

Teens

A Story of Australian School Girls

Mack, Louise (1870-1935)

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Teens A Story Of Australian School Girls

Chapter I Waking Up

To-morrow, Lennie Leighton would be thirteen. To-night, she was plaiting her hair in preparation for the greatest event of her thirteen years of life —her entrance into the great, strange world of school.

She stood in front of her little looking-glass, and watched herself while she talked. Floss, Mary, and Brenda, her younger sisters, sat about the room, and looked at her and listened to her. And the Mother, who was putting away the clothes from the laundry, came and went.

“It will be just simply *lovely!*” said Lennie. “It will be just simply *scrum!* Imagine me getting a scholarship! Three whole years at school for nothing, and all my books given in. Why, it will save——”

“You have to *get* the scholarship first,” interrupted Mary.

“You have to know ‘*avoir*’ and ‘*etre*,’ Len. The paper says so,” said Floss.

“Of course I know them,” said Lennie. “How absurd.”

“You said, ‘*Que je suis*,’ the other day,” said Floss.

“Oh, that was a slip,” said Lennie. “Anybody might make a slip. Why, I consider I'm pretty good at French. Miss Middleton always says so. No; if there is anything I'm at all afraid of, it's the arithmetic paper. I know I have no head for arithmetic. I wish I could do tap-sums. They're such horrid, catchy, little things.”

“*I* can do them,” said Floss.

“I can *do* them,” said Lennie. “Only sometimes I forget how to fix the fractions. But I daresay they won't give them this time. There was one in the last papers, so they are hardly likely to have one in these.”

“But what time does the examination begin?” asked Floss.

It was probably the twentieth time she, or someone else, had asked that question, but she always waited for the answer.

“Half-past nine, *exactly*,” said Lennie. “I'll go in with Bert in the half-past eight tram.”

Bert was their only brother. He was three years older than Lennie, and went every day to a boys' school in Sydney, from which he was soon to go on to the University.

The others stifled sighs of envy.

At half-past eight to-morrow they would be making their three little white beds, or clearing away the breakfast table, and helping to set the dining-room in order for their three hours' study with Miss Middleton. The prospect was a very tame one, when viewed in the light of the brilliant time Lennie would be having.

Lennie plaited on to the end of her long, brown hair, then turned the ends up, and tied them tightly with a piece of black tape. Then she threw the plait over her shoulder, and looked sideways at it in the glass.

"I shall always wear a plait now," she said. "It would be horrid to have one's hair all hanging round one in the tram."

The others were all silent.

"I wonder what it will be like," said Lennie, sitting on the edge of her bed, and looking at them.

They hazarded no suggestions.

"There will be crowds and crowds of girls, of course. Heaps of nice ones; some nasty ones. I think I'll know at a glance which I shall like, and which I shall hate. And we'll all be sitting in a big room together, and we'll write our papers without being allowed to say one word. It will be awfully exciting."

"You won't know one of them," said Floss.

The element of the wet-blanket would keep creeping into the tones of the other three—the three who were not going up for an examination to-morrow.

"I daresay I will be introduced," said Lennie. "The head mistress told Mother she would look after me."

A tremendous sigh burst forth suddenly from nine-year-old Brenda.

"I *wisht* I were going," she wailed. "Oh, I *wisht* I were going."

"Oh, it's lovely," said Lennie, heartlessly. She had curled her round, black-stockinged legs up under her, and was crouched in a ball-like attitude on the bed.

"No more Miss Middleton! No more *Philosophe!* No more of those silly drawing-copies! No more writing essays, and getting no marks for them! It will be so heavenly to get marks, and to have girls to work against. And to beat them."

"Don't sit on the bed, Lennie," said Mrs. Leighton, coming in. "And it's time you were in bed, children. You must be up early to-morrow, Lennie. No more lying in bed till the second bell rings."

"Oh, *no*, Mother. I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'll be up at six every morning now. You see, there was nothing to get up for before."

"I see," said the Mother dryly.

It was ten minutes past seven next morning when Floss squeezed the second spongeful of water over Lennie's little, pale, sleeping face.

"Lennie?" she cried, "*Len!* *Len!* *Lennie!* Its seven o'clock, and you've got to go to school to-day." She shook the dreamer with a most unsisterly shaking.

"Shtopt," mumbled Lennie, heavily. She drew the bedclothes over her

head, and went on with her dream.

“Lennie! Wake up! *Wake up!* It is nearly eight o'clock.”

She put her cold nose down against Lennie's face, and shouted.

“Oh, *do* leave me alone,” wailed Lennie. “I *never* get any sleep.” She turned over suddenly on her other side, and disappeared altogether under the blankets.

Floss was distracted. She stood in silence for a minute, and in that minute Lennie went back into her former comfortable slumber.

“You *must* wake up,” said Floss. She pulled the bedclothes determinedly away from Lennie's head. “Do you know what time it is?” she shouted in her ear. “It's *nine o'clock!*”

Lennie opened one eye, looked drowsily at Floss with it, murmured that she would get up in a minute, but kept the other eye closed for fear that she might wake right up, and not be able to go to sleep again.

“It's the day of the examination. You'll be hours late.”

But the eye had closed before Floss was half-way through her sentence.

“Isn't this awful? *I* can't wake her.” Then an inspiration seized her. “I'll go and get Brenda.”

She went into her bedroom on the other side of the passage. Two girls in various stages of dressing were there, and Floss poured her tale into their ears. Brenda, with the long, thin legs and thick, frizzy dark hair, threw down her brush.

“*I'll* soon wake her,” she said, in a brisk, businesslike manner.

She ran out in her petticoats across the passage into Lennie's room. There, over the bottom of the bed, hung the neat serge frock that was to air itself for the first time that morning; and, under the bedclothes, head and shoulders all covered with the blankets, lay the girl who was to have been up and dressed in that dress by half-past six.

Brenda pulled the green Venetian up with a clatter to the middle of the top pane, and opened the window as wide as it would go.

Then she went to the bedside, and leant down over Lennie.

“Len,” she said gently. “Len.” She pulled the clothes away, and shook her sister till the sleepy eyes looked up into hers.

“There's a cup of tea,” she said.

Her little, black eyes were twinkling wickedly. And then, just as she had expected, Lennie yawned, rubbed her eyes, sat up in the bed, and was suddenly wide awake.

“How nice,” she said. “I *do* love a cup of tea in the morning.”

“Well, it's on the dining-room table, and the sooner you get dressed and go down for it the hotter it'll be,” said Brenda.

Lennie was very cross. But she was effectively awakened.

Chapter II Head or Tail

A large, brown, two-storey building, with a wide, wooden staircase, a verandah all round, and an asphalted playground, shaded with two huge Moreton Bay fig trees.

This was the School.

And in the playground, and on the verandah, and in the little lobby at the bottom of the staircase, and on the great, wooden staircase itself, girls, and girls, and girls.

There were girls in groups of threes and fours; girls in pairs; girls standing shyly alone, their eyes wandering wistfully about in sight of some familiar face.

Most of them had school-books in their hands— little red Schneiders, or fat, red, shiny Grammaires —and every now and then they would stare into these for a minute, then gaze away over the roof of the offices opposite, and gabble something quickly to themselves. These were the last refreshers they were taking before the great bell summoned them up the staircase, to the awful ordeal that lay before them.

Lennie stood by the verandah railing, and watched them.

She had had a queer little feeling of loneliness when she had said good-bye to Bert outside the gate, and walked alone across the playground, with all that gathering facing her; but by the time she had taken off her hat and hung it on the pegs in the entrance lobby, and had folded her gloves up, and stuffed them into a corner of her luncheon-basket, the shy feeling wore off a little, and she was able to raise her eyes, and look about her.

After all, these girls were all new girls, like herself. They all probably felt just as bad as she did. There was some consolation in that.

And then, some of them were such very little things. Two small, fair-haired sisters standing very close to each other under the fig-trees, looked no more than nine and ten. And there came a girl whose dress hardly reached her knees. And there was another, with a dress even a trifle shorter; and there another and another. Lennie wondered within herself how such babies as these could expect to pass the examination. She felt quite sure they would be plucked, and even went to the length of a little premature pity for them. She thought it was a shame of their mothers to send up such very young children.

That girl walking about with her arm round another girl's waist—surely *she* was never going up for the examination. Why, she was quite grown up. Lennie caught little bits of her conversation as she passed and re-passed, and heard her mention, very frequently, the words “he,” and “him.”

Suddenly the Town Hall clock struck half-past nine out in the city, and the school bell began to ring at the same moment. There was a rush towards the stairs, and a last frantic look into the Schneiders, before they were cast on to the table in the entry-hall at the bottom of the stairs.

The examination took place in the big school-room, out of which numerous little class-rooms opened. The girls sat at long rows of raised desks, that grew higher and higher as they went nearer to the wall behind. Paper and pens were laid in neat little piles along the desks, with a good space between each pile. The girls took their places; then one of the teachers came round with large blue papers, which she handed to them in silence. These were the examination papers.

In front of the desks, and facing them, sat another teacher. When all the papers had been distributed, she rang a bell sharply, and said:

“If any girl wishes to ask a question, she must ask it now. Has anyone anything to ask?”

Nobody spoke. Then she rang the bell again, said “Perfect silence in this room, please,” and the examination began.

Lennie opened her blue paper, and glanced down it. It was arithmetic, and not French, as she had expected.

And, horror of horrors! Staring her in the face were one, two, of those terrible tap-sums!

For a minute she thought of saying she was ill, or bursting into tears, and rushing out of the room. But she dipped her pen into the ink-bottle instead, wrote “Arithmetic” at the top of her sheet of foolscap, and looked for a sum that she could do.

The two hours flew by like lightning. They were the shortest two hours most of those girls had ever known. When that little bell on the table rang, and the teacher cried, “All papers must be given up in ten minutes,” the girls thought she had made a mistake. But in ten minutes their papers were taken from them; they were only allowed a minute over to write their names at the bottom of their work; and they were told that they might go down to the playground till the school-bell rang again.

“This afternoon you will be examined in French,” said the lady at the table, who was the school's head mistress.

As they went down the stairs everyone was talking to someone else. All the shyness and remoteness had vanished. That arithmetic paper had brought them all together, and the question “How did you get on?” was flying about in the air. Some had done badly; some had done well. Lennie, listening to what the others said, was afraid she had not done well. If *their* answers were right, *hers* were all wrong.

She began to be a little nervous, but she ate her lunch, and read through

as much French grammar as she could before the bell rang.

Going up the stairs again, she overheard that grown-up girl in brown say to her friend, "What is the present subjunctive of *finir*, to finish? Is it '*que je finasse*' or '*finusse*'?"

"*Que je finasse*, I think," answered the other, to Lennie's horror and intense surprise.

She would have put them right, but her shyness kept her silent. She was sorry for them when she saw, among the verbs they were asked to conjugate, the present subjunctive of *finir*.

She, herself, found the French paper very easy. She had just finished her last answer when the papers were called in, so she went home that day in a very satisfied frame of mind.

"I think I've done well," she said to them at home.

"Do you think you'll pass?" asked Floss, in a matter-of-fact way.

"*Pass!* Of course I will. I don't think I made one mistake in my French paper."

And next day she came home in good spirits, and was still confident that she had done well. English and History had been the subjects for that day.

The third day she came home doleful.

"I think I'm plucked," she said.

"Why?" asked the little sisters in dismay. Although they had been a little envious of her when she left home-lessons for school life, they would have been dreadfully miserable if she had failed in her examination.

"Well, we had to read aloud, and then give the roots of words. I had a crumb, or something, in my throat, and could not read a bit, and I was asked to give the root of porter, the railway man."

"French, *porter* to carry," cried Floss, "I know that."

"I forgot it," said Lennie, "I knew it as well as I know my A. B. C., but I couldn't think of it at the moment. It is dreadful to have to answer your questions aloud. I always forget everything."

On the fourth and last day, her spirits came back to her.

"I think I'm safe for the scholarship," she said. "I didn't make one mistake in my dictation—as far as I know. We had 'harass' and 'embarrass.' I remembered that little verse Miss Middleton taught us—

'Two 'r's' in embarrass,
And one 'r' in harass,
But both, I confess,
Contain 'double s,'

and spelt them both right. We had disappoint, and I got that right. D-i-s-s-a-p-o-i-n-t."

"Oh, *Lennie*," almost screamed Floss. "Why, that's wrong; that's *wrong*. There's only one s and there are two p's."

"*Are* there? Oh! Well, perhaps I put it that way. Of course I can't remember now what I wrote. Yes; I think I did put two p's and one s."

She looked annoyed, and said no more for some time. But that same night, when they were going to bed, she asked Floss:

"How do you spell cemetery? Is it c-e-m-e-t-a-r-y?"

"Oh, *no*," said Floss again. There are three e's in it. Don't you remember Miss Middleton telling us that? C-e-m-e-t-e-r-y."

"I'm *sure* there's an 'a' in it," said Lennie.

She had taken off her serge dress, and had put on a little blue dressing-jacket, and was unplaiting her long brown hair.

"No, I'm *sure* there isn't," said Floss.

"Floss, you don't know everything. I think I should know better how to spell it than you."

"Well, you asked me," said Floss, aggrieved.

"Yes, because I thought you'd know."

"So I do know," said Floss. "I know it's e-r-y."

Lennie brushed her hair out, and plaited it loosely, and while Floss was saying her prayers, she slipped quietly downstairs, into the diningroom. There was no one there but the Mother, sewing peacefully by the fire.

"I want to look in the dictionary for a minute," said Lennie; "there's a word I'm not quite sure of."

She took Webster down from the shelf, and looked through the C's till she came to cemetery. And then she saw that Floss was right. She turned to the D's and found disappoint. Floss was right about that, too.

She went back to bed gloomily. She did not tell Floss where she had been, nor what the dictionary had said, but she began to feel a little nervous. It would be a dreadful thing to be "plucked" in that easy examination.

"I'll either be plucked, or I'll be at the tail of the list. And I thought I was going to be head."

In a few days the results were published in the papers, and a long list of girls' names appeared.

The print swam before Lennie's eyes, her hands trembled as she looked at that long black column. She looked at the head first. Her name was not there. Then her eyes darted to the tail. She was not there. At any rate she was saved that shame.

But alas and alas! there were only two names between hers and the tail. She had come third bottom, and she received as hard a blow as if she had been the very last on that long list of girls. Her lip quivered piteously, and

her eyes filled in an annoying way, but she choked the lump in her throat, and when Floss and Mary and Brenda came rushing joyously in to hear what had happened, she stalked past them with her head turned aside, and made for the refuge of her little white pillow. Up there she swallowed many lumps in her throat, and left many sorrowful marks on her pillow case, and wondered a little fearfully if her mother and father would be very angry, and wondered too what Floss and the others would say. It was hard to be big sister to three such inquisitors! It was dreadfully hard to be the eldest, and to have things expected of you! No one expected anything of Floss and Mary and Brenda, only she, Lennie, was expected to do everything! And the tears that began in sorrow for herself, ended in vexation with the rest of the family, and then a more comfortable feeling set in.

“I knew she wouldn't do well,” Floss said to Mary. “I could see very well that she had made ever so many mistakes in her dictation paper. And as for the sums——”

“Lennie can't do sums,” Mary said, decidedly; and she was more or less right.

The name of the girl who had passed first was Elinor Grey. She was that very little girl, in the very short dress, whom Lennie had pitied, and who, she had been sure, would not pass.

And the names of Alice Jones and Lydia Steel, those two grown-up girls with long dresses, did not appear at all. They had failed.

“You must work hard now, Lennie,” said the Mother that night, “I am going to give you a room to yourself. I think it will be better for you to work up there at night, than in the dining-room with Brenda and Floss and Mary all talking.

“A room to myself,” said Lennie. “Oh, how lovely. Oh, Mother, I'll work so hard up there. Is it the empty room on the third story? That *will* be nice. You'll see how hard I'll work now.”

Chapter III About Nothing in Particular

It was on the third storey that Lennie had her new bedroom.

There was a little, irregular-shaped room up there, very narrow, but as long as the house was deep, that looked over other people's yards at one end, and at the other, opened upon a stretch of suburb, ending in the sands of Botany Bay. From that window Lennie had one golden glimpse of the lazy, fair Pacific, and the calm blue waters of Botany Bay and its white sands; and nearer, the fresh, bright green of Chinamen's gardens—green when all the rest of the world was burnt yellow with the heat of the fierce Sydney summers; and, nearer still, rows of ugly suburban houses, that had a loveliness of their own when the sun burnt red in the sky behind them.

