

"And I've an almost new blotter, and some Indian curios, and some foreign stamps, and a very good post-card album, and a quite new birthday book."

"That Kate Greenaway one? Oh! you promised to give it to *me*!" exclaimed Monica.

"You've got two of your own already!"

"I don't care! I want this as well."

"Then buy it at the sale."

"No, I'm going to get Jill's box of pastels and Miriam's autograph album. I've bagged them in advance. Tibbiekins, I *must* have that birthday book!"

"You can't, Cuckoo! Don't be greedy!"

"But you *promised*!"

"Well, I can't help it if I did, and I don't remember promising, anyway. That birthday book's going down to the sale, and if you want it, you'll just have to buy it. There!"

"You mean thing!" blazed Monica. "Just because you're head girl, you think you can do as you like. Keep your old birthday book, and sell it to anybody you can. *I* shan't buy it! But I'll pay you out for this--see if I don't! I think you're perfectly hateful, Lorraine! I wish you'd go away to a boarding school, or to a college like Rosemary. I don't want you here at home, anyway!"

"All right, draw it mild!" said Lorraine, who was well accustomed to her younger sister's outbursts of temper.

"You really did promise poor Cuckoo that Kate Greenaway birthday book," remarked Mrs. Forrester later in the evening.

"I can't remember anything at all about it, Mother," said Lorraine impatiently. "Cuckoo makes such an absurd fuss. Surely she might be ready to give up something for the prisoners of war. It's not good for her always to get her own way! She's really so absurdly spoilt!"

"Somebody else likes her own way occasionally!" suggested Mrs. Forrester, with uplifted eyebrows.

"Well, you can't say I'm spoilt! The middle girl never is. It's Rosemary and Monica who get all the attention in this family!" declared Lorraine, flouncing out of the room in a state of mind bordering on rebellion.

She wrapped up the birthday book in white tissue paper, and packed it the first of all her articles for the sale. The best of us have our faults, and there was a strain of obstinacy in Lorraine's disposition. She and Monica had waged war before this, on occasion. They did not speak to each other at supper.

"What a nice, cheerful thing it is to have two thunder-clouds sitting at the table!" commented Mrs. Forrester. "It's so pleasant for the rest of us, isn't it?"

"Mind the milk doesn't turn sour!" chuckled Mervyn. "You girls are the limit!"

The sale, by special permission of Miss Kingsley, was fixed for three o'clock on Thursday afternoon, a whole hour's lessons being remitted in its favour. It was to be held in the gymnasium, and the articles were to be spread out on

benches. Each form had contributed its own quota, and had appointed two representatives as saleswomen. The goods were marked, but bargaining was permissible if the figure was considered by the saleswoman to be too high. The mistresses constituted a court of appeal on this score.

All had done really nobly in the way of bringing contributions, and most of the "white elephants" were quite useful and desirable possessions. The girls wandered round, looking at an assortment of brooches, penknives, pencil-boxes, paints, chalks, books, music, blotters, photo frames, toys, and a number of little trifles such as girls love. Lorraine, with three weeks' accumulated pocket money, a hitherto unspent birthday present, and what was left in her savings-box, felt in a position to be munificent, and determined to patronize each separate stall. She first made a tour of them all, before she should decide upon her purchases.

"It's quite a good show," said Vivien, fondly fingering a black cat mascot she had just bought and fastened upon her blouse. "Seen the kids' things? They're ripping, some of them. They must have been looting at home! I've got the prettiest little purse! I'll show it to you. Only gave sixpence for it. It's a real bargain!"

"I've been wanting a muff chain for *years!*" declared Nellie. "I put it down regularly on my birthday and Christmas lists, but my family always gave me something else instead. Now don't you think this is just the jinkiest one you've ever seen? I can't think how Audrey could part with it!"

"Muff chains aren't fashionable now!"

"That won't trouble me in the least!"

"I hunted out my old dolls and dolls' clothes," said Claire, "and the kids went wild over them. Dora doesn't care for dolls, so it was no use keeping them for *her*. She's a regular tomboy."

"What did you bring, Claudia?" asked Nellie.

"Those *Art Magazines* and copies of *The Connoisseur*. Dad let me have them from his studio."

"Oh, goody! They're the very things I want!" rejoiced Lorraine. "Tell Patsie not to sell them till I come!"

She had reached the Second Form stall, and was hurriedly reviewing its contents, gazing over the heads of a chattering mob of juniors. Suddenly she gave a gasp of consternation. In the middle of the bench, temptingly spread forth in a row, were a number of objects with which she was familiar--some coloured supplements from Christmas numbers, a mug with a robin on it, a sandalwood box, a carved photo frame, a travelling ink-pot, two plaques of Thorwaldsen's "Night" and "Morning", and a model of a Swiss chalet. They were household articles which she had appropriated to herself, and had hidden away for safety in a drawer on the top landing at home. Each one was a treasure. She loved the coloured supplements, and had meant to have them framed when she could afford it. The robin mug was her last link with childhood. The chalet, though really the property of Richard, had been knocking about in the attic till she had rescued it, and the other things had all been apparently discarded by their rightful owners until she had adopted them. To see them here, laid out ready for sale, was a shock.

"It's that abominable little wretch of a Cuckoo! I'll slay her for this!" she thought grimly, and started off to find the offender. She discovered her among a crowd of kindred pig-tails, and dragged her away into a discreet corner.

"What do you mean by priggish my things for your stall?" she demanded angrily.

"They're not your things!" retorted Monica. "Not more than anybody else's. Those coloured pictures belong to Father and Mother, and the chalet was Richard's, only I'm sure he doesn't want it, and the ink-pot's the one Aunt Ellie left behind, and the photo frame is Rosemary's. I found them all in a drawer on the top landing."

"You knew I'd put them there!"

Monica coloured to the tips of her ears.

"They're as much mine as yours!" she flared.

"Did Mother say you might have them?"

"I didn't ask her, and no more did you when you took them! Anyhow, they're 'white elephants' now, and 'on sale!'"

"You must get them back, Monica!" urged Lorraine desperately. "Tell Kitty and Joan you took them by mistake!"

"How can I? Really, Lorraine, I wonder at you! Do you want me to disgrace the family? Nice thing it would look for the head girl's sister to take things back that she'd just given! Why, the whole form would scoff at us! Surely you might be ready to give up something for the prisoners of war? That's what you said about me, at any rate! If you want your

old things, you must buy them back!"

And Monica, making a sudden dive between two Fifth Form girls, escaped from her sister, and sought the farthest corner of the gymnasium.

In spite of her indignation, Lorraine could not help acknowledging that there was justice in these remarks. It would certainly be most undignified, and in fact impossible, to take back articles once given to the sale. Cuckoo's taunt about the prisoners of war stung Lorraine badly. If she wanted her treasures, there was nothing for it but to put the best face she could on the matter, and buy them at once before anybody else had an innings. It might already be too late. In considerable anxiety she hurried back to the stall, and found a curly-headed junior critically handling the robin mug. She snatched it from the child with scant ceremony.

"If you don't want this, Doris, I do! How much, Kitty, please? I'll take these pictures too; yes, and this chalet; and I'll have the ink-pot and the frame as well. That's all, if you'll make them into a parcel. Thanks!" and Lorraine sailed away, leaving Doris open-mouthed, and Kitty cheerfully clinking the change in her brown leather moneybag. It was annoying to have spent so much, for it meant forgoing a piece of music which she had intended to give to Morland. She watched her cousin buy it instead.

"I'll borrow it from Vivien and copy it," she thought rapidly. "Or if Morland plays it twice over, he'll have it by heart. Hallo! Four o'clock already, and these stalls not half cleared! We shall have to have an auction."

Patsie, on being consulted, agreed, and readily undertook the post of auctioneer, to which she was voted by general accord.

"I don't know whether to take it as compliment or not," she twittered. "I suppose you think I've got the gift of the gab, and will make a good Cheap Jack! Well, I'll do my best for you. Here goes! Give me a ruler or something for a hammer."

A treble line of girls spread themselves round in an amused circle. Patsie, and especially Patsie in a bantering mood, was always worth listening to. They prepared themselves for a half-hour of sheer fun.

The amateur auctioneer--or rather auctioneers--seized upon the first thing that came to hand, which happened to be one of Claire's discarded dolls. She held it aloft, and descanted eloquently upon its virtues.

"Look at this!" she proclaimed. "A real Parisian doll--*bebe jumeau--je fais dodo--je voudrais une maman*--and all the rest of it! Kindly notice, they're real ball joints, and not just slung together with bits of elastic. Observe the beautiful little teeth, that might have stepped out of a dentist's advertisement, and the richness of the brown curls. 'Hair rather thin', did someone remark? Well, buy a new wig for it, then; you can't expect everything! 'Lost a hand?' So have a good many of our soldiers. It's only in the fashion. Be glad it hasn't lost both, and a leg too! White silk dress and red coat, and clothes that take on and off! Why, I feel that I want to play with it myself, and take it to bed with me. What offers? Someone kindly make a bid to begin. Two shillings--thank you! Two and six! Three shillings! Come, ladies, it's worth pounds instead of shillings at present-day prices! Four shillings! Four and six! I see I shall have to buy it myself. Only four and six! I'm getting too fond of it to part with it! Five shillings! I'm going to name it Rosabelle! Five shillings! Going at only five shillings! With a red coat and a white silk dress! I'll throw in this hat as well. Five shillings--who'll say five and six? It's a real bargain. The sort you only meet once in a lifetime. Going at five and six! Real Parisian. Going! Going! Gone!"

Patsie struck her ruler on the back of an extemporized desk, and dropped the doll in question into the delighted arms of Virginia Hewlett; then, leaving Dorothy to complete the business part of the transaction, transferred her attention to other objects of sale.

"Here's a post-card album!" she announced. "If you don't collect post cards, you ought to; and if you haven't an album to put them in, now's your chance! Best crocodile back! 'Imitation', did somebody remark? Well, never mind, it's quite as good as original. We can't import crocodiles during the war. The Kaiser's bought them all up to manufacture crocodile tears! 'Some of the slips torn'? Mend them up with a little seccotine, and they'll be as good as new. Fourpence! Sixpence! Eightpence! A shilling! Going at a shilling! Going! Gone!"

There seemed no end to Patsie's powers of apt description. The girls giggled hysterically as, almost with tears in her voice, she descanted upon the merits of a cracked teapot, the beauties of a battered birdcage, or the capacity of a Japanese pencil-box. The fun of out-bidding spread like infection, and many of the articles fetched far more than they had originally been marked at by their owners. There are limits, however, to school-girl pockets, and Miss Kingsley had made a special proviso that no credit was to be given. As the purses grew thin, the objects on sale went off, as Patsie expressed it, "dirt cheap", and several girls secured bargains surpassing even their wildest dreams.

"Time's getting on, and we put up the shutters at five," continued the loquacious auctioneeress. "I'll take the rest in lots. Some one please give me a cough lozenge, for my throat's getting hoarse. You don't wonder? Then take my place, and do the talking yourself. You're welcome to it. Oh! you'd rather not, when it comes to the point? Give me a bid, then, to start this charming assortment of fancy articles--chalks, marbles, pencils, wools all mixed together and going for next to nothing. Pennies will do it. We don't want to take anything home again."

Thanks to Patsie's persuasive tongue, the whole stock of goods was at last disposed of, and quite a nice little sum was counted up for the prisoners of war.

The girls trudged home with their parcels, in high spirits, voting the whole affair a huge success, and laughing immoderately over some of the incidents. Vivien, in an unwonted mood of generosity, actually offered to copy the piece of music for her cousin. Claire and Nellie, after quarrelling over a framed picture, patched up peace, and presented it between them to their form mistress.

Lorraine, when she reached her own bedroom, locked her particular treasures securely in her bottom drawer. But that night, when she was settling snugly on her pillow, there was a patter of bedroom slippers along the landing, her door burst open, and a little sobbing, dressing-gowned figure came creeping into her bed.

"I'm sorry I took your things," it gulped. "I c--c--couldn't go to sleep till I'd said so. I t--t--took them because I was cross about the b--b--birthday book. I was a b--b--b--east!"

"I was a bigger beast, Cuckoo!" confessed Lorraine, hugging her tight. "Look here, I'll buy you another Kate Greenaway birthday book, exactly the same only absolutely new, and give it to you for Christmas. Would you like that?"

"Yes, I'd love it. But might I have it *before* Christmas? I meant to copy some of those dear little pictures on to a calendar for Mother. She said she liked them so much, and I'd planned it for her present, and *that* was why I wanted the birthday book so badly."

"Poor old Cuckoo! I understand. I'll order it at once at Smith's."

"You don't think me greedy?"

"Not a bit of it! I wish I'd known about the calendar. There, wipe your eyes, and go back to your own bed. It's striking ten, and you ought to have been asleep an hour ago!"

CHAPTER X

A Sinister Incident

'Twixt home and The Gables, Lorraine found her life that autumn a very busy one. As head girl, the demands made on her time were considerable. She sometimes thought it would have been easier to be at a boarding school, where her whole energies could have been focused upon school matters; private interests, though very enthralling, were certainly a hindrance. And there were so many of them—her painting lessons and delightful intimacy with Margaret Lindsay, and the rich art world that had thereby opened its doors to her; an increasing friendship with Morland Castleton, whose musical genius spurred her on to fresh efforts at her violin; her affection for Claudia and for the rest of the merry crew of the Castleton family; to say nothing of the dear home people who claimed her attention: Richard and Donald fighting in France, Rodney making his first flights in the Air Force, Rosemary hard at work in the college of music, and writing ecstatic weekly budgets of her experiences, Mervyn with his fun and nonsense and gossip from the Grammar School, and Monica, who was the spoilt darling of the family.

Whatever her faults, Lorraine possessed to the full that intense zest of life that the French call "using up one's heart". It is a gift that—thank God!—the war has given to most of our British girlhood. The old, fashionable attitude of boredom, that at one time spread like a blight over certain classes of society, is happily passing away, purged by the common need of sacrifice. It is incredible that at one time girls could exist in this world, possessed of eyes and ears, and pass by the touching, dramatic, joyous human comedy as though they were blind and deaf. All the things we learn at school are of no value to us unless with them we learn to love life—life in all its aspects of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, work and pleasure.

There was so much going on at The Gables, both in lessons and games. The hockey season had begun, and every Wednesday afternoon the school played in a field on the cliffs which they rented; under the coaching of Miss Paget, a new mistress, the teams were improving. Dorothy as captain made a much better leader than Helen Stanley had done a year ago, and Patsie and Vivien as half-backs were considered rising stars. The second team, which hitherto had been rather contemptible, raised its standard to an amazing extent, and seemed to promise great things. The girls began to look forward to Wednesdays.

One bright sunny afternoon in early November they were assembled on the field. In their navy serge skirts and scarlet jerseys they made a bright patch of colour against the green of the grass and the autumn blue of the sky and the grey-blue expanse of sea that spread beneath the yellow cliffs. It was a pretty scene, with a background of late-flowering gorse bushes and a foreground of corn marigold that edged the field. The sunshine fell on the athletic figures and hatless heads of the teams. A very pretty scene indeed, and so evidently thought a dark-faced, clean-shaven individual who was dodging about the gate, busy with a camera. He fixed a stand, put his head repeatedly under a black velvet cloth, and was apparently focusing upon the groups of players. The girls noticed him, and pointed him out to Miss Paget. The dragon in her was at once roused to wrath, and she advanced in defence of her flock.

"May I ask on what authority you're taking photographs of this school?" she asked icily.

The stranger was all smiles and civility. He displayed an excellent set of teeth as, with a decidedly foreign bow and flourish of his hat, he offered a plausible explanation.

"I ask your pardon, Madam! I am an American—a journalist. I have been sent by my newspaper to England to write an article upon Girls' Schools. I have heard of yours, and wish to include it in my report, with a photo of its pupils. I crave your permission to take a snapshot of the game."

Miss Paget stared at him with suspicion. She was a good judge of character, and had studied types of nationality; moreover, she had herself spent six months in the United States. The man's physiognomy and accent were anything but American. She would set them down as decidedly Teutonic.

"Certainly not!" she replied. "Miss Kingsley would not dream of permitting it."

"But I have permission from Miss Kingsley!" he fawned. "I am to send her photos."

"Miss Kingsley did not mention the matter to me, and unless I have her express directions I cannot allow it. Will you kindly remove your camera?"

"Just one little snapshot!" he begged insinuatingly.

"You've interrupted our game. Will you please go? And I must remind you that this is a military area, and that, unless

you have a signed permit for photography, you are liable to be arrested."

"Oh, that is all right! I have the credentials of my newspaper, as well as the assent of Miss Kingsley."

Miss Paget's temper, which had been rapidly rising, now fizzed over.

"If you don't take yourself off, I'll send some of my pupils to fetch the coast-guard!" she thundered.

With an apologetic shrug of the shoulders the interloper packed up his camera and departed, not without trying to secure a hurried surreptitious snapshot with a small kodak, an effort which was nipped in the bud by Miss Paget, who stood like a sentry at the gate, speeding his departure. She watched him till he was safely out of sight and then joined the excited girls, some of whom had overheard the conversation.

"That's no American!" she proclaimed. "And I don't for a moment believe that he had permission from Miss Kingsley to photograph the school."

"She'd have said so, surely," commented Vivien.

"Probably he didn't even know her name till you mentioned it, Miss Paget," said Lorraine.

"He's a foreigner in my opinion--possibly a spy," continued the mistress. "This field would make a most excellent landing-place for enemy aircraft. One can't be too careful in these matters--living as we do near the coast, in a military zone. The cheek of the man, too! Calmly to set up his camera and begin to take us without asking leave! Even in times of peace it would be unpardonable. I must say I have the very strongest suspicions of his intentions."

"It seems rather the wrong time for an American magazine to be wanting an article on English Girls' Schools," said Patsie.

"It's the most flimsy excuse."

The affair made quite a sensation in the school. Miss Kingsley, when the matter was reported to her, disclaimed all knowledge of the photographer or any commission to him to take the hockey teams. She was justly indignant, and almost thought of mentioning the incident to the police. The girls talked the affair threadbare. They were quite sure they had had an encounter with a spy. Their suspicions were further justified in the course of a few days by an experience of Lorraine's.

She was going by train on Saturday morning to Ranock, a little place a few miles from Porthkeverne, whither her mother had sent her to return some books to a friend who lived near the station. There were several other people in the compartment; and sitting in the corner on the side next to the sea was a man whom Lorraine was nearly sure she recognized as the pertinacious stranger of the hockey field. She watched him now keenly. He was gazing out of the window at the sand-hills and stretches of marshy shore. Presently they passed the golf links, and, quick as thought, he whisked a little kodak from his pocket and began to take instantaneous photographs through the carriage window. Lorraine uttered an exclamation and nudged the gentleman who sat next to her. Promptly he interfered.

"Look here! Snapshots aren't allowed without a permit," he remonstrated.

The photographer slipped the kodak back into his pocket and smiled his former plausible smile.

"I am an American," he began, "a journalist. I have been sent by my newspaper to England, to write an article upon golf links. I wish to include those of Porthkeverne, with illustrations."

"Have you a permit?" persisted his fellow-passenger. "You'll get yourself into trouble if you haven't. The authorities are uncommonly strict about it."

"It's a queer dodge to photograph the golf links from a railway carriage," commented someone else.

"Not at all! I take hundreds of photos for my magazine in this way," explained the self-styled journalist.

"Well, you'll just not take any now," returned the other. "If you do, I shall inform the guard."

Lorraine listened excitedly. She was quite loath to leave the compartment at Ranock. She wondered to what destination the man was travelling, and hoped that the other passengers would keep an eye on him. She went that afternoon to see her uncle, Barton Forrester, who was a special constable, and told him about both incidents. He looked thoughtful.

"I'll report the matter to Wakelin," he commented. "One can't be too careful in a place like this. Of course the fellow might have a permit, but it had better be inquired into. Give me as accurate a description of him as you can."

Lorraine shut her eyes, visualized, and gave her impressions of the stranger. Uncle Barton rapidly jotted down a few notes. He communicated the result to the chief constable, who issued an order that the next time anyone answering to that description was sighted his photographic permit was to be demanded and inspected. There is such a thing, however, as shutting the stable door after the steed is stolen; and, in spite of the vigilance of the local police, nothing further was seen or heard of the enterprising photographer. He had evidently betaken himself and his camera to other scenes of adventure.

The school talked about the episode for a while with bated breath, then forgot it in the whirl of other interests. It was getting near Christmas time, and there was ever so much to be done in preparation. The excitement of the moment was the rhythmic dancing display. All the term a teacher had been coming weekly from St. Cyr, and those lucky individuals who were members of the dancing class had had the time of their lives. Of course the musical ones, and those with some idea of the poetry of motion, scored the most, but even those who were not naturally graceful enjoyed the movements.

Miss Kingsley had decided that her pupils should give a display of what they had learnt, and invited an audience of parents and friends to the gymnasium on breaking-up day. The performance was to begin at three o'clock, and long before that hour the proud band of selected artistes, arrayed in their costumes, were assembled ready in the small studio which served as a dressing-room. There were a good many of them, and the space was limited, so it was a decided cram.

"Everybody seems to take up so much more room than usual to-day," declared Patsie, flinging out a long arm with a floral garland, and hitting Effie Swan by accident in the eye.

"Of course they do, when they're as clumsy as you are," retorted that distressed damsel, with her handkerchief to the injured orb. "I call you the absolute limit, Patsie--you're fit for nothing but a barn dance! Clogs would suit you better than sandals."

"Gently, child, gently! Sorry if I've hurt your eye, but don't let that warp your judgment. The Flower Quadrille's going to be rather choice, though I say it as shouldn't."

"The others' part of it, perhaps, but not yours."

"There, don't get excited! I forgive you!"

"It's for me to forgive, not for you, I think!" grumbled Effie. "A nice object I shall look dancing with my eye all red and inflamed!"

"I wish the gym. were a larger room!" groused Theresa. "The dances would have a much better effect if there were more space for them, and I should like a parquet floor."

"What else would you like?" snapped Lorraine. "Some people would grumble in Paradise. The old gym's not such a bad place for a performance, and the floor has been chalked. I think myself it's a very decent sort of room. Would you like to dance on the lawn?"

"Not in December, thanks!"

"Are you ready, girls?" asked Miss Paget, opening the door. "Miss Leighton has just come, and we're going to begin."

There was no doubt that the dances were extremely pretty. Miss Leighton was an excellent teacher, and her pupils did her credit. The audience was charmed, and clapped with the utmost enthusiasm at the end of each performance. There was a Daisy Dance, in which twelve little girls, dressed to represent daisies, went through a series of very graceful movements; and a Rose Gavotte that was equally pretty and tasteful. A Butterflies' Ball, in which the dancers waved gorgeous wings of painted muslin, was highly effective; and so was the Russian Mazurka, given by Vivien and Dorothy, attired in fur-trimmed costumes and high scarlet leather boots. The babies looked sweet in a Doll Dance, and little Beatrice Perry made a sensation by her *pas seul* as "Cupid", dressed in a classic toga with the orthodox bow and arrows. She was a beautifully made child of six, and danced barefooted, so she looked the part admirably, and quite carried the audience by storm.

Monica, with floating fair hair, a figured muslin dress and a basket of flowers, capered as a "Spring Wind" and dropped blossoms in the path of "April"; even Patsie, the overgrown, looked quite pretty in her Flower Quadrille. But everybody decided that the star of the afternoon was Claudia. She was beautiful to begin with, and her forget-me-not costume suited her exactly. Perhaps her long experience in posing as a model for her father's pictures made it easier for her to learn the right postures. She had dropped into the rhythmic dancing as into a birthright; her movements seemed

the very embodiment of natural grace, and to watch her was like surprising the fairies at dawn, or the dryads and oreads in a classic forest. The best of Claudia was that she was quite without self-consciousness. She danced because she enjoyed it, not to command admiration. She received the storm of clapping quite as a matter of course, just as she took the exhibition of her many portraits in the Academy.