She grew to love that window beyond all things she possessed. Her little deal table, with its faded tablecloth, was dragged up close to the sill, and all her books were neatly piled upon it, and when she had shut the bedroom door behind her, and slipped the little latch, it seemed to her that she really entered into a new world, a free place, peopled only with Lennie, and all her imaginations.

There was no carpet on the floor, and the bare white boards, always scrupulously clean, were pleasing to Lennie's eye. It was like being in Germany, she said to Brenda and the others, to have a great bare floor, clean everywhere, and with nothing about it to harbour dust and fluffy matter. And Brenda and the others wished they had bare floors too.

That was a characteristic of Lennie's, the power to excite in others envy of even her commonest, most trivial belongings. If she liked them—and she liked most things that belonged to her—she surrounded them with a halo, and, in a vivid word or two, showed them to onlookers as something superior, or uncommon, or romantic. She had always a reason for this glorifying of her little things; even the plain bare floor took on a touch of romance by the magic name of Germany.

During the first few weeks at school, Lennie never lingered about the playground, after school was over, as many girls did. Some stayed behind for tennis, and some for chatter, and some took longer than others to straighten their hair, and prepare themselves for their homeward journey. The pretty girls, and those who were well-dressed, had little looking-glasses that they consulted when they fluffed out their hair with their own tiny pocket-combs, and when they put their hats on.

But Lennie had no looking-glass, and she did not belong to the tennis players. She was always one of the first to rush down the wooden staircase when the clock reached a quarter-past three, and in five minutes she had

packed her books into her basket, put on her hat, and perhaps her gloves, and had flown across the playground, and through the gates, and was in her tram at twenty minutes to four.

At half-past four she was at home.

As she walked down the street in which she lived, a most delightful feeling used to creep over her. She would picture to herself the house, lying a little way back from the road, with its shadow lengthening in front of it, and the quiet afternoon light falling on the brass gate-plate, inscribed "James Leighton, M.D." And the hall, with the door always closed to shut the world out, and to shut the little family in; the peaceful hall, with the cat purring on the mat at the bottom of the stairs, and the kettle boiling in the kitchen, and Brenda, and Floss, and Mary all doing nothing, and everything in the house having a quiet hour.

All the little worries of school life used to fade away as a dream fades at morning. The lessons for to-morrow, the likes and dislikes of school-fellows, an enemy's biting words, a friend's falseness, a teacher's reprimand—they all went into the past, and the present was filled with one lovely, restful image—the thought of home, with its boiling kettle.

Home! The kettle boiling! An intense stillness, and peacefulness and drowsiness in the hall, in the drawing-room, in the dining-room, even in the kitchen. It never was so dear to Lennie as at that moment when she was opening the front gate, and was about to pass, a school-stained, dusty, weary little figure, into its welcoming precincts.

She rushed through the hall, threw her basket on the floor, tossed her hat on to one chair, and her gloves on another, and called, "Mother, mother, where's everybody?"

How quickly the sleepy quiet of the house was broken up!

"There's Lennie," cried the sisters.

"Yes, dear," called the Mother, from somewhere up the stairs.

"Miss Lennie's home," said Emma in the kitchen, and in a minute she had rinsed the teapot with boiling water, measured two teaspoonfuls from her caddy, and made the tea.

Then Mary came out, and carried in the little tray, with one cup and saucer on it, and a small brown teapot, and a plate of bread and butter, and milk and sugar.

Sometimes Lennie would have it in her bedroom. That was when the Mother was out.

And Mary and Floss and Brenda would troop upstairs after her, and sit wherever they could find or make a seat in her room, and watch her as she drank her tea, and made havoc of her bread and butter.

Oh! school was a lovely place, thought they. It meant fun all day, and

afternoon tea afterwards.

Home was the loveliest place, thought Lennie. But none of them said these things openly.

When the Mother was at home they all sat round the table in the dining-room, and Lennie had her tea there, and talked between her bread and butter, and listened and asked questions, and gave graphic descriptions of things that had happened at school that day.

There never was such a girl for tea as Lennie.

All Australian girls, even before they reach their teens, are tea-drinkers. They are connoisseurs, too, and the ten-year-olds will ask for a little more sugar, a little more milk, some more tea to make their cup stronger, or some hot water to weaken it, in the self-possessed voices of their mothers.

If it had been permitted, Lennie would have had tea seven times a day.

She had once spent a month at Ooroobong, Uncle Sydney's station, and during the month she had had her desire for tea gratified to the utmost. For the squatters and their wives and daughters, and indeed everyone connected with an Australian sheep station, drink tea more often, and in greater quantities, than any other people in the tea-drinking world.

They began—and Lennie with them—at half-past six, with the early morning cup of tea. Then, at breakfast, an hour or so later, came two, or perhaps three, more cups. Not unfrequently there was tea at eleven o'clock. There was always tea at lunch. And tea at four o'clock was a meal which no member of the family would ever care to miss. And the seven o'clock dinner would have seemed a poor thing to the squatter if his large, strong, sweet cup of tea had not been placed within hand-reach.

In all of these tea-drinkings Lennie joined. She was twelve years old, but no one warned her that the habit would injure her. It did not occur to anyone that she was only twelve, for at twelve they had themselves been just as fond of it as she was.

The consequence was that she came home from Ooroobong with a sallow, colourless skin, and faint olive shadows under her eyes. The roses she had gone to seek were further away from her cheeks than ever. She had lost even the faint ones that she had taken with her. And she was tired, and listless, and had no appetite, and was always lying on the sofa, or lounging in an easy chair. And eventually she was taken up to the Doctor's study, and a strong and nasty tonic was ordered for her, and tea was banished altogether from her food regime, and for six months she drank nothing but cocoa and milk.

Then she was allowed tea for breakfast. And in a year's time, by dint of earnest persuadings, she induced the Mother to let her have just one cup at afternoon tea.

But those two cups of tea were her limit. She was never allowed more. She could only look back on Ooroobong and think what a delicious time that month had been, and go over those seven tea-drinkings in her memory.

Now, when she had finished her tea, and was rested a little, she gathered her books together, and went upstairs. She piled them on her table, looked at them, thought that to-morrow she would do a little of her home work in the afternoon, but that she was tired to-day, and wanted to forget lessons for an hour or two. That afternoon never came.

In Brenda's room there was a box as high as Brenda's head, and almost of the same breadth as height. It was here that Lennie's afternoon hours slipped away. The box was divided into two by a piece of board, that shut off the top storey from the lower, and each storey was divided into two rooms. There was a bedroom, a drawing-room, a dining-room, and a kitchen, and these rooms were occupied by nine dolls. Two were mother-dolls, two were little boy-dolls, and there were five little girl-dolls.

No time was long enough for Lennie when she was with the dolls in the dolls' house. She loved everyone of them—loved every stick of furniture of their doll ladyships, every tiny piece of clothing.

Sometimes she felt ashamed. She envied Brenda, and Mary and Floss, for they were young still, and did not go to school, but she was old, fourteen. They could play with dolls for years to come, but, at fourteen, what girls were childish enough to like to dress and undress a little china thing, with a black head and blue bead eyes; to make sailor trousers and coat for the little wax thing with curly hair and red round cheeks; to save up pennies and threepences, and buy dear, cunning little chairs, and washstands, and coal-scuttles, and dolls' mangles, and irons, and tiny couches, and beds, and their wardrobes, and chests of drawers, and sewing machines!

Lennie's heart still thrilled with as lovely a delight as in the days of her childhood, when her fingers touched these small, queer imitations of living people, and their ways. The fascination was as strong as ever for her in the tiny chair legs, the dresser with its dinner service in forty pieces, the sewing machine with its wheels like spiders' webs, and its handle that would not turn for girl or doll.

It was the smallness, the tininess of them that fascinated her. Big dolls were stupid things, to her mind. But the little things—those that the hand could close over, and were dressed in all the garments that a little girl wears—these filled her still with a warm, tender feeling, and every afternoon she sat on the floor before the dolls' house, and arranged and altered the furniture, and dressed and undressed the tiny dolls, and put them all to bed beneath those sweet dolls' counterpanes that were made from the real counterpane of a real bed.

These children led a very indoor life. There were few walks within walking distance, and the garden in front was narrow and close to the street. They played in their bedrooms, or on the back balcony for the most part, and were perfectly happy there.

Then at night, after the early evening dinner was over, and Lennie had finished her half-hour's practice, up to the third storey she would go, and no one would see her again that evening, unless they went to look for her.

She had a little student's safety-lamp of her own, which burned on her table, beside the books. Emma, the servant, slept in the room behind her. Everything was quiet up there.

Sometimes, after she had closed her door, and turned up the lamp, and looked dreamily at her books for a minute or two, she would lie down on her hearthrug, and shut her eyes, and go off into a long, dreamy doze. She would think of the girls at school. One after the other came into her mind, and her thoughts went wandering over them. She imagined what their homes were like, and their fathers and mothers. In her dreams she looked into their houses, and saw them talking and laughing there, playing with dolls perhaps, practising, doing home lessons, just as she was doing, or ought to have been doing.

Then she would wonder about the teachers, where they lived, and who lived with them, and what they did when they got home in the afternoon.

On and on her imagination led her. She was always *wondering* about people. And the time slipped by up here in the bedroom, and the lazy little dreamer on the hearthrug went on wondering and imagining until sometimes it was too late for home-work. She would creep sleepily into bed after her long, dreamy doze, and next day she would need all her brains to help her through her lessons.

And yet, strangely enough, Lennie had the reputation of being a very hard-working little girl. The teachers called her "promising," and "bright," and "industrious."

It may be that they would not have thought her bright and promising if they had not thought her industrious, for industry is what the teacher loves. The girl whose exercise-book is always neat and clean, and who never fails in her repetition, is thought more of than the girl who understands allusions, and can answer general questions.

At this time of her life, Lennie was a combination of these two species of girls. She never failed in her repetition, and she kept her exercise-book tidy, and when a classic name cropped up in an English lesson, there was often only one girl in the class who was acquainted with it, and Lennie was that girl. She had begun to read, when she was nine years old, the big books out of her father's study. For one hour every day the Mother had sat

beside her, and pointed patiently with a knitting needle along the lines of "Plutarch's Lives," "Macaulay's Essays," Gilfillan's "Lives of the Poets." Lennie had not understood all of what she read, but she had grown familiar with the old Greeks and Romans, and with the names of the lights of English literature; and this desultory knowledge of hers, unusual to the other girls, soon brought her into notice in her class.

Day after day Lennie would tell herself, as she lay dreaming in her room, "I just *scraped* through to-day." But on the morrow she would scrape through in the same way, and so on, for many and many a morrow.

Of course there came a time when she was sorry for her lazy ways: there always comes a time of regret to those who have thrown away their opportunities for learning. Lennie's came with the examinations. She had to sit up till the oil burned out of her lamp, and cram her brain with page after page of history that should have been read one page at a time all through the quarter. And as for the subjects that refused to be crammed into that little head at a night's notice, the algebra, and arithmetic, and Euclid, well—in each of these she was bottom at examination time.

And here I may as well tell you that all through Lennie's life she never recovered the ground she had lost when she first began to study those three subjects. The simple, elementary work was explained, and the other girls listened, and worked. Then the class went on, and on, and Lennie with it. But while the other girls brought clear minds to their work, Lennie had only dim and befogged ideas that were more puzzling to her than no knowledge could have been. She never understood the why and the wherefore of things mathematical. Sometimes her sums were right. She did not know how they came to be right. More often they were wrong. The reason of this was a mystery to her also.

She had neglected the days of small things; the day when the teacher had gone patiently and slowly over and over the early work. As long as she lived practice, and stocks, and compound interest, and factors, and quadratics, and the exercises on Euclid, would remain misty, ungraspable things to her mind.

Chapter IV The Great, Strange World

School was a great, strange world. A new world, unbounded, so far as Lennie's eye could see; indented with a hundred thousand episodes, of great importance to every dweller in the new world; broken up by rivers—of tears; or by mountains—of detentions, bad marks, punishments; covered with exquisite fruit and flowers, friendships and fancies, competitions, winning, and losing, and laughter; and one larger, lovelier blossom than all the rest, the flower of Fun.

Lennie soon began to love this new world with a secret, passionate love, that feverishly demurred at holidays, and rejoiced, with hidden delight, at a new system of detention introduced about this time—a Saturday morning school.

This was supposed by the teachers to be the most severe punishment that they could give to a pupil, and indeed, it was severe enough to most of the girls. They nearly all liked play on Saturday morning, liked to enjoy themselves at the swimming baths, or to stay at home and do little household tasks, and read their favourite story-book, and plan nice things to do in the afternoon. It was very hard to have to come into town, and sit in the old school-room and write French exercises on this dear last day of the week.

But Lennie did not find it hard. She was glad when her name was read out among the little lists of those whose Saturdays were taken for neglected home-work. She smiled a quiet little smile to herself, and said, in a whisper to the girl who sat next to her, "I'm so *glad*." And if her Sundays had been taken too, she would still have been glad. For she was filled with the love of life, the delight of friendships, the feeling of excitement which woke in her when she was among all these girls, and she wanted to be with them always, for ever, and ever, and ever.

The girl who sat next to her was Mabel James; she and Lennie were now close friends. They sat next to each other in school, for they were both in the same class—class B, the second from the top—and they walked about the playground at playtime and lunch hour, with their arms round each other's waists.

Mabel was the first friend Lennie had ever had. The thirteen years of life before she had come to school had been filled with her sisters, and her mother, and her governess, and Bert. She had seen other girls walking about in pairs with their arms round each other, but she herself had never known any girl well enough to walk with her, and talk in a low voice to her, and hold her with an arm round her shoulders.

Mabel and she both went to school the same day, though they did not meet for several days after. One morning—it was the fourth day that Lennie had spent at school—she was called upon by Miss Greyson to recite the piece of “Paradise Lost” which had been set as a home-lesson for the night before. Miss Greyson never began at the top of the class, and went slowly down to the bottom, hearing each girl say her lesson in turn, as some of the teachers did. She would walk quickly into the class room, shut the door, and almost before she reached her little table in front of the desks, she would fasten her eyes on one of the girls, and nod slightly, and wait for that girl to say her repetition. So that the girls never knew when they would be called upon to recite. There were never more than a dozen asked, but nobody knew who would be in the dozen, and everyone learned the piece lest she should receive that terrible little nod.

This day, Miss Greyson had listened to three girls, and Lennie had sat quietly in her seat, and had listened too in a dreamy way, with her eyes on the map of Africa. Suddenly she became aware that Miss Greyson was looking at her, then she noticed that there was a silence in the class, and finally she understood that she had been called upon.

It was the first time she had ever raised her voice in the school. A horrible nervousness came over her. Her heart thumped like a steam engine; a deep, hot blush burnt all over her face.

But worse still, every word of the lesson went out of her head. She could only remember the last words of the girl who had just recited, “And justify the ways of God to men;” but that line came at the end of the piece, and what came before it she could not, for the life of her, recall.

“I am waiting,” said Miss Greyson's calm, but determined voice.

Lennie's eyes went along the ceiling, but there was no Milton there. They fell to the desk, and fixed themselves to an ink-stain. But that, too, refused to help her. Her heart beat loudly and more loudly, it seemed to have come into her throat, and she would hardly have been surprised if it had suddenly leapt out of her mouth.

“I am waiting,” said the calm voice again.

Oh-h-h! She pressed her finger-nails into her palms, bit her lip till it ached, drew a short breath, and was ready to sink into the ground with shame, when a voice to her right whispered very slowly and *very* softly.

That was the first line. In a flash, all the rest came back to her. She said it at last, in a nervous voice that kept pausing to take a little gasping breath, but she reached the last line without one mistake.

“What is your name?” asked Miss Greyson.

“Lennie Leighton.”

“Well, Lennie, I want to know why you kept me waiting so long?”

“I—I forgot it,” came the answer.

“Did you learn it last night?”

“Yes.”

“Did you know it when you came into class?”

“Yes.”

“And when I asked you, you forgot it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Lennie, I want to know what made you remember it?”

Now, was there ever a more dreadful question for a nervous little girl to answer! If she said “somebody prompted me,” the girl who had done so would get into disgrace, and she, herself, would probably share it.