"I'd give anything to have your face," said Patsie enviously to her afterwards. "Some folks are luckers! Why wasn't I born pretty? It gives people such a tremendous pull!"

"I don't know," answered Claudia, rather taken aback at the question.

"Look here!" said Lorraine; "we've got to take the faces our mothers gave us. Haven't you heard of a beautiful *plain* person? I know several who haven't a single decent feature, and yet somehow they're lovely in spite of it all. Some of the most fascinating women in the world have been plain--George Sand hadn't an atom of beauty, and yet she enthralled two such geniuses as Chopin and Alfred de Musset."

"I'll go in for fascination, then," rattled on Patsie. "We can't all be in the same style. Claudia shall do the Venus business, and I'll be a what-do-you-call-it? Siren?"

"Oh, no! Sirens were wretches!"

"Why, I thought they were only a sort of mermaid! Well, I'll be very modern--chic, and *spirituelle*, and witty, and *fin-de-siecle* and all the rest of it; and I'll have a salon like those French women used to have, and everybody'll want to come to it, and talk about the charming Miss Sullivan, only perhaps I'll be Mrs. Somebody by that time! I hope so, at any rate. I don't mean to be left in the lurch, if I can help it!"

"What shall you do if you are?" laughed Lorraine.

"Go in for a career, my dear!" said Patsie airily. "Farming, or Parliament, or doctoring. Everything's open to us women now!"

"Well, I wouldn't try Rhythmic Dancing, at any rate! You're certainly not cut out for that!" scoffed Effie, whose injured eye was still smarting.

CHAPTER XI

Madame Bertier

"When the bitter north wind blows,
Very red is Baba's nose,
Very cold are Baba's toes:
When the north wind's blowing.
When the north wind's blowing!"

So sang Monica, rather out of tune, as she reached home, in a scratchy mood, on the first afternoon of the January term, and hurried up to the fire.

"I don't like school! I *don't* like it!" she proclaimed to a sympathetic audience of Rosemary, Cousin Elsie, and Richard (who was home on leave). "I call it cruelty to send me every single day to sit for five whole hours at a horrid little desk, stuffing my head with things I don't want to know, and never *shall* want to know, if I live to be a hundred. *Why* must I go?"

"Poor kiddie!" laughed Richard. "You've got it badly! It's a disease I used to suffer from myself. They called it 'schoolophobia' when I was young. They cured it with a medicine called 'spinkum-pankum', if I remember rightly--one of those good old-fashioned remedies, don't you know, that our grandmothers always went by."

"You're making fun of me!" chafed Monica. "And I do really mean what I say. It's cold at school, and horrid, and Miss Davis is always down on me, and I hate it. Why must I go?"

"And *why* must I go back to the trenches?"

"*Don't!*"

"All serene! You and I'll find a desert island together somewhere, and live upon it for the rest of our lives. You see, they'd never have us back again if we deserted. We'd have to stop on our island for evermore!"

"I thought you liked The Gables?" yawned Elsie. "Vivien does. I'm sure it's a very nice school."

"Oh, Vivien! I dare say! It's all very fine for monitresses. But when you're in the Third Form, and your desk's on the cold side of the room, it's the limit. Yes, I dare say I *shall* get chilblains if I sit close to the fire, *but I don't care!*"

"The first day's always a little grizzly," agreed Lorraine, who had followed Monica to the hearth-rug and joined the circle of fire-worshippers. "One hates getting into harness again after the holidays. I believe Rosemary's the only one of us who really enthuses. You'll be gone, too, by next week, Quavers! But I suppose you really *enjoy* singing exercises, and having professors storming at you."

"Of course I do," said Rosemary, with a rather unconvincing note in her voice.

Lorraine glanced at her quickly, but the little brown head was lowered, and shadows hid the sweet face. Lorraine could not understand Rosemary these holidays. She had returned from her first term at the College of Music seemingly as full of enthusiasm as ever, and yet there was "a something". She gave rapturous accounts of pupils' concerts, of singing classes, of fellow-students, of rising stars in the musical world, of favourite teachers, of fun at the College and at the hostel where she boarded. She had made many new friendships, and was apparently having the time of her life.

"From her accounts you'd think it was all skittles, but I'm sure there's a hitch somewhere!" mused Lorraine.

Rosemary, with her big eyes and bigger aspirations, had always been more or less of a problem. The family had decided emphatically that she was its genius. They looked for great things from her when her course at the College should be finished. They all experienced a sort of second-hand credit in her anticipated achievements. It is so nice to have someone else to do the clever things while we ourselves wear a reflected glory thereby. Mrs. Forrester, mother-proud of her musical chick, could not refrain from a little gentle boasting about her daughter's talents. She told everybody that she liked girls to have careers, and that parents ought to make every effort to let a gifted child have a chance. In Lorraine's estimation Rosemary's future was to be one round of triumph, ending possibly in a peal of wedding bells. Lorraine was fond of making up romances, and had evolved a highly-satisfactory hero for her sister. He was always tall, but his eyes varied in colour, and he sometimes had a moustache and sometimes was clean-shaven. Though his personal appearance varied from day to day, his general qualities persisted, and he invariably possessed a shooting-box in Scotland, where he would be prepared to extend a warm welcome to his bride's younger sister.

Meantime, though Rosemary had been a whole term at the college, her family had no means of judging her progress. She had diligently practised scales, exercises and arpeggios, but had steadfastly refused to sing any songs to them. Vainly they had begged for old favourites; she was obdurate to the point of obstinacy.

"Signor Arezzo doesn't want me to! I'm studying on his special method, and he's most particular about it. He keeps everybody at exercises for the first term. When I go back he says perhaps he'll let me have just *one* song."

"But surely it couldn't spoil your voice to sing 'My Happy Garden'?" demanded her father, much disappointed.

"He forbade it *entirely!*" declared Rosemary emphatically.

This new attitude of Rosemary's of hiding her light under a bushel was trying to Lorraine. She had been looking forward to showing off her clever musical sister to Morland. She had expected the two to become chums at once, but they did nothing of the sort. Rosemary treated Morland with the airy patronage that a girl, who has just begun to mix with older men, sometimes metes out to a boy of seventeen. She was not nearly as much impressed by his playing as Lorraine had anticipated.

"He ought to learn from Signor Rassuli!" she commented. "Nobody who hasn't studied on *his* method can possibly have a touch!"

"But Morland's exquisite touch is his great point!" persisted Lorraine indignantly.

"I can't stand the boy!" yawned Rosemary.

It is always most amazing, when we like a person exceedingly ourselves, to find that somebody else has formed a different opinion. With all his shortcomings, Lorraine appreciated Morland. He often missed his appointments, and was generally late for everything, but when he turned up he played her accompaniments as no one else ever played them. Moreover, he was a very pleasant companion, and full of fun in a mild artistic sort of fashion of his own. He was certainly one of the central figures in the beautiful, shiftless, Bohemian household on the hill. Lorraine had a sense that, when he went, the Castleton family would lose its corner stone. Yet some day he would be bound to go.

"I expect to be called up in March!" he announced one day.



"EVERYTHING'S GONE WRONG!" DECLARED LORRAINE TRAGICALLY

Lorraine looked at him critically. Morland, with his ripply hair and the features of a Fra Angelico angel, would seem out of place in khaki. His dreamy, unpunctual ways and general lack of concentration would be highly exasperating to his drill-sergeant. She wondered what would happen when, as usual, he turned up late. Artistic temperaments did not fit in well with the stern realities of life. She had a feeling that they ought to be exempted.

Music, this term, was more to the fore than usual in Lorraine's horizon. After Christmas a fresh teacher had come to the school, who gave lessons in French, violin, and piano. Her name was Madame Bertier, and she was a Russian by birth, though her husband was a Belgian at present interned in Germany.

She was a new arrival at Porthkeverne, and had rooms in the artists' quarter of the town. She spent her mornings at The Gables, and filled up her afternoons by taking private pupils. Like most Russians, she had a charming manner, and was brimming over with talent. She was a striking-looking woman, with a clear, pale complexion, flashing hazel eyes, and carefully arranged coiffure. Her delicate hands were exquisitely manicured. She dressed becomingly, and wore handsome rings. Her foreign accent was decidedly pretty.

Most of the school, and the Sixth Form in particular, went crazy over her. They admired her frocks, her hair, her earrings, and the whole charming air of "finish" about her. It became the fashion of the moment to adore her. Those

girls who took private music lessons from her were counted lucky. The members of the French class vied with one another in presenting offerings of violets or early snowdrops. She accepted the little bouquets as gracefully as a prima donna.

"She's *the* most absolutely topping person I've ever met!" affirmed Vivien, who was one of her most ardent worshippers.

"Um--well enough!" said Lorraine, whose head was not turned by the new idol. "She's not quite my style, somehow. I always feel she's out for admiration."

"Well, she deserves to be admired."

"Not so consciously, though."

"I think she's too precious for words. It's something even to be in the same room with her!" gushed Audrey. "I've scored over you, Vivien, because she's written two verses in my album, and she only wrote one in yours!"

"Yes, but it was original poetry in mine!"

"How do you know, when it's in Russian?"

"She said so, at any rate."

"Oh! I must ask her to put in an original one for me."

"She's coming to tea with us to-morrow."

"You lucker!"

There seemed no lengths to which the girls would not go. Several of them kept sentimental diaries in which were recorded the doings and sayings of their deity. Audrey's ran as follows:--

Jan. 15th.--A new sun rose in the sky, and the world of school has changed for me. I could do nothing but gaze.

Jan. 16th.--Her name is Madame Bertier.

Jan. 17th.--Her Christian name is Olga Petrovna.

Jan. 18th.--She looked directly at me, and I blushed.

Jan. 19th.--To-day she smiled upon me.

Jan. 22nd.--To-day she accepted my flowers.

Jan. 23rd.--A black day. Vivien has engrossed her entirely.

Jan. 24th.--I have asked Mother to call upon her.

Jan. 25th.--The world dark. Mother too busy to call.

Jan. 30th.--Mother called to-day. Hooray!

Feb. 1st.--She is coming to tea. I feel I am treading on air.

Feb. 2nd.--She has been to our house. It was the happiest day of my life.

Though she came as a stranger to Porthkeverne, Madame Bertier very soon found friends. Her attractive personality and her musical talent gained her the entree into the artistic and literary circles of the town. Two principal figure-painters asked her to sit for her portrait, and her violin was much in demand for concerts at the Arts Club. Like most of the Bohemian residents of the place, she found her way to the studio at Windy Howe, and a pastel drawing of her profile soon stood on Mr. Castleton's easel. She did not win universal favour, however, at the house on the hill. Claudia, walking from school one day with Lorraine, exploded upon the subject.

"I can't bear the woman! I don't know what Vivien and the others see in her. I call it very flashy to wear all that jewellery at school. She's always up at our house, and Morland's fearfully taken with her. They play duets by the hour together. Father's going to paint her as 'The Angel of Victory' in that huge cartoon he's designing for the Chagstead Town Hall. I don't think she's a scrap like an angel! She pats Lilith and Constable on the head, just for show, but she looks terrified if they come near her smart frocks. Violet detests her. It's the one thing Violet and I agree about. We've been squabbling over everything else lately. It's a weary world!"

"Madame's fascinating enough on the surface," agreed Lorraine thoughtfully, "but she's not the kind of woman I admire. Somehow I don't quite trust her. Do you believe in first impressions? So do I. Well, my first feeling about her was distinctly non-attractive. We ran away from each other mentally, like two pieces of magnetized steel. She's very sweet to me at my music lessons; but I'm sure it's all put on, and she doesn't care an atom. It's an entirely different thing from my Saturday lessons."

One great reason why Lorraine had not, with the rest of the school, fallen under the spell of the fascinating Russian lady, was the intense affection she had formed for her art teacher. She could not worship at both shrines, and she felt strongly that Margaret Lindsay was infinitely more worthy of admiration. The studio down by the harbour was still her artistic Mecca. She had a carte blanche invitation to go whenever she liked. She turned in there one Friday afternoon on her way from school.

"Carina," she said, flopping into a basket-chair by the fireside, "I'm just fed up to-day!"

The friendship, which had begun conventionally with the orthodox "Miss Lindsay", now expressed itself by "Margaret", "Peggy", or such pet terms as "Carina" and "Love-Angel".

"What's the matter?" asked her friend, squeezing a little extra flake-white on to her palette, and putting the cap on the tube again. "It isn't often *you're* fed up with life!"

"Everything's gone wrong!" declared Lorraine tragically. "My head aches, and I didn't know my literature, and Miss Janet glared at me, and maths. were a failure this morning too, and I felt scratchy and squabbled with everybody. I'm afraid I was rather hard on some of those kids, though they were the limit! Carina, when *you* were at school, did you sometimes have a fling out all round, or were you always good?"

"I confess," said Carina humorously, "that, when I trod the slippery paths of youth, I often flopped flat, and made an exhibition of myself. I don't think I was a nice child at all!"

"I call you a saint now! I wonder what most saints were like when they were young."

"Many of them began as sinners. I expect even St. Francis of Assisi howled when he was a baby, and smacked his nurse. We all feel more or less scratchy sometimes. What you want, child, is a good blow on the hills. If it should be as fine and mild to-morrow as it was this morning, we'll have our painting lesson out of doors. Bring your thick coat and a wrap and we'll go right up towards Tangy Point, take our lunch and our sketch-books with us, find a sheltered place in the sun, and paint some pretty little bit on the cliffs. You'll go back to school on Monday feeling at peace with all mankind, or rather girlkind. Do you like my prescription?"

"Rather! You're the best doctor out! It'll be glorious to get away from everybody for a day. I have too much of Monica on Saturdays as a rule. I've an instinct it's going to be fine to-morrow!"

Porthkeverne had its share of sea-fog in winter, but it also had its quota of sunshine, and this particular February day turned out a foretaste of spring. Birds were singing everywhere as teacher and pupil, with lunch and sketching materials in their satchels, set off on their tramp over the moors. They crossed the common, where Lorraine had stood among the thistles for "Kilmeny", and came to "the little grey church on the windy hill", which Mr. Castleton had chosen as the scene for his illustrations to "The Forsaken Merman". The sound of the organ came through the open door, and, peeping in, Lorraine could see Morland's golden hair gleaming like a saint's halo in the chancel, and caught a glimpse of Landry's perfect profile as he sat listening in the dusty gallery.

"Shall we go and speak to them?" asked Margaret Lindsay.

"No," said Lorraine emphatically. "I'm not friends with Morland to-day. He promised to practise an accompaniment with me last night, and he never turned up. I shall just leave him to himself. He's a bad boy!"

"He has his limitations!" agreed Margaret.

The breath of early spring was in the air as they walked through the cluster of houses termed by courtesy "the village", and, climbing a stile, took the path along the cliffs. On such days the sap seems to rise in human beings as well as in the vegetable world. Lorraine literally danced along. Margaret Lindsay's artist eyes were busy registering impressions of sunlight on pearly stretches of sea, or effects of green sward and grey rock in shadow.

"The Cornish coast in February is perfect," she decided, "and it's so delightfully quiet. Heaven defend me from the 'fashionable resort', which is some people's idea of the seaside. I read the most delicious poem once. It began--

She was a lady of high degree,

A poor and unknown artist he.
'Paint me,' she said, 'a view of the sea.'
So he painted the sea as it looked the day
When Aphrodite arose from its spray,
And as she gazed on its face the while,
It broke in its countless dimpled smile.
'What a poky, stupid picture!' said she.
'It isn't anything like the sea!'

The wretched artist, in several more verses of poetry which I forget, paints the sea in every possible effect of storm and calm, all to the scorn of the lady, who decides--

'I don't believe he *can* paint the sea!'

But in desperation he makes a final dash for her patronage, probably, poor man, being hard up.

So he painted a stretch of hot brown sand,
With a big hotel on either hand,
And a handsome pavilion for the band.
Not a trace of the water to be seen,
Except one faint little streak of green.
'What a perfectly *exquisite* picture!' said she,
'The very *image* of the sea!''

Lorraine laughed.

"No one can accuse Tangy Point of pavilions and big hotels! We seem quite alone in the world, up on these cliffs. I haven't seen a solitary person since we left the village."

"Which remark has instantly conjured up somebody. Look on the shore below us--no, to the left, down there. I see the flutter of a feminine skirt--yes, and masculine trousers too! He's getting out of a boat, and going to speak to her. Actually a kiss! How touching! They don't know that there are spectators on the cliffs. We must be hundreds of feet above them. They look like specks!"

"I brought the field-glasses," said Lorraine, opening her satchel. "It brings that couple as close and clear as possible. Why, I know that grey costume and that crimson toque. It's Madame Bertier, as large as life! Look for yourself. Carina!"

Margaret Lindsay readjusted the glasses to her sight and focused them on the figures below.

"There's not a doubt about it!" she pronounced. "I can almost hear her broken English! Who's the man?"

Lorraine stood frowning with concentrated thought.

"That's what is puzzling me! His face is so absolutely familiar. I *know* I've seen him before, somewhere, and yet, for the life of me, I can't remember where. It's one of those aggravating half-memories that haunt one. I'd like to try throwing down a stone to attract their attention."

"I shouldn't on any account. Let's leave them to it, and go and find a place to take our sketch. We shall lose this effect of sunshine, if we're not quick. Madame Bertier doesn't interest me enough to make me waste valuable time in watching her flirtations."

"But I wish I could remember who the man is!" ruminated Lorraine, with knitted brows.

"He's certainly not worth bothering your head about! Come along and sketch!"

CHAPTER XII

The Sensation Bureau

"Look here!" said Vivien one day in recreation time, "I think this school's a very second-rate sort of show. We're a set of blighters!"

She was sitting on a form in the gymnasium, in a decidedly pessimistic frame of mind, eating a piece of hard oatcake.

"It's as dry as chumping chaff!" she confided dismally. "I don't like my lunch!"

"In these days of rations there's never even a scrap of margarine to spare, let alone butter!" groused Audrey, who was also in a mood to mop up sympathy. "I bring biscuits every morning, but they're not what biscuits used to be."

"Nothing is."

"What's wrong with the school, though?" asked Lorraine, with somewhat of the irritation of a nurse when her pet fledgeling is unduly criticized. "It seems to be jogging along all right, as far as I can see."

"There you've hit the nail on the head exactly. It's jogging, and I hate things to jog. I like them to go with a swing. The Lent term's always as dull as ditch water."

"We have our societies----" began Lorraine, but Vivien interrupted her impatiently.

"Oh, yes! Those precious societies! I know! Every one was keen at first, and then they slacked. They always do! Don't talk to me! I'm blue!"

"Are we down-hearted? No!" jodelled Patsie, throwing up her last bit of biscuit, and trying to catch it in her mouth like a terrier. "I say, Vivien, you silly cockchafer, why don't you buck up? If the school's dull, then for goodness' sake do something to make it more lively, instead of sitting and looking like a dying duck in a thunderstorm. What the Muses do you want?"

"Something to happen."

"What? An elopement? A fire? A burglary? Tell me the sort of sensation you're craving for, and we'll try to accommodate you. I'm going to start a Sensation Bureau. Excitements guaranteed. Terms cash, or monthly instalments. You pay your money, and you take your choice. Address: Miss Sullivan, The Gables. Cheques and postal orders must be crossed."

The girls sniggered, for Patsie was at what they were wont to call her "Patsiest". At school she supplied the place of public entertainer. Her favourite role was that of the jester, with cap and bells.

"I really *have* got a brain-wave, though," she rattled on. "I agree with Viv. Things at present are just about as dull and unromantic as they could possibly be. Girls don't have any fun as they had in the Middle Ages, or even in Jane Austen's times. My great-grandmother ran away from school to Gretna Green, but it's never done now. Well, the next best thing to real adventures is making them up. That's where my Sensation Bureau comes in. Here's Vivien pining for romance. Well, I'm prepared to give it to her hot and strong. I'm going to write her a letter every day from 'Jack', and post it inside the hollow tree in the garden. She can get and post hers there too, if she likes. Will you trade letters, Viv.? It'll be a stunt!"

"If you'll write the first," agreed Vivien, brightening up.

"Of course your 'Jack' will write first to his little 'Forget-me-not!'" laughed Patsie.

Patsie was gifted with a most lively imagination, and some talent for writing. Her tastes ran on the lines of cheap novelettes. She evolved a supposititious hero for Vivien, and began a series of epistles couched in exceedingly ardent terms. All the most extravagant nonsense that she could invent was scribbled in the letters, which, addressed simply to "Forget-me-not", were posted inside the hollow of an old ash-tree at the bottom of the school garden. Vivien shared the effusions with her friends, and they had tremendous fun over them in a corner of the cloak-room. They helped her to concoct replies. The imaginary romance afforded them extreme entertainment. It was as exciting as writing a novel. They worked it through all sorts of interesting stages--hope, despair, and lovers' quarrels--till it culminated in a suggested elopement. Patsie really outdid herself sometimes in the brilliancy of her composition. "Jack" had developed a floweriness of style and a knack of describing his bold adventures that raised him to the rank of a cinema hero. The girls used to wait for his letters with as keen an anticipation as for the next number of a serial. Vivien, the fortunate

recipient of them, was envied. Several other enthusiasts suggested opening a correspondence, but Patsie was adamant.

"The Sensation Bureau's got enough in this line on its hands. I'll provide something else for you, if you like--a shipwreck, or an air-raid, or a railway accident--but until those two are safely 'eloped', I can't take on any more love affairs. Oh, yes! you can put down your names if you like. I've a nice little matter in my mind for Audrey, later in the term--no, I shan't tell it you now, not if you beg all day!"

The girls were sitting near the stove in the gymnasium before afternoon school, and munching some home-made chocolate concocted with cocoa and condensed milk. Like most war substitutes, it was not so good as the real thing, but it was certainly much better than nothing. The talk, with several side-issues concerning eatables, drifted back again to the all-engrossing "Jack". Vivien, as the heroine of the romance, assumed an attitude of interesting importance. She affected much knowledge of his doings.

"You've never yet told us exactly what he's like," said Nellie.

"Well, of course it's difficult to describe him. He's tall, you know, with flashing eyes and little crisp curls."

"Has he a moustache?"

"N--n--o, not exactly a moustache." (Vivien's imagination was not nearly so ready as Patsie's.) "He's rather like Antonio in that piece they had at the cinema last week. He flings money about liberally, and he's always jumping into a motor and driving off very fast."

"Where does he get his petrol?" asked Lorraine.

"Oh, it's supplied by the Government. He has a simply enormous salary and private means as well. We shall be rolling, you know. I'm looking forward to having you all staying with me when we settle down."

The circle beamed almost as if the prospect were real.

"Where's the house?" enquired Audrey.

"He has several houses," said Vivien thoughtfully, checking them off on her fingers. "A town one, of course, in the West End, a hunting-box near Warwick, and a place in Wales. I believe there's an estate in Ireland as well."

"Shall you hunt? Oh, Viv!"

"Of course I shall. 'Jack' simply *adores* hunting. We're going to talk over my mount to-morrow, if the dear boy's able to turn up."

In the excitement of these prospective plans Vivien involuntarily raised her voice. The previous conversation had been in subdued tones, but her last remark must have been audible over half the gymnasium. Nellie nudged her so violently that her piece of chocolate fell to the floor. In turning to recover it she noticed the cause of the sudden interruption. Miss Janet was within a few yards of them turning over some music by the piano.