She made no answer at all, but sat and looked piteously at the desk.

“Well, the girl who prompted Lennie Leighton put up her hand?” said Miss Greyson, unexpectedly.

Why, she knew all the time.

After a pause, a hand stole up into the air, fluttered there a moment, and sank down again into the owner's lap.

Miss Greyson's eyes now left Lennie, and fixed themselves on this new object.

“What is your name?”

“Mabel James.”

“You are one of the new girls. Well, Mabel, did you think that it was you that I was calling on to recite? Did you not see that I was looking at Lennie Leighton?”

No answer to this.

“You did, and you saw that Lennie had forgotten her lesson. And you remembered it. And you just whispered it loudly enough for her to hear. And that is what we, in this school, call prompting.”

No one but Mabel and Lennie knew the misery of this minute to them.

“Listen to me, all of you,” the clear voice rang out. “There are many new girls in the class, and there are thirty-three old ones, and I am speaking to all of you, old and new. I want you to understand that it is just as wrong, just as decertful, just as dishonourable, to prompt your neighbour, as it is to copy her sums, and pass them up to me as your own work. In one case, you deceive me for your own advantage; in the other, for the advantage of the neighbour. But they are both wrong, girls, both prompting and copying, and the girl who allows herself to be copied, or to be prompted, is just as wrong as the girl who does the copying, or the girl who gives the prompt.”

Here she paused a minute, and looked gravely, and a little sternly at them all. Then her mouth softened into a wonderfully sweet smile, which seemed to flow right over the girls; their faces brightened immediately,

their lips became less unhappy looking, and their eyes less strained.

“And now,” said Miss Greyson, “we must go on with the lesson.”

And this was how Lennie came to know Mabel, and how Miss Greyson came to know them both.

The two girls walked downstairs that day together, and the next day they walked about the playground with their arms linked in each others. They had both been lonely before. Now they were lonely no longer. At lunch time as they were leaving the schoolroom, Lennie said:

“Where do you have your lunch?”

“I sit on a seat in the shed,” said Mabel.

“Let us sit under the fig-trees,” said Lennie, shyly. “On the roots of the trees. Nobody else sits there.”

“Oh, yes, let us,” said Mabel, gladly.

So they took their baskets out into the playground, and settled themselves comfortably at the foot of the trees, and leaned back against their trunks, and felt as if they were having a picnic.

“Isn't it nice?” said Lennie.

“It's lovely,” said Mabel.

“Do you like school?” asked Lennie.

“I think so,” said Mabel. “I never went to a public school before. I used to go to a little school in our street, and there were only five girls besides me, and we all knew each other quite well. But here I don't know anyone at all; do you?”

“Not a soul,” said Lennie. “I—didn't you think that—I thought that—the girls would speak, didn't you? or that the teachers would tell them who I was, or something like that.”

“Oh, no; I knew it wouldn't be like that. Why there are three hundred girls here. I suppose it is because there are so many that they don't take any notice of you.”

Then Lennie confessed that Mabel was the first girl who had spoken to her since she had been there. And Mabel made a similar confession to Lennie.

“I *did* wish someone would speak,” said Lennie.

“So did I,” said Mabel.

“They were at their jam sandwiches now. Lennie noticed that Mabel's bread was cut in very thick slices, and was carelessly wrapped up in newspaper. Mabel, on her part, was looking admiringly at Lennie's dainty little square morsels, the crusts cut off, the bread well buttered, and nice plum jam spread in between.

“Do you cut your own lunch?” she asked.

“No. My mother cuts it for me. Do you cut yours?”

"I should think I did," said Mabel. "I don't know who would if I didn't. We all cut our own, my five brothers and me."

"Doesn't your mother cut any?"

"My mother is dead."

Lennie stopped in the middle of a banana, and could hardly finish the bite she had just taken. She did not know what to say, or what to do. Mabel went on eating her lunch calmly, but she did not look at Lennie for several minutes after, then she asked:

"Can you play tennis?"

"No; I have never tried."

"I can't either. I'm glad you can't."

"I'm glad you can't."

"What's your favourite lesson?"

"English."

"Is it? So is mine. How funny!"

"I love English better than anything."

"So do I. Except, perhaps, drawing. Do you like drawing?"

"I can't draw a line, but I should like it if I could."

"I wish we had it every day."

"Instead of arithmetic and algebra. I can't bear them."

"Can't you really? Why, how funny! Neither can I."

"Mother said I would have to learn them properly when I came to school," said Lennie. "Our governess didn't care for them herself, and never gave us many sums. But I was always having English. Whenever we didn't know what to have, I used to say, 'Let us have English, Miss Middleton,' and she'd say, 'Very well,' and I'd read out of Chambers's English Literature. But I don't think it's like that at school."

"Oh, no; every lesson is fixed for ever," said Mabel. "They are all pasted on the board in our class room, and I want to copy the table into my exercise book to-day. Then I won't forget what home lessons we have."

"I'll copy it too," said Lennie. "When are you going to do it?"

"Let us go now," said Mabel.

So, having eaten their last lunch crumbs, they shut up their baskets, went to the filter and drank big mugs of water, then up the staircase to the schoolroom. When they entered class room B, their room, they found that it was quite empty, and Lennie was very happy as she and Mabel sat down together, and ruled lines in their exercise books, preparatory to copying out the time-table.

As they sat there, side by side, Lennie stole peeps at her companion. Mabel was pale, and had brown curly hair, cut short like a boy's. Her eyes were a dreamy grey. She was much taller than Lennie, and stooped slightly

from the shoulders.

“How old are you?” asked Lennie.

“Fifteen last week.”

“I was thirteen last week, last Monday.”

“And I was fifteen on Monday.”

“Why, our birthdays must be the same day.”

“Mine's June the twentieth.”

“So is mine.”

They looked at each other with shy smiles for a minute, then went on with their work, the smile still lingering on their lips.

“Isn't it funny,” said Mabel, drawing a long straight line without a ruler, “that we should both like English best, both be born on the same day, both hate arithmetic, both hate algebra.”

She paused for breath.

“Both come to school the same day, both be put in the same class.”

“Both sit next to each other.”

“Both not able to play tennis.”

Their voices were rising with the excitement of all these extraordinary coincidences.

“Both,” began Lennie.

But she could not think of another.

“Both,” began Mabel.

But she too had come to the end of her comparisons. Then they began to laugh, and Mabel said frivolously:

“Both have eyelashes on our eyes.”

“Both wear boots.”

“Both wear button-up boots.”

They could hardly speak now for laughter.

“Both—wear—h-hats.”

“Both—wear—h-hair.”

“B-both——”

But their laughter was too much for them, and they rolled from side to side in their seats at each fresh piece of nonsense, and finally dropped their heads on their arms, and rested both on the desks, and lay there in spasms of the most ridiculous laughter.

For ten minutes their merriment had the best of them. Then the bell for afternoon school rang slowly, and they sat up in a hurry, with red faces and moist eyes, as girls began to enter the room.

Their laughter was over then, but it had put the seal on a friendship that lasted a long, long time.

Chapter V A Girl Without A Mother

For some time Mabel and Lennie kept a little apart from the other girls. Or perhaps it was that the other girls kept apart from them. At any rate, the two friends found that their friendship had sent away all loneliness; and they were quite happy with each other, and had no wish to take others into their friendship.

It was “Mabel, Mabel, Mabel,” with Lennie from breakfast-time to bed-time.

The little sisters were patient listeners, and they soon came to know what Mabel did at school, what Mabel did at home, what Mabel said, how Mabel looked—better even than Mabel knew herself.

Long before they had seen her, they had arranged it in their minds that they liked her very much. “She is such a *funny* girl,” they said among themselves as they discussed Lennie's school in Lennie's absence. For it touched their quick sense of the ridiculous to hear how Mabel cut her lunch when she was in a hurry, chopping the end off a boat-shaped twist loaf, pulling out a lump of bread, filling in the hole with butter, then plugging it up again with the soft bread she had just pulled out of it, and cutting it up and spreading it with a knife at lunch-time. And it woke little giggling laughs in them when they learned that Mabel's hat had only cost a penny, because her father had bought a dozen of them at some old draper's sale.

“Do the girls ever ask the girls to go and see them?” Brenda asked Lennie one afternoon.

“The girls' *friends* do,” said Lennie.

“Well, is Mabel nearly a friend of yours, Len?”

“Of course she is,” said Lennie. “She and I are *great* friends.”

“Well, I thought you were,” said Brenda. “Only —well, why don't you never ask her to tea?”

She got rid, at last, of the thought that had been troubling her for some days.

“Don't you ever,” corrected Lennie.

“Don't you never, I mean,” said Brenda, quickly.

“But it isn't; it's don't you ever.”

“I *said* don't you ever.”

“You *didn't*, Brenda. You said, don't you never.”

“Well, but why don't you never ask her?”

Brenda's negatives were evidently hopeless, and Lennie, who had perhaps been trying to evade the little sister's question, now felt herself obliged to answer.

"I don't know," she said, uncertainly. "I haven't asked Mother yet. I don't know whether she would let us have a girl to tea."

"Why, we've had girls here. The Raymondses, and Jenny Rowe, and Sylvia May. They've all been here to tea. You *ought* to ask Mabel."

"But their mothers know mother. I mean, mother knows their mothers."

"But poor little Mabel hasn't got any mother," said Brenda, in warm reproach.

And just at that minute their own mother walked into the room.

"Wouldn't you let us have a girl if she didn't have a mother," said Brenda, running to her.

"What does she mean?" asked the Mother.

"Poor little Mabel at school's mother's dead," Brenda told her (Brenda was three feet odd, Mabel over five). "And Lennie thought you wouldn't let us ask her here to tea, because—and Lennie says she's nicer than any of the other girls—and Lennie's never asked a girl yet."

Her bright dark eyes were moist with her intense earnestness, and the mother would not have smiled for the world, though a smile was dangerously near her lips.

"Why, Lennie, dear!" she said. "Why didn't you tell me you wanted to ask her? If I had thought of it, I would have told you to ask her last Saturday to Mary's little party."

"I thought—I didn't know. I thought you mightn't like me to ask her, Mother, because you don't know anything about her except from me."

"But I want to know more about her, dear. And I want you to ask her; of course, I want you to ask her."

"We thought you only liked girls when you liked their mothers," said Brenda.

"Funny children," said the Mother. "I like little girls for their own sakes, and for the sake of my own little girls; not for the sake of anything or anyone else in the world. And as for poor little motherless Mabel——"

"She's a great, big, tall girl, mother," interrupted Lennie.

"Well, as for this tall Mabel of yours, I am just as anxious to have her here as you yourselves, darlings. When shall we ask her?"

It was delightful when Mother said "we" like that; and soon the following Saturday was fixed for the invitation.

Mabel came the next Saturday. She did not wear her penny hat, but her best one instead—a brown straw trimmed with black ribbons. She wore her best dress, too—a thick, brown serge, with a high velvet collar and cape—and the sisters thought she looked remarkably nice.

They all liked her as much as they had expected to—or, perhaps, more. They liked the way she sat on the floor in front of the dolls' house, and took

the dolls on her lap as though she had known them all her life. It pleased them to find that she did not consider herself—this grand, much-talked-of Mabel—too grand or too grown-up to love dolls and dolls' houses.

Lennie was pleased, too. She had secretly been a little ashamed of taking Mabel to the dolls' house, and now it seemed that Mabel, who was fifteen years old, still cared to play with dolls.

“We're going to have such a nice tea,” Lennie heard Brenda whispering to Mabel, in a friendly way.

And Mabel answered, laughing:

“I'm glad I'm going to stay.”

It *was* a nice tea, too. The Mother had seen to that; and Lennie's heart thrilled with pleasure when the tea-bell called them all down to the dining-room, and the cosy lamplight shone through its yellow shade on piles of hot scones, and little fairy cakes, and strawberry and melon jam in clear glass dishes, and a beautiful, shiny tongue, thick with glaze, lying among sprays of feathery parsley, and a still more beautiful salad, with little pieces of pink prawns mingling with the lettuce green.

“This is Mabel, Father,” Lennie said, and Mabel walked up fearlessly to the great grey-haired doctor, and shook hands with him as though he had been a boy. He looked at her with kindly eyes, said, “We have all heard of Mabel, from this little Lennie of ours, and we have been wondering when Lennie was going to bring her to see us.”

“And this is Bert, Mabel,” Lennie said, again, introducing her friend to her brother.

Dark-haired Bert said, “How do you do?” as Mabel said, “How do you do?” Then they all sat down to tea.

All the while, Lennie was furtively watching her Father and Mother and Bert, trying to discover in their faces the impression Mabel was making on them. She was so busy with these thoughts of hers, that she forgot to speak, and neglected her glazy tongue, and prawn salad, and sat in silence with her eyes going from one face to another of the little party.

Mabel was quite at home. Yet, though she spoke readily and naturally, and without awkwardness, she did not try to put herself into notice. And soon Lennie read in her father's eye that he was pleased with this new friend of his eldest daughter.

Then she was happy, and went on eating her tea.

Everybody was bright and merry. Everybody was hungry, too, and where there are hungry little girls, and plenty of nice scones and tempting little cakes, there is sure to be a certain amount of happiness.

Brenda sat on one side of Mabel, Lennie on the other. Floss and Mary were on the opposite side of the table, and had the best opportunity of

gazing at the visitor. They looked at her all the time, and she could not help wondering how they always knew just when she was ready for another scone, or for another cup of tea, or for strawberry jam, or little cakes.

Bert was watching her, too, from the other side of Mary.

“Will you have bread or cake?” he asked her once.

“I think I'll have cake; there's always bread and butter at home,” said she, quaintly.

“Do you really like cake better than bread and butter?” asked the Doctor, with a twinkling eye.

“I *think* I do,” she answered. “Don't you, sir?”

“Well, with all these little girls of mine, I'm afraid I don't get quite as much as I used to.”

“Oh, *Pa*,” said Brenda in quick remonstrance. “At any rate, I'm quite sure I don't eat so many slices of currant cake as I did when I was Brenda's age.”

“How many used you to eat then,” queried Brenda.”

“Well, I remember one Christmas Day when I was a little boy in velvet knickerbockers. It was a short, cold day, and it soon came to be bed-time. My nurse was putting me to bed when I asked her in confidence, ‘Nurse, what do you fink I had for breakfast? Bread and butter and Chrissy cake. What do you fink I had for dinner? All the other fings, and Chrissy cake. What do you fink I had for tea? Chrissy cake and Chrissy cake.’ And when this statement of mine was inquired into it was found that a whole Christmas cake had disappeared from the pantry, pink and white icing and all. And who do you think had eaten it?”

“*You* did,” Brenda cried, excitedly.

“I don't remember eating it,” said the Doctor, sadly.

“Oh, *Pa*.” Brenda gave a slight reproachful frown at him. Then she smiled, and said, coaxingly:

“You *did* eat it, didn't you?”

“I think it was the little boy in knickerbockers, darling.”

“But that was *you*.”

“At any rate, I've never eaten a whole Chrissy cake since. Have you, Mabel?”

“We didn't have any Christmas cake last year,” she answered.

“Did you have any the year before?” Brenda wanted to know.

“No, we didn't have any the year before. There wasn't anyone to make it. Jane can't make cakes in our oven, she says.”

Her eyes looked down at the tiny rosebuds in palest pink on the borders of her plate.

When tea was over and they were going through the hall, on their way to

the cozy drawing-room, the Mother laid her hand on Mabel's shoulder for a minute.

"You must come as often as you can, dear," she said, and did not seem to notice that Mabel did not then say "Thank you."

"Come up to my room for a while," said Lennie, slipping her arm round her friend's waist. They set off up the stairs with arms entwined round each other, and the other sisters looked after them and watched them eagerly. And by and by Brenda was to be seen stealing up the staircase towards that bedroom on the third storey. And soon Floss and Mary slipped away from the drawing-room where the doctor was reading a paper, and the Mother was darning Bert's socks, and crept gently up to Lennie's door.

Brenda had already entered. They could hear her voice within.

"What a dear little cape your dress has got," she was saying to Mabel, and her hand kept stealing up under the cape towards Mabel's collar.

Floss knocked softly; Lennie cried, "Come in." They went in, and shut the door behind them, and every one of the five felt that they were just as happy as ever they could be.