Vivien's complexion assumed a dull beetroot shade. She wondered whether Miss Janet had overheard. It was impossible to go up to her and explain that they were only pretending. The mistress's face was inscrutable. She did not even glance in their direction, but picked out two or three songs from the pile and walked away into the house. The little circle broke up. Miss Janet's vicinity seemed to have put the stopper on romance. She was certainly not a sentimental person.

On the following day there was a fog--one of those white sea-fogs which sometimes enveloped Porthkeverne, when everything was veiled in soft mist, and even the very furniture was clammy. Vivien, whose throat was delicate, came to school with a Shetland shawl across her mouth. She sat and coughed in the gymnasium during recreation, and fingered a letter in her pocket. It was quite a fat letter, and addressed to "Jack Stanley, Esq".

"If it weren't so damp I'd run down the garden and post this," she said to Lorraine. "I expect there'll be one waiting for me in the tree, but I promised Mother I wouldn't do anything silly, and I suppose it *would* be silly to run down the wet garden in my thin shoes and without my coat."

"It would be absolutely cracked, with that cough. I'll go. Give me your letter."

It was part of the procedure of the romance that the correspondence must be deposited inside the hollow tree, or else, on wet days, it would certainly have been far simpler to hand over the notes in school. Vivien had once hinted this, but Patsie stuck firmly to her plans, and, as she was the originator of the whole scheme, she had the right to make the arrangements.

"Jack's letters will be found in the garden, and nowhere else," she decreed.

So Lorraine, who was sufficiently interested to want to hear the next instalment supplied by Patsie's fertile imagination, ran out into the fog and among the dripping bushes down the path that edged the lawn. The pillar-box was moist and earwiggy; she wetted and soiled her sleeve by reaching down into it. At the bottom, in company with a fat spider and several woodlice, lay a letter addressed in a bold hand to "My Forget-me-not". She exchanged it for Vivien's epistle and scudded off through the damp mist back to the gymnasium. If any eyes were watching as she passed the study window and came in by the side door, it was much too foggy for her to see clearly. As she handed the letter to her waiting cousin she noticed that the envelope was not gummed down securely.

"Hallo, 'Jack's' been in a hurry with this," she commented. "It isn't properly stuck."

"Perhaps it's the damp that's melted the gum," said Vivien, pulling out the contents impatiently.

Jack's correspondence, though addressed to her, was common property. Several heads bent over the closely-written sheet, eager for what might be termed "the next episode" of the romance. The letter was dated "The Grand Hotel" and began:

"MY OWN DARLINGEST FORGET-ME-NOT,

"It is twenty-four hours since I last wrote to you, and the time has seemed an eternity. How I manage to live without your presence I cannot imagine. Life apart from you is a blank wilderness. I wander by the sad sea waves, and were it not for the fond hope of meeting you again I should cast myself into them and perish. Forget-me-not, my ownest own, I can stand this misery no longer. Surely the clouds that have separated us may now be blown apart, and again I can bask in the sunshine of your smile? If you can forgive me, meet me alone at twilight in the old familiar spot on the beach, that hallowed place where we first gazed into each other's eyes and vowed fidelity. I have a plan to propose, but I dare not write it: I must tell it to you in words and beg for your favour on my knees. I shall be there, awaiting your approach with burning anxiety, and longing to clasp you in these fond arms.

"With all the love in the wide world,

"Your most devoted slave,

"JACK."

The girls giggled.

"He's worse than ever this time," said Audrey.

"Got it badly," agreed Nellie.

"I wonder what his plan is," grinned Claire. "I say, Patsie, what's 'Jack' going to do next?"

"Wait and see," remarked Patsie calmly. "I'm not going to give away his secrets beforehand. It will all unfold itself in due time."

"History essays, please!" said Claudia, who was working monitress for the week, and whose duty it was to collect the exercise-books and give them to Miss Kingsley. "Don't be all day about it, I'm in a hurry!"

"Here's mine," answered Lorraine. "And do you mind giving this note to Morland? It's a list of pieces by that new Russian composer, Vladi--something--ski. Rosemary sent it for him."

"Right you are!" said Claudia. "He's mad on Russian music just at present."

The bell rang at that moment and the girls trooped upstairs to their class-room. They had taken their seats, and Miss Turner was just in the act of opening her Latin book when Miss Janet came bustling in. Miss Janet's moods varied. This morning the corners of her mouth were tucked in and her eyes were inscrutable. The form instantly set her mental register at "stormy".

"Stand up, girls!" she commanded briskly. "Move from your desks and form into line over there, facing me!"

Exceedingly astonished, the form obeyed.

"Now each of you turn up your feet so as to show me the soles of your shoes, right first, then left. Thank you! Lorraine, whose shoes are damp, will go downstairs and change into her gymnasium shoes: the rest may take their seats."

Very much mystified the girls returned to their desks. Miss Janet departed, and Lorraine ran down to effect the

required change. She could not understand Miss Janet's fussy solicitude for her health. She did not remember that the form had ever been examined thus for damp feet. She could only conclude that Miss Janet, who was apt to take sudden whims, had been studying a treatise on hygiene. At eleven o'clock she had a further surprise. Miss Paget brought her a message telling her to report herself to Miss Kingsley in the study. Wondering what was the matter, she answered the summons at once. She found Miss Kingsley and Miss Janet sitting together at the table with trouble writ large on their faces. The mental atmosphere of the room cut her like a knife, it was so unmistakably hostile.

"Lorraine," began Miss Kingsley sternly, "I've sent for you to ask you a straight question, and I expect a straight answer. Did you to-day bring to school a letter addressed to--er--a member of the opposite sex?"

Utterly amazed, Lorraine hesitated, then, remembering her note to Morland, replied;

"Yes, Miss Kingsley."

She wondered how the head mistress had got to know about it. Had Claudia been so careless as to leave it inside her exercise-book?

Miss Kingsley's glance was hypnotic in its intensity. The corners of Miss Janet's mouth twitched nervously.

"I'm glad you are candid enough to confess it, though I have ample proof against you. *You*, Lorraine! You, whom I chose as head girl, and leader for the rest of the school! I've never been so bitterly disappointed in anybody!"

Miss Kingsley's voice trembled as she spoke.

"You might at least have the grace to look ashamed of yourself!" added Miss Janet.

Lorraine was staggered, but not ashamed. She could not see that the occasion warranted such sweeping condemnation.

"It was a very harmless letter----" she began in self-justification.

"Harmless!" blazed Miss Kingsley. "If this is your idea of correspondence, I'm disgusted with you. I call it most *unmaidenly!*"

"I don't know what modern girls are coming to!" echoed Miss Janet. "In *my* young days they held very different standards."

"It will be my duty," continued Miss Kingsley grimly, "to inform your mother of this disgraceful correspondence."

"But Mother knows!" gasped Lorraine.

"She knows?"

"Yes, she saw me write the letter."

"Did she read it?"

"No, she didn't ask to."

"Is she aware what you wrote in it?"

"I expect so."

"Lorraine, I can't believe you! I know Mrs. Forrester too well to imagine that she would allow you to carry on such a clandestine correspondence as this."

"But Mother *likes* Morland," persisted Lorraine, "and I *had* to write to him, to send him Rosemary's list of pieces. She asked me to let him have them soon."

Miss Kingsley looked frankly puzzled.

"Morland?" she said inquiringly. "The letter is addressed to an individual named 'Jack'."

Then a great light broke across Lorraine. In her relief she almost laughed. Her suppressed chuckle was fortunately taken for a subdued sob.

"Oh, Miss Kingsley!" she cried. "Did you get the letter out of the hollow tree?"

The head mistress nodded gravely.

"Then it's all a mistake--it wasn't--written to anybody real. It was only a little bit of fun we had among ourselves. Pa--I mean one of us--made up 'Jack' and wrote his letters, and another of us answered them. It was only nonsense!"

"Did you write this?" asked Miss Janet grimly, handing a sheet of note-paper across the table.

It was in Vivien's handwriting, which bore a strong resemblance to Lorraine's own, and it was couched in terms strong enough certainly to rouse a flutter in the breast of a careful schoolmistress. It mourned Jack's absence, referred to turtle doves, Cupid's arrows, and other tender things, thanked him for handsome presents, and looked forward rapturously to the next meeting with him. It ended with fondest love, and was signed: "Your little Forget-me-not".

"No, I didn't write it," answered Lorraine.

"Then who did?"

Lorraine hesitated.

"As it was only a joke, will you please excuse my not answering? It doesn't seem quite fair to give anybody else away. The whole form were in it, really."

Miss Kingsley fixed her with a glance which Lorraine afterwards described as that of a lion-tamer. Then she summed up:

"As you all seem to have been equally foolish, I'll let the matter stand at that. But I wish to say that I've never in my life read more perfectly idiotic, senseless, worthless *drivel* than is contained in these silly letters, and if that's your idea of amusement, I'm sorry for you! I should have thought that *you*, Lorraine, would have been above such nonsense, and would have used your influence to interest the girls in something more sensible. These letters must be stopped at once. I distinctly forbid anything more of the sort, and you may tell the others so. Do you understand?"

Miss Kingsley, as she spoke, tore 'Jack's' latest effusion into shreds, and threw the bits into the waste-paper basket.

A very dejected and indignant Sixth Form listened to Lorraine's account of the interview.

"Miss Janet must have fished some of the letters out of that tree, and read them and put them back!"

"What a sneaking trick of her!"

"And she thought it was you, because you'd got your feet wet."

"Sporting of her to examine our shoes! It's like Sherlock Holmes!"

"Sporting! I call it disgusting!"

"Is poor darling 'Jack' *never* to write again to his little 'Forget-me-not'?" demanded Vivien, with a note of tragedy in her voice.

"We'd better drown him, or kill him at the front, or let him die suddenly of pneumonia!" said Patsie sadly. "Then you can look decently sorry for a while. It really *is* too bad, just when I was working up so nicely for the elopement! He was buying a new car on purpose. Never mind! I'll write a novel some day, when I've left school, and I'll put all the letters in--every scrap of them. And when it's published, I'll send a copy of it to Miss Janet!"

"Oh!" thrilled the excited circle.

"She'll say *then*: 'The dear girl! I always said she was clever, and would turn out a famous authoress!' People generally say afterwards that they 'always said'."

"Oh, Patsie! It *will* be so delightful! Do begin it soon!"

"Not till I leave school, and that's a whole term and a half off, with the Easter holidays thrown in. You'll have to wait!"

CHAPTER XIII

Rosemary's Secret

The fresh year flew on wings. The snowdrops--fair maids of February--faded in the school garden, and their pale, ethereal, green-tipped blossoms were replaced by golden daffodils that seemed to reflect the stronger sunshine. Mezezeon and other fragrant shrubs put out sweet-scented flowers, and the great white arum lilies were throwing up their sheaths. Violets and early primroses might be searched for under sheltered hedgerows, and the Japanese cherry-trees were bursting into bud. Mother Nature seemed to be shaking her garments, and getting ready for the great carnival of Spring.

With the longer days, Lorraine was often up at Windy Howe. It was the sort of household where you could arrive at any time without presenting an apology for your intrusion.

"You must take us just as you find us," said Claudia. "You know I'm glad to see you, Lorraine, but I shan't treat you as a visitor, and have you shown into the drawing-room. You don't mind?"

Claudia was sitting in the nursery, rocking the latest addition to the Castleton family, a tiny white bundle, with golden down on its pink head. She nursed it dutifully, patting its back with the experience gained with seven other younger brothers and sisters.

"Yes, it's rather sweet," she agreed, in answer to a comment from Lorraine. "I'd like them all right if they didn't cry so much; it's such a nuisance when they're perpetually squalling. The fact is I'm fed up with children. I never seem able to get away from them here. I've the greatest difficulty in doing my home lessons. Violet's always asking me to take the baby or Perugia, and Lilith and Constable are generally tearing about somewhere, to say nothing of Beata and Romola and Madox. Lorraine, I've *quite* made up my mind. I'm seventeen now, and I'm leaving school this summer. I'm *not* going to stay at home and just help with the children! It isn't good enough!"

"What would you like to do?" asked Lorraine, watching with sympathy while her friend made another effort to soothe the obstreperous new little brother to sleep.

"I don't know!" said Claudia forlornly. "I don't seem good for anything except to do odd jobs. Perhaps I'll go on the land. It would be a change to make hay and hoe turnips. I should be away from Violet, anyhow. We've been squabbling again dreadfully of late. I can't stand it much longer. If Morland's called up, I'm going off too. I don't care where!"

She spoke resentfully, almost desperately; Lorraine had not seen her in such a mood before. She had sometimes guessed that her friend was not altogether happy at home, though until to-day she had never received such a big slice of Claudia's confidence.

"Couldn't you go to college--or to study something?" she suggested vaguely.

The baby was crying so lustily that conversation was difficult. Claudia's remarks were punctuated by the regular tap-tap of the rockers on her chair.

"I've asked Father, but it's no use; he won't send me. He says it's Beata's and Romola's turn now, and they must go to school. Life's horrid--I just hate it all!"

The baby, lifting up a despairing wail, also protested against the evils of existence.

"Poor little man! He doesn't like life either!" soothed Claudia. "There! There! Are his toes cold? Sissie'll warm them for him. It's no use; I shall have to take him to Violet, and she's trying to write letters!"

This little peep behind the scenes at Windy Howe made Lorraine feel worried about Claudia. The next time she went to the studio by the harbour, she talked the matter over. Margaret Lindsay knew the Castleton family so well that she might be counted upon for advice.

"Claudia's simply fed up!" explained Lorraine. "It's partly the children, but principally Violet. I don't think I should like to live with Violet myself."

"Perhaps not, yet she has her good points. On the whole I think she's very decent to all those step-children. With her own little tribe as well, it must be difficult to manage the household. But I sympathize with Claudia. When she leaves school I'm sure it will be far the best plan for her to go away from home for a while."

"But her father won't let her!"

"Suppose she could win a scholarship? I fancy that would smooth the way."

"Oh, do you think she could?"

"Suppose you ask Miss Kingsley if she can suggest any career for Claudia? She's sure to be interested in her pupils' plans for the future. I certainly think it's a shame for the girl to be kept at home acting nursemaid to the younger ones. I'd willingly tackle Mr. Castleton some day and have a little talk with him about Claudia, if there's any plan to propose. I knew her own mother, so that gives me a pull. I'd speak to Violet, too. I dare say she'd be quite nice about it."

"Oh, Carina, I wish you would! I think Claudia has a wretched time. Do you know, the children got hold of the album I gave her for her birthday, and they scribbled all over it? And Violet didn't even scold them. Wasn't it trying? She lets them scramble about everywhere and do what they like. Claudia's so worried, she says her hair's beginning to fall out."

"I didn't know her hair was falling out. She'd better cut it short, in that case. She mustn't on any account let that lovely hair be neglected."

Miss Kingsley, on being appealed to, was deeply interested. She talked things over with Miss Janet, and they came at once to a conclusion. There was nothing for it but a good kindergarten training. There were several open scholarships for a kindergarten college whose principal was an intimate friend of theirs. They would write about it at once, and Claudia must go in for the examination. They would make a point of coaching her specially. In their minds the whole matter was already decided. It would be a splendid chance for the girl, so they said. That wise old Greek slave AEsop, who knew human nature so well that his fables are as true to life now as they were two thousand years ago, tells the story of a king who wished to fortify his castle. He asked advice, and the mason recommended bricks, the carpenter wood, and the tanner leather. Each thought his own trade supreme. The Misses Kingsley were perfectly sure that Claudia, who was experienced with children, would succeed admirably in kindergarten work. They even saw visions of her being established some day at The Gables in the capacity of a mistress.

Claudia, on being introduced to her future prospects, gasped a little. She acquiesced, but did not look quite as grateful as her friends had anticipated.

"I'd get away from home, at any rate! And that would be something!" was all she would say to Lorraine.

"It would be a career!" said Lorraine, fresh from a brainy, bracing talk with Miss Janet. "Once you've got your training, you'll be independent and able to earn your own living."

"Um--yes----" Claudia spoke without enthusiasm. "I wonder what the college would be like? Jolly hard work, I expect!"

"Miss Janet says it's adorable!"

"Oh! There are several scholarships. I wish you'd go in for one and come too; then we should be together."

It was Lorraine's turn to look blank. It is one thing to recommend a vocation to a friend, and quite another to take it up yourself. Viewed from her own standpoint, the joys of a kindergarten training did not seem so attractive. She began to wonder whether Miss Janet had overstated them and the delights of independence.

"I--I don't know yet whether I want to leave home, and if I do, I'm going to study art!" she stammered lamely.

"I wish I could study music, but there's not the faintest little atom of a chance of doing that," returned Claudia bitterly.

Nevertheless, at Miss Kingsley's insistence, she set to work diligently to read up for the open scholarship examination. Miss Janet kindly coached her, and gave up many hours of leisure on her behalf. Claudia was quite clever at lessons when she chose to apply herself. The progress she made under this private tuition delighted Miss Janet. Miss Kingsley wrote fully to her friend the principal of the college, and received a most encouraging reply.

"The girl you mention seems just the kind of student we wish to procure at present," wrote Miss Halden. "I am allowed a certain liberty of selection, and, so long as a candidate's marks do not fall below a given standard, I may make my own choice. I am not necessarily obliged to award the scholarships to those who send in the best papers, but to those who, after a personal interview, I consider would in the end make the most successful teachers. There are other qualifications to consider besides examination points. Charm of manner is an extremely valuable asset in dealing with children; and I would rather train a girl who is gifted with imagination and tact than the most erudite student who is deficient in these necessary qualities. If Claudia Castleton is what you say, and you can coach her sufficiently to gain a pass, I think she may be almost sure of a scholarship."

The Misses Kingsley were most excited at the receipt of this letter. They did not tell Claudia its full contents for fear she might slack off work, but they could not help throwing out hints.

"It's something to have friends at Court!" beamed Miss Janet, as she put on her pince-nez and took her pupil for Latin construction. "You see, we know Miss Halden so very well. I fancy there's luck in store for you, Claudia!"

"Yes," said Claudia dolefully, as she looked up a last word in the dictionary.

Margaret Lindsay had taken the opportunity of a visit to the studio at Windy Howe to speak to Mr. Castleton on the subject of the possible scholarship. He was busy painting at the time, and far more interested in the proper perspective of his background than in his daughter's future prospects. He agreed abstractedly with anything that was suggested.

"If they'll give her a free training, let her go by all means--don't you think that pearly grey throws the cliff into relief?--I've no doubt Miss Kingsley's right--I think that gorse-bush is an improvement--yes, she's getting a big girl, I suppose--I had made the cliff darker, but I like the sun on it--the children grow up so fast--I'm glad you like that shade of brown under the rock, because I consider it brings out the whole picture."

Young, pretty Mrs. Castleton, on being appealed to, burst into tragic tears.

"I'm sure *I* don't want to stand in the girl's light," she sobbed. "If it's the right thing for her to leave home, I suppose she must; but nobody need say *I've* turned her out. I shouldn't have thought it would be any more fun teaching kindergarten than helping to look after her own brothers and sisters! However, that's a matter of opinion, and I've always tried to do my best by my husband's children, but it's small thanks one gets for it all."

The examination for the scholarship was to be held in London, and candidates were required to fill up beforehand certain papers of application and forward them to the College. The forms arrived on the very last day of term. Miss Janet summoned Claudia to the study and gave them to her.

"They must be signed by your father," she explained, "and you must post them not later than the sixth. The envelope is already addressed, and my sister and I have filled in our part of the application. All you have to do is to get Mr. Castleton's signature. When Miss Halden receives these papers, she will send you a card of admission for the examination. That will not be for three weeks, so I shall see you again before you have to go up to London. Be sure to go on with your work during the holidays, and give special attention to Latin grammar."

"Yes, Miss Janet," said Claudia dutifully, taking the large envelope and slipping it into her coat pocket.

"Post it to-morrow," urged Miss Janet, as she dismissed her pupil from the study.

The advent of Easter saw Rosemary again at Porthkeverne. She not only returned for the holidays, but "came back for good". The secret which had haunted and puzzled Lorraine since Christmas was out at last. Rosemary had written home and told the plain, unvarnished, brutal truth.

"Signor Arezzo says it's no use my going on. He'll never be able to make anything of my voice. I've been at the Coll. two terms, and tried my best, but he says it's futile--I'm only fit to warble in a small drawing-room to friends who are not over-critical, and it's a waste of money to stop on here!"

This was indeed a blow. It was a very crushed, disappointed, miserable little Rosemary who returned to the bosom of her bewildered family. At first they would not believe the severe decision, and passed through the stages of denial, indignation, and annoyance to realization and resignation. It is so very humiliating to find out that your swan, about whom you have cackled so proudly, turns out to be only an ordinary, domestic, farm-yard bird after all.

Evidently the first thing to be done was to comfort Rosemary. She needed it badly. She went about the house a pathetic little figure, with big wistful eyes.

"I'm heart-broken, Muvvie!" she sobbed in confidence.

"Never mind, darling; we want you at home if they don't want you at the College! You can go in for V.A.D. work, and help at the Red Cross Hospital. It's delightful for me to have my daughter back. You don't know how I shall appreciate your company!"

"But I feel I'm such a failure!"

"Not at all! You simply haven't slipped into your right niche yet. People sometimes make bad shots before they find their vocations. Cheer up! Your singing is a great pleasure to us, if it's not fit for a concert platform."

"I never want to sing another note in all my life!" declared Rosemary.

Little by little details of the tragedy leaked out. Lorraine heard many of them, sitting on her sister's bed, while Rosemary ruefully unpacked the boxes of music and the tea-things and all the other treasured trifles she had taken to the College.

"He says I haven't the physique for a singer. I've not got enough 'puff' in my lungs. You should see Maudie Canning, his favourite pupil. She has the most enormous chest, and such a throat! Just look at mine!" (Rosemary was examining herself in the glass as she spoke.) "It stands to reason, if an organ hasn't proper pipes and bellows, it can't sound. You want such a big voice to fill a concert-hall."

"But couldn't you go on with music just for yourself?"

"Signor Arezzo doesn't care to bother with amateurs. His time is so valuable that he gives it all to promising students only. No, I've quite made up my mind never to sing again! Don't argue with me! It's no use, and only makes me feel irritable. I tell you I'm heart-broken!"

It was terrible to have Rosemary in such a disconsolate mood. It seemed to throw a blight over the whole family. Lorraine was immensely concerned. In her trouble she turned instinctively to the studio by the harbour. Margaret Lindsay, who herself had weathered many troubles, was an expert in the art of comfort.

"Rosemary's heart is broken!" said Lorraine tragically, sitting on the window-seat in the sunshine, and squeezing her friend's arm.

"Poor child! Tell her that some of the best things in the world have been done on broken hearts! She's very young yet, and I'm sure she's wanted at home."

"That's what Mother says."

"And perhaps she mightn't have liked public singing. It isn't all applause and bouquets. I know several professionals, and they talk of long, weary railway journeys, and uncomfortable hotels, and many disagreeables that show a very shady lining to the life. Somehow I can far more easily fancy little Rosemary happily married and settled down in a home of her own, than touring about to concerts. You mustn't let her give up her singing! She'll make a most delightful amateur."

"She scorns the word 'amateur'."

"She's feeling sore at present, but she'll get over that stage, I hope. I'm not sure if an amateur hasn't infinitely the best of it. I often wish I were an amateur artist. You skim the cream in the matter of enjoyment, without any of the responsibility. In six months I hope Rosemary will think differently, and will be the star of the musical parties at Porthkeverne, if she can't shine on the stage."

"It's a come-down for her, all the same," groaned Lorraine. "I wish she could marry a duke! But no dukes ever come to Porthkeverne. Perhaps she won't marry at all. Some of the nicest people I know haven't married."

Margaret Lindsay looked out far away over the dancing, gleaming water before she answered; Lorraine could not see the shadow in her eyes.

"Sometimes it's the person whom you *don't* marry whom you love the most: the beautiful ideal is never shattered by the actual—it stays up in the clouds always, instead of trailing down to earth."

Lorraine was lost in contemplation of her sister's future prospects.

"If she doesn't marry, she'll have to brace up and go in for some other vocation," she decided. "Miss Kingsley says one ought to look years ahead, but somehow I can't imagine Rosemary ever being middle-aged."

"It's an art to grow grey gracefully," smiled Margaret Lindsay.

CHAPTER XIV

What Happened at Easter

In spite of her real concern for Rosemary's disappointment, Lorraine enjoyed the Easter holidays. There was much to be done in them. Morland and Claudia were anxious to revisit the Sea-Nymph's Grotto, which had been neglected during the winter, so with Landry in attendance they chose a fine day, and had another delightful picnic there. Fortunately the tides had not reached as high as the mouth of the cave, and their "furniture" was undisturbed; even the shell patterns remained as formerly, though the sea-weed was brown and shrivelled. That was a matter easily remedied, however, for the rock pools below were full of pink and green algae, and corallines beautiful enough for a mermaid's bouquet.

"It would be a ripping place for a hermit," said Morland. "I expect it beats a dug-out hollow. I shall often think of it when I'm called up!"

"Me go to the war too!" said Landry suddenly.

He spoke so seldom that Claudia turned in surprise.

"No, Landry, dear, I couldn't spare you."

"But Morland's going!"

"All the more reason why you should stay at home and take care of me."

"Me want to be with you *both*," said Landry fretfully.

"But that can't be. The Government will send papers, and then Morland will have to go."

There was trouble in the boy's blue eyes; his poor dull brain seemed to be making a supreme effort to understand. He spoke again, still in the language of a little child.

"Landry will take the nasty papers and hide them, and then Morland stay at home."

"No, no, dear! Landry couldn't do that," laughed Claudia, fondling his hand. "You must be my good boy and look after me when he's gone."

Landry relapsed once more into his habitual silence, but it was evident that a new and unusual access of thought was stirring in his feeble mind. He kept looking at Morland with awakened interest. Lorraine, watching, wondered what was the result of his cogitations. His own sister and brother, accustomed to his moods, took no more notice of an occurrence that seemed trivial at the moment, but afterwards bore unexpected fruit.

"When we've made the cave so nice, it seems almost a pity to keep it *quite* to ourselves," suggested Morland after a pause.

"Why, but we all pledged ourselves to absolute secrecy!"

"I know we did."

"Whom do you want to bring here?" enquired Claudia suspiciously.

"Oh, nobody in particular. Only Madame Bertier was asking me one day if there were any caves along the coast. I thought she'd like to see this one."

"You're not to bring that Russian woman here! I don't like her. I hope you did not tell her about it?"

"Of course not!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Crystal clear I didn't!"

"It's *our* secret, and *nobody* is to know," said Claudia, still ruffled. "Let us all take a sort of oath!"

"Right oh! *I* shan't break it!" agreed Lorraine emphatically.

"Will you swear, Morland?" urged Claudia.

"Who's going to tell?" asked Morland huffily. "What a fuss you girls make about nothing. The cave might be full of diamonds instead of only shells!"

"Only shells, indeed!" Claudia's tone was belligerent.

"I wish you'd both help me to collect some shells," put in Lorraine, trying to patch up peace. "I want some more desperately badly for the museum."

A duty which Lorraine had undertaken during the holidays was the arrangement of the school museum. She was the curator, but during term time she was so fully occupied that she had never been able to sort and label the specimens which the girls had brought to her. The whole collection had been so far stored away in boxes. Now, however, Miss Kingsley had set apart special premises for the museum. There was an unused room at The Gables that in the days of former tenants had been occupied by the coachman. It adjoined the house, but was approached by an outside staircase from the yard. It had been filled with lumber, but Miss Kingsley had had this cleared away, the floor had been scrubbed, and some old desks moved in to serve as cases for the specimens.

Miss Kingsley and Miss Janet had gone away for Easter, and the servants were also taking a much-needed rest. The Gables therefore was shut up for the holidays, though the charwoman, who lived in a cottage close by, went in to scrub and clean. Before leaving, Miss Kingsley had given Lorraine the key of the museum, so that she might enter it when she wished, quite independently of going to the house.

Lorraine spent very happy mornings there--sometimes alone, sometimes with Claudia to help her. With the aid of natural history books from the school library, she identified and labelled the specimens to the best of her ability. It was a quiet kind of work that appealed to her. She felt that the room was going to be a tremendous acquisition to the school. All sorts of treasures could find a home on the walls, secure from the meddling fingers of juniors. She intended to keep it as a sort of sanctum for the monitresses, and had visions of holding committee meetings there, and bringing tea in thermos flasks.

One morning she had arranged to spend a little time at the museum and to meet Claudia, who had promised to come and help her. The trysting-place was the old windmill, and Lorraine stood there waiting. Claudia was late--the Castleton family were always late for everything--and Lorraine walked impatiently up and down the road. Footsteps coming round the corner made her turn expectantly. To her surprise, the new-comer was not her friend, but her uncle, Mr. Barton Forrester.

"Why, Uncle!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing up here? I thought you were so busy at the office?"

"So I am; and I ought to be at work now. This is what comes of being a special constable! There's a pretty to-do today! The telephone wires have been cut, and the job is to discover *where!*"

"The telephone wires cut!" echoed Lorraine. "But who has cut them?"

"Some spy, I suppose. One has constantly to be on the lookout for treachery, especially in a place like this. If we could only find out where the leakage is! There, Lorraine, I can't stay. I've got to see Mr. Jermyn immediately."

Uncle Barton--busy, energetic little man that he was--waved his hand to his niece and hurried away up the road, just as Claudia, also in a hurry, turned the corner. Lorraine cut short her apologies with the news about the telephone wires.

"It means," she explained, "that, until they find the place and can mend it, Porthkeverne's cut off by telephone from all other places. You may depend upon it, as Uncle says, there's some treachery at the bottom of this. Isn't it horrible to think that there may be spies in the town, ready to betray one's country?"

"Dreadful!" shuddered Claudia. "They ought to intern everyone who's the least bit under suspicion."

The two girls walked rapidly to The Gables, and went into the school-yard and up the outside staircase. Lorraine had the key in her pocket, and unlocked the museum. Directly she entered, she noticed that the room was not as she had left it. Some of the desks and boxes had certainly been moved. She remembered exactly how she had placed them yesterday. Her first thought was that Mrs. Jones, the charwoman, must have been in to clean; but that was clearly impossible, for she herself had the key. Who could have intruded into the sanctum, and for what reason? She discussed it with Claudia. It gave them both a most uncanny feeling to think that someone had been able to enter. The Gables was practically shut up. Had a burglar been picking the locks during Miss Kingsley's absence? There seemed to be nothing in the museum likely to excite the cupidity of even an amateur thief; the specimens, though interesting to the school, were of no monetary value. Lorraine's glance went slowly round the room, and took in the desks and boxes, the walls, on which she had pinned natural history prints, and finally wandered up to the ceiling. Ah, here was a clue at last! The trap-door in the corner had certainly been moved--it did not now quite fit down. There was about an inch of

light to be seen round its edge. A horrible idea suggested itself to the girls. *Suppose somebody was in hiding up there!*

The bare notion blanched their cheeks. With one accord they fled from the room, locked the door on the outside, and scurried down the steps. In the yard they paused. What was to be done next? They did not feel capable of tackling a possible burglar unaided, yet it seemed rather weak to run away.

"Let's fetch Morland!" said Claudia.

The suggestion seemed a good one. Lorraine was only too content to throw herself upon masculine aid. They walked at double speed to Windy Howe, and hauled Morland from the piano. He stopped in the middle of a Brahms sonata, and offered at once to go back with them to the school.

"You see, Miss Kingsley and everybody's away, and there's only the charwoman about," explained Lorraine. "I know she'd be worse scared than ourselves if we told her."

"Right-o! I'll go and investigate," agreed Morland, rather pleased to show his courage before the girls.

So they all three went back to the museum, and here Morland placed desks and boxes together, and mounted on them so as to reach the trap-door, through which he wriggled. The girls held the pile steady, and watched his long legs disappear through the opening.

"It leads on to the roof!" he shouted. "I'll climb up and explore. I'm in a sort of garret with a ladder in the corner."

To the waiting girls it seemed a very long time before Morland returned. At last, however, they heard his footsteps overhead, and he called to them to hold the erection while he came down. It was with a sense of relief that they saw his boots issue through the trap-door. They had had an idea that he might have disappeared for ever.

"Well?"

"Did you see anybody?"

Morland shook his head. He was dusting his sleeves, and trying to rub the dirt off his hands.

"I didn't catch a burglar, but I've made a discovery," he said slowly.

"What?"

The girls were half-frightened, half-thrilled.

"I've been on the roof. Did you know the telephone wires run over the school?"

"I never noticed."

"Well, they do. And what's more, they've been cut!"

"Great Scott!"

"Whoever did it has been very clever. It was a unique spot to get at them, and impossible to be seen from the road."

"I must tell Uncle Barton *at once!*" gasped Lorraine breathlessly. "It's exactly what he was wanting to find out!"

"We'd better ask Mrs. Jones if anybody has been hanging about the place," suggested Claudia.

The charwoman, on being interviewed, assured them that nobody had been to the school. There was only one key to the museum, so it could not have been entered in their absence.

"Did you leave the window open?" asked Morland of Lorraine.

"I believe I did, just a little at the top."

"Well, don't you notice that the leads below the window communicate with one of the bedroom windows of the school? Any one inside The Gables could step out and get into the museum that way."

"But Mrs. Jones says nobody has been in the school, didn't you, Mrs. Jones?"

"Yes, miss, no one but myself--except--yes, I do remember, one of the teachers came and asked if she might fetch a book she'd forgotten, and I let her go in."

"Which teacher was it?"

"That foreign lady."

"Madame Bertier?"

"I don't know her name. She wasn't there more than a few minutes."

"Oh!" said Lorraine thoughtfully. "Thank you, Mrs. Jones!"

Uncle Barton also looked thoughtful, when Lorraine described to him the whole occurrence. He wrote a note at once to the Chief Constable, to tell him where the telephone wires were cut, and sent the office boy to deliver it. Then he asked for any details his niece could supply.

"You're a little brick!" he commented. "There's treachery at work somewhere, undoubtedly, but the question is how to lay our hands on it. Can I trust you and the Castletons just to keep this dark for the present? I'd rather it wasn't noised all about the place. I've my own ideas, and I want to work them out in my own way."

"Shall I say anything about it to Madame Bertier?" asked Lorraine.

"Most decidedly not! Please don't mention the matter to anybody. You can give *me* the key of the museum till Miss Kingsley returns. You don't need to go there again at present?"

"I'd be scared to death!" confessed Lorraine.

In spite of Uncle Barton Forrester's injunctions, the episode of the cut telephone wires became known. The Castletons on their return home had found Madame Bertier in their father's studio, sitting for her portrait, and, being full of the exciting subject, had poured out their story. The pretty Russian was aghast.

"It is too horrible!" she exclaimed; "to have happened while Miss Kingsley is away! Some burglar would be bad—but it is perhaps a spy. I was at The Gables yesterday, just for a moment, to fetch a book. I saw nothing! Had I met anyone I should indeed have been very alarmed! The police will no doubt keep the house under observation now."

"The question is how anybody got into the room when it was locked," said Claudia.

"Perhaps they brought a ladder. You say the window was left open?"

"Yes, but it's shut and fastened now. Whoever came wouldn't be able to get in so easily again."

The Easter holidays were nearly over, and in a few days the Miss Kingsleys would be back to look after their own property, and take what precautions they thought fit against burglars or spies. At the near prospect of term time, Claudia, whose spirits had effervesced lately, suddenly waxed serious. Lorraine could not make out what was the matter with her.

"You look about as cheerful as an undertaker, old sport!" she remonstrated. "Something's got on your nerves!"

"I'm in a beastly hole," admitted Claudia, with a gusty sigh. "I know I'm a slacker."

"What have you been doing?"

"Something awful!"

"Go ahead and confess, then!"

They were sitting in the garden at Windy Howe, resting after planting some rows of peas, and sheltering under a tree from the heavy drops of a sudden April shower. Claudia pulled off her gardening gloves, and rested a delicately-modelled chin upon a prettily-shaped hand. There was desperate trouble in her blue eyes.

"I'm scared to go back to school, and that's the fact! I've done an awful thing! The day we broke up, Miss Janet gave me some papers to be signed and sent in to the Kindergarten College. She said they must be posted before the 6th. I put them in my coat pocket. Well—I've only just remembered them."

Lorraine was aghast.

"Claudia! Your application for the exam! How *could* you forget?"

"I don't know, but I did!" groaned the sinner.

"When did you remember?"

"Only this morning. I hadn't worn my coat during the holidays, it was too hot. I put it on this morning to run to the

town to shop for Violet, and stuck my hand in my pocket, and found that wretched envelope."

"But did you never think of it once during the holidays? I should have thought studying would bring it to your mind."

"I haven't done any studying—I was so dead sick of lessons," confessed Claudia. "I've just been playing about with the children all the time."

"Oh!"

Lorraine's tone was eloquent.

"What *will* Miss Janet say?" speculated Claudia gloomily.

What, indeed? Lorraine did not dare to anticipate what would happen at The Gables on the receipt of such news. Only a member of the haphazard Castleton family would have been capable of such a shiftless act. It was exactly what Morland would have done, but Lorraine had expected better things from Claudia.



"CLAUDIA! HOW *COULD* YOU FORGET?"

"Can't you get it signed now, and send it off?" she suggested.

"Father's away to-day, but I'll ask him to sign it when he comes back, and post it at once. I don't suppose it's much use, though."

"Oh, Claudia, I'm so sorry!"

"Well, it can't be helped now," said her friend, rather impatiently. "The rain's stopped, and I'm going to plant another row of peas."

Lorraine could not quite understand Claudia's attitude of mind, which seemed to hold more dread of Miss Janet's anger than concern for missing the application for the scholarship. There was a curious shade of relief mingled with her contrition. She began to sing quite cheerfully as she planted the peas, and, when Constable came running past, she picked him up and kissed him.

"Violet would miss me dreadfully if I went away. We've been friends the last few days," she remarked later on. "I helped to make Baby a new frock, and he looks so sweet in it. He *is* a darling!"

There was trouble at The Gables when the Misses Kingsley returned and learnt the bad news. They wrote off at once to Miss Halden, explaining the circumstances, but the answer came back that certain rules of the College were very strict, and the governors could not consider any application submitted later than the 6th.

"Also," wrote the Principal. "I feel that a girl, who could forget such an immensely important step in her own career, would be of no use to us, and I could not feel justified in awarding her a scholarship. I am exceedingly sorry, but fear this decision must be final."

So there, as far as the College was concerned, the matter ended. At school, however, Claudia with an obstinate look on her face weathered the storm of Miss Janet's contempt.

"After all the trouble I took in coaching you! It's really too bad! You've ruined your own career, and no one but yourself to thank for it! Why, the scholarship was as good as gained! You'd so easily have passed the exam. It was all arranged with Miss Halden, and you've spoilt the whole thing with your carelessness. You might at least have the grace to say that you're sorry!"

"I'm very sorry, Miss Janet," said Claudia in an apathetic voice.

The mistress glanced at her keenly.

"I doubt if you really are! I can't make you out! I'm disgusted with the whole affair. One gets very little thanks for trying to help people!"

Claudia, in terrible disgrace, retired sobbing. Later on, however, she poured confidences into Lorraine's ear.

"I'm sorry of course to disappoint Miss Janet, but I can't tell you how relieved I am, really! I never wanted to go, and that's the fact. I'd have *hated* to be a kindergarten teacher! I'd rather go on the land if I leave home at all, but--but----"

"Claudia!" began Lorraine, with sudden enlightenment, "were you going to be *home-sick*?"

"I suppose so. I'm fond of the children, you know, though I get fed up with them sometimes. It would take a very strong magnet to draw me away. Perhaps if something really *fascinating* offered, I'd want to go--but not for Kindergarten! No thanks! Some other girl may get the scholarship instead of me, and she's welcome to it. After all, home is a very nice place."

"It certainly is. I don't want to leave mine just at present," agreed Lorraine reflectively.

CHAPTER XV

An Academy Picture

With the beginning of a new term two very important events happened in Lorraine's little world. Mervyn was sent to Redfern College, and Morland went into training. Mervyn's exodus was really somewhat of a relief, for he had been getting rather out of hand lately, and had waxed so obstreperous on occasion that his father had decided to pack him off at once for a taste of the discipline of a public school. Morland, who was now eighteen, went away in high spirits. On the whole he was tired of lounging about at home. He had reached the age when the boy is passing into manhood, and begins to think of making his own way in the world. All kinds of shadowy pictures of the future were floating in his mental vision, day dreams of brave deeds and great achievements, and laurel wreaths to be won by hands that had the luck to pluck them. His eyes were shining as he bade Lorraine good-bye.

"You must have thought me rather a slacker sometimes," he said. "But really there wasn't anything to urge a fellow on at home. Perhaps I'll tumble into my own niche some day. Who knows? Would you be glad, Lorraine, if you saw me doing decently?"

"Glad? Of course I should!"

"I didn't know whether you'd worry your head one way or another about it, or care twopence whether I went to the dogs or not!"

"Don't be silly! You're not going to the dogs."

"I might--if nobody was sufficiently interested in me to mind."

"Heaps of people are interested!"

"One doesn't want people in heaps--I prefer interest singly. By the by, if you've any time to spare, you might write to a fellow now and again. I'll want letters in camp."

"All serene! I'll send you one sometimes."

"Just to remind me of home."

"Morland! I believe you've got home-sickness as badly as Claudia. You'll be back at Porthkeverne before long, unless I'm greatly mistaken!"

"With my first leave, certainly," twinkled Morland.

As the weeks passed by in April, the artistic world of Porthkeverne reached a high pitch of anticipation and excitement. Practically every painter there had submitted something to the Academy, and the burning question was which among them would be lucky enough to have their work accepted. They looked out eagerly for the post, awaiting either a welcome varnishing ticket or a printed notice regretting that for lack of space their contributions could not be included in the exhibition, and requesting them to remove their pictures as speedily as possible.

In the studio down by the harbour expectation ran rife. Margaret Lindsay had finished her painting of "Kilmeny"--if not altogether to her own satisfaction, at any rate to that of most of her friends--and had dispatched it to the Academy.

"I don't believe for a moment that it will get in," she assured Lorraine. "I never seem to have any luck, somehow. I'm not a lucky person."

"Perhaps you will have this time," said Lorraine, who was washing out oil paint brushes for her friend, a messy task which she sometimes undertook. "Let's *will* that you shall be accepted. You *shall* be!"

"All the 'willing' in the world won't do the deed if the judges 'will' the other way, and their will tugs harder than ours!" laughed Margaret. "It depends so much on the taste of the judges. There's a fashion in pictures as in other things, and it's constantly changing."

"Is there? Why?"

"That I can't tell you, except that people tire of one style and like another. First the classical school was the favourite, then pre-Raphaelitism had its innings, then impressionism came up. Each period in painting is generally boomed by some celebrated art critic who deprecates the old-fashioned methods and cracks up the new. The public are rather like

sheep. They buy what the critics tell them to admire. *Punch* had a delightful skit on that once. Ruskin had been pitching into the commonplace artist's style of picture rather freely, so *Punch* evolved a dejected brother of the brush giving vent to this despairing wail:

'I takes and paints,
Hears no complaints,
And sells before I'm dry;
Then savage Ruskin
He sticks his tusk in,
And nobody will buy!'"

"I love *Punch*!" cackled Lorraine, drying the brushes on a clean paint-rag. "Tell me some more artistic titbits."

"Do you know the one about the old lady in the train who overheard the two artists talking? One said to the other:

"Anything doing in children nowadays?"

"And his friend answered: 'A feller I know knocked off seven little girls' heads--nasty raw things they were too!--and a chap came in and carried them off just as they were--wet on the stretcher--and said he could do with a few more.'

"The poor old lady, who knew nothing of artists' lingo, imagined that she had surprised details of a ghastly murder, instead of a satisfactory sale to an enterprising dealer. But to come back to the Academy, Lorraine; I know I shan't get in! I've sent five times before, and always had the same disappointment, if you can call it a disappointment when you don't expect anything. The last time it happened I was in town, and I went to the Academy myself to fetch away my pictures. As I walked down the court-yard and out into Piccadilly with my parcel under my arm, I felt pretty blue, and I suppose I looked it, for a wretched little street arab stared at me with mock sympathy, and piped out: 'Have they rejected you too, poor darling?' He said it so funnily that I couldn't help laughing in spite of my blues."

"When are you likely to hear your luck?" asked Lorraine.

"Any day now; but it will be bad luck."

"Then I shall call every day on my way home from school to see if you've had a letter."

Lorraine kept her word, and each afternoon took the path by the harbour instead of the direct road up the hill. Day after day passed, and the post-woman had not yet delivered the longed-for official communication.

"No news is good news!" cheered Lorraine. "Mr. Saunders had his rejection last week, so Claudia told me. Mr. Castleton only heard this morning."

"How many has he in?"

"Three--the view of Tangy Point from the beach, Madox wheeling Perugia in the barrow, and the portrait of Madame Bertier. Claudia says they're immensely relieved, because even Mr. Gilbertson is 'out' this year. Here comes the second post! Is there anything for you? I'm going to see!"

Lorraine, in her impatience, tore down the wooden steps of the studio, and waylaid the post-woman. She came back like a triumphant whirlwind, waving a letter.

"I believe this is 'it'. Oh, do open it quick! I can't wait. I never felt so excited to know anything in all my life! I could scream!"

Margaret, equally agitated, nevertheless kept her feelings under control, and opened the envelope with outward calm, though her fingers trembled noticeably. She looked at the enclosure, flushed crimson, and, turning to Lorraine, dropped a mock curtsy.

"Madam Kilmeny," she announced, "I'm happy to be able to inform you that your portrait is to appear upon the walls of the Royal Academy!"

"Oh, hurrah!" jodelled Lorraine, careering round the studio in an ecstatic dance, somewhat to the peril of various studies on easels. "I *knew* it would get in, Carina! I had a kind of premonition that it would!"

"And I had a premonition the other way entirely. I never was so surprised in my life! You've been my little mascot, and brought me the luck!"

"No, indeed; it's your own cleverness. It's a beautiful painting. Claudia says even her father admired it, and he

scarcely ever allows anybody's work is decent except his own."

"I certainly take praise from Mr. Castleton as a compliment," admitted Margaret. "I'm glad to hear that he liked it. Well, this is actually my first real artistic success. I don't know myself this afternoon. I feel an inch taller than usual."

"And so do I, to think I'm going to be hung in the Academy! Of course, I know you've idealized me out of all recognition; but there's a foundation of 'me' in the picture--enough to cock-a-doodle about. The Castletons have been painted so often, they don't care; but it's a unique experience for me. It makes me feel somehow as if I were Kilmeny, and had spent those seven long years among the fairies. I felt it all the time I was standing for you, Carina."

"That's where you made such a perfect model. I could see the glamour of the fairies in your face, and tried to catch it in my painting. I always contend that one of the chief elements in a good sitter is imagination, so as to maintain the right expression. One sees many apathetic portraits, and knows that the originals must have been feeling bored to tears. You never looked bored."