They all sat on the floor, and they all talked. Mabel asked questions, and they all asked Mabel questions. Floss and Mary had been a little shy before, but the shyness took wing and fled now, and they were as much at ease as Brenda, who had never been shy in her life. They talked about school, and lessons, and dolls, and books, and each other, and about all manner of nice things that only girls know how to talk about. You and I know, do we not? We have been school girls in our time, and have sat on the floor and said—"Do you like history?" "So do I." "Do you like grammar?" "Neither do I." "I don't like analysis." "Neither do I." "I love geography." "Oh, so do I." And we were very happy when we asked and answered those questions. There was nothing that made us happier than to find that someone else liked what we liked, or did not like what we did not like.

Peals of laughter came through the closed door. Brenda, with arms clasped round her knees, rocked herself to and fro with laughing, and looked like a figure for the game of honey-pots. "You *do* make us laugh, Mabel," she kept saying. "Tell us something else."

Not for nearly an hour did the Mother disturb the happy chatterers. Then she called them down to a game in the drawing-room with Bert, and the doctor and herself.

The game was new to Mabel. It was called "Putting on the Pig's Tail," and everyone had to be blindfold in turn, and pin a long strip of paper to the pig that Bert sketched roughly on a great sheet of blank paper, and pinned to the wall. The long thin strip was the pig's tail, and you were

supposed to pin it on to piggy, blindfold. You set out hopefully, trying to remember just where piggy was, but you found that you had pinned the tail in his mouth as often as not. The Doctor played too, and nobody attempted to stop the delighted laughter of anybody.

At nine o'clock Mabel went up to get her hat, and when she came down again, there were bananas, and apples, and more cakes, and cocoa on the dining-room table.

Then Bert took her to the tram, where one of her brothers was to meet her.

“She had a new dress on,” Brenda said, when the sisters and the Mother were alone together. “She got it made to come here in. She told me. I *never* asked her.”

“Oh, Brenda!” exclaimed quiet little fair-haired Mary. “I heard you say to her, ‘Is that a new dress?’ ”

“Poor little girl,” said the Mother, “she must come often, Lennie—any Saturday afternoon—to tea.”

“Do you *like* her, Mother?” was the anxious question; and, “Father and I like her very much,” was the beautiful reply.

Chapter VI The Second Visit

Mabel's second visit to Lennie occurred exactly a week later. On the Friday following the Saturday of her first visit, Brenda asked boldly at breakfasttime:

“Lennie, is Mabel coming to tea to-morrow?”

The sisters all looked a little startled, and Lennie blushed, and glanced furtively at her Mother, who immediately rose to the occasion, and replied in the most satisfactory manner:

“Yes, ask Mabel if she would care to come, Lennie.”

“If you are not going anywhere to-morrow, Mab, will you come to our place for tea?” said Lennie at school that same morning, with a secret feeling of pride and pleasure at being able to renew this invitation so speedily.

Mab was surprised, and also delightfully excited.

“Of course I'm not going anywhere. I never do. I'd love to come. Did your Mother say I might?”

“Oh, Mother *wants* you to come,” was the eager answer. “And so does Brenda, and so do they all.”

This second Saturday was a little different from the previous one. Although Lennie would not have said so for the world, in her heart of hearts she was afraid that Mab had found the first Saturday evening a little dull. She was not sure that Mab liked playing games, and for her own part would have liked better to stay up in the bedroom all the evening and talk.

And that is just what they did this second time. When tea was over, and Mabel and Lennie stole upstairs for a talk in the long, bare bedroom, and Brenda and Floss and Mary followed as soon as they dared, the Mother and the Doctor went off to the theatre; and as there was no one to call the gay talkers downstairs, they stayed up there in the bedroom, and chattered the whole evening—a state of things that pleased them better than any game in the drawing-room.

A little after seven, Bert, on his way upstairs, caught the sounds of much laughter and merry talking from Lennie' bedroom, and, knocking at the door, called out amiably:

“What are you girls talking about? May I come in?”

He went in to find them all sitting on the bed, in comfortable, humped-up attitudes, of which the Mother, had she been there, would have strongly disapproved, and have speedily upset.

“Come on,” Brenda cried, joyfully. “We're playing Goods and Bads. We're just telling Mabel her Goods.”

Then she rushed on with her telling, and Bert seated himself on the only chair, and listened in amazement.

"You're very kind," said Brenda.

"You are good-natured," said Lennie.

"You—you—you are not a bit cross," stammered Mary.

"You are a favourite at school," said Lennie.

"You wear penny hats," cried Brenda.

"That's not a Good," said Mab. "That's a Bad."

"Oh, it's mine—it's mine. I'll keep it till the Bads," cried Brenda, excitedly. "I'll say another Good instead. You are very good at putting on the pig's tail."

Shrieks of laughter.

"Pig's tail is as bad as the penny hat," said Mabel. "There can't be many Goods about *me*, I'm afraid."

"Oh, but Brenda's such a silly," cried Lennie, in quick extenuation of her friend's virtues and good qualities. "You're good at analysis; you're the quickest runner I've ever seen; you're unselfish, your hair's curly; you're always up to fun." She poured out such a sudden flow of Goods that Mab looked over to Bert to see if he was laughing. He was sitting on his chair, as grave as a judge, his dark face a little in shadow, and his bright, keen eyes watching everything; but when he caught Mab's glance he smiled, and looked away quickly to a picture over the mantelpiece.

"I think everybody likes you," went on Brenda.

"I'm sure they don't," said Mab, a little sharply, for she had noted the twist of Bert's mouth, and felt uneasy now in this cataloguing of her characteristics, although five minutes before she had been delighting in it. "I'm sure they don't, and I don't want them to," she went on boldly, as Bert's twist of lip widened to a grin.

The four sisters stared indignantly at their brother, and their eyes said very plainly, "We *do* wish you would go away; Mab doesn't like you being here." But Bert did not choose to read their glances, and settled himself in his chair, and seemed to be waiting for them to go on amusing him. This style of entertainment was new to him; boys never dreamt of asking boys to sit in their bedrooms, and be told their good qualities and their bad ones, in the frank manner of these five girls. He had nothing to do this evening, and he determined to stay here enjoying himself.

"I think you'd better drop me," said Mab, with a nervous laugh. "Tell Lennie's Goods now."

They persisted earnestly, with a fierce side-glance at Bert, that they had not nearly, not a *quarter*, finished her Goods yet; but after their persistence they were silent for quite three minutes, and a pause began, that seemed as

if it would never end. Brenda broke it at last with a giggle, and an inspiration that shook the whole bed and the five squatting figures.

"Let us tell Bert's Bads," she cried.

All their faces brightened immediately, and the eager way in which Lennie cried, "Oh, yes!" boded ill for poor Bert's character. It was evidently going to be torn in pieces.

"He's cranky," said Brenda.

"He's as cross as two sticks," cried Floss.

"He's always late for dinner," said Mary.

"He puts his ties on crooked," said Lennie, noting the twist of the blue silk tie.

"He has to get Father to help him with his Greek," said Floss.

"He doesn't like peaches and cream," said Mary, who was very fond of that delicacy herself.

Bert laughed out loudly now. "Ha! ha! I must be bad," said he teasingly, "not to like peaches and cream."

"I think you had better not say *anything*, Mary," Brenda exclaimed in a scornful voice. "You only make things worse."

"No she doesn't," said Bert, "she makes me better; that's the worst of it."

The sisters were confused at this, and angrier than ever with him.

"You can't play tennis at bit."

"You never know when you're not wanted."

"You never shut the front gate after you."

"You are not in the least sensitive."

This last was Mabel's first arrow.

Bert sat unmoved through it all, and showed no signs of giving way before this ferocious onslaught.

They went at it harder, and now they threw off all pretence of playing, and showed themselves to be in deadly earnest.

"You think you're getting a moustache."

"You play the same exercises as Brenda."

"Papa gives you an allowance, and you're always borrowing threepences from Mother."

"You didn't know how to parse 'like' when Lennie asked you."

"You knew very well we didn't want you."

"You only came in here to listen."

"You needn't think Mab likes you—she doesn't."

But these barbs, sharp though they seem, had no effect at all on the enemy. He just sat there and laughed, and the harder they pounded him the more loudly he laughed, and the more he laughed the angrier they grew.

"If you only *knew* how we want you to go way."

“If you only knew how *horrid* you are.”

Then they had to pause for breath, and while they were pausing Brenda had a happy thought.

“*I saw you talking to Sylvia Green yesterday. I saw you give her a bunch of flowers out of our garden.*”

Quick as thought the laugh went off Bert's lips, and a deep colour rushed into his cheeks. He tried to smile, but only succeeded in getting up a painful-looking grin.

“Oh! oh! oh! You're red all over!”

But Bert had risen, and was going as quickly as dignity would allow towards the door.

“You're the silliest little creatures I've ever known in my life,” he said, and was gone.

They could not go on with their Goods and Bads for some time, they were laughing so. Bert's sudden flight was too funny for anything. Now they knew where his weak points were, and that blush of his placed him at the mercy of five girls who were quite merciless.

“We've just got to say *Sylvia Green*,” said Lennie, comfortably, “and he'll do whatever we want.”

It was Lennie's turn then to have her Goods told. She was very anxious to hear what Mab would say, and her anxiety made her quite nervous. Her hands trembled.

“You have a good temper,” said Floss. They generally started off with that. It was a sort of general, non-committal virtue, which was given, with fair certainty, to everyone.

“You have a lovely complexion,” said Mab.

Lennie went scarlet. Floss, Mary, and Brenda stared from her to Mab, and from Mab to her, in surprise, and wanted to know, “What's a complexion?”

“No, *I don't think shy is a Good.*”

“And Floss knows very well that it isn't. She only says it, because she knows it's a Bad. It would be ever so much nicer, Mab, if you and I had this game all to ourselves.”

The little sisters were deeply hurt, but they thought it wiser to take no notice of this cruel remark. It was very hard for them, though, to go on picking out their sister's Goods after this, and only a fear of being sent away kept them going. The game seemed to be flagging a little when they came to Brenda's Bads, and then there was some lively fun.

Brenda greeted all her bads with a little irresistible giggle, and while all the others had looked hurt, or vexed, or solemn at theirs, she seemed to enjoy hers immensely.

“Don't stop,” she kept on urging them. “There's another yet. There's one you don't know of.”

They guessed everything they could possibly imagine, but still she said, “There's another.”

At last their patience gave out. They had given her every fault they knew, or could make up, and the little monkey kept on crying, “You don't know it. Nobody knows of this one.”

“Tell us what it is *immediately*,” said Lennie, in a severe and grown-up voice. “If you don't tell us, you shall never be allowed to play here again.”

This awful threat had its effect. Brenda giggled again—and told.

“Bert is hiding behind Lennie's curtain-wardrobe. I saw him slipping in, and didn't tell.”

They were off the bed in a minute, and were rushing towards the curtain. But Bert was too quick for them. He was at the door before they could reach him, and even had time to call mockingly—“Who's unselfish! Who's shy! Who's got a lovely complexion!” before he slammed the door behind him.

They locked the door then, shook Brenda for her treachery, and gave up Goods and Bads.

“There's one comfort,” said Lennie, “he didn't hear much.”

“I don't think you'll be able to say *Sylvia Green* to him now,” said Floss. “If you do, he'll say *Lovely Complexion*.”

“By the by,” said Mab, “what shall I say to him when I want to go home? Perhaps he won't take me to the tram.”

“Oh, yes, he will. He *has* to.”

“I mustn't be later than nine,” said Mab, easily. “I wonder what time it is now.”

Floss went to look. In a minute she came back breathless to announce that it was *three minutes past eleven!*

“Oh, Lennie! What shall I do? Father will be *so* angry,” cried Mab, rushing for her hat and gloves like a mad thing, and wondering piteously how it could be so late.

“Perhaps the clock's wrong,” said Lennie. “We must get Bert. You run and tell him, Floss, and I'll go and look at the kitchen clock.”

She ran down into the kitchen. The maids were not there, and the hands of the clock were at five minutes past eleven. It must be right. Then she rushed upstairs again to Bert's room, found the door locked, and cried out, as a last hope: “Bert, what time is it?”

“Six minutes past eleven by my watch,” said Bert, gruffly.

“Then come quick,” said Lennie. “Come quick, and take Mab home. She's so frightened. She had to leave here by nine, and Mother and Papa

will be home in a minute, and they will be *so* angry with me. Do hurry, Bert.”

“Can't. I'm in bed.”

“Oh, *Bert!* Oh, you *must* get up—you *must* get up! Mab can't go home by herself, and the servants must have gone to bed. Oh, Bert, *do* get up—*do* be quick!”

They all gathered outside the door, and joined their entreaties to Lennie's, and when Bert gave up answering them, could only hope he was getting ready, and hurried him with little impatient remarks.

“What are you putting on now?”

“Have you got your boots on yet?”

“Never mind your tie.”

“If you can't find your stud, tie a handkerchief round your neck.”

At last the door opened, and Bert walked out. He had no appearance of having dressed in a hurry, had no handkerchief round his neck, and wore the tie he had been wearing all day.

It was half-past eleven when he and Mab were out on their way to the last tram, and the four sisters were off to bed at their best speed, thinking themselves lucky that their parents were so very late that night.

Bert walked along beside Mabel in silence; she only broke it every now and then to ask, “Do you mind walking a little quicker?”

She increased their speed so often, that they were nearly running by the time they reached the tram. She was too anxious and preoccupied to notice that every now and then a grin came and went about Bert's lips.

Mab had arranged that her brother Charlie, or Jane, their servant, should meet her at the end of the tram, but she told Bert that she knew they would never wait for her till twelve o'clock, as Bert's watch now told the time to be. She was surprised then, when she leapt out of the tram, to find Jane standing there, with a not specially unamiable expression on her face.

“As there is someone to meet you,” said Bert, “I'll go back in this tram. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said Mab, “and thanks very, *very* much for getting up out of bed to bring me home. I'll never forget it.”

“I don't think you will,” he said, laughingly, as the tram moved out again.

“Oh, Jane, is Father very angry? Has he gone to bed? Have you been waiting here two hours and a half by yourself?”

“Are you out of your mind, Miss Mabel?” said Jane crossly. “I only just come—had to run all the way, too. Those brothers of yours were late coming home to their tea, but I ran so hard I got early, and you're early, too.”

“Early! But, Jane! Why, it's twelve o'clock.”

“What have you had for your tea?” said Jane. “Look at that clock there—five minutes past nine—and we'll be home at a quarter-past nine.”

“I took Mabel home in good time last night, Mother,” said Bert at breakfast next morning.

The little sisters looked at him fearfully, then gratefully. He was not going to betray them, after all. What a nice kind brother he was, in spite of those many Bads! All that day, a Sunday, they were as good as gold to him. Lennie let him read the book she was just half-way through; Brenda took him a cup of afternoon tea to his own bedroom; and Floss made him a buttonhole to wear to church.

It was not till Monday morning, when Mab and Lennie were together again, that they discovered the trick Bert had played them of putting all the clocks on, and taking away their precious visitor half an hour before her time.

Chapter VII From Eight Till Ten

It was not long before they had an opportunity of paying Bert back. A few weeks after this, he announced that he was going to have a boys' evening, and wanted to have the whole and sole use of the dining-room from eight till ten. He was president of a certain football club, the Junior Whites, and he was going to have a meeting and an entertainment all in one. The Mother was urged to do her best with the cakes and oyster patties necessary for the feasting part of the meeting, and Lennie, Floss, Mary, and Brenda were all strictly forbidden to come near.

Now, many and many a time before had these meetings taken place in the dining-room. There were generally a dozen boys present, all of whom the sisters knew by name and sight, and when the business part was done with, there was a lame boy who could sing comic songs, and a very thin ladylike boy who used to bring his violin, and a lively cricket of a boy who was always dying to get a "flap," as he called it, at the piano. Between these and the rest of the party who had voices, or who had no voices, there was much applauded music, and singing in boys' gruff, broken tones. They were very ready with their 'Hear, Hears!' these boys, and their encores, and they got dreadfully hilarious at ten o'clock, and the sisters up in their bedrooms used to hear strange sounds as of furniture being thrown about, and used to wonder drowsily if the dining-room would be in pieces in the morning.

But nothing was ever broken, and at ten the boys stole out through the hall door like mice, and went home thoroughly satisfied with their evening.

Dozens of times this had happened, and never once had the sisters thought of even peeping through the dining-room door; but on one particular night—a Saturday—Mab was there, and the mischief that followed was all due to her.

When she was told that the Junior Whites were coming there that evening, she proposed that they should all go down into the dining-room, and ask to be allowed to join in the singing and the oyster patties.

"Oh, Bert would never let us," Lennie said, decidedly.

"Well, but, if he doesn't, we can—we can—do something," vaguely. "You know we ought to. We have to pay him out for the clocks that night."

"Yes, we must do something," agreed Lennie, eager, as usual, to enter into all her friend's plans. "What shall we do, Mab?"

"I vote," said Mab, in a leader-like way, "that we go down as soon as they come, you and I and Floss and the other two, and say that we have come to stay!"

It happened that the Mother and the Doctor were at the theatre again this Saturday; and so at ten past eight, there was no one to stop the five figures who stood on the mat at the dining-room door, waiting to suppress their laughter before they turned the handle and went in.

“What do you want?” cried Bert, in vexed tones, as the door opened, and his four sisters and Mabel James came walking in, without any invitation, right in the middle of the important election of a new treasurer. “Why are you coming in here, Lennie?” angrily.

“Oh, do let us in,” said Mab, sweetly. “We have nothing to do, and want to stay here and listen to your music.

“And have some of your oyster patties,” chimed in Brenda.

“And help you with your singing,” added Lennie.

Brenda's artless remark about the oyster patties turned the scale, and turned it against the girls. Bert was too incensed to speak for a moment, and, by that time, the new-comers had all squeezed together on the sofa. The Junior Whites were staring with all their eyes; the ladylike boy drew himself up and glanced quickly at his violin; the lame boy kept his maimed foot well under the table; the boy who was always flapping at the piano put on an interested and interesting expression, and began to wonder if his nails were clean.

Their spirits were quite damped when their president rose from his seat at the end of the table, and, marching over to the sofa, ordered those five pretty little girls to go out of the room that very minute.

The only boys in the room who were not sorry when the door closed on the last of the five were the two Joneses. They were noted for their greediness, and had taken Brenda's speech about the oyster patties very much to heart. It was quite a relief to them to know that the supper was not to be shared with those five extra mouths.

“Well, now that we've been treated rudely—been turned out in fact,” said Mab, “there is only one thing to do—revenge.”

They flew up the stairs again, and this time they all went into their Mother's room.

“I want a dress and a bonnet of your Mother's,” cried Mab; Lennie began to look for one immediately.

“What are we going to do?” the sisters cried, excitedly. “Are we all going to dress up?”

“Not all,” said Mab. “Only one, or perhaps two. I think only you and I, Len. I have the loveliest idea, ha! ha! Oh, dear, how funny it is. He! he! he!”

And when she told it to them, and they fully understood it, they had to choke their handkerchiefs into their mouths, for the dining-room was just

underneath the Mother's bedroom, and it would never do to let the Junior Whites hear them laughing.

"You and I will do it, Len," Mab decided quickly. "We can't have more than two."

"Oh, Mab!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I don't think—I—I think I wouldn't be much good. I might laugh; I'm sure I'd laugh."

"Oh, Mabel, let *me* do it," Brenda cried. "Oh, do let me be in it. *I* wouldn't laugh. I *love* dressing up. I'll wear Mother's black silk and lace mantle."

Mab knew at once that Brenda was the one who would help her most.

"Yes, I'll have you," she said, decidedly. "But you must be a little girl, and you're to speak only when I tell you to."

Ten minutes later some one knocked and rang rather imperatively at the Leighton's front door. Emma went to open it, and saw a tall lady in a black bonnet and mantle, and a little girl in a big hat, standing on the doorstep.

"Does Dr. Leighton live here?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Then would you kindly take a message to Master Reggie Evans, and tell him that his mother wishes him to go home immediately. Tell him not to delay a minute. Good evening."

Emma hastened into the dining-room, delivered the message, and in three minutes Reggie Evans, the ladylike boy with the violin, was hurrying through the hall with his instrument under his arm, and a sadly disappointed expression in his eyes.

Bert had been awfully sorry he had to go, but had said nothing about a little premature oyster patty.

Reggie had hardly gone when, rat-a-tat-tat, there was another knock at the Doctor's door. A little girl had come to ask if Fred and Eddie Jones were there.

"Will you tell them that their father thaid they had to come home at onth," she said, with a very pronounced lisp.

Emma thought this was a very strange coincidence. It struck her that these boys must have come here without asking leave, and when she called Bert out to give him this second message, she whispered:

"I don't think the young gentlemen could have asked their Mamas to-night, Master Bert."

It was a dreadful blow to the Joneses. They were not at all sure they would go. They wanted to know who brought the message.

"A little girl," said Emma.

“What sort of a girl?” said big Jones.

“A little girl with a lisp, sir.”

“Jennie!” said both the Joneses together.

She was their youngest sister, somewhat a friend of Brenda's, and they realized at once that it must be a serious matter if Jennie was sent for them all by herself.

Very reluctantly they went off, with many sighs and not a few hints.

“You fellows will have a tuck-in when we're gone.”

“There'll be three short at supper.”

But Bert was really blind to their hints, and let them depart with nothing but regret that they had to go so early.

“It's a great nuisance,” he said. “There's a lot of business to do to-night, and big Jones knows all the other clubs better than any of us.”

For a quarter of an hour there was peace. Then the door-bell rang again, and a gentleman in a long macintosh, with a belltopper on his head and a big stick in his hand, asked, in a low voice:

“Is Master Norman Mutton here?”

“Who do you say, sir?” said Emma.

“Master Norman Mutton.”

Some suspicion flashed through Emma's mind. That was not a man's voice. She leaned forward.

“Why, Miss Mabel,” she cried, “it's *you!*”

Mab caught her by the arm, and pulled her out on to the door-mat.

“Oh, Emma, don't tell,” she said, giving way to her laughter. “Promise you won't, and I'll tell you why I'm doing it.”

She whispered the story of the clocks that were put on, and said that she was only paying Master Bert back for sending her home half an hour early.

“You don't tell me,” said Emma, “that it was you all the time!”

“Yes.”

“Was you the lady in black with a bonnet and mantle?”

“Yes.”

“Was you the little girl with the lisp?”

“No; that was Miss Brenda! Didn't she do it well? She was supposed to be Jennie Jones.”

“Well, now, I never!”

Emma was won over in a minute, and entered into the joke with as much spirit as Mab herself.

“If I can keep from laughing,” she said, “I'll go and tell him.” She loved fun as well as anyone.

So Master Norman Mutton received his summons. A gentleman had called for him, and had gone on. Would Master Mutton please hurry?

“There must be something wrong,” said Bert.

The other boys looked quite startled.

“I think I'd better be off,” said Master Mutton, nervously. “Perhaps there's a big fire somewhere going on.”

“If there's a fire we'd see it,” said Bert. “We'd better go out and look.”

The whole party hastened out through the hall, and never thought of glancing up the staircase, where the heads of the five pretty little girls were all craned out over the banisters of the second stair.

“Now for the oyster patties,” cried Brenda. “Come on, Mab, come on Lennie,” and she led the way to the dining-room like a seven-year-old Napoleon. They went straight to the cupboard where the boys' supper was waiting to be placed on the table. They made for the oyster patties, and, oh! how the Joneses' hearts would have ached to see these five girls make hay of their delicacies.

“It's awfully naughty,” said Mab, with a patty in one hand and a cake in the other.

“It's lovely,” said Lennie, though the brunt of their doings would surely come on her shoulders.

In the midst of their revelry footsteps sounded in the hall, and back came the Junior Whites. There was no sign of any fire, and they had met Reggie Evans returning to say that no one had sent for him, and it was all a hoax. He was inclined to blame Bert, who was inclined to blame Emma, and together they were all in a very bad temper. They came straight into the dining-room, and caught the feasters red-handed.

“Lennie!” shouted Bert, in tones of thunder.

“Nobody sent for me at all,” cried a new-comer, running into the room, breathless. “I've been all the way home and back. It was all a hoax.”

It was Norman Mutton.

He looked angrily at Bert.

“It wasn't a hoax,” said Bert.

“Nobody sent for me at all,” Norman insisted.

And now the supreme moment had come. The five sisters all looked helplessly at Mabel, and under their helpless glance she became brave as befitted a commander-in-chief.

“*We* sent for you,” said she. “Yes, *we* sent for you.”

She was moving backwards towards the door, the sisters following.

“We thought the clocks might be wrong again, and we sent for you quite early,” she said, and, gathering her army together, made for the door.

When the Junior Whites realized the trick these girls had played them, they were stunned. It was not anger, and not disappointed greed, though every single oyster had disappeared; it was pure, unaffected admiration.

Even the Doctor said it was the best joke he had ever heard.

But the Joneses never could see any joke in it. They lived a long way off, and when they arrived home, it was altogether too late to go back, and they had not even the consolation of seed cake and lemon syrup, which was all there was left to the rest of the Whites.

From this night the four sisters were Mab's, heart and soul. They worshipped her; there was no one in the world so funny, so nice, so quick, so entirely amusing, and such a wonderful hand at tricks as this Mabel James who had so lately come into their midst.

And Bert, although he never said so, agreed with them in everything.

Chapter VIII The Other Girls

Of course there were other girls at the school besides Mabel.

Slowly Lennie's horizon began to widen, and before the first quarter was over, she knew all the girls in the class. It had at first seemed impossible that she could ever remember the names of more than half a dozen; but the half-dozen increased to twenty, and the twenty widened out to take in thirty, and finally she knew them all—the whole forty-seven of them.

In her own mind, and in her talks with Mabel, she classified them into the prettiest ones, the cleverest ones, the funniest ones, the most daring ones, the ones she liked best, the ones the teachers liked best, and the ones she liked least.

As for the ones the teachers liked least, she and Mabel were quite decided on that point. These were two girls who sat next to each other whenever they could, but were continually being separated, and whose names were, of course, Mabel and Lennie.

Yes, they were quite decided on that point! But as all the others of the forty-seven had probably come to the same decision respecting their several selves, it is not wise of us to dwell too long upon this matter.

The oldest girl in the class was Caroline Thompson. She was tall and slight, with smooth, fair hair, and pale-grey eyes. She had worked so hard that her sight had failed her a little, and she now wore spectacles.

As well as being the eldest, she was the good girl of the class—the one upon whom all the teachers depended. Her work was always carefully prepared, and she had never been known to be late, nor to stay away a day. Her maps were beautiful bits of work, that were often held up to the other girls by Miss Greyson. She had a quiet manner, and had no particular friend, but always sat with her sister at lunch time. Nobody ever had a word to say against Caroline.

The prettiest girl was certainly Mimi Dawson. She looked liked a girl who was petted, and perhaps pampered, a little at home. She was the only child of wealthy parents, and no girl in the school was dressed with such taste and care. In the summer, her dresses were of the daintiest muslin, or finest cambrics, with wide sashes, and shady leghorn hats. In winter, she wore little plain brown and blue serge frocks, high button-up boots, a toque of brown seal, and a cape lined all through with real fur.

Her hair floated about her shoulders in a long golden cloud. Her little head was always held well back, and she was a graceful walker, and danced like a fairy. It was a pleasure to look at her as she crossed the playground. The girls' eyes always wandered towards her when she came

into, or went out of, her class-room.

Pocket-money was never wanting with her. She carried a little blue cloth purse, in which there were always sixpences and shillings, and very often half-crowns and half-sovereigns. She spent sixpence a day on chocolate—so the girls said. With her school-fellows she was a great favourite. They liked her prettiness, her dainty dresses, her ridiculous little ways, and her chocolate.

Besides, she was the dunce of the class, and the cause of much merriment. No one had ever heard Mimi answer a question correctly. As for her compositions, they were too funny for words. Miss Greyson often read them aloud to the class, and the girls roared with laughter at Mimi's mistakes; and Mimi herself sat and listened, and smiled sweet arch smiles, and ate chocolate behind her handkerchief.

Lulu La Roche was another pretty girl. She was fair, too, but had blue eyes, while Mimi's were golden-brown.

The girls said Lulu was eaten up with conceit. One day she came to school and said to Mabel that someone had told her she was like Mrs. Langtry, a beautiful English actress.

“You *can't* be like Mrs. Langtry,” said Mabel, candidly. “Your eyes are too little.”

Lulu was justly annoyed.

“Nobody ever told me that before,” she said.

But the girls noticed that from that very day she began to open her eyes in a strange, frightened-looking way. Every few minutes she would forget, and the eyes would be natural and small again. Then she would remember, and her eyebrows would go up, and her eyes would be suddenly made round and large. This habit grew upon her, and when she became a woman, she found that she could not throw it off, and went about the world rounding her eyes every two or three minutes.

The girl whom everybody liked, teachers as well as schoolfellows, was Ella Hodson, the girl with red hair. In every school there may be found an Ella Hodson. It is an unfortunate school that does not possess one. For, though her hair was red, and she was stout and clumsy, and not clever, and not very bright, her nature was so sweet, and her temper so kind and even, that all the girls loved her. She was like a mother to some of them. They came to her when they were in trouble, and her sympathy was always as warm and ready as the most exacting friend could have asked. She was slow, and steady, and simple, and had the same kind, bright smile for everyone, big and little. Every day she had something interesting to tell, under her breath, in school time. One day she would describe one of her mother's new dresses; another day she would tell her listeners about a play

she had been to see the night before. The girls used to scramble to get the seat next to her, for these were fascinating topics in school time.

Her father kept a lolly shop in Sydney. In its windows were laid out piles and piles of almond-rock, and French jellies, and date creams, and chocolate jacks. Ella gave away generous junks of cocoanut icing, and passed round bags of chocolate creams in the dullest part of lesson time, and little girls were never overlooked. When one is thirteen or fourteen it is unnatural to dislike a girl whose father keeps a lolly shop, but Ella would have been loved if her father had sold machine oil.

Nell Neilly was the life of the class. She was a little, black-haired girl, with a pale face, a mouth with a wide smile, and eyes brimful of mischief.

She was perpetually in trouble. Four days out of the five she was kept in after school. On the fifth day, she generally managed to lose half-an-hour of her playtime.

The girls looked on Nell as their chief fun-maker. The days were dull when she was away. She made lesson time funny and exciting, and when she was good, they felt aggrieved. But the teachers wore themselves out in inventing punishments for her; they talked at her, and with her; kept her in, took her Saturdays, wrote to her father, were kind to her, were angry, threatened her with expulsion, but could not cure her of her wild, mischievous ways.

One day she went too far. She ate Miss Hammerton's dinner.

The caretaker sent up hot dinners every day to the teachers in their own rooms. This particular day, a little girl, the caretaker's daughter, was carrying a dinner tray to Miss Hammerton, the head mistress. At the top of the stairs she met Nell, who had been kept in, and was waiting for Miss Hammerton to come to her.

"Who is the dinner for?" asked Nell, looking with hungry eyes at the bowl of soup, the hot roast beef and baked potatoes, and the plate of dainty fairy-pudding.

"For Miss Hammerton," said the little girl.

"I'll take it in to her," said Nell. "I'm just going in. Give it to me."

She took the tray in her own hands, and went towards Miss Hammerton's door. The little girl ran down stairs, and Nell found herself standing alone in the lobby, with all those nice hot things under her nose.

She turned away from Miss Hammerton's door, and went swiftly and quietly through the schoolroom into the empty class-room, and sitting down on one of the seats she ate every morsel of poor Miss Hammerton's dinner.

"I'm so hungry," she kept saying to herself.

Miss Hammerton, in her room, was hungry too. She was busy with some

papers, and went on writing, and waiting, and feeling more and more hungry as the lunch hour slipped away. If she had not been so busy, she would have gone down herself to the caretaker and made inquiries into the matter.

She was still writing, and waiting, when the bell rang for afternoon school. She could not believe her ears, pulled out her watch, and saw that it was really two o'clock. And class-room A would be waiting for her to give them their English lesson, and she would have no chance of lunch till after three.

She was angry, and hungry, but she went in bravely to her class, and taught them the rules of Prosody for a whole hour. Then there was another class waiting for her to hear their French verbs.

As soon as school was over, the caretaker was sent for, and Miss Hammerton poured out the story of her wrongs, and demanded to know the reason of such neglect. And then the little girl was brought up hurriedly, and she explained that she had given the tray to one of the young ladies who had asked to be allowed to take it in to Miss Hammerton. She did not know the young lady's name, but she would know her if she saw her.