"No, the fairies were dancing round me all the time! You conjured them up. Do you know, Carina, I think fairies are your forte? I like those small paintings of them better than anything else you do."

"Those coloured frontispieces for children's magazines? They're certainly the only things in which I've ever succeeded. It's well to realize one's limitations. I've been so ambitious in my time, and wanted to paint historic scenes and battle-pieces, and other things quite beyond my powers. It's strange if the line we rather despise turns out to be our best bit of work. Look at Edward Lear. He was a rather classically inclined artist, whose serious work seems to have vanished, yet he is known and appreciated all over the world by the delightful and inimitable *Book of Nonsense* that he knocked off in a few leisure hours to amuse the children of a noble family whose portraits he was painting. Hans Andersen, too, is another instance. No one ever now reads his numerous novels and solid books, but his fairy-tales have been translated into almost every language. Nothing so charming and poetical has ever been written. His is a magic flute that draws children of every clime and age to listen to him. Not that I'm for a moment comparing myself to Edward Lear or Hans Andersen! All the same, I think I shall take a hammer and smash up those statues I was trying my hand at, and stick to fairies for the future."

"I hope they'll hang 'Kilmeny' on the line!"

"So do I, but I don't expect it. It will be most exciting to go up to town and see it. I wonder----"

"You wonder what?" asked Lorraine, for Margaret had suddenly stopped short.

"Never mind! It was an idea that came into my head. Perhaps I'll tell you some other time."

"Oh, do tell me now!"

"Certainly not--you must wait. No, it's no use your guessing, for I shan't say whether you're right or wrong."

Lorraine's guesses, which were of rather a wild description, did not come anywhere near the real truth, which was sprung upon her a few days later by her enterprising friend. It was nothing more or less than an invitation to go up to London with Miss Lindsay and see "Kilmeny" for herself on the wall of Burlington House.

"I daren't tell you beforehand in case it should be an impossible scheme," said Margaret, "but your mother gives permission, and I saw Miss Kingsley myself, and she promised you a few days' holiday. I told her it was part of your education to see the Academy, and she quite agrees with me. So you're to go!"

This was news indeed! Lorraine was half crazy with joy. Though she had turned seventeen, she had never yet been to London. Porthkeverne was a long journey from town, and any holidays which she had taken had been to visit relations in other parts of the country. She had envied Rosemary when the latter started for the College of Music; now she was actually to see the great city for herself, and in company with Carina, of all delightful people in the world. They were to go up for a whole precious week, and to stay in a hotel--Lorraine had never yet stayed in a hotel--and they were to do theatres, and as many of the sights as could possibly be crammed into the short space of time. The prospect was dazzling. Monica, catching in her breath sharply, decreed: "You're the biggest lucker I've ever met, Lorraine!"

Clothes, of course, were a paramount topic.

"I can't let Miss Lindsay take a Cinderella with her to London," said Mother, looking over the fashionable advertisements in the papers, and trying to decide what was the most suitable costume for a girl of seventeen. "You want something to look smart in at the Academy, and yet that won't get soiled directly with going about in motor omnibuses. Now this is a sweet dress! I'd like you in this, but it would be ruined in five minutes if you were caught in a shower; and how can we guarantee fine weather? Does your umbrella want re-covering? If there isn't time to have it

done, Rosemary must lend you her new one."

By dint of much eager cogitation on the part of the whole family, Lorraine's wardrobe was at last satisfactorily arranged and packed in a suit case. She herself, in a new grey coat and skirt and a grey travelling hat trimmed with pink, joined Margaret Lindsay at the railway station. They were to catch the early express, and Mother, Rosemary, and Monica came to see them off. It felt so grand to be going away without the rest of the family, and to hang out of the carriage window shouting good-bye while they frantically waved handkerchiefs upon the platform. Lorraine, still clutching in her new gloves the sticky packet of sweets that Monica had pressed as a last offering into her hand, went on signalling until Margaret pulled her forcibly back on to her seat.

"We don't want your head whisked off first thing, please, and we're coming to the bridge. I wouldn't sit on the lunch-basket, if I were you! Let me put it up on the rack."

"I'm *so* excited!" sighed Lorraine. "I'm glad we've got the carriage to ourselves, Carina, because we can talk. Isn't it sport?"

"We shan't keep it long. It will probably fill up at St. Cyr, so work off your spirits now, if you want to. But my advice is to take things calmly, or you'll be tired out before we get to town."

The long railway journey, first along the coast, and then inland through scenery which was very different from Porthkeverne, was deeply interesting to Lorraine; and if she grew tired and closed her eyes for part of the route, her enthusiasm woke again when they reached London. The great station with its crowds of people, the rows of cabs and taxis, the streets with their endless traffic, all seemed a new world to the little country mouse who was making her first acquaintance with the metropolis.

"It's busier than I expected, and ever so much dirtier!" she commented.

"Yes, it's a different world from Porthkeverne--no arum lilies and yuccas and aloes--only plane-trees and lilac-bushes in the squares. Here we are at our hotel! It will be nice to wash and rest!"

Lorraine, with a beaming face, sat next morning at the little table laid for two, and discussed plans over the breakfast bacon. She had drawn up a programme of things she wanted to see in town, of so lengthy a description that Margaret Lindsay declared it would take at least a month instead of a week to work through it adequately.

"Some of the shows are shut up because of the war," she said, going through the list and putting ticks against the most suitable places. "We can see the Zoo, and Madame Tussaud's, and Kew Gardens, and I'll enquire whether the Tower and the Houses of Parliament are open to visitors at present. Westminster Abbey will, of course, be on view, but I expect we shall find the monuments banked up with sandbags for fear of raids. Never mind, we'll do Poets' Corner at any rate. What would you like to start with this morning?"

"May I choose? Then I plump for the Academy!"

So to the Academy they went, and it was a very gay, pink-cheeked, bright-eyed version of Lorraine who walked up the flight of stairs at Burlington House, and through the turnstile into the entrance hall where the palms are. She had seen small exhibitions at the Arts Club in Porthkeverne, but never a series of great rooms hung with large pictures. Margaret was turning over the pages of the catalogue.

"Oh, do find out where 'Kilmeny' is, and let us go and see her first!" begged Lorraine.

"She's in Room VII, No. 348."

It was difficult to tear Margaret away from the nearest pictures, but Lorraine's impatience dragged her along to Room VII. "Kilmeny" was really in a very good position, if not exactly on the line, only just above it, and fortunately the pictures on either side were in low tone, and did not spoil the effect of colour.

"A field of poppies or a Venetian carnival next door would have utterly killed my sunset and thistledown!" rejoiced Margaret. "I ought to be very grateful to the hanging committee. It doesn't look so bad as I expected."

"Bad! It's the most beautiful picture in the whole room."

"We must hunt up our other friends," said Margaret, turning over the pages of the catalogue. "Where are Mr. Castleton's, I wonder? Oh, there's one in the next room--No. 407. Let's go and look at it."

The picture in question was the portrait of Madame Bertier, a clever study in an impressionist style, showing the bright eyes and eager features of that volatile lady under cover of a large black hat and veil. It was perhaps one of the best pictures that Mr. Castleton had ever painted, and it was attracting quite a small crowd. Margaret and Lorraine came

up, and joined the outer circle of admirers. In front of them stood two gentlemen and a lady--foreigners. They spoke softly and rapidly together in French. Lorraine, whose knowledge of that language was not far beyond the ordinary schoolgirl standard, could not understand all they were saying, but she caught a word here and there. The lady was admiring the skill of the painting, and voting it worthy of the Salon in Paris; one of the gentlemen admired the beauty of the model, the other, with a pleased smile, explained that it was his wife, and that, though a charming portrait, it scarcely did justice to the original.

"Mais c'est a merveille!" he said, with a quick gesticulation, as he moved on to allow other people access to the picture.

Lorraine nudged Margaret, and drew her aside.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered. "That man in the light suit declared that Madame Bertier was his wife!"

"Impossible! Her husband is interned in Germany!"

"Well, that was what he said at any rate."

"Perhaps he was making up, just for effect. Some people like to tell these wonderful fibs in public, just to impress the outside world."

"Then why didn't he speak English, if he wanted to impress people?"

"Which man was it?"

"That one--next to the lady in blue."

"Why--why--if I'm not utterly mistaken, I verily believe it's the man we looked at through the glasses from Tangy Point: he met Madame Bertier on the shore."

"And I couldn't remember where I'd seen him before. Oh, Carina! Let's follow them, and I'll look at him again."

But the crowd in the Academy was rapidly increasing, and the three foreigners were lost behind a row of ladies in fashionable spring hats. They must have made an unexpected exit, for though Lorraine kept her eyes open for them the whole of the morning, she did not chance to see them again.

"It's rather mysterious, isn't it?" she said to Margaret afterwards.

"It is--if he was telling the truth. Some of these foreigners are queer people. Never mind Madame Bertier now; let us enjoy ourselves. Shall we get tickets for a *matinee* to-morrow, or leave theatres for the evenings? Remember, we want plenty of time for Kew."

CHAPTER XVI

An Opportunity

Lorraine, after a delirious round of pleasure in town, returned to Porthkeverne quite tired out with festivities, but declaring that she had had the time of her life.

"It will be your turn next," she said to Monica, who sat on the floor while she unpacked, and demanded a circumstantial account of every hour of the gay visit. "We shall certainly have you jaunting off to London some day."

"Not till I'm seventeen, perhaps," the voice was doleful, "and that's just ages to wait. Daisy Phillips has been to London three times, and she's only ten! She crows over me dreadfully."

"Poor old Cuckoo! You're a badly-used child! See what I've got for you inside this parcel."

"A Japanese pencil-box! The very thing I wanted! And such a lovely one! It's nicer than anybody else's in the whole form."

"Then you'll score over Daisy for once!"

"Rather! Lorraine, you're a trump! Oh, and the ducky little blue knife inside, and pink pencils! I know everybody'll want to borrow them at once, but I shan't lend them to a single soul! They're too nice even to use myself. *Do* say I'm not to lend them, and then the girls needn't call me stingy."

"All right! I absolutely forbid them to be lent. Where's Rosemary? I've a parcel here that may interest her. No, Cuckoo! You're not to peep inside. What a Paul Pry you are! Go and call her, and I'll show it to her myself."

Somehow Lorraine felt as if the little visit to London had suddenly added years to her age. It had enlarged her circle of experiences so greatly that she had begun to look on life from almost a grown-up standpoint. She had gone away, older certainly than Monica, but regarded in the family category as one of "the children", and she had returned to take her place on a level with Richard, Donald, Rodney, and Rosemary. She was allowed to read Richard's letters from Mesopotamia, instead of only having portions retailed to her; and she was not sent out of the room now, when Father and Mother discussed Rodney's future for those halcyon times when peace should be declared, and he should leave the Air Force. She began in some measure to realize her mother's daily, hourly anxiety about these boys at the front, and to understand how behind all the happiness of her daily life stood a nightmare, with a spectral hand raised ever ready to fall on those three best beloved.

Trouble, which mercifully spared their own family, struck nevertheless very near. A yellow envelope arrived one day at the Barton Forresters' house, and Aunt Carrie opened it with trembling fingers and a sinking heart.

"There's no answer!" she said briefly to the waiting telegraph girl. Then she sat down and tried to face what the short message from the War Office really conveyed. Only twelve words, but it meant the hope of a family trailed in the dust. Lindon, their one treasured boy, had "gone west". Well, other mothers had given their dearest and best! She would offer him gladly, joyfully, on the altar of Britain's glory! But her face seemed to grow suddenly shrunken, and the high colour faded from her cheeks, leaving a network of little red veins instead.

"If only she wouldn't try to be *quite* so brave about it!" said Mrs. George Forrester. "It's such a terrific effort for her to keep up like this! Why, the very next day she went to the Red Cross Hospital just as usual. She hasn't slacked a single thing. The strain must be tremendous. She absolutely worshipped that poor boy! The girls hadn't an innings in comparison with him. I admire the way she's taking it, but I'm afraid some day it will be more than she can stand, and she'll just collapse. If it had been Richard, I couldn't have borne to speak of him to anybody just at first, yet she talks quite calmly of Lindon. It's too much for human nature!"

Uncle Barton, grown suddenly ten years older, went about looking small and stooping, with a reef of wrinkles about his kind eyes. He clung to Betty, whose manner had softened under the blow. Of the three girls she understood him the best, and, though she was still undemonstrative, her silent consideration comforted him.

Lorraine, in the sanctuary of the studio by the harbour, railed at Providence.

"Why should Lindon be taken?" she asked bitterly. "Lindon--the nicest of all our cousins! Oh, Carina, why should a splendid hopeful young life like this be sacrificed, and poor Landry be left behind? I don't understand! It seems so futile--such a waste!"

Margaret stroked her hand for a moment before she answered:

"It may seem so on the face of it, but then we don't see the whole--only one side of it. Perhaps the splendid useful life is wanted for work and greater development in the next world, where it can spread its spiritual wings unhampered by physical disabilities. And poor Landry may be needed here, as a discipline to purge somebody's soul, or to bring kindness to a heart that might otherwise have gone unenlarged. This world is a school to train character, and, if some of us are sent on quickly into a higher form, it is because there are other lessons to learn there. Don't for a moment call Lindon's sacrifice 'waste'! Have you ever read these lines?

'A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the Rood;
The million, who, humble and nameless,
The straight, hard, pathway trod--
Some call it consecration,
And others call it GOD!'"

There was one person who, Lorraine suspected, was grieving for Lindon more than she would allow anybody to imagine. Rosemary had always been fond of this particular cousin, and, between the day-dreams of dukes and generals who were to sue for her sister's hand, it had sometimes occurred to Lorraine that a far more ordinary and commonplace romance might be enacted under her eyes near at home. Lindon had been wont to come to the house far more frequently than Elsie, Betty or Vivien; he had always enjoyed Rosemary's singing, and had given her his photo in a locket before he went away. He had written to her often from the front, and though there had been no hint of such a thing as an engagement, it had been apparent to anyone not absolutely blind that they were interested in each other. It is perhaps much harder for a girl, in such circumstances, to lose her lover, than for one who is definitely engaged, and can claim open sympathy for her sorrow. Rosemary felt that she could not talk about Lindon to Elsie, Betty and Vivien. They had always been rather jealous of his preference for her, and had resented his frequent visits to Pendlehurst. They did not know about the locket or the letters. She kissed Uncle Barton, however, with extra affection, and he responded so warmly, holding her arm as they walked down the garden, that she somehow thought he understood.

So Rosemary gulped back this trouble as she had borne her disappointment about the College of Music, and flung herself into that universal panacea for heart-breaks--work for the Red Cross. She slaved at scullery-duty three mornings a week at the hospital, and put in alternate afternoons rolling bandages at the depot. She would have given up her whole time to either, but that her mother would not allow.

"You're all eyes, child!" she commented. "You must get out into the fresh air this lovely weather, and put some roses into your cheeks. I shall give you a tonic. You look like a canary that's been moulting."

Privately, Rosemary felt as if her heart had been moulting, and she had not yet had time to grow her new spiritual feathers. The fact that anybody was noticing, however, made her brace up. She had no wish to pose as a sentimentalist. She swallowed the tonic dutifully, took the prescribed daily walk, and even, with a great effort, practised the piano. She could not yet bring herself to touch her songs--the remembrance of Signor Arezzo's verdict was still too raw.



CLAUDIA FLUNG HER ARMS ROUND ROSEMARY'S NECK AND HUGGED HER

One glorious beautiful afternoon saw Rosemary wending her way up the hill to the Castletons. Lorraine had promised to send a paper pattern to Claudia, but had been at home all day with a violent headache, so Rosemary had volunteered to walk to Windy Howe after tea and take it. She went by a short cut through the fields, and approached the house by way of the orchard. The apple-trees were in full blossom; the lovely pink bloom stood out against the blue of the afternoon sky in a delicate maze of colour too subtle for even the most cunning artist hand to reproduce. Mr. Castleton's sketch, left on its easel under the hedge, and splotted with dabs of rose madder and Payne's grey, gave only the faintest impression of the fairy scene. Clumps of primroses bloomed among the grass, and a thrush, on the tip-top of a hawthorn bough, trilled in rivalry with the blackbird whose nest was in the old pear-tree. They were not the only musicians, however. Somebody had opened the gate from the garden and was walking leisurely down the orchard--somebody in a light cotton dress, with the sunshine gleaming on her golden hair. She came slowly, and sang as she walked, sang like the blackbird and the thrush, for sheer enjoyment of the glory of the spring day. The clear high notes went thrilling through the air with all the freshness and sweetness of the birds' tones.

Rosemary, unnoticed, stood aside to watch and listen, as Claudia, still warbling on high A, stopped under an apple-tree to feed a coopful of chickens with some bread she had brought. The girl's beautiful face and figure against the apple-blossom background and the blue sky made a picture worthy of the brush of an Academician.

"Heavens!" thought Rosemary. "What a voice! If Signor Arezzo could hear *that*, now, he'd consider it worth training. It has all the glorious tone and volume that I lack. And so pure and high! I should think she could take C! The girl looks a singer. With that magnificent chest and throat she ought to be able to bring out her notes. She has such a splendid physique. She's a lovely girl, too. What a sensation she'd make on a concert platform!"

Aloud, however, Rosemary simply said, "Good afternoon!" presented the paper pattern, explained that Lorraine had a headache, and asked if Claudia were fond of singing. Claudia flushed crimson.

"Oh, I can't sing!" she stammered. "Not really. Only just to myself when nobody's listening. I didn't know you were there."

"You ought to take lessons," commented Rosemary.

Claudia shook her head. She was pinning back a yellow curl with a clasp.

"That's quite impossible, so it's not an atom of use thinking about it. It's Beata's turn for music, and she's to begin the violin with Madame Bertier next term. Don't look distressed! I'll just squall on to please myself. Nobody else cares to hear me, I'm sure."

"It's a pity to waste a talent," said Rosemary.

Claudia shrugged her shoulders.

"It isn't wasted; it comes in handy to croon the babies to sleep," she answered humorously. "And as I'm going to stay at home for the present it will most probably be wanted."

Rosemary went home with her head in a whirl. A voice like that to be devoted to crooning children to sleep! It seemed wicked. Her experience at the college had taught her enough to make her realize how much might be made of Claudia's voice with proper training. Oh! if she could only have exchanged places with Claudia! For a moment a flood of wild, bitter jealousy swept over her. This girl had all the qualifications for the want of which she herself had failed. Why had not Providence, who gave her the keen enthusiasm for music, also gifted her with that throat and voice?

"It's not fair!" raged Rosemary, wiping away very salt tears. "Some people have all the luck in life. I'd give worlds for a strong voice, instead of my wretched little drawing-room twitter."

From her sister she enquired whether Claudia could dance.

"Dance!" echoed Lorraine eloquently. "You should just see her! I wish you'd been at the rhythmic dancing display last Christmas. Her forget-me-not dance was simply a dream. Everybody said they never saw anything quite so beautiful. Miss Leighton was tremendously proud of her. She said that Claudia was the only girl in the whole school who took to the poses absolutely naturally. She fell into them as easily as easily, while all the rest of us had to practise no end."

"She's a very graceful girl, as well as immensely pretty."

There was a terrific struggle raging in Rosemary's heart. She knew that Signor Arezzo was always on the look-out for really suitable sopranos to train for opera. A girl who fulfilled his critical conditions would be awarded entirely free tuition, with a maintenance-scholarship in addition at the College of Music. If Claudia could be coached a little in Signor Arezzo's particular method of voice production, so that no glaring faults should offend him, it was highly probable that, if she were to sing before him, he would decide to give her a training.

"After two terms with him, I know *exactly* what he wants," reflected Rosemary. "I could teach someone else, though I could not do it myself. There are all my books of exercises and studies packed away at home; I'd made up my mind never to look at them again. Oh, dear! It will be like opening a wound to get them out. Shall I, or shall I not? The girl seems contented enough as she is."

It takes some qualifications for sainthood to hold open for another the door of a paradise you may not enter yourself. As Rosemary's mind see-sawed up and down, her eyes fell on a quotation printed on a calendar which hung in her room.

"Four things come not back to man or woman--the sped arrow, the spoken word, the past life, and the neglected opportunity."

"It *is* an opportunity," she mused; "an opportunity of helping such as probably I shall never find again in the whole of my life. Rosemary Doris Forrester, you've got to buck up and not be an envious beast. You're going to unpack that music, and teach that girl all you know. I say so, the real *I*--not the horrid, mean, jealous, selfish, contemptible part of

me. Here goes! I'll write and propose it, and send the letter up at once by Lorraine, so as to burn my boats. I hope to goodness Claudia will have the sense to snatch at such a good offer. I shan't tell anybody a word about it beforehand."

Lorraine, who always went willingly on any errand to Windy Howe, handed over her sister's impulsive letter, quite unwitting of its contents. Claudia read it, flushed, and caught her breath with a sharp little cry. She turned to her friend with eyes like two stars.

"Do you know what Rosemary proposes?" she asked.

"No."

"Why, she actually offers to teach me to sing! And oh, Lorraine! She hints that, if I try hard, she would write to Signor Arezzo and ask him to hear me, and perhaps he would be able to give me a scholarship for the college, and I could go and study."

It was Lorraine's turn to assimilate the surprise.

"Good old Rosemary! She's a trump card! But I thought you didn't care about winning scholarships, Claudia. I believe you missed sending in that application on purpose."

Claudia blushed consciously.

"That was altogether different. I hated the idea of teaching kindergarten. But to study singing! I'd *love* it! You know how fond I am of music--as fond as Morland is, really, only I never had his fingers for the piano. I shouldn't be much of a player, I know; but to sing! It's my ideal! I'll go and write to Rosemary now, and say I'm ready to be her pupil tomorrow. Oh, it *is* good of her!"

So the exercises and studies came out of their retirement in the dark cupboard after all, and Rosemary grew so interested in "putting Claudia through her paces", as she described it, that her own bitter disappointment began somehow to soften and tone down. Claudia was a pattern pupil. To begin with, her voice was such excellent material to work upon; then she had a very world of young enthusiasm, and was sufficiently modest to accept her teacher's dicta without argument. She practised diligently, and the training soon began to tell. In quite a short time there was marked improvement. Rosemary, listening to her deliciously pure high notes, felt a vicarious satisfaction. They were so exactly what she had always longed to produce herself.

"I shan't write to Signor Arezzo till we're through Book II," she decreed. "If you go on at this rate, I think he'll be satisfied when he hears you. If he accepts you, I *shall* be proud!"

For answer, Claudia flung her arms round Rosemary's neck and hugged her.

"You're the sweetest, kindest, most unselfish darling in the whole of the wide world!" she blurted out.

CHAPTER XVII

A Mid-term Beano

Though Lorraine and Claudia might regard Madame Bertier with more or less suspicion, she was an immense favourite with the rest of the school. The Misses Kingsley found the vivacious little Russian lady one of the best teachers they had ever had, and treasured her accordingly, while most of the girls still revolved round her orbit. She was undoubtedly very clever and fascinating. There is a certain type of pretty woman who can be adorable to her own sex. Madame liked admiration, if it were only that of a schoolgirl, and she thought the flowers and little notes that were showered upon her charming tokens of her popularity.

"They practise their hearts upon me, these poor children!" she would observe sentimentally. "The little love letters! Ah, they are *tout a fait gentilles*! Wait a few years! They will be writing them to somebody more interesting than their teacher! Oh, yes! I know well!"

"For goodness' sake don't put such ideas into their heads!" said Miss Janet, who admired the open-air type of girl, and had no weakness for romance. "I wish you wouldn't encourage them to write you those silly notes. It's a form of sentiment I've no patience with at all—a mere waste of time and paper!"