But it was after school hours now, and the girls had nearly all gone home. It was Friday, too, and nothing could be done till Monday. Poor Miss Hammerton was angrier still to think that, by Monday, she might have relented a little towards the culprit.

When Monday came, the little girl was brought into the big class-room when the girls were all together for roll-call, and at once picked out Nell.

"I gave 'er the dinner," she said, pointing with her finger to the black-haired miscreant in the back seat. "She must have eaten it 'erself."

"So it was you, Miss Elinor Neilly, who ate my dinner!"

You know what schoolgirls are. Just a touch, just a mere bringing together of two flints without any friction, and out they burst into laughter! At these words of Miss Hammerton someone started, and then the rest followed, and in a minute the whole school was in a convulsion. Naughty Nell dropped her head on to the desk in front of her, and giggled away as delightedly as if she had given Miss Hammerton six dinners, instead of having eaten her only one. Everyone screamed with laughter, and the little girl began to cry, and rushed out of the room as fast as her small legs would carry her. She thought she was accused of eating the dinner herself.

But Miss Hammerton could send her voice through the loudest and wildest laughter, and the girls stopped presently to hear that an hour would be expected of them that afternoon after school, and to see Nell marched across the floor, and through the door, and away out of their sight.

"I wish to know what you mean by such conduct!" said Miss

Hammerton, in her own room, with the doors shut.

Nell didn't know what she meant, and didn't try to explain.

"Have you no explanation to give, Elinor?"

"Hungry," Nell murmured low.

This may have sounded pathetic to her, but to Miss Hammerton it was impertinence pure and simple.

"Hungry!"

The audacity of this little black-haired thing appalled her. Such an excuse for such a crime was unheard of! To plead hunger to her, who had gone starving for seven whole hours, was the last straw.

"You are a most audacious child! A most impertinent little girl!" she cried angrily. Then she looked down at the pale face before her, and was struck with its thinness and its pallor. Up into her warm woman's heart pity came leaping, and her eyes softened suddenly. The child might have been hungry often, for she had olive circles under her big black eyes, and her hands and wrists were as thin as a bird's.

"What did you have for breakfast?" she asked, hurriedly.

Nell thought a minute.

"Porridge," she answered, looking up quickly, and then down again.

"Anything else?"

Nell thought again.

"Bacon and eggs."

"Anything else?"

The pity that had softened Miss Hammerton's voice began to melt out of it.

"Toast and honey."

"Anything else?"

"And marmalade."

"Anything else?"

"Cocoa."

"Anything else?"

"A banana."

"And was that all?"

"And another banana."

"*And you were hungry!*"

Nell thought the pause that followed was very trying.

"And *I* had for my breakfast one dry biscuit and a glass of milk."

"Well, you *were* a silly," said Nell to herself.

"And no dinner at all, because Miss Elinor Neilly, who had only porridge, and bacon and eggs, and toast and honey, and marmalade and cocoa, and two bananas—was hungry, and saw fit to eat my dinner."

A bad quarter of an hour followed for Nell. Miss Hammerton was angry in earnest now, and when she was angry, she was so cutting and so stern that the boldest girls in the school melted into tears of fright. Nell did not cry, she had never cried before anyone in her life, but she stood first on one foot and then on another, and bit a little piece out of the corner of her handkerchief.

Then the worst part of the interview came, when Miss Hammerton cast aside her sternness and her sarcasm, and spoke gently and sorrowfully.

“I work very hard, Nellie,” she said: “I did not think that any of my girls would take my dinner.”

But there was a rush and a scuffle, and Nell had turned, and burst open the door, and was away down the staircase before Miss Hammerton knew she had gone. But not before she had seen the big black eyes grow moist, and the mouth pucker suddenly, and the nostrils dilate.

She had rushed away to cry!

And indeed that was the case. Behind a fig-tree in the playground, Nell sobbed into her handkerchief for five minutes. Then she took her hat and went home, and was seen no more at school that day.

But next morning she tapped brightly at Miss Hammerton's door, and entering, poked forward a bunch of flowers—red roses and dark heliotrope—tied with a broken boot-lace.

“Some flowers,” she muttered, and was gone; and Miss Hammerton knew that for a little time at least there would be peace as far as Nell Neilly was concerned.

Chapter IX Tea At Mabel's

Mabel had been six times to Lennie's, but she had never yet asked Lennie to come to her. Brenda was always questioning her sister as to when she was going to see Mabel in her own home; but Lennie had always been obliged to make the same answer, "She hasn't asked me yet."

At last, one Monday, Mabel said in a whisper during English lesson:

"What are you going to do next Saturday?"

"Nothing," said Lennie, expectantly.

"Will you come to tea with me?"

"Oh-h. I'd *love* to," the delighted answer was whispered back.

After school, they discussed the matter in full.

"Are you sure you want me?" Lennie asked. And when that question was warmly and satisfactorily answered, Mabel said, "I didn't ask you before, because I didn't think you'd come."

"But of course I'd come. Don't you know I'd want to come?"

"I thought you mightn't like to."

"P'raps you don't like coming to my place?"

"Oh, but our place is so different. I love going to your place. It's always so nice there, and you have such nice things for tea, and you all come to tea together, and your Mother and Father are there, and everybody takes notice of you. But it isn't like that at my place. You see, there are all the boys, five of them, and they play cricket or go in the bush, and they never think of coming home just because it's tea-time."

"Oh, but that would be all the nicer. I think I would be shy with all your brothers, and I'd rather that just you and I had tea all to ourselves. I think that would be lovely. My people never go out to tea, and you and I can't have tea by ourselves at our place. I wish we could."

"I often have tea all by myself," said Mabel. "I read a book while I'm having it."

"Let us read books when I'm there. We never do at home, because there are so many of us sitting round the table together, and—and—I don't suppose there would be room for all our books."

"Well, have you ever read a book called *A Feast of Good Things*?"

"No."

"I'll lend you that, then; and will you bring me one with you, because I've read all the books in our house, over, and over, and over."

"I'll bring you—let me see; ever read *Little Women*?"

No, Mabel had never read it—that dearest, brightest of all dear girl books.

“Why, then, I suppose you've never read *Little Women Wedded* nor *Little Men*?”

“No; I haven't read any of them. Are they all the same? I do love a lot of books about the same people. I never can get a book big enough, can you?”

“I think they always end them too soon. I would like them to go on, and on, and on. But *Little Women* goes on to when they get married, and *Little Men* goes on a long time after. But still it would have been nice if there could have been another afterwards. I think that if I were an author I would write a book that would go on to the very, very end.”

“Till they all died, everyone of them.”

“But sometimes they all die at the end of little tiny books.

“So they do. I don't know——”

“I don't know——”

They did not even know what it was they did not know, these two dreamy little school girls.

“At any rate, bring *Little Women* on Saturday, and come early, Lennie; come about three o'clock.

So three o'clock next Saturday saw Lennie setting out, with *Little Women* under her arm, for this delightful visit to her friend.

“I will send Bert for you at half-past eight,” said the Mother, as Lennie bade her good-bye.

“Give my love to Mabel,” said Brenda.

“And mine,” said Floss.

“And mine,” said Mary.

And they all longed for the time when they should be school girls, and should be going out to tea with their one dear particular friend.

Mabel lived in an adjacent suburb, and ten minutes in the train, and a walk of fifteen minutes more, brought Lennie to the street which she had been directed to find. Then she found the house—a three-storey house, standing all alone in a weary-looking little garden where all the plants were either leafless or brown, or were crushed down, and lying along the garden beds. At the side there was a little brown lawn with a big apple-tree at one end of it, and on a table under the apple-tree a boy's old hat was lying, and something that looked like the blouse Mabel wore on school days.

Mabel herself opened the door to Lennie's knock.

“Did you bring it?” were her first words. Then she said: “I'm so glad you've come; we can have a lovely afternoon now.”

She led Lennie through the hall, and up the narrow staircase, to her own bedroom on the second storey.

“I made toffee this morning,” said Mabel; “and I thought we would stay up here and eat it, and have a little read.”

She was fingering the well-worn *Little Women* as she spoke, and her eyes kept growing absent as little bits of the story absorbed her.

“Where is my book?” asked Lennie.

She had taken off her hat and gloves, and was glancing about her curiously. Mabel sat down on the edge of her bed for a minute, with her eyes still in the heart of the book, and for a little while Lennie was utterly forgotten by her friend and hostess. In this little while she occupied herself with looking round.

It was certainly a very uncommon room, this bedroom of Mabel's. To begin with, it was much bigger than the bedrooms of most girls. In most homes it would have been the “Mother's room.” And that was what it had once been in Mabel's home.

But this Mother had been dead three years. For two, the room had never been used. The door had always been closed, and the blinds down, for two years. But, in the third year, Mabel was drawn in some quiet, strange way towards the place where her Mother had lived last.

The Father was pleased. He knew it was better and wiser to make that silent room alive again. And he helped Mabel to move her own little bed in, and her big dolls' house, that he had made for her twelve years before, and her book-cases, and her little tin bath, and her little black cabinet, and all the treasures that girls gather round them in their childhood and their girlhood.

The great, white bed with its snowy hangings was taken down, and stowed away in a spare room, and Mabel moved in a year before this story begins.

In that year she had grown as fond of her long wide room, with its high ceilings, and pale-green tinted walls, as Lennie was of her bare corner on the third storey. Mabel had balcony windows, and the balcony outside them was wide and shady; and, as her room was the only one that opened on to it, the balcony was hers also.

The carpet on the floor was old, and badly in want of a shaking. It had a slightly musty smell; but neither Lennie nor Mabel, nor anyone else in the house, noticed that.

It was the furniture that impressed Lennie; the great, black wardrobe, that took up all one end of the room, the two large chests of drawers, the massive toilet-table with its swinging mirror, the roomy ottoman under the window, the book-cases on the walls, the deep arm chair, the writing-table with its rows and rows of tiny drawers and pigeon-holes, and its great leather chair that swayed from left to right at the writer's will.

Then the pictures on the walls, the landscapes and seascapes, the heads and the flower panels, all chosen by one who had looked for something

better than the merely beautiful.

Lennie got up, and began to walk slowly round the room, her eyes on these lovely bits of river scenery, and great sea stretches, and laughing child faces, and exquisite flowers, and all the fair things on the walls.

"What *lovely* pictures!" she said at last. Mabel looked up from her book for a minute. Then she closed it, with her finger marking the place where she left off.

"They were—my Mother's," she said, softly,

"Were they?" said Lennie. Her voice grew soft at once.

"She loved pictures. My Father used to bring them for her when she was ill. He had them all hung here where she could see them."

"Was she ill long?" asked the now soft Lennie's voice.

"Five years."

"What a long time—and Mabel—was this—her room?"

"Yes—but it's mine now—Father said he was glad—I——"

Then there was silence. They did not look at each other. Lennie coughed a few little gentle coughs and gazed at a panel of overrunning nasturtiums.

"She was a poetess," said Mabel. Her voice was a little easier now, but her eyes still looked pained. "She wrote whole sheets and sheets and sheets of poems; they are all there in the desk."

"Did—did—she write them out of her head?"

"Yes; they are all there on piles and piles of paper. I think she was going to have made a book of them some day."

Another pause.

"Have you read them, Mabel?" very gently.

"I have read some—I can't read writing very well——"

Another pause.

"Did she die long ago, Mabel?"

"Three years."

By and by it seemed as if the strain was too much for them both, for Mabel opened her book slowly, and looked into it again, and Lennie wandered off to one of the book-cases.

"*A Feast of Good Things* isn't here, Mab, is it?" she asked, diffidently.

"Oh, I forgot you," cried Mabel. "There, I'll get it for you. That big red book at the end. Give it to me a minute. I'll find you the story I like best. That's it. Where are you going to sit?"

"On the sofa, I think."

"I'll have the big chair, then. But we must get our toffee first. It must be cold now."

She leaned out of the window, and brought in a plate from the outer sill.

"I put it there to get cold. It's quite cool now. I hope it hasn't gone to

sugar.”

But it had. It was very white and crumbly-looking, and had none of the stickiness about it that belongs to the very best toffee.

However, neither Mabel nor Lennie were epicures. A few knocks on the plate, and the toffee broke into uneven pieces. Then the plate was placed on a chair between the sofa and the arm-chair, and the beautiful afternoon began in earnest.

It was all reading and eating. Toffee and *Little Women* and *A Feast of Good Things*, till the day-light faded, and a street lamp shone in on the figures of the two who were lying in such comfortable attitudes, munching very slowly, and reading very quickly.

Lennie sighed every now and then for sheer happiness. She had never heard of that wise Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, so she could not know how near she was to realizing his idea of happiness.

“A book of Verses underneath the bough,
A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou
Beside me——”

He was a great poet, Omar, and a noble thinker and a shrewd, and yet his ideal of happiness was almost the same as that of two little school girls who had never heard his name.

Mabel crouched lower and lower over her book. She held it closer and closer to her eyes. She turned impatiently from one side to the other, trying to catch the last of the light on her page.

They both read on, long after they should have stopped, as their aching eyes told them afterwards. But at last there was no light at all, the books dropped into their laps, and they looked up petulantly to find that the room was nearly dark.

At the same moment the tea-bell rang in the dining-room underneath them.

“Let us go down,” said Mabel. “We will take our books, and read more by the gas in the dining-room while we're having tea.”

“Are you sure your Father won't be there?” asked Lennie.

“He might; but I don't think so. But he'll read too, if he is.”

They went down to the dining-room, and found that there was no one there but Jane, the general servant.

“Come along,” she said, crossly. “Have your tea before the eggs is cold. And mind you leave one egg for your Father, Miss Mabel.”

They had hardly seated themselves at the table, their books still in their hands, when the door opened and the Father walked in.

He was half-way across the room before he saw Lennie, and then he

started, and looked as if he had a good mind to run away. He was a grey-haired man, with a stoop about his shoulders, and eyes like Mabel's. He, too, had a book in his hand.

"Miss Lennie Leighton," said Mabel, quickly.

He bowed stiffly to Lennie, then made another movement towards the door, mumbling some words that sounded like "I'll wait."

"The eggs are cooked," said Mabel. "Jane laid your place at the end, father."

He thought better of the running away then, and with a nervous cough, seated himself at the end of the table, and put his book down at the left side of his plate.

Mabel passed him an egg, and the bread and the butter, and poured out a cup of tea for him. When he had cut the top off his egg, his hand went to the book beside him. It was opened quietly, almost slyly. Then he was deep in it, and Lennie and Mabel were quite forgotten.

But their books were ready, too, and in a few minutes this strange trio had each lost all thoughts of the other. Lennie ate her egg in fairyland, among fairy princes and princesses, Mabel was across the seas at Jo's first party, and Mr. James was with some eccentric people called *The Thinkers of Today*.

They read all through tea-time. It was the most delightful tea-table Lennie had ever known, though the cloth was badly crumpled, there were no flowers as at her home, no cunning little cakes and scones, and Jane wore a dirty apron, and the eggs were as hard as stones. The room, too, was untidy, and undusted. The boys' books and hats and boots lay about on the sofa and the side-tables. The need of the Mother's hands showed in a dozen details.

But for all that, for all the hard-boiled eggs, the black, bitter tea, the soiled cloth, the careless fare, Lennie was wishing with her whole heart that her relations would have their meals in this delightful way.

The three sat on reading for a long time after they had finished their tea. Jane came in at last, and began to clear away with a loud clatter of plates and banging of spoons.

"Go into the drawin'-room, Miss Mabel," she said, in an annoyed voice.

She spoke as if she were used to ordering Mabel and the rest of them to do what she wanted.

Mabel rose; Lennie followed her. Jane had lit the gas in the drawing-room, which was even more untidy and uncomfortable-looking than the dining-room.

"Sit here, under the gas," said Mabel.

She had snuggled up in an arm-chair again. Her book was opened, and

she was evidently going on with it. So Lennie followed her example, made herself cosy in a corner of the sofa, and went back to her fairies. It occurred to her once to wonder if Mabel's Father was still sitting at the dining-room table, lost in his book. Then she forgot everything but her serial story.

Somewhere between seven and eight, Mabel's brothers came home. They could be heard in the dining-room, talking loudly to Jane and each other, and asking incessantly, "What's for tea?"

They found their way into the drawing-room very soon. There were three of them—Charlie, Aubert, and Siddie. Without the least shyness they seated themselves near the two girls, and began to ask questions, and to tell their own wonderful adventures that day.

"Do you like Mabel?" Aubert asked of Lennie.

"You and Mabel are in the same class, aren't you?"

"Do you like that old school you go to?"

"Who's the tallest, you or Mabel?"

"Whereabouts do you live?"

"Have you got any brothers?"

"Has he got a football of his own?"

"Will we call for Mabel next time she goes to your place?"

"When's she going to your place next?"

The questions poured out of them. Aubert was perhaps the most persistent. He was a tall boy of twelve, with curly black hair and big black eyes, full of life and curiosity and wit. Siddie was a quiet little fellow of eight, with fair hair, and grey eyes, and a shy mouth. Charlie was a long-legged fellow with big hands and feet, and a fine face, boyish now, but with the indications of a fine-looking man in its straightforward eyes, well-cut nose and mouth, and broad forehead.

When Aubert had asked at least three dozen questions, and Lennie had replied to half a dozen, and Mabel had thrown her book aside, and cried impatiently, "No use trying to read while you boys are here," Lennie thought of the time, and wondered if she ought to be getting ready to go home.

"You must have some supper first," said Aubert, ceremoniously.

"There isn't any," said Siddie.

"There *is*," said Aubert. He frowned at Siddie, who then looked meekly at the carpet.

"You always have supper at your house, don't you? Mabel said you did," said he, to Lennie.

"Oh, but Aubert," said Mabel, "Jane won't get us any, I'm sure. She is always cross on Saturdays, and I know she won't make cocoa for us."

"I'll go out and see what there is," said Aubert.

He came back in a few minutes with a dinner plate in his hand. On the plate there were four very large, very green cooking apples.

“I got these,” he said, his black eyes dancing. “They were on the pantry shelf.”

He marched up to Lennie.

“Have an apple?”

Then to Mabel.

“Have an apple?”

Then to Charlie.

“Have an apple?”

And now one apple remained on the plate.

But there were still two who were apple-less, Aubert himself, and Siddie.

It was a hard minute for Aubert. He had not realized before that either he or Siddie must go without.

Then, quick as thought, his native courtesy told him that the visitor must not be allowed to notice the shortness of his provisions. He looked at Siddie for a fleeting second.

“You don't like apples, Siddie,” said he.

And helped himself to the remaining great green delicacy.

They all munched away, biting with much enjoyment through the tough green skins into the sour green fruit.

All but Siddie. He sat on the sofa and looked stunned.

Then suddenly the sense of injury rushed over him. This wrong was too hard for him to bear.

“*You know very well I do,*” he shouted, and rushed out of the room, tears streaming down his face.

Soon after this episode came Bert, and the end of the visit.

“I could go there every day of my life,” said Lennie, when she described it to the Mother and the little sisters at home.

The little sisters sighed. They could not even say, “But the tablecloth was dirty.”

Lennie had not told them that.

Chapter X A Scrape

Every girl in the class adored Miss Greyson.

She was very strict, very quick. She overlooked nothing. She never broke her word. Every punishment that she threatened was carried out.

No teacher in the school was so severe, so sharp. Yet, no teacher was half so well loved.

"I love her to come near me," Lennie confided in Mabel.

"When she stoops over my shoulder to show where my sum's wrong, I feel as good as an angel," Mabel said, also in confidence. "It makes me shiver, I'm so happy when she stays a long time near me."

She taught the class English, history, geography, arithmetic and algebra. Monsieur Fregaut taught it French, Mr. Newby Latin.

What a difference there was between poor Monsieur Fregaut's lessons and Miss Greyson's. The girls chattered all the time during the former, and wrote their home-work under his very eyes.

They were silent as mutes the moment Miss Greyson entered the room. They would not have talked for worlds. She kept their attention always on the strain. They could hardly take their eyes off her face. And her hours went by like minutes, while lesson-hours with other teachers seemed as if they would never end.

One Friday morning, Lennie was lazy. It was arithmetic, and she hated arithmetic.

She sat at the end of the seat and Mabel sat next to her. Her slate was on the desk in front of her. On the big blackboard was a fierce-looking practice sum. The other girls were all working away for their lives at it; Mabel's pencil was going pretty slowly, Lennie's was not going at all.

Miss Greyson was down at the front desk, stooping over the shoulders of the girls down there.

Lennie's head was stooping too—over something in her lap.

It was a book without any covers: it was open at page ninety-seven, and the print was large, and delightfully free from the little black marks that mean "people talking." Lennie did not care for the talking in books.

She had brought this book into school under her history and exercise books. She could not do her practice sum. The afternoon was dull and close, and she had slipped the book into her lap, and it had opened of itself. It was a delightful book in school; out of school she had not cared for it very much, but it became suddenly interesting when read instead of practice sums.

Every now and then she looked round furtively to see where Miss

Greyson was. She was still down at the front row.

Lennie kept her pencil between her fingers, and her hand on her slate, and went on reading.

Mabel finished her sum, wrote "Answer" in big letters at the side, and put up her hand to show that it was done.

Then she turned to see how Lennie was getting on, and the coverless book met her eye.

"Oh-h! You'll catch it, Lennie!"

This was a most daring piece of wickedness. There was hardly anything worse that a girl could do, than read a story-book in school. Mabel was shocked and a little frightened.

She glanced over Lennie's arm for a minute, and took in two lines of the page nearest her. Then she read two more.

Then she forgot to be shocked or frightened, and read right down that page, and over the next one.

All of a sudden, Miss Greyson looked straight up at Lennie.

She knew at once what was going on. The two girls' heads were close together, their eyes intent on something under the desk. She watched in silence for about a minute.

"Lennie!"

Her voice rang out sharply.

Lennie jumped, Mabel started, the book was shuffled under a fold of Lennie's dress.

"Will you please pass me what you have there?"

The voice had a very severe note in it.

Lennie began to get red. She stared at the desk, and wished the school would open and swallow her up, for she knew she would never have the courage to pass up her book to Miss Greyson.

"Did you hear me, Lennie?"

All the practice sums were stopped now. The class craned round to look at Lennie's face, and a hush of excitement fell over the girls.

There was going to be a scene! They were almost grateful to Lennie for having done something she ought not to have done, it was so nice to have arithmetic broken up by a scene.

"Lennie Leighton, did you hear me speak to you? Pass me, at once, what was in your lap."

Miss Greyson was young, with dark hair, and a clear, olive skin. Her eyes were fine and dark-grey, and they flashed now, and a colour came into her pale, clear skin. The girls knew very well that she looked beautiful when she was angry.

But Lennie was still sitting with her eyes on the desk. She had managed

to push the book under her, and she was now sitting on it.

“Caroline Thompson, go up and take that book from Lennie Leighton, and bring it here to me.”

That was the next order.

Caroline left her seat with a subdued air and solemn mouth, and made her way up to the end of the back seat. But when she got there Lennie had slipped it away into Mabel's hands, and Mabel had passed it on down the row.

Nell Neilly was sitting on it at that minute.

“It isn't here,” said Mabel in a whisper.

“It isn't here,” said Lennie.

Caroline announced this aloud to Miss Greyson.

“They say it isn't here, Miss Greyson.”

Then Miss Greyson became angry in real earnest. Her cheeks went from pink to dark rose. She stamped her foot slightly.

“Go back to your seat, Caroline.”

Then, when Caroline had re-seated herself, she cried: “Girls, whoever has that book, pass it to me *at once*.”

Then she sat down on her chair before her own little table, and faced the class in silence.

It was that silence of hers that the class was so afraid of. It meant Saturday mornings, sums after school, no play time, all manner of dreadful things. The girls could resist anything better than that.

A little stir took place in the back seat. Something was going on. Ella was handing the book to the girl in front of her, and that girl was passing it on, and it was coming, slowly and surely, down to Miss Greyson's hands.

When it reached the front desk, she stepped forward, and took possession of it. She lifted it up, and looked at the name on the first page:

The Beautiful Wretch.

Oh, the thrill that went through the class as those dreadful words fell from her lips:

The Beautiful Wretch.

Another thrill, for she had said it aloud again. This time her voice was shocked. The first time it had only been angry.

The shock must have been quite a startling one, for she had turned pale.

Then came the awful command:

“Caroline Thompson, go and ask Miss Hammerton to come to me.”

Caroline's heart was beating as loudly as anyone's, but she walked across the room quite quietly, and went out of the door.

Miss Greyson turned to the blackboard and made a few nervous strokes in the corner with the chalk in her hand. She did not attempt to hide from

the girls the fact that she was quite upset. They watched her, and let their thrills run through them again, and did not dare to turn and look at Lennie.

If they had looked, they would have seen that she was looking a little frightened, and a little defiant, and altogether uncomfortable.

In three minutes two people came into the room, Caroline and Miss Hammerton. The latter walked with a somewhat majestic step to Miss Greyson's desk.

“Did you send for me?” she asked.

She was a tall, dark woman, with a quick but commanding manner, and a beautiful, low-toned, penetrating voice. She was to these girls what the Czar is to his subjects, the supreme power. Their very lives as schoolgirls were in her hands, for she could expel them if she saw fit.

Far greater was she to them than the head of the country, the head of the world. She was the head of the school.

“Lennie Leighton brought this book into school. I found her reading it under the desk in arithmetic lesson.”

No emotion showed itself on Miss Hammerton's face. She took up the book, and looked at it.

“What is the book?” asked that deep voice of hers.

“*The Beautiful Wretch*”, she answered herself.

And now there was no mistaking the emotion that rushed all over her face.

“*Did you bring this book into my school, Lennie Leighton?*”

She did not even wait for Lennie to answer.

“Leave your seat at once, Lennie, and come into my room. Miss Greyson, kindly excuse Lennie Leighton for the rest of the lesson.”

She held the book between her thumb and finger, indicated to Lennie that she was to go first, then the book swam before her eyes. Miss Hammerton walked after her, and closed the door of class-room B upon the disappointed listeners.

It was dreadful to have the scene snatched away from them in that manner, just as they were preparing to revel in it luxuriously.

Not a word did Miss Hammerton speak when she reached her room; but she sat down at once to her desk, and wrote this letter:—

“DEAR SIR.—The book which accompanies this note of mine has just been taken out of your daughter's hands. She brought it into her classroom, and was discovered reading it surreptitiously under her desk. It is the first time in the history of the school that such a book has been seen in the hands of one of my pupils. I intend it to be the last, and as I seriously, though with much pain, contemplate declining to allow your daughter to remain, I should be glad if you could come down to me before three

o'clock this afternoon.

Yours sincerely,
JANET HAMMERTON.”

Johnnie, the caretaker's boy, was called, and the letter and the book, wrapped up in brown paper, tied with strong twine, and sealed with red wax, were given into his hands.

Then, for the first time, she spoke to Lennie.

“I have written to your father. Till he comes, you will please sit at that little table, and read Queen Victoria's reign from this history book.”

Poor Lennie! It was not very quickly that she read, as you may imagine. There was a dreadful lump at the back of her throat, and the words of took no notice of her. The morning passed, and lunch hour came, and the girls could be heard going down the stairs.

A girl brought Lennie's basket to the door. Miss Hammerton received it, and the girl, who was no other than Mabel, went away dejectedly, without a glimpse of Lennie.

The teachers had hot lunches served to them in their own private rooms. Miss Hammerton ate hers at her table; Lennie choked over hers, and left everything untouched but one banana. That seemed to slip down her throat without any trouble.

Then at last the playtime was over. The great bell rang for school. Tramp, tramp, up the stairs came the big and little feet. In this room on the landing every sound could be heard.

Suddenly heavier feet rang on the wooden staircase. They were quicker feet, too. They came straight to Miss Hammerton's door, for it was close to the top of the stairs.

A rap, clear and sharp.

“Come in,” cried Miss Hammerton; and in walked the doctor.

“*Father!*” cried Lennie. The lump in her throat swelled to a tremendous mountain; then the mountain broke up, and tears burst from her eyes. She rushed to him, casting Queen Victoria to the floor, and threw herself into his arms.

He gave her a little squeeze. Then he looked at Miss Hammerton. His eyes were twinkling, but he was very courteous.

“I came as soon as I read your note, madam,” said he. “I am afraid that you have been distressed about my daughter. It was very wrong of you, Lennie, to read a story-book in school.” He gave her another tiny squeeze, for he was her father, and, unlike some fathers, remembered quite well how dreadful a thing a school scrape was. “It was very wrong. But as for the book, my dear madam, there was not the slightest harm in it. It is a book of my own. This little girl must have carried it away from my study. When I

tell you that it is by William Black, that good Scotch writer whose books are always perfectly quiet and harmless, you will realize that the title is the only dreadful thing about it. I have never read one word to offend me in any of William Black's books, have you? Although of course I do not give them to my children to read now, some day they may read them all. I must confess the title is a little scaring, especially in a school-girl's hands, but I am glad to be able to ease your mind of the thought that it was a really wicked book."

Miss Hammerton's face had been changing and changing.

"Why, William Black!" she said. "*William Black!*" For she was a Scotswoman, and although she had never come across this particular book of his, knew even more of William Black than the Doctor himself.

And then her eye and the Doctor's met, and, whether it was his twinkle, or her astonishment, they both found themselves giving way suddenly to a burst of hearty, merry laughter.

"It had no cover. I could not see the author's name, and I did not care to look into the book and find out for myself what it was about," said the lady a little confusedly.

"The name is stupid," said the Doctor.

"It certainly gave me a great shock."

"I quite understand. It was a most natural thing——"

Now Miss Hammerton could be very gracious when she chose, and the occasion seemed to her to call for a little graciousness on her part.

"Would you like to take Lennie home with you now?" she asked. "She is a little upset, and perhaps it would be better that she did not go back to school to-day."

And that was the end of the scrape.

Lennie was driven off at half-past two in the Doctor's gig, and the girls had to wait till Monday for the end of the story.

But she promised her Father that night that she would not take story-books into school again, and on Monday she went to Miss Hammerton first, and then to Miss Greyson, and said that she was sorry.

Miss Greyson kissed her; they were alone in the class-room at the time.

"I am sorry, too," she said. "You could be top of the class if you liked to work, Lennie."

"And *she kissed me*," said Lennie to Mabel, afterwards. "And, oh, it was lovely! She has such a sweet smell about the face, as if she washed it with nice scented soap, and Mab, her cheek is as soft as a kitten's. I do love that woman, Mabel!"

"So do I," said Mabel, a little enviously, for the joy of kissing Miss Greyson had never entered into her dreams. It was a little hard that Lennie

should have had that joy all to herself.

Chapter XI Friday Doings

Some of the girls, and Mabel among them, liked Drawing better than any other lesson, but the great majority of the school looked upon Sewing as the favourite lesson of the week. Friday afternoon held only one other lesson besides, and that, half an hour of arithmetic; and at two o'clock all books and slates were neatly put away, the sums were cleaned from the blackboards, and classes B and C went into the big schoolroom and took their places among the girls labelled D, for these three classes all had their sewing lesson together.

Classroom A and the senior girls had gone past their day for the sewing hour. The head mistress considered that their University work was too important to be left for the needle and thread, and when a girl was promoted to A she left the sewing class behind her for ever. But the three lower classes enjoyed it to the full. Friday, which was naturally a delightful day, coming as it did before Saturday and Sunday, was made still more dear to the girls by the thought of that lovely hour, when friends sat next to each other and talked gently over their running, and their felling, and their hemming, with no fear of being sharply commanded to be silent and attend to their work.

Classroom C was a tremendous room, with half-a-dozen windows at each end of it. As the rows of seats and desks were fixed on raised platforms that sloped upwards towards the wall, the back seats were higher than the level of the window sills, and one could sit at the end of the seat and look right out into the city. The girls all hurried to secure these end seats, and there was generally a rush and confusion, quite unlike ordinary schooltime, when the classes came together for sewing. Little girls would dart frantically past big girls; friends who had been separated by their positions in different classes, rushed together, and did their best to get seats near to each other; and though Miss Crispy would cry, "Gently, young ladies, gently," no one would think of going gently until they were seated as they had wished to be.