Madame shrugged her shoulders eloquently.

"What will you? We all have our own methods! As for me, I win their funny little hearts, then they will work at their lessons for love—yes, for sheer love. In but a few months they have made *beaucoup de progres*! *N'est-ce pas*? Ah, it is my theory that we must love first, if we will learn."

Though Miss Janet might sniff at Madame's sentimental method of education, she nevertheless could not deny its admirable results. In French and music the school had lately made enormous strides. The elder girls had begun to read French story-books for amusement, and the juniors had learnt to play some French games, which they repeated with a pretty accent. Both violin and piano students played with a fire and spirit that had been conspicuous by their absence a year ago, under the tame instruction of Miss Parlane.

Madame did not confine herself entirely to her own subjects. She took an interest in all the activities of the school. It was she who arranged a ramble on the cliffs.

"They get so hot, playing *toujours* at the cricket," she said to Miss Kingsley. "Of what use is it to hit about a ball? Let them come with me for a promenade upon the hills and we shall get flowers to press for the *musée*. It is not well to do always the same thing."

A ramble for the purpose of gathering wild-flowers was a suggestion that appealed to the Sixth. The museum was not too well furnished with specimens. There was scope for any amount of further collecting.

Since the curious episode of the cut telephone wires during the Easter holidays, there had been no further happenings at the museum. Miss Kingsley inclined to Madame Bertier's view, that some spy, finding the window had been left open, had taken a ladder and forced an entrance that way. She had caused a screw to be placed in the window, and the door was kept carefully locked except when the room was in use.

To Lorraine the place felt haunted. She had a horror of being there alone, and never ventured to go there unless accompanied by two or three of her schoolfellows. She had an unreasonable idea that the little trap-door in the corner might suddenly open, and a sinister face peer down out of the darkness. The nervous impression was so strong that she held the monitresses' meetings in the class-room instead of in the museum. When the mid-term beano came round, she suggested that they should assemble in the summer-house.

It had been an old-established custom at the school that once in each term the seniors should hold a kind of bean-feast. They met to read aloud papers, and suck sweets. Their doings were kept a dead secret from the juniors, who naturally were exceedingly curious, and made every effort to overhear the proceedings. On this occasion the seniors took elaborate precautions against intrusion from the lower school. Two monitresses stood in the cloak-room and sternly chivvied the younger girls to hasten their steps homewards. They went unwillingly and suspiciously.

"Why are you in such a precious hurry to get rid of us to-day?" asked Mona Parker, pertly. "You're not generally so keen on us going off early."

"There's been too much loitering about the cloak-room lately," vouchsafed Dorothy.

"Bow-wow! How conscientious we are, all of a sudden! You've something up your sleeve, I think, Madam Dorothy!"

"Mona Parker, put on your boots at once, and don't cheek your betters!"

"But there *is* something going on, I'm sure!" piped up Josie Payne. "Nellie, be a sport and tell us!"

"Mind your own business, and don't butt in where you're not wanted! How long *are* you going to be in lacing those shoes?"

"There, there! Don't get ratty! I'm ready now!"

The dilatory juniors, by dint of much urging, were at last hustled off the scenes. The ringleaders among them departed in rebellious spirits, which fizzed over in the playground into a series of aggressive cock-a-doodle-does, significant of their attitude of annoyance.

The monitresses wisely took no notice. They were too glad to be rid of the younger element to follow into the playground and do battle. Having cleared the premises, they passed the signal "all serene!" and repaired to the summer-house. It was a good place for a secret meeting, for it was at the bottom of the garden, facing the main path and a patch of lawn, so that it would be quite impossible for anybody to come from the house or the gymnasium without being seen. The accommodation was limited, but some of the girls sat on the floor, and some on the gravel in front. It had been a matter of considerable difficulty to procure sweets, and every likely shop in the town had been foraged. The result, though not very great, was quite wonderful for war-time: there was actually some chocolate, some walnut toffee, two ounces of pear drops, and some gum lozenges. The contributions were pooled, and shared round impartially.

The members were sucking blissfully while Lorraine went round and collected the literary portion of the entertainment.

"Only eight papers to-day! You slackers! Audrey, where's yours? Haven't had time to think of anything? How weak! Doreen, I expected the Fifth to do its duty. Thanks, Phoebe, I'm glad you've written something, and you too, Beryl."

"Please keep mine till the *very* last, and don't read it at all if there isn't much time!" implored Phoebe.

"You mustn't read mine first!" fluttered Dorothy.

"Nor mine!"

"Nor mine!"

"Look here! Somebody has got to come first! I shall do it by lot; I'll write your names on slips of paper and shuffle them. Lend me a pencil, Patsie. There! I'll stir them round, and Audrey shall draw one."

Audrey picked out at random one of the little twisted scraps of paper, and the lot fell upon the protesting Dorothy. She rose apologetically.

"They're not much," she murmured. "Just a few 'Ruthless Rhymes', that's all.

Anna Maria
Fell into the fire,
She was burnt to a cinder.
Pa said: 'Let's open winder!'

In a river in the city
Jack was drowned
And never found.
Mother said it was a pity
His new boots went down with him.
They'd have fitted Brother Jim.

A bomb dropped on to the house and blew
Beds, tables and chairs to Timbuctoo.
'Dear, dear how annoying!' murmured Aunt May,
'We'd spring-cleaned the place only yesterday!'

Poor little Johnnie, he swallowed his rattle,
It stuck in his throat and he gave up life's battle;

They couldn't get Johnnie to 'ope eyes and peep'
But they shook up the rattle and sold it off cheap."

The next on the list was Lorraine's own contribution.

DIARY OF A GIRL IN THE YEAR A.D. 4000

To-day I used my new air wings, and flew up the Thames valley to see the remains of ancient London, recently excavated. It is an extraordinary sight, and certainly seems to throw some light upon the manners and customs of that quaint old nation, the English of two thousand years ago. In the museum are some weird specimens of public conveyances, notably a thing called a "tramcar" in which all sorts and conditions of people sat squeezed up side by side, and were whirled along the street, instead of the street moving as it does now, to convey passengers without any trouble. There were also machines called bicycles, consisting of two wheels and a saddle. The curator says they were much used in olden times, though how people balanced on them, goodness knows! Not half so convenient as our modern wings! Another interesting exhibit was a collection of clothing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; coats, cloaks and dresses actually made of such rare materials as cloth, silk, cotton and velvet. It makes one gasp. How beautiful they must have looked--but oh! how insanitary! How different to our modern pulp clothing that is burnt (by law) every week. I am told some of the things used to be sent to a place called a laundry, and washed all together. No wonder germs were spread in those days! It is a marvel they did not all die off from infectious diseases. There were also some fine specimens of dishes upon which food used to be served, interesting as survivals of an old custom, but amazing to us, who live on concentrated tabloids. The time those ancients wasted over meals must have been stupendous! Some old school books also made me smile. Oh, the poor children of those days! Fancy them sitting at desks and trying their eyes over that wretched small print. Now, when all the teaching is by cinema and gramophone, we realize what a purgatory education must have been in the past. I am very thankful to be living in A.D. 4000, with all our modern advantages. Think of having to go by sea to visit your friends in America, when to-day we simply get out the balloon and whisk over to pay a call. My new electric shoes have just come, and I expect will be a tremendous aid to my dancing. I shall wear them at my birthday-party. By the by, I must send a wireless to Connie, to ask if she means to come to my party. She mentioned yesterday that she was flying to China, but perhaps she will be back in time. Dad has promised me a new best glass-sided diving boat for a present, so I hope to do a little ocean exploring this summer. I hear the scenery at the bottom of the Pacific is most beautiful--far finer than the Atlantic, which everybody knows now. Well, I must go and start my gramophone, or I shan't know my Japanese lesson for to-morrow. Professor Okuto is the limit if one slacks. Good-bye, dear little diary. I'll type some more in you another day.

The girls giggled.

"You've gone ahead rather far," commented Audrey. "It sounds blissful to fly, and use a diving boat, but I'd draw the line at learning Japanese."

"Oh, it will be one of the languages of the future, no doubt!" Lorraine assured her. "French will probably be quite old-fashioned, unless it's studied like Greek and Latin are nowadays."

"I expect the children of even a few hundred years hence will have awful times learning the history of this war," said Dorothy.

"Probably they'll know more about it than we shall ever do. There are generally secret facts that crop up again after everybody is dead. It'll be a gold-mine for historians."

"And for story-writers."

"Rather!"

"Audrey, choose another scrap of paper, and see who's next on the list."

It proved to be Patsie, and her contribution was a collection of parodied proverbs. She called them:

MORAL MAXIMS FOR YOUTHFUL MINDS

Take care of the shrimps, and the lobsters will boil themselves.

Haste not pant not.

A cockroach saved is a cockroach gained.

A mouse in the hand is worth two in the hole.

Treacle by any other name would taste as sweet
Catch moths while the moon shines.
All is not mirth that titters.
A squashed slug dreads the spade.
It's the last sob that breaks the camel's heart.

"And if a child won't learn his maxim,
The teacher promptly takes and smacks 'im!"

Vivien, who was fond of rhymes, had cudgelled her brains for Limericks, and produced the following:

NELLIE APPLEBY

There was once a schoolgirl named Nell,
Who fancied herself quite a swell;
With her head in the air
And her frizzled-up hair,
She reckoned she looked just a belle.

PATSIE SULLIVAN

We know a young damsel named Pat,
She's big, and she's floppy and fat.
When to dance she begins
We just shriek as she spins,
And wonder whatever she's at!

LORRAINE FORRESTER

There is a head girl named Lorraine
(Of which fact I admit she is vain),
She walks on her toes,
With an up-tilted nose,
Her dignified post to sustain.

AUDREYROBERTS

There is a young slacker named Audrey,
Whose taste in cheap jewels is tawdry,
Necklace, brooches, and bangles
She flaunts and she jangles,
And her get-up is just a bit gaudy.

DOROTHYSKIPTON

I know a young person named Dolly,
Who's ready for any fresh folly.
She thinks she's a wit,
And can make quite a hit,
But she tells a few whoppers, my golly!

The girls giggled uneasily. There was a sting in each of the verses, and nobody likes to be made fun of. Somehow, Vivien always stuck in pins.

"We'll make one about you," began Patsie, with a rather red face.

"There was a young person named Vivvie,
Who liked all her schoolmates to chivvy----"

But at this point Claudia suddenly, and perhaps rather fortunately, interrupted.

"What's that queer noise?" she asked. "It sounds like a sort of suppressed giggling!" There was dead silence for a moment.

"I don't hear anything," said Lorraine.

"I do, though!"

"It's a kind of snorting!"

"I believe it's at the back of the summer-house."

Patsie dashed up and darted round, and, with a yell of vengeance, flung herself upon three juniors crouched with their impudent noses pressed to a crack in the boards, through which they had been spectators as well as listeners during the proceedings. A fourth child was in the very act of descending from the garden wall.

"You young blighters! How dare you! You deserve to break your legs, swarming over a high wall like that! It would just have served you right if you had, and I shouldn't have been sorry for you. Not the least teeny tiny bit, though you limped about on crutches for the rest of your young lives! Come here at once!"

As a speedy method of collecting the offenders, Patsie seized them by their pig-tails, and hauled them in a bunch to the front of the summer-house. Lorraine eyed them severely.

"If this had been a Masonic meeting," she remarked, "you'd have been obliged to have your heads chopped off for eavesdropping. Freemasons keep a sword-bearer on duty, so I'm told, to kill anybody who tries to intrude. I'm not sure if we oughtn't to do something----"

She paused, as if searching for a suitable punishment.

"Cut off their pig-tails," suggested Patsie grimly.

"No! no!" yelled the interlopers, in genuine alarm.

"I certainly shall if you ever try to come eavesdropping again. I give you three seconds to get back to the house. Now then--scoot!"

The juniors did not wait to be told twice, but with their precious pig-tails flying in the wind, raced up the garden at record speed, and disappeared into the gymnasium. Lorraine laughed as she watched their long legs careering away.

"I'm afraid they heard the cream of it!" she admitted. "It was rather clever of them, wasn't it? That little Mona is the limit! She leads all the others. I shall make a point of sitting upon her hard for the rest of the term."

"Solomon said in accents mild,
'Spare the rod and spoil the child;
Be they man, or be they maid,
Whack them, and wollop them,' Solomon said!"

quoted Patsie, choking over her last piece of chocolate.

CHAPTER XVIII

An Adventure

To give Madame Bertier her dues, it was she who suggested the wild-flower ramble upon the cliffs. It was for seniors only, and it had the immense advantage, in schoolgirl eyes, that it was held upon a Thursday afternoon; Madame had urged Thursday and stuck to the point.

"It was real sporty of her," chortled Patsie. "Miss Kingsley or Miss Janet always try to fix up rambles or things of that kind for Saturdays, and then it's taking away a holiday instead of giving us one. We've all generally got something on at home for Saturday afternoons, and though, of course, we like rambles all right, it isn't quite good enough to have to throw up our home engagements for them. Three cheers for Madame!"

"Bless her!" murmured Audrey, ecstatically. "We shall miss French on Thursday afternoon and I hadn't done a single line of my exercise or learnt my poetry. It's moved a weight from my mind."

"Don't congratulate yourself too soon, old sport! She'll probably tell us to give in the exercises."

"Well, she can't hear the poetry at any rate."

"Unless she makes us say it on the cliffs!"

"Oh, surely there won't be time for that?"

"Um—I don't know! Never trust a teacher to give one a *real* holiday! Miss Janet always tries to 'combine instruction with amusement', as the old-fashioned children's books used to put it. Madame will probably try to teach us the French names of the flowers at any rate."

"Perhaps she doesn't know them!" said Audrey hopefully.

There were eighteen seniors in the school, and on the Thursday in question they were all ready by half-past two, armed with baskets or tin cases in which to put their flowers. Their exodus was watched with envy by the juniors, who had appealed in vain to be allowed to join the excursion.

"Eighteen are quite a big enough party to keep together," decreed Miss Kingsley, "and you juniors had an aquarium expedition only last week."

"But that was on a Saturday!" objected a valiant spirit, anxious to obtain a Thursday holiday.

Miss Kingsley, however, couldn't or wouldn't see the point, and withered the speaker with an extra-scholastic glare.

The elder girls were not at all sorry to be going alone. They clung to their privileges as seniors most tenaciously.

"We don't want the whole rag-tag and bobtail of the school trailing after us," said Dorothy. "It's quite enough in my opinion to include the Fifth. I hate marching about in a troop, like trippers."

"Well, we can spread out when we get on to the cliffs. There's no need to be so fearfully particular to keep together."

Madame Bertier, among her many other accomplishments, possessed some knowledge of botany. She had studied the wild flora of the district, and knew where to take the girls to secure a variety of the best specimens. The walk she chose was down a lane, over some fields and across a portion of the moor, where Lorraine, who thought she knew all the neighbourhood of Porthkeverne, had never happened to go before. As in most rambles of the sort, it was a difficult task for the mistress to keep all the members of her flock in sight. Some were always on ahead, and others lagging behind, while a few would make detours over gates or banks in quest of particular specimens. There was the usual amount of jodelling, cuckooing and calling, and running back to fetch laggards; there was frantic excitement over a patch of wild strawberries, and great congratulation when several rare flowers were found and carefully put away in tin cases. As generally happens in natural history rambles, there was decided rivalry among the numerous budding botanists. Each wanted to be the first to secure a new specimen and to take it in triumph to show to Madame. Lorraine, who was not superior to the common weakness, had not yet had any luck at all. Seeing the others heading in a bee-line for a small tower on the hill, and, knowing she could catch them up there, she determined to branch off to the left, cross a dyke and go by herself over a particularly interesting-looking piece of the moor. If she were quick she would probably reach the tower as soon as most of the others; they would be sure to sit down there to rest and compare specimens. She would have asked Claudia to go with her, but Claudia was on in front talking to Dorothy.

"If I jodel to her it will give the show away," thought Lorraine. "No! I must do it on my own."

So she jumped a dyke, scrambled down a bank, and in a few minutes had reached a tract of wild heather-clad land that adjoined the cliff. Small bushes, bracken, and brambles mixed among the heather made walking difficult, and there were several boggy places which she was obliged to skirt. This took her farther than she had intended. Looking round she could not see her landmark, the tower.

"It must be over there to the right," she said to herself. "Hallo, what a gorgeous silver fritillary! I'll get it if I possibly can."

Lorraine was rather keen on entomology, and though she had no net with her, she pulled off her hat and ran in eager pursuit of the butterfly. It was an exciting chase, several times she nearly secured it, but it managed to elude her and flitted tantalizingly away. At last it paused and hovered, then settled on a spray of wild rose. Lorraine crept up stealthily, hat in hand. Surely she had her prize now? But just at the critical moment, again the lovely wings fluttered; she made a grab and a dash forward simultaneously, then suddenly the earth seemed to open and swallow her up.

As a matter of fact, she fell about nine feet, and lodged on a heap of shale. It was so totally unexpected, and so amazing, that she lay there for a moment or two almost stunned. Then she moved cautiously and sat up. She realized what had happened. In her mad rush after the butterfly she had not noticed where she was going, and she had fallen down the shaft of an old tin-mine. Above her were its rocky sides, with bushes and a patch of blue sky at the top. Below the ledge where she sat it sloped away towards a black hole. Lorraine, still a little dazed, shuddered as she looked down in the direction of that dark pit. She was unhurt, and she was safe enough on the edge of the shale, but how was she to get up to the level of the ground above? The sides of the shaft were far too steep to climb, and a slip might mean a plunge down, down, down into that horrible depth that loomed below.

She stood up cautiously and shouted with all the force of her lungs. There was no reply. Again and again she called, but beyond the alarm-note of a blackbird there was no response. She began to grow seriously frightened. She must be some distance from the tower, and she had wandered from the rest of the party. Suppose nobody heard her calling? The bare idea sent her breath in gasps. In time, no doubt, they would notice her absence, but they would not exactly know where to search for her. They might even imagine that she had gone home. Suppose the night came on before she was found? Suppose even days were to pass and nobody remembered the disused mine or thought of looking for her there! With white cheeks and trembling hand she leaned against the side of the shaft and called with what breath she could still muster.

There was a rustling among the heather above, and a face suddenly blocked the blue of the sky--a vacant face that peered down with the curiosity of a child. Lorraine gave a fluttering cry of relief.

"Landry!" she called. "Landry!"

How or from where he appeared she could not guess, though it was possible that he had seen the school passing near Windy Howe and had followed Claudia in the distance. He stared down at Lorraine with a certain amount of interest, but as much unconcern as if she were a bird or a rabbit.

"Landry!" she cried again. "Claudia is up by the tower. Go and tell her I have fallen down the old mine!"

The bushes rustled, and once more that patch of blue sky appeared above. Landry had gone indeed, but would he bring help? Lorraine feared that all he cared about was to find Claudia, and that with his customary taciturnity it was quite within the bounds of possibility that he might never mention her predicament at all.



SHE STOOD UP CAUTIOUSLY

She waited a while and then shouted, and kept on calling at intervals. Her wrist watch told her she had been nearly an hour down the shaft. Would help never come? She was very tired and her head swam. If she were to faint, nothing could save her from falling down into that black gulf below. Her voice was growing weaker. It seemed stifled inside the shaft. What was that sound in the distance? Surely a shout! With all her remaining energy she raised her voice in a wild halloo. Next moment Dorothy peeped over the bushes and turned with a cry to summon Claudia.

Though she was found, it was more than an hour before adequate help could be fetched from a farm, but at last two men appeared carrying a ladder, which they lowered down the shaft on to the ledge of shale. Then one of them descended and helped Lorraine to mount. Madame and a thrilled group of girls were waiting for her at the top.

"Did Landry tell you?" Lorraine asked Claudia.

"Yes, he told me and brought me to the place," said Claudia. "Landry may be very proud of himself to-day, the dear boy!"

"That mine did ought to be fenced round," remarked one of the men who had brought the ladder. "Mr. Tremayne's been warned about it many a time, but he's always put off having it done."

"Ah yes, it must be fenced!" exclaimed Madame, hysterically. "*Mon eleve!* If she had fallen a little farther, what then?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, but Lorraine, who had been sitting on the grass, sprang to her feet.

"*Don't!*" she implored. "*Don't* please say any more about it. I want to get away from the place. I know I shall dream it over again all night! Let me go straight home. I don't want to get any more flowers. I want just to be quiet and forget about it if I can."

CHAPTER XIX

Morland on Leave

At the end of June Morland came home on leave. He looked well in his khaki. Military training and camp-life had already worked wonders with his physique; his lanky, overgrown aspect had disappeared, his chest measure had increased, and he proudly showed the muscle in his arm. His father, always with an eye to artistic effects, wished to sketch him for a picture of Hector, and indeed, with his classic profile and short, crisp, curly, golden hair, he would have made a capital representation of that Trojan hero. But Morland absolutely struck at the suggestion of sitting as model, declaring that he meant to enjoy himself during his brief leave, and should not even show his nose inside the studio.

"Dad must paint the kids," he confided to Claudia. "I'm fed up with portraits. Don't even mean to have my photo taken if I can help it. You remember that picture of me when I was about five--'Grannie's Darling'? It came out as a coloured Christmas supplement, and was stuck up in everybody's nursery. Well, they got to know at the camp that I was the original of it, and they led me a life I can tell you! They've christened me 'Grannie's Darling'! I'm not going to be 'Hector' or anybody else! It isn't good enough! I sometimes wish I were as dark as a gipsy and had a broken nose! They couldn't call me 'My Lady's Lap-dog' then! Do you know, they caught me once and held me down and tied a blue ribbon round my neck! I gave them something back though, for ragging me! They didn't get it all their own way. Lap-dog indeed! Wait till I'm out at the front, and I'll show them who's the bull-terrier!"

"Poor old boy, it seems to rankle!" consoled Claudia laughingly. "I should think it's probably envy on their part. They wish they could send as good-looking a photo home to be put in a locket! Just forget them while you're on leave. We'll try to do something jolly. What would you like best? It's Saturday to-morrow, so I'm at your disposal. Shall we go for a picnic somewhere?"

"Yes, if the kids don't trail after us! I don't bargain to take Beata, Romola, Madox, Lilith, Constable, Perugia and perhaps the baby in its pram!"

"You shan't! I'll see to that. Just Landry and I'll go, and we won't tell the small fry we're off."

"How about the grotto?"

"A! I'll ask Lorraine to come with us. The tide will be just right to get round the rocks, so we'll take our lunch and eat it there."

Lorraine, shamelessly regardless of appointments at the dentist's and dressmaker's, accepted the invitation, and joined the party with a picnic-basket. It was an ideal day for the excursion; the warm sunshine was tempered by a cool breeze blowing in straight from the Atlantic; the sea had assumed its summer hue of intense blue-green, and the cliffs were covered with the beautiful crimson wild geranium.

The young people loitered along in no particular hurry, looking out to sea at the vessels, picking flowers or wild strawberries, or even a few early dewberries. As they wound up the path by the coast-guard station they heard voices behind them, and a little party consisting of an officer and two ladies passed them, walking briskly in the direction of the moors. Morland, who had saluted, turned to the girls with an eloquent face.

"It's Blake, our captain," he explained. "I saw him travelling down on Thursday, and I believe he's staying at the 'George'."

"Do you like him?" asked Claudia.

"Like him? If there's one man on the face of the earth whom I abhor it's that fellow! Thinks he's the Shah of Persia and we're dirt under his feet! He's not popular, I can tell you. He makes my blood boil sometimes!"

"He's dropped something," said Lorraine, bending down and picking up a small leather dispatch case that was lying by the side of the pathway. She handed it to Morland.

"Could you run after him and give it to him?" suggested Claudia to her brother.

"I shan't trouble myself. He's gone too far."

"We can leave it at his hotel afterwards then."

"I suppose we can, though if he flings his things about like this he doesn't deserve to have them returned to him, the blighter!" groused Morland, pocketing the case with a frown. "I wish Blake was taking his leave somewhere else. I'd

rather not breathe the same air with him!"

"Is it as bad as all that?" asked Claudia.

"Worse!" said Morland gloomily. "But I don't want to talk about him--he's the skeleton at the feast--the crumpled rose-leaf--the snake in the paradise--the anything else you like that spoils my enjoyment!"

"Rather mixed similes," laughed Lorraine. "But never mind! We'll forget him if you like. He certainly didn't look at all attractive in my opinion."

Morland pulled a face and shook a fist in the direction in which his officer had disappeared, then declared himself better and ready to jog along.

They found their special property--the cave--still uninvaded. No visitors had yet happened to come across it. The table and seats and the little cupboard at the end were just exactly as they had left them last time. They collected some driftwood, lighted a fire on the rocks below, and boiled their kettle. It was delightful to have a picnic again in the grotto. As they sat chatting afterwards, Morland pulled from his pocket the leather case which Captain Blake had dropped on the path. He turned it over thoughtfully.

"I've a score or two to settle with the owner of this," he remarked. "I'm not going to let him have it back too easily. I vote we just give him a scare about it. Let him think he's lost it altogether."

"Is it anything important, I wonder?" asked Claudia.

"The more important the better--serve him right for losing it. I say--I'm going to stow it away here in the cupboard. It'll be quite safe, but he won't know that, and I hope he'll be in a jolly state of mind about it. We'll give him a fortnight to get excited in, then you girls can come and fetch it, make it into a parcel, and leave it at the 'George', and ask them to send it on to him at the camp."

"It would really serve him right," sympathised Claudia; "only I don't quite know----"

"I *do* know!" chuckled Morland. "It's the best rag I've ever had the chance of playing on him, and you bet I'll take it."

"Suppose he finds out?" suggested Lorraine.

"He won't find out. How could he? You girls will just leave the parcel at the 'George', and say someone who picked it up had handed it over to you, and will they please forward it to the officer who was staying there. Nothing could be simpler."

"Are those the papers that send Morland to the war?" asked Landry suddenly.

"Don't you worry your head about them," answered Claudia soothingly. "They're nothing to do with you, Landry."

"I don't want Morland to fight!" persisted the boy. "Morland shan't go to the war!"

"I'll be off some day, old sport!" laughed Morland.

"To-morrow?"

"No, no, not to-morrow; but before so very long, I hope."

"Will the Germans shoot at you?"

"You jolly well bet they will!"

"Don't excite him, Morland," interfered Claudia; for when Landry once woke out of his usual stolid calm and began to trouble his poor dull brains with questions, he was apt to get peevish and troublesome. "No, no, Landry dear; Morland is quite safe at present, and we won't let the Germans get him. Take this basket down to the beach and find me some more shells. I want some yellow ones to finish the pattern I was making on the ledge here."

Claudia was an adept at managing Landry, and could keep the boy quiet and change the current of his impulses when others only irritated him. She put a basket in his hand and a yellow shell for a pattern, led him by the arm to the mouth of the grotto, and showed him the spot on the beach where he would be likely to find more. To her relief, he departed quite happily on the errand. She had been afraid he was on the verge of a burst of temper. She turned to her other brother.

"I'd a great deal rather you took that officer's case back to him right at once, Morland!"

But Morland was in a don't-care mood.

"He's not to have it for a fortnight. If I don't leave it in the cupboard here, I shall just chuck it into the sea, so I give you full and fair warning! Be a sport, Claudia! Here's Lorraine ready to see the fun of it. Aren't you, Lorraine?"

Neither of the girls was really quite easy about the propriety of thus hiding the officer's papers, but to please Morland they consented to do as he wished, and to come again in a fortnight to fetch them. After all, it seemed only a sort of practical joke, and, to judge from Morland's accounts, ragging was very much in fashion at his camp, among the Tommies at any rate. So long as Captain Blake did not find out who had kept the leather case there would be no trouble, and they thought he deserved some punishment for his arrogant behaviour towards his men.

It was a concession which they afterwards deeply regretted.

CHAPTER XX

Smugglers' Cove

Morland's leave ended on Sunday night, and by Monday morning both he and his superior officer were back in camp. Claudia came to school in an unusually quiet and depressed frame of mind.

"Yes, I miss Morland," she acknowledged to Lorraine; "but it isn't altogether that. I'm worried about him. Perhaps it's silly of me, but I can't help it. I know I can't expect him to keep a boy always, yet one feels that growing up ought to be growing into something better--not worse. Honestly, between ourselves, I don't think Madame Bertier has a good influence over him. He's always fearfully taken with her, absolutely infatuated. She fascinates him just as she does Vivien and Dorothy and some of the girls at school, and she encourages him in things he'd much better let alone. She was up at Windy Howe on Sunday, and took Morland off for a long walk, although he'd promised to stay at home that last afternoon. They went along the cliffs towards Tangy Point. Don't think I'm jealous, but I really feel angry with her--carrying him away from his family when he'd only a few hours left of his leave!"

"I hope he didn't show her our cave?" asked Lorraine quickly.

"I hope not, but I think it's extremely probable. Oh, yes! I know he promised to keep the secret, but he's beginning to say that our secrets are childish, and not worth keeping. I've several times heard Madame asking him if he knew of any caves along the coast. If she asked persistently enough he'd be sure to tell her. I know Morland!"

"Why is she so keen on caves?"

Claudia shrugged her shoulders.

"There are a great many 'whys' about Madame that I can't answer. She's the sort of woman you read about in a novel. She's bewitched most people at Porthkeverne. I own she's very nice and pleasant, and when I'm with her I even fall under the spell a little, and almost like her, but all the time at the bottom of my heart I don't trust her at all."

Whatever Claudia's private opinion might be of Madame Bertier, that pretty Russian lady was very popular in the artistic and literary circles of the town. She was always ready to pose as model, or to play her violin at concerts or At Homes. She was capital company, had a fine sense of humour, and could keep a whole room full of people amused with her lively chatter. In addition to her engagement at The Gables she had now a number of private pupils in Porthkeverne, and had established quite a connection for lessons in French, Russian, and music. On the subject of her husband she was guarded, but it was generally understood that he was a prisoner in Germany, and that she sent him parcels. Lorraine, with a remembrance of that brief sentence she had overheard at Burlington House, often wondered if that were the case.

Madame's Academy portrait had been considered quite one of the pictures of the year: it had been reproduced in art journals and illustrated papers, and in the opinion of the critics was almost Mr. Castleton's best piece of work. To Lorraine's great joy, "Kilmeny" also came in for a share of notice in the newspaper reviews, and one day a letter arrived at the studio by the harbour, containing a special invitation for the picture to be exhibited at an important provincial art gallery in the autumn. Such invitations are the swallows of an artist's summer of success, and Margaret Lindsay's eyes shone, as she showed Lorraine the official document with the city arms heading the paper.

"You've been my mascot, you see!" she said brightly. "I've tried to get into that particular exhibition time after time, and always had my pictures rejected. And now, just to think that I'm specially invited, and a place of honour kept for my 'Kilmeny'! I feel an inch taller! I must paint you in the sunset again, Lorraine!"

Lorraine, curled up on the window-seat, turning over art magazines, shook her head.

"Don't repeat yourself!" she advised. "Why not paint the dawn instead? It's just as beautiful as sunset--more so, I think, and would give you a different scheme of colour, all opal and pearly pink, instead of golden and brown. Can't you choose some other fairy-tale heroine?"

"Yes--the Dawn Princess! I can see her in imagination, standing at the edge of the waves, with a rosy sky behind her, and trails of sea-weed under her bare feet. I believe it would be a companion picture to 'Kilmeny'! If I can paint it in time, I'll see if the Art Gallery will consent to exhibit the pair. I'm actually getting ambitious. Will you stand as model again?"

"With all the pleasure in life, any time and anywhere you want me! I'm yours to command!"

A good and adequate picture of the dawn was not so easy to paint as a sunset. They were on the west coast, and, in

order to get the effect of the sun rising over the sea, it was necessary to be on some promontory where they could look eastwards over a stretch of water. The only headland which answered the required points of the compass was Giant's Tor Point, which jutted out in a curve from the mainland, with the whole of Pendragon Bay between it and the opposite point of the coast. The sandy beach under its shelter had been named "Smugglers' Cove". It was several miles away from Porthkeverne, so unless they could walk there by moonlight, it would be quite impossible to reach it in time to witness from the beach the spectacle of dawn. A moonlight scramble over cliffs and rocks might be highly romantic, but not altogether a safe proceeding, and Margaret Lindsay had a better suggestion to offer.

"We'll take my little bathing-tent, and pitch it on the shore in some sheltered place, and spend the night there. There will be just room for us both to cram in, and with a rug each we should keep quite warm. Then we shall be all ready and prepared for the dawn the moment it comes."

The weather was so warm that there were no objections to camping-out, and Mrs. Forrester quite readily gave permission for the expedition.

"You're such a *sensible* person, Muvvie dear!" gasped Lorraine ecstatically. "Some mothers would have howled at such a plan. I'm sure Aunt Carrie wouldn't have let Vivien go. You always seem to see things just from the same point of view as we do ourselves."

"I know you'll be safe with Margaret Lindsay, or I wouldn't let you stir five yards from my apron strings. I could be a dragon of a mother if the occasion required!" laughed Mrs. Forrester. "So far, happily, you've never wanted to do anything especially outrageous. I can see no harm in your camping-out on the beach just for one night. I should be a very unreasonable person if I objected."

"But then you're Muvvie and nobody else, you see!" said Lorraine, dropping a kiss on the dear brown hair that was just turning grey.

So it came to pass that on the very Tuesday evening after Morland had returned to camp, Margaret Lindsay and Lorraine shouldered bathing-tent, rugs, and picnic-basket, and trudged out to Giant's Tor Point. They arrived there about sunset, and found a quiet, sheltered spot among the rocks, well above high-water mark, where they pitched their tent. There was not a soul in sight: they seemed to have the whole of the headland and the bay entirely to themselves. It was a calm, warm evening, and the waves lapped gently upon the beach. The sand in the spot they had chosen was dry, so they piled up heaps of it for pillows, and laid down their rugs; then, having completed these preparations, opened their baskets and had a picnic supper. The sunset had faded by that time, and a full moon was shining over the bay, glinting on the waves and lighting up the outlines of the crags on the headland. The silence was broken only by the gentle purring of the waves on the pebbles, or the call of some night-bird. The calm stillness was beautiful beyond description: it was like a glimpse into another world where all petty struggles and troubles had faded away. It needed an effort to leave the beautiful moonlight and go to bed inside the tent, but they tore themselves away from it at last, and rolled themselves up in their rugs. It was a long time before either of them slept; the unusual circumstances, their cramped position, and the swish-swash-grind of the waves made them keenly on the alert. Though Lorraine would not have confessed it for worlds, she found the situation a trifle eerie. She thought she heard noises in the distance, and recalled tales of smugglers and wreckers and ghost-haunted coves. She was glad to have Margaret close beside her. There was comfort in the sense of contact with something human. Not till after midnight did she fall into a troubled sleep.

When she awoke, the moon had passed across the sky, and the first hint of dawn was in the air. Margaret had flung back her rug, and was stepping out of the tent. Lorraine followed her, shivering a little, for the morning air was chilly. Everything was wreathed in pearly shadows, and the headland loomed like a grey mass of mist, with the sea for a silver lake below. Each moment the light seemed to grow stronger, and what at first had appeared mere clumps of darkness resolved themselves into mussel-covered rocks or banks of sea-weed. At the far side of the bay, behind the heather-clad hill, the sky was changing from pearl to rose. Margaret, whose paints were ready, began to set up her easel to sketch the evanescent effect without delay. But just as she was putting in the pegs, Lorraine nudged her and pointed. At the end of the cove, where the bay merged into the open sea, there had suddenly arisen a strange object. They both looked at it, and both at the same moment realized what it was--neither more or less than the conning tower of a U-boat!

Margaret hastily pulled down her easel, and drew Lorraine behind the shelter of some rocks. She judged that if a U-boat were so near to the coast, then somebody in collusion with the enemy must be about on the shore. Nor was she mistaken. They had hardly concealed themselves when voices were heard quite a short distance away, and the grating sound of a boat being pushed along the shingle. In the gathering brightness of the dawn they could see, not a hundred yards off, the entrance to a cave from which two men were taking some barrels. They rolled them down the beach, and with apparent difficulty hoisted them into a small boat. So intent were they on their occupation that they never glanced in the direction of the rock where Margaret and Lorraine were concealed. The bathing-tent, fortunately, was round a

corner, and out of sight. No doubt they imagined that in that early hour of the morning they had the cove to themselves. Two anxious pairs of eyes, however, were watching them narrowly, and making a mental register of their actions. As the men went back to fetch more barrels, they were met by a third companion who issued from the cave; he stood for a moment speaking to them, and looking out over the water towards the conning tower of the U-boat. The first rays of the rising sun fell full on his face.

As she watched him standing there in the sunlight, with the background of the dark cave behind him, some detached links in Lorraine's memory suddenly welded themselves together, and formed a continuous chain. In a flash she recollected where she had seen him before—he was the man who had tried to take the photo of the hockey field and of the golf links in the autumn, and not only that, but she could almost be sure that he was identical with the stranger who had met Madame Bertier on the beach, and the foreigner who had admired her picture in the Academy. The sudden discovery almost stunned her. She realized all it might mean. It was evident enough what the men were doing. They had a secret store of barrels of oil inside the cave, and were taking them out to supply the U-boat. They were in a hurry, and the business did not last long. Their cargo was soon complete, the boat pushed off and was making its way along the side of the cove to the place where the conning tower still showed like a blot on the water.

As soon as it seemed safe to move from their hiding-place, Margaret and Lorraine dodged round the rocks, and abandoning tent, easel, and painting accessories climbed up the cliff-side and tramped home across the moor to Porthkeverne with all possible speed. They were sure that what they had witnessed ought to be reported at once, so they went straight to the police station and told their amazing story. The constable listened attentively, jotting down points in his notebook, asked various questions and took their names and addresses. He was guarded in his communications, but he thanked them for coming.

"I may have to call on you for more help" he remarked thoughtfully, then turning to Lorraine: "I suppose you're at home to-day if I chance to want you?"

"You'll find me at school at The Gables until four o'clock."

He nodded, and made another entry in his notebook, then, dismissing them courteously, rang up his chief on the telephone.

Lorraine went home to breakfast, feeling as if she had suddenly stepped into the pages of a detective story. That some treachery was taking place at Porthkeverne was beyond question: loyal subjects of King George do not supply U-boats with casks of oil, and the man whom she had seen was palpably no British subject, but a foreigner. She wondered what the next step in the course of events would be, and what help she would be able to render. The answer to her surmising came from a direction she had not anticipated. She had only been at school about an hour, and was at work on a piece of unseen Latin translation, when a message was brought to her summoning her to the study. She found her Uncle Barton there, talking to Miss Janet.

"Lorraine," he said briefly, "Miss Kingsley has excused your lessons to-day. Get your hat and coat and come with me, for I want to take you by train. We've just time to catch the 10.40 if we're quick."

Much excited and puzzled, Lorraine flew to the cloak-room, and donned her outdoor shoes and hat with lightning speed. What was going to happen next in this amazing chain of events? On the way to the station, Uncle Barton explained.

"The police have long been trying to catch a notorious spy, and from the description you gave this morning, they think they are on the right track of the man they want. A certain foreigner at St. Cyr is under observation, but they cannot arrest him without a witness to his identity. If you can certify that to the best of your knowledge he is the man whom you saw this morning supplying casks of oil to a U-boat, then the police can act. Should you know him again if you saw him?"

"I'd remember him anywhere now!" declared Lorraine.

It was a comparatively short journey to St. Cyr, and on arrival there they went straight to the police station. They were shown by a constable into a private office, where they were shortly joined by a detective. He questioned Lorraine carefully as to the various occasions on which she had seen the suspected foreigner.

"A man answering exactly to that description has been staying at a boarding-house in Spring Terrace," he commented. "We happen to know that he was out all last night, and returned on a motor bicycle at eight o'clock this morning. These facts would fit in with the supposition that he was at Giant's Tor Point at dawn. What we want you to do is to watch the house, and identify him if he comes out. Now of course you understand that it wouldn't do for a young lady and a detective to sit on the doorstep waiting for him. At the first sight of us he'd escape by the back way.

We want to catch him off his guard. My idea is this. Have you any notion of gardening?"

"A little," said Lorraine, surprised.

"You could rake about, at any rate, and pull up a few weeds? Well, there's a small public park right in front of the house in Spring Terrace. If you don't mind putting on a land worker's costume that I've borrowed for you, we'll employ you for the day on a job of gardening in the park. You can keep one eye on the weeds, and the other on the front door of 27 Spring Terrace. I shall be near you, bedding out fuchsias. You agree to take on the job? Then may I ask you to step into this other room and put on your land costume? There's no time to be lost. We don't want to miss the fellow. I've a man selling newspapers and watching the house, but he's no use as a witness."

This was indeed an excitement. Lorraine felt thrills as she hurried into the corduroys, leggings, and smock that had been placed ready for her. They were an indifferent fit, but in the circumstances that did not matter. The hat she thought decidedly becoming. On her return to the office she found that Detective Scott had also accomplished a quick change. He was now arrayed in a shabby suit of clothes, and carried a parcel of bedding-out plants.

He smiled satisfaction at her get-up, and handed her a rake and a basket.

"Good luck to you!" said Uncle Barton. "I shall be somewhere about in the park, not far from you; but I'd better not show up too much. These fellows soon get their suspicions aroused if they see people hanging round."

It was certainly a new experience for Lorraine to walk through the streets of St. Cyr in smock and corduroys, but the townspeople were so well used to land workers that nobody took any particular notice of her. The park was close at hand, and here the detective, setting down his parcel of fuchsias, showed her a patch of border next to the railings, and instructed her to weed and rake it.

"No. 27 is the house with the green blinds and the plant in the window," he whispered. "I've seen Jones--the man who's selling newspapers--and he says nobody has come out from there yet answering to the description of the fellow we want."

With that he left her, and, turning his back, began operations on a round bed already fairly full of lobelias and geraniums. Lorraine, with all her attention concentrated on the door of No. 27, worked abstractedly. She thought afterwards that, if any of the ratepayers of St. Cyr had taken the trouble to watch her gardening operations, they would have decided that girls on the land were certainly not worth their salt. She raked, and weeded, and picked up a few dead twigs, and scraped some moss off the path with a trowel, turning her head every other moment to peep through the railings. Once the door of No. 27 opened, and she held her breath, but it was only a lady who came out with a little child. Was this mysterious foreigner really in the house? He might have escaped by a back way, or have gone off in some disguise, in which case all her waiting would be in vain. Hour after hour passed by. The night at the cove and the agitation of the early morning had made her very tired, but she stuck grimly to her job. She was hungry, too, for it was nearly three o'clock, and she had eaten nothing since breakfast. The detective, who had been pottering about the flower-beds, sauntered carelessly up to her as if to direct her work.

"Can you hold out any longer?" he asked under his breath.

"I'll try!" she answered pluckily.

"I'll send a boy to buy you some buns. I expect, after a night out, the fellow's sleeping. There's no knowing what time he may choose to take a walk. The only thing is to stick it as long as you can."

The buns arrived in due course, delivered in a paper bag by a small boy. Lorraine felt a little better after eating them, but her task of waiting and watching had grown irksome in the extreme. She hated that patch of ground behind the railings. She felt that she would remember the look of the brown soil for the rest of her life. The market-hall clock chimed the quarters. The distance between the chimes seemed interminable. She had never realised that fifteen minutes could be so long. Four o'clock struck, then the time dragged on till half-past, then a quarter to five.

"I believe I'll faint or do something silly if I stay here much longer!" thought Lorraine. "I wish my legs wouldn't shake in such an idiotic manner!"

Five o'clock sounded from the tower of the market hall. She stretched her weary back, and leaned on her rake. Her eyes were fixed on the door opposite. It was opening. Someone was standing in the hall, and apparently speaking. He slammed the door and came down the path towards the gate. There was no mistaking the dark, clean-shaven face; she knew its owner again instantly. At the gate he paused and lighted a cigarette, then walked rapidly away in the direction of the railway station.

The detective turned from his flower-beds, humming a tune with apparent indifference.

"Can you identify him?" he whispered.

"Certainly I can. Without a doubt it's the man I saw this morning."

"We'll just catch him at the corner of the park, then. I've a couple of men waiting," chuckled the detective, taking a short cut over the flower-beds, regardless of tender seedlings.

Lorraine was not near enough to witness the actual arrest. What happened next was that Mr. Barton Forrester came and took her back to the police station, where she formally identified the prisoner. Then she thankfully changed into her own clothes, and went with Uncle Barton into the town to get some tea.

Little Uncle Barton was as excited and pleased as a boy at the result of the adventure. His face beamed with satisfaction as he ordered cakes at the cafe.

"We've done a good day's work, Lorraine," he confided, lowering his voice lest bystanders should overhear. "That fellow has been under suspicion, but they couldn't catch him tripping. Dodson, the detective, believes he'll turn out a notorious spy, in which case they'll have plenty of witnesses against him on other charges, without needing to bring you into the matter again. They'll deal with him under martial law. There are far too many of these spies about the country--half of the foreigners who are here ought to be interned! You looked A1 in that rig-out" (his eyes twinkled). "Will you stick to your job as lady-gardener in the park?"

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Lorraine eloquently, helping herself to a second cup of tea.

CHAPTER XXI.

Trouble

When Lorraine looked back upon those few warm days in July, she decided that they had contained more concentrated adventure than had been provided in the whole course of her life. Events seemed to follow quickly one upon another.

On the day after her exciting experience at St. Cyr she went to school as usual. It was an effort to do so, for she was tired, but she had a record for punctual attendance, and did not wish to break it unless under special compulsion. To her surprise, Claudia was absent. She missed her chum, and kept looking anxiously towards the door, expecting the golden head to pop in at the eleventh hour. But nine o'clock and the roll-call came, and no sign of Claudia. Miss Turner marked her absent, and put back the book inside the desk. The girls took out their copies of Moliere, in preparation for the French lesson. Miss Turner collected some papers from her desk, and walked away to instruct the Third Form on the subject of Roman history. The Sixth sat with their books before them and waited. Under ordinary circumstances Madame Bertier was punctuality personified. She was generally in the schoolroom before Miss Turner made her exit. What had happened to her to-day? At twenty minutes past nine Miss Janet entered, looking flurried.

"I fear Madame must be unwell, as she has not come or sent a note," she explained briefly. "You had better go on with your preparation and write your exercises. I suppose you know what to do next? Then get to work, and of course I put you on your honour as seniors to keep the silence rule."

Lorraine, sitting scribbling away at her desk, felt in no mood to break the rule by entering into conversation with either Dorothy or Audrey, who sat respectively to right and left of her. Her thoughts were far away from the pen which was automatically writing her exercise. What had become of Madame Bertier? Was her absence in any way connected with the events of yesterday? That was the question which kept forcing itself upon her brain. She wondered whether Miss Janet had ever harboured suspicions of the attractive Russian. She had never fallen under her sway so completely as her sister had done. Something in Miss Janet's worried expression made Lorraine think her surmise a correct one. Lorraine's French grammar went to the winds that morning, and she wrote down mistakes, which, in calmer moments, would have caused her to shudder.

At the eleven o'clock interval, Claudia walked into the cloak-room. Lorraine, who had come for her packet of lunch, greeted her with surprised enthusiasm.

"Here you are at last! Why are you so late? I've simply loads to tell you! Do you know that Madame Bertier's never turned up to-day?"

"Hasn't she?" said Claudia abstractedly. "I've loads to tell you too, Lorraine. Come into the garden; I don't want anyone to overhear."

When they were out of reach of the ears of prying juniors, Claudia continued:

"I'm in dreadful trouble; that's why I'm so late. Everything's gone wrong. Yesterday afternoon I had a telegram from Morland: 'Take parcel immediately to the George'."

"That case that the officer lost? I always thought Morland ought to have given it back to him at once. Well! Did you go to the cave and fetch it?"

"I went," said Claudia slowly, "but, when I looked in the little cupboard, it wasn't there."

"Not there!" Lorraine's tone was horror-stricken.

"No. I hunted all round the cave, but it had gone, absolutely."

"Great Scott! What are we to do?"

"I don't know. I telegraphed to Morland that it was lost. I hope he won't get into trouble about it."

"I hope not." Lorraine's face was very grave.

"And to make things worse, Landry is ill in bed to-day. He's in one of his most fractious moods, and won't have anybody near him but me. I only ran down to school for a few minutes to tell you that the dispatch case is lost, then I must go back to him. I've explained to Miss Janet that he's ill, and I have to nurse him. There's the bell, and you must go in. What a nuisance! Come and see me after four, if you can."

"I'll try. Good-bye till then."

Claudia and Lorraine hurried in opposite directions, the one home and the other into school. Lorraine was in a ferment of emotion. Who could possibly have taken the pocket case? Some intruder must have discovered their cave and have stolen it from the cupboard. Was it some chance tourist who had climbed up the rocks, or was it--could it be--Madame Bertier?

Lorraine had always suspected that Morland had told her the secret of the grotto. What if she had gone there, found the officer's private papers, and made treasonable use of them? There were so many doubtful episodes in connection with her--the cut telephone wire; her meeting on the shore with the man arrested only yesterday as a spy, who had claimed her portrait at the Academy as that of his wife.

"It looks bad!" thought Lorraine. "Oh, why didn't we persuade Morland to give that wretched case back at once to his captain? What will he do when he gets Claudia's telegram?"

The answer to this question came later on in the day. She was walking back to school at a quarter past two that afternoon, when just by the windmill she met Morland himself on a motor bicycle. He dismounted at once.

"Lorraine! The very person in all the world I want to see. I say, I'm going to ask to leave the bike at the windmill here, then will you walk up the hill with me?"

"It's nearly school time!" demurred Lorraine.

"Hang school for once! I tell you I *must* talk to you. I'm in the most awful mess I've ever got into in my life. Is it true what Claudia telegraphed? Is that pocket book really gone from the grotto?"

He spoke rapidly, catching his breath. Lorraine felt that, as in the case of yesterday, school must yield to weightier matters. She could not desert Morland now for the sake of a botany class. His business was urgent.

"Leave your bike then, and I'll come," she consented.

So they walked up the hill together towards Windy Howe, and he poured out his story.

"It seems there were most important papers in that pocket case," he confided. "The captain's kicked up an awful shindy at losing them. He's inquired and advertised, and put it into the hands of the police. At first I was like Brer Rabbit, I just 'lay low and said nuffin', and chuckled to think I was leading him such a dance. Then one of the chaps told me he'd heard that a coast-guard at Porthkeverne had seen a Tommy picking something up on the road. I can tell you that made me sit up. I'd forgotten we were close to that wretched coast-guard station. I twigged in a flash that I was in the greatest danger of discovery. Blake would remember passing me on the moor. I stood aside and saluted. There was no other Tommy near. Lorraine, if they fix this on to me I shall be court-martialled! I tell you I simply can't face it!"

It seemed indeed the most desperate problem with which they had ever dealt. Unless the case were found, ruin stared Morland in the face. Captain Blake, strictest of martinets, would not be likely to overlook so grave an offence.

"How did you manage to come over here to-day?" asked Lorraine.

"Pitched it strong about urgent business and got a few extra hours off, borrowed a motor-bike and pelted here for all I was worth. I felt I didn't care whether I broke my neck or not."

"Oh, Morland!"

"Well, I tell you I didn't! I rode part of the way at sixty miles an hour, and I whizzed down that long hill to St. Cyr simply like a hurricane. Look here, I don't want to show up at home for fear Dad or Violet ask questions. What's to be done?"

"Wait at the bottom of the orchard and I'll run up to the house and fetch Claudia. She's at home to-day nursing Landry, who's in bed."

"You mascot! The very thing!"

Leaving Morland sitting under the elder bushes by the orchard gate, Lorraine made her way into the garden, and, finding one of the numerous little Castletons playing about, despatched her with a message to Claudia. The latter came out at once, Lorraine explained hurriedly, and the two girls, with some difficulty evading the curiosity of Beata, Romola and Madox, whisked down a side path into the orchard, and joined Morland. They held a very agitated council of three under the elder bushes.

"Are you *certain* the case isn't there?" urged Morland.

"Absolutely. I hunted for half an hour round the cave," declared Claudia.

"Then who's taken it? If it's some chance tourist who's got it, it may be returned."

Lorraine shook her head.

"I'm terribly afraid it's Madame Bertier. I believe she's mixed up in a very queer piece of business here. I want to tell you what happened yesterday."

As Lorraine recounted her adventures at St. Cyr, and the connection of the foreigner, whom she had helped to identify, with the fascinating Russian, Morland's face darkened.

"Great Heavens! Was the woman a spy after all?" he groaned. "It's the limit! What an infernal ass I've been! If she's caught with those papers on her, and they're traced to me, I'm done for--once and for all! Look here, I'm going out to the cave to have one last hunt for the case. It might have slipped behind something. Will you girls come with me?"

"What's the use? I know we shan't find it," said Claudia. "Besides, I can't leave Landry. He's in bed, and very troublesome. He talks rubbish the whole time, mostly about you, Morland! He keeps suddenly laughing and saying he's stopped your going to the war, and isn't it clever of him, but he gets angry if I ask how, and shouts out that it's his secret and he won't tell me. Violet's fed up with him. I left her in his room, but if I'm not quick back, she'll be sending one of the children to hunt for me."

Morland rose hurriedly.

"I'd best scoot before the kids find me out. Lorraine, will you come?"

It seemed cruel to desert the poor boy at such a pinch, so Lorraine consented, but by the time they had walked down the steep lane to Pettington Church she changed her mind. At the lychgate she stopped.

"I'm so tired to-day, Morland! I don't think I *can* trudge all that way to Tangy Point! Time's important, and you'll walk so much faster without me. You hurry on, and I'll wait for you here."

"Right oh! I'm a selfish beast to ask you to go. Good-bye, old girl! If I don't find that case, perhaps you'll never see me again!"

"Morland! Morland!" called Lorraine.

But his khaki-clad figure was already tearing along the steep track up the cliff, and he did not look round. In another moment he had vanished behind a turn of the rocks.

Lorraine sank down on the seat inside the lychgate. She felt mean at not walking with him, but the afternoon was sultry and hot, and she was very tired after her yesterday's adventures. She knew that he had gone on a fruitless errand, and that, though it might satisfy him to look on his own account, he would certainly not find the missing pocket-case inside the cave.

"Oh! why didn't I make a stand at the time, and insist on his giving it back to Captain Blake at once!" she fretted. "I wish I'd more strength of mind! I was a weak jelly-fish. He'd have done it if I'd held out more. What's going to happen now, goodness only knows! When he sees that the case really isn't there, I'm afraid he'll do something really desperate, run away, or jump into the sea, or anything. It's the worst fix I've ever been in, in all my life. Could I take the blame on myself? It was as much my fault as his. I'm certainly what would be called an accomplice. I wish I could ask Detective Scott about it, but I daren't. Morland might be arrested, like that spy. Oh! it's too horrible to think he may be court-martialled! Will they put him in prison? Shoot him, even?"

Lorraine's notions of military discipline were hazy, but she knew that the keeping back of important papers was an offence of the utmost seriousness, and that if they had fallen into the hands of a spy it might mean a charge of treason. Wild visions of saving Morland at any cost floated through her mind. She felt almost prepared to give herself up to the police and make a confession. Yet how could she do so without involving her friends? She would certainly be asked if she had picked up the case herself, and why she had not returned it immediately to its owner. What would she answer?

"They'd have it all out of me in five minutes when they began cross-questioning, and I should only land Morland in a worse mess than ever," she decided gloomily. "Could Uncle Barton help, I wonder? No, as a special constable he'd be bound to give information. He's no more use than Detective Scott!"

Lorraine sighed, and moved farther along the seat into the shade. It was a broiling afternoon. The sun was pouring

down on the grey tower of the little church, and on the mildewed grave stones and the bushes of rosemary and lavender, and the box edging that led to the Norman doorway. A rambler rose rioted over the railings of a monument; its crimson trusses of blossom veiled the broken urn inside. Over the wall the green cliff-side stood out against the gleaming sea. Bees were humming under the archway of the roof. Some swallows scintillated by with gleaming wings. Not a soul was near. She was alone with the sunshine and the birds and the flowers. There flashed across her a strong memory of the day when she and Claudia and Morland had taken their first walk to the cave, and had stopped to look at the church--the Forsaken Merman Church, as Claudia always called it. How happy they had been then, with no terrible shadow hanging over them! She could almost hear Claudia's voice quoting the poem:--

"From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers,
But we stood without in the cold blowing airs."

It was just the opposite now, for she sat without in the heat, and there was nobody inside saying prayers. The door stood open--not shut. Something urged her to enter--some impulse so strong and so overpowering that instinctively she rose and walked up the little path between the lines of box edging. It was almost as if an invisible hand led her on, under the groined porch and through the carved Norman doorway. How cool and peaceful it was inside, in the soft, diffused golden light falling on the sandstone pillars through the saint-filled windows.

Though no service was in progress, she had a sense that the prayers of many generations lingered in the place, and made it holy. The haloed saints in the east window smiled down at her with calm eyes. Had they ever been in trouble as she was to-day? In their white robes and with palms in their hands, they looked so infinitely removed from the twentieth century. Yet their own times must have seemed absolutely modern to them. There was nothing in their lives which could not be also in ours. The same All-Father who gave them that perfect peace could give it surely to us.

In the dim shadow of the chancel she dropped on her knees and prayed--not a stilted, formal prayer, but a sort of intense, white-hot, wordless passion of entreaty for that bright-haired boy whose life was going so wrong.

As she rose to her feet again her eyes fell on the carved oak balustrade of the gallery at the west end. It was the place where Landry had been wont to sit and listen when Morland played the organ. She could almost see him now, with his parted lips and far-away blue eyes, and the sunlight from the window behind making a halo of his hair. She wondered how the church looked from his vantage point. She had never been into the gallery. She walked slowly down the nave and up the dusty, worm-eaten flight of stairs into the cobwebby regions above. There was a low bench facing the balustrade. She moved along it, and sat down in Landry's seat. There was no dreamy, haunting music to-day from the organ, filling the church like the murmur of the sea. Morland had sterner work to do in the world now than to improvise nocturnes. How rapt his face had been as the grand harmonies came thrilling from his fingers! Was this the exact angle from which Landry had viewed him? She moved slightly farther along, and in doing so kicked some object with her foot. She stooped to pick it up. It was something quite small, and covered with dust. She held it up to look at it by the light from the window. Then, with a little gasping sob, she fell back on to the seat.

It was nothing more nor less than the lost pocket-case.

Landry! They had never thought of Landry! He had been with them in the cave when they hid it inside the cupboard. Lorraine remembered now how he had made confused reference to papers and Morland going to the war, and how Claudia had soothed him, and told him to pick shells on the beach. Without doubt he must have taken the case with some dazed belief that by so doing he was hindering the authorities from sending his brother to the front. Perhaps that was the mysterious secret he was babbling about in bed to-day. The case might have lain for months in the dust, if Lorraine had not chanced to come into the gallery this afternoon. Chanced! There was no such thing as chance! Surely it was the answer to that intense, voiceless thought-wave of prayer, in which her groping spirit had for a moment soared into a higher plane and touched the fringes of the eternal world.

Morland was saved--saved from the shadow of a terrible disgrace. She must let him know at once, for by this time he must have reached the cave and ransacked it in vain. Suppose in his despair he were to carry out his threat and never return! The horror of the thought sent Lorraine tearing down the gallery steps and out into the sunshine. She must follow Morland and find him and tell him. She was rested now, and the walk would seem nothing. Besides, it was cooler, and a breeze had sprung up from the sea. When the heart is light our feet seem literally to dance along. The distance to Tangy Point to-day seemed halved. She climbed down the steep little track from the cairn on to the shore. Seated on a rock below the cave was a depressed-looking figure in khaki. Morland did not stir till she came near, then he rose with a haggard face and wild eyes.

"Lorraine, it's all U P with me!" he said breathlessly.

But for answer she waved the pocket-case.

They decided on the way home that the safest and wisest plan was to make it into a parcel, address it to Captain Blake at the Camp, and post it to him from Porthkeverne. He would receive it the next morning, and would probably be satisfied and make no more enquiries as to who had found it and forwarded it.

"So it wasn't Madame Bertier who took it after all!" commented Lorraine.

"No," said Morland thoughtfully. "But I believe she would have done it if she'd had the chance. I've had my eyes opened to-day. I've been a fool, Lorraine. I'm going to start a fresh page, and try to be worthy of my best friends. I simply can't express what I owe you. You're the sort of girl that keeps a fellow straight--some women send them on the rocks. When I think of you, I think of everything that is true and good."

"I'm not much to boast of, I'm afraid," said Lorraine humbly, "but I'm trying--trying hard, like many other people who are a great deal better, and nicer, and sweeter tempered than I am."

CHAPTER XXII

The Parting of the Ways

Events, most fortunately, turned out as Lorraine and Morland had hoped. Captain Blake received an anonymous parcel containing his lost dispatch-case, and, judging probably that some chance passer-by had picked it up and tardily restored it, made no further stir in the matter. So the cloud which had threatened to break in an overwhelming storm of ruin blew safely over, and left clear skies behind.

Lorraine returned to The Gables next morning to find the school in a whirl of excitement over the disappearance of Madame Bertier. She had been missing from her lodgings since the very morning when the U-boat took in its cargo of oil from Smugglers' Cove. She had departed no one knew whither, without even a portmanteau or a handbag, and had left absolutely no trace of her destination. The police came and examined her belongings, but they found nothing treasonable, though a heap of white ashes in the fire-grate showed that papers must have been burnt. The fascinating Russian adventuress vanished from the world of Porthkeverne as suddenly and mysteriously as she had appeared there. Her exit made a nine-days' wonder in the artistic and literary circles where her clever personality had won her so much favour. Wiseacres shook their heads and remembered suspicious circumstances which had not struck them at the time as incriminating.

At The Gables, Miss Kingsley hastily reorganized her teaching staff, handing the French classes over to Miss Paget and the music to Miss Turner until the end of the term. She felt the blow to be a double one, for not only did it seriously upset the arrangements of the school, but it wounded her in a tender spot. She had been very kind to Madame Bertier, and had thought that, in befriending and giving her employment, she was aiding a distressed ally to gain an honourable living. To her upright and patriotic temperament the disillusionment was painful.

There was little of the term left now; in a few weeks the holidays would be here, and the group of girls who were working together in the Sixth Form would be dispersed. Lorraine could hardly realize that her school days were so nearly ended. She had been happy at The Gables, and she was sorry to leave. Yet life stretched before her very bright and fair, with such pleasant prospects that she thrilled when she thought of the future. Her father had decided that her artistic talent was quite sufficient to justify him in sending her to London to study art, and had consulted Margaret Lindsay as to the best master under whom to place her. Lorraine, in her Saturday mornings' lessons, had dabbled in a variety of arts and crafts, and had tried her 'prentice hand at water colours, oil painting, illustrating, gesso, metal work, wood engraving, and enamelling. Each, she knew, was a separate career in itself that would take many years in which to gain even a mediocre proficiency. On the whole her inclination led her to take up sculpture. She had been most successful with clay modelling, and several Porthkeverne artists who had seen some of her work had praised it and advised her to go on. Down at the dear studio by the harbour, where her first artistic inspirations had been received, she talked the matter over with her friend. Margaret was packing to go away, and the room was strewn with canvases, water-colour boards, paints, and other impedimenta. Lorraine, sitting on the table, flourishing a mahl-stick, aired her views.

"It's so glorious to take up something that you feel perhaps some day you may--if you work hard--be able to make something of. Carina, if I ever get anything into an exhibition, I shall just want to turn head over heels with joy. Art suits me far better than music. If you go in for playing or singing, you have to perform before an audience, and the feeling that anybody is listening to me simply *withers* me! You don't know what agonies I go through when I'm asked to play my violin before visitors--I'm so nervous that my fingers absolutely dither. Now, painting or sculpture you can do when you're quite alone, and when it's finished people can look at it, and you needn't even be there to show it off. Don't you sympathise?"

"Indeed I do. For anybody afflicted with shyness, a studio is certainly preferable to a platform; and works of art, if they are worth anything, live on. You ought to do well, Lorraine, if you work. You've the sculptor's thumb--broad and thin and turned back. I'm glad you're to study under Mr. Davidson; he's an inspiring teacher and very thorough."

"I shall leave the music to Monica," decided Lorraine. "She's a monkey sometimes, but she's a clever little mortal--much cleverer than I am. I sometimes think she'll be the success of the family."

All of the Sixth Form at The Gables were going their several ways. Patsie contemplated work on the land, Vivien meant to devote herself to the Red Cross, Dorothy was destined for college, Nellie to study kindergarten training. For Claudia the future was still nebulous. Under Rosemary's instruction she had practised her singing with an immense enthusiasm. Her voice was developing wonderfully. Rosemary listened to it with somewhat the feeling of an artist who has created a most beautiful thing. She had taught Claudia to accomplish what she could never compass herself. Her

own talent, passed on to another, had gained ten talents more. At the end of July, before the College of Music closed its summer session, Rosemary wrote to Signor Arezzo concerning her pupil, and received a reply making an appointment for her to bring Claudia to have her voice tested. This was tremendous news. She went up to Windy Howe with the letter. Mr. Castleton, absorbed in a classic painting of Beata and Romola as wood nymphs, detached his mind with difficulty from Greek draperies and focused it upon his eldest daughter.

"I did not know Claudia could sing!" he remarked with surprise.

"Why, my dear, she's always singing about the house, and has a very good voice too. It would be splendid if she could make something of it," put in his wife, who in this case proved her step-daughter's firm ally. "Be generous now, and let the girl run up to town with Miss Forrester. Who knows what may come of it?"

Mr. Castleton was mixing a subtle shade of grey for the folds beneath Romola's girdle. At the moment he would have consented to anything to get rid of visitors and go on with his painting.

"Let her go if she likes," he agreed.

So the appointment was accepted; and one day in the next week an anxious little Rosemary, living in a whirl of hopes, piloted a nervous, blushing, but quite too lovely Claudia into the solemn precincts of the College of Music. Signor Arezzo had in his time trained hundreds of musical students. Most of them possessed moderate talents, some were clever, and an elect few passed on to the concert platform. It was only once or twice in his teaching career that he had discovered a voice worthy of grand opera. His experienced eye measured Claudia with satisfaction. Her beautiful throat was certainly that of a singer. On the operatic stage that face and figure would be worth a fortune. He did not commit himself, however, but, asking her to come nearer to the piano, played a few chords and began to test her voice. At first Claudia was nervous, but after she had sung some exercises the feeling passed, and she poured out her notes as naturally as she had done in the orchard at home. The professor made her try various scales, arpeggios, studies, and a song.

"Thank you," he said at last. "That will do. I can safely promise you a scholarship at the College next September. If you're ready to work I think we may make something of you. Now, will you go into the ante-room and wait while I speak to Miss Forrester? I want to have a word with her."

When Claudia, with shining eyes, had gone out of the room, Signor Arezzo turned to Rosemary and shook her warmly by the hand.

"I congratulate you!" he said. "Unless I'm much mistaken you've discovered an operatic star. The girl has a most marvellous voice. She'll be a credit to the College some day! And she has every element for a successful *prima donna*--graceful movement, enthusiasm and dramatic fire. You say you have only been training her since last May? Why, it's marvellous! You must be a born teacher. I couldn't have done more with her in the time myself. If you would care to help me with some of my pupils, you could take a good deal of work off my hands. I have never found anyone before who so absolutely realised my methods. I should be very glad to give you charge of the beginners under my supervision."

It was Rosemary's turn now to be surprised.

"Oh, if I only might!" she gasped.

Two very delighted and happy girls returned to Porthkeverne next day; Claudia with the sure prospect of a scholarship, and Rosemary almost dazed at the offer of so splendid a post as assistant to Signor Arezzo.

"Isn't it wonderful, Muvvie?" she confided. "Just when I was wailing that my life was spoilt, I've found my true career. I see now that I should never have been a success on a platform, and I'm glad Signor Arezzo had the honesty to tell me so. But teaching is quite different. I can feel how things ought to be, and I can make other people do them. It's like working on their instruments instead of mine. Think of going back to the dear old College, and actually having an established place there! I do hope I shall really be as useful to the Professor as he seems to expect! With Lorraine studying sculpture, and Claudia and myself at the College, what a gorgeous time we shall all have at the hostel together!"

The final day of the term at The Gables had arrived, and the girls, in their best dresses, were ready to assemble in the gymnasium for the speech-giving which always celebrated the close of the school year. The monitresses met in the Sixth Form room for the last time. They took their parting differently, according to temperament. Audrey was sentimental, Nellie a trifle tearful. Each was ready to expatiate on her plans for the future.

"In three weeks I hope to be on the land, and driving a milk-cart with a piebald pony," said Patsie cheerfully.

"But why a piebald pony?" asked Dorothy, in a puzzled tone.

"Why? Because people are so superstitious about them, and it would be such sport to come careering down the street and see folks suddenly bending to touch their shoes, and know they were all having wishes. I'd feel like a fairy godmother, or Father Christmas. I've got my land costume, and it's no end! I wanted to turn up in it to-day to show you all, only Mother wouldn't let me."

"Violet's sewing very hard, making clothes for me to take to London," vouchsafed Claudia. "She's been a perfect trump lately! Beata and Romola are to start school here in September. They're fearfully excited."

"And little Monica will be in the Fourth Form," said Lorraine. "I wonder who will be monitresses in our place, and whom Miss Kingsley will choose for head girl?"

"Whoever your successor may be, she won't make a better head girl than you, Lorraine," said Patsie heartily. "We haven't said much, but we've appreciated you all the year. You've been a sport!"

"I? Why? I've done nothing for the school, I'm afraid--not nearly as much as I wanted to do."

"We didn't want a paragon," returned Patsie. "You've been yourself, and that was quite good enough. On the whole it's been a ripping year."

There is very little more to tell. How Rosemary and Lorraine and Claudia prospered at their work in London; how Margaret Lindsay took a studio in town for the winter, and joined them at their hostel; how Morland went to the front, did a splendid unselfish deed, and won the D.C.M., are all beyond the limits of a school story, and in the borderland of the bigger world of grown-up life. But, when Lorraine in days to come looks back upon the old fun at Porthkeverne, I think she will emphatically decide that whatever happiness or success she may win afterwards, she never spent a jollier, livelier, more light-hearted, and altogether satisfactory time than the year she was Head Girl at The Gables.

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