Miss Crispy was the tiniest, primmest little lady imaginable, with small, bird-like hands, and a voice that never could penetrate through the buzz of the girls' chatter. She was always dressed in neat, old-fashioned black garments, but before the lesson began she would take from her basket a little apron of turkey-red twill, with wonderful embroideries on its bib, and pocket, and its collar that fastened halfway down her back, just out of reach of her little hands. When the girls saw the red apron come out of the basket, they always rushed forward with offers of help, and half-a-dozen

eager hands seized upon the collar, and half-a-dozen voices said, "I'll pin it on for you, Miss Crispy." Sometimes they stuck the pin into her: they generally managed to give her a slight prick, and she always gave a little leap into the air, and cried out, "Oh, oh!" Then she smiled, and all the girls round her laughed, and thought how different this was to arithmetic and every other lesson.

Miss Crispy was supposed (by the girls) to know every kind of fancy work in the world. She could imitate in silk embroidery any flower you liked to bring her. Her roses were wonderful things with pink leaves and yellow hearts, and little white blotches, and rose blotches, and variegated greens of every hue, in the leaves and stalks. Her tulips were as large as life, and even brighter, and her forget-me-nots were so real that the ordinary forget-me-not grown in gardens looked a little sickly after these flowers of needle and thread. "It is wonderful," the girls used to say, "it is wonderful how she makes them *stand out*."

For all her flowers were thickly raised, and beautifully smooth. Stitch upon stitch went down, and the flowers grew fatter and fatter, and still new stitches were laid upon them. And all so rapidly! The tiny hands worked like lightning; you could not see the beginning and end of a stitch when she was working *very* quickly, as she sometimes did to please the girls.

"Just let us see how fast you can go," they would plead. "Ah, do, Miss Crispy! Just one little forget-me-not as quick as ever you can." And they would crowd round her, and fix their eyes firmly on her needle. When they said "Now!" she would start, and in a minute a succession of little gasps would break from the open mouths around her, and the forget-me-not would have flowered forth from under that wonderful needle of hers.

"Oh, but how *can* you, Miss Crispy?" they used to say, impatiently.

"You will work just as quickly one day," she would reply. "But you must learn to run before you can learn to fell." (That was her one little joke, and one that only a sewing-mistress would have indulged in.)

But roses and forget-me-nots, and Swiss embroidery, and Honiton lace, and Mount Mellich work, and drawn-thread work, were only for a favoured few. Plain sewing must first be thoroughly mastered, and only six had reached the higher realms of fancy work so far. The only one among the six whom we know was fat, rubicund Ella. Mimi, Mabel, Lennie, Caroline, they all stitched laboriously at the little square pieces of calico, most of them black with much usage. On these squares were practised all the stitches that belong to plain sewing. There were button-hole stitches, running, hemming, felling, feather-stitching, herring-boning, darning, eyelet holes, slip-stitching, back-stitching, top-sewing; and all these on a square of calico as wide as this page.

It was a matter of no small skill and art to arrange these stitches so that no one ran into another. For instance, Mabel and Lennie, who of course sat next to each other at the end of the back seat, had hemmed down one edge of the square, turned down and back-stitched another, button-holed the raw edge of a third, and slip-stitched the fourth. In the centre they had cut a round hole, and filled this up with darning. Then round this they had worked a dozen tiny eyelet holes that made a decorative ring about the darn. Outside the eyelet holes again, went another ring, this time of feather-stitching, and round the feather-stitching an outer ring of herringboning. This made what Mabel and Lennie called a Centre, and it was their ambition to work this Centre as ornamentally as possible. As for the rest of the square, three tucks of three different widths were made in running-stitch down each side, just above the button-holing, and the hem, and the back-stitch, and the slip-stitch. In this way all the stitches were introduced, and the square had a pleasing and orderly appearance, quite unlike the squares of some of the girls.

Nell Neilly's, for example, was an extraordinary looking object. She had been working at it for nine months, and week by week it grew darker and darker in hue, and more and more complicated in appearance. Her darns and eyelet holes and tucks and feather-stitches were mixed and jumbled together in a wild and wonderful way, and whenever she had a short piece of cotton in her needle, she used it up by making little things she called Spiders, little pin-spot bodies with innumerable legs growing out from all sides. And here and there appeared tiny faces, with round eyes and big, grinning mouths made of white sewing cotton. Week after week Miss Crispy cut out the faces and the Spiders from Nell's calico, and week after week Nell worked in fresh ones with rounder eyes and bigger mouths than ever. In time Nell's square was the feature of the school, and was passed up and down the seats surreptitiously, and brought bursts of irresistible giggling from the little girls, and quiet laughs from the elder ones.

Miss Crispy knew very well what was going on at these times, and every now and then she would look towards Nell and say, "Nellie, have you cut out those *nasty* things of yours? Well, do so *immediately*. And young ladies, *attend* to your work!"

But poor Miss Crispy could never keep order among all those classes. She was hurried hither and thither from one girl to another, and at the end of the afternoon her cheeks were as red as her turkey-twill apron.

It would be, "Miss Crispy, Miss Crispy, I've finished hemming my calico. Will you come and show me what to do next, please?"

"Miss Crispy, my cotton's too sticky. I can't make button-holes to-day."

"Miss Crispy, I wish you would come to *me* for a minute. You never

come to me at all.”

“Miss Crispy, what shall I do after the darn? Shall I make a button-hole or—”

“My cotton keeps breaking, Miss Crispy.”

“Miss Crispy, I can't make my slip-stitches not show through. I wish you'd come and teach me.”

“Or eyelet-hole, or shall I ——”

“Do come here for a minute, Miss Crispy.”

“Herring-bone?”

“What shall I do with the leaf of the sunflower, Miss Crispy—satin stitch, or long and short stitch?”

“Somebody's taken my cotton, Miss Crispy—somebody's taken my cotton.”

“Well, here, here, take a piece of mine! Do the leaf in long and short stitch, Ella, and don't make them even! Do your eyelet holes now, Mimi! I'm coming to you in a *minute*, Jessie! Now, Nellie, cut out those spiders immediately, and attend to your work, young ladies, attend to your work!”

Up in the back row, delightful whisperings went on between friends in groups, and friends in pairs. Schoolgirls always have something interesting to say to each other, but never as much as in school, when the voice must be kept down, and any moment may separate the talkers to two different ends of the schoolroom. Miss Crispy did not separate girls very often. She was too tender-hearted for that, and of course the girls took advantage of her, and talked without ceasing from beginning to end of the adorable hour.

Among all the happy girls there were none more happy at sewing than Mabel and Lennie. They sat at the end of the back row, and every ten minutes or so their eyes went through the huge open windows, out into the trees of the park across the street, or down into the street itself. The drowsiness of early afternoon was over the world outside, and the hum of voices from other class-rooms up here had a faint, monotonous, musical note that made one dreamy and happy, and a little, a very little, lazy. Not lazy enough to dislike doing needlework, but too lazy to care to turn Peter the Great's doings into English, and far too lazy to work out a sum in compound interest, as the poor girls in A were probably doing.

“If we could only have Sewing every day,” said Lennie one Friday as they sat in dreamy happiness, making eyelet holes with leisurely stitches.

“It wouldn't be as nice,” said Mabel, wisely. “It's only because we only have it once a week that we love it so. I like it better than anything, except Drawing.”

“I could go on like this for ever. I wish it would never come to an end.”

“Miss Crispy's not a bad little thing, is she?”

“Oh, no; I like Miss Crispy. Not like I like Miss Greyson, but I think Miss Crispy's nice too.”

“I like Miss Greyson better than anyone I've ever known in my life.”

“So do I.”

“Better than any woman I've ever known.”

“Yes; so do I.”

“I wonder *why* we like Miss Greyson so much?”

“Oh, it's because she is so, so—well I don't know. She's so pretty, you know, Mab.”

“Oh, but I don't think that's why. I think it's because—because—well, I don't know. You know, she has such a way with her, Lennie.”

“Oh, yes; I know. I don't know how to explain it. Of course, Miss Crispy's very nice, but——”

“Well, you see, you never feel as if she could get really angry, and so you feel as if it doesn't matter so very much what you do with her.”

“And with Miss Greyson you feel as if everything you do matters, and you want her to like you, so that you'd do anything for her.”

“I think Miss Greyson likes you, Len.”

“*Do* you? I think she likes *you*.”

“Do you? What makes you think so? Why do you think she likes *me*, eh?”

“Well, she nearly always asks you when you put your hand up.”

“Well, she asks you too. And she thinks your compositions are the best in the class.”

“Do you think she does really? Oh, but she thinks you read better than anyone, and you never make a mistake in parsing and analysis.”

“Perhaps she likes us both.”

“Well, I don't know; I think she does, because—I don't know whether you have ever noticed—she always smiles at you and me if we're in the playground when she comes through in the morning.”

“Does she? I've never noticed it.”

“Oh, you have, Mab. I'm sure you have.”

“Of course, with Miss Crispy it's so different. She smiles at everyone, doesn't she?”

“And Miss Greyson hardly ever smiles at anyone.”

“Miss Crispy hardly ever gets cross with anyone. I don't believe she could be really angry and make you feel as if she were going to eat you up that very minute. That's how Miss Greyson makes you feel, and that's why we like her so,” which was certainly a very peculiar explanation of a liking.

But, strangely enough, the very next Friday wrought a sudden and wonderful change in little, kind, mild Miss Crispy. For one hour she was

transformed into a stern-faced, merciless being, whose ears refused to listen to any pleadings, and whose eyes refused to notice any signs of misery on the faces round her. If she had eaten the whole school at a bite, the girls could not have been more astounded.

It seems that Ella's father, the famous lolly-maker, had a failure with a tremendous baking of chocolate ice that week. There had been a mistake in the vanilla flavouring, and three times the proper quantity had utterly spoiled the ice for selling purposes. One morning Ella was told that she might give it all away to her schoolfellows if she liked. It was a Thursday morning, just as she was starting for school; she had no time then to get the chocolate ready for carrying, but when she arrived at school she told the girls that she was going to bring them the biggest feast of sweets they had ever had in their lives. This exciting piece of news spread rapidly through class-room B, and even crept out into classes C and D. Ella found suddenly that half the school had something to say to her, while the girls in her own class were all anxious to sit in her seat. In play-hour, she was in the habit of walking up and down the ground with her arms spread out round the shoulders of the two girls who walked on either side of her with their arms round her waist; but this day there was quite a string of girls clasping each other round the waist to right and left of Ella. She, taller and fatter than any of them, walked in the middle of the long row, and talked away in her slow, interesting gossipy manner, of a party to which her eldest sister had been the night before. The girls at the outer ends of the line kept straining forward to see Ella's face, and hear what she was saying, hoping, perhaps, to catch the mention of the words Chocolate Ice.

It was wonderful how popular Ella was next morning as she crossed the playground with a big dress-basket hanging somewhat heavily from the strap in her hand.

“Hullo, Ella!” sounded from all sides.

But she took everything in good part, smiled away good-humouredly, took off her hat, put the basket under the form, and went upstairs to school.

At half-past twelve down she came with a dozen adoring girls around her, and out came the basket, and (ah, me, to be there again!) the orgies that began that hour are not to be described in simple English words.

Every girl in the school had a “help.” Clean sheets were torn ruthlessly out of the exercise books, and huge junks of the black-and-white were stowed away in the pocket for school-time, when chocolate ice is so desirable a stimulant—to more chocolate ice. Perhaps you will understand the quantity that each girl received when I tell you that each girl declared she had five shillings' worth. At the same time, as I have my doubts whether anyone had ever bought or possessed chocolate ice to the value of

five shillings, I would advise you, little readers, to try and imagine twenty three-penn'orths of chocolate ice if you would realize the largeness of Ella's gift.

There was very little lunch eaten that luncheon hour. Jam sandwiches, and bread and butter spread with devilled ham, had a peculiar flatness of flavour that had never belonged to them before. Black-and-white and long gulps of water, followed by more black-and-white and more delicious dryness of the throat, and again more water, took the place of ordinary, everyday lunch, and many mothers were surprised next morning to find the sandwiches of yesterday dry and uneaten in their daughters' table napkins. For who, with five shillings' worth of chocolate ice in her pocket, could settle down to plain sandwiches!

When the big bell rang, and the wooden stairs resounded with the tread of many feet, there was not one among the girls who remembered that the day was Friday, and that the well-beloved sewing hour was near again. Chocolate ice had even driven away the remembrance of the most looked-for lesson of the week.

In due time arithmetic, the first lesson of the afternoon, was over, and the classes began to pour out from their rooms into great class-room C. They came with dreamy, well-contented expressions in their eyes, and peculiar twists to their mouths. The fact was, that, as they filed through their different doorways, each one had popped a bit of chocolate into the mouth, and this was now melting cosily at one side of the tongue. It was the effort of keeping it there, out of the way, that made the lips twist slightly sideways, and it was a funny thing to see the same unconscious twist to fifty different mouths.

But Miss Crispy noticed nothing, except the calmer manner of the girls as they arranged themselves about the long rows of seats. They were less wildly hilarious to-day, and though everyone looked happy, the mad spirits that burst through them on certain sewing days were not in evidence on this occasion.

So the lesson began, and all went smoothly for a little time. All except one thing; the cotton of the square-workers. That cannot be said to have gone smoothly, for, every minute or two, impatient sighs, and "Oh, bothers!" broke from the sewers, as the thread came with difficulty, and with a slightly rasping sound, through the calico just pierced by the needle.

It was not only the square-workers whose cotton stuck and jolted in this annoying way; the fancy-work girls found their silks even more exasperating. As Ella said to Lennie, "Your cotton croaks, but my silk squeals," and certainly sticky silk makes a very peculiar noise when you draw it through linen. It was no use to rub the fingers vigorously on one's

pocket-handkerchief every few minutes, for pocket-handkerchiefs were even stickier now than fingers.

It was not long before Miss Crispy began to wonder what was wrong with everyone's cotton that day. As she took hold of the needle of one girl, and another, to show her some new stitch, she found that her own fingers had an unpleasant feeling, and that the needle went through only with a very hard push. She went on helping, teaching, passing from one girl to another, until at last she thought the fault must be with her own hands, so she left the room for a minute, and hastily washed them in Miss Greyson's hand-basin. In her absence, new bits of ice were broken from the lumps in various pockets, and popped into various mouths.

Then back came Miss Crispy, with fresh and pleasant fingers, and, picking up Nell Neilly's work, began to cut out spiders vigorously.

"Now, Nellie, Nellie, this will never do," she said. "Now, watch my needle, Nellie, for a minute or two. I am going to show you how to herringbone. It is very simple. Watch my needle all the time. One stitch there—a little one; now up there, another little one; and pass your needle under—so; and bring it out there—so; and make a little stitch. Did you follow that?"

She turned to look at Nell, and caught her in the very act of biting through a big lump of black-and-white.

"Nellie!"

Miss Crispy's voice was shocked.

"Chocolate ice at your sewing lesson! Oh, Nellie! No wonder your needle is sticky. Come down with me at once into the first seat, and sit where I can watch you all the time. But if I find you eating that nasty stuff again to-day, you shall stay and write out a hundred lines of Shakespeare."

But as they were passing down towards the front desk, Nell first, Miss Crispy behind her, Miss Crispy's eye wandered to left and right of her, and lighted on a small girl biting frantically into something she held to her mouth in her handkerchief.

"Jessie McDoonie! What are you eating?" She hurried away to this new miscreant, and arrived there just in time to see the chocolate ice bulge in a lump from Jessie's right cheek.

"What are you eating, Jessie? And you have it in your mouth now. What is it? Do you hear me speak to you?"

Jessie heard, but could not answer. Her tongue had no room to move till the black-and-white had melted down a little. She tried to push it backwards with her tongue, thinking she might swallow it at one gulp, but it would not move from its post between her cheek and jaw.

And now Miss Crispy noticed a slight stir on either side of Jessie. Two

little girls to left and right were hastily getting something into their pockets. Her suspicions were aroused. She looked at their cheeks—and yes! there were lumps there too. Her eyes swept angrily along that row from one girl's face to another. Then she looked to the row beyond, and the row beyond, and the row beyond that, which was the back row of all.

Out of every five of the faces before her, one had this strange affliction of the cheek. Mabel and Lennie, Mimi, Caroline, Ella, all the big girls and many of the little ones, sat with mouths tightly and unnaturally closed, the consciousness of guilt in their eyes, and a bulge in one cheek.

For a minute poor little Miss Crispy wanted to run away and leave them all to their wrong-doing. For a minute she felt as if they were too much for her.

The next, she had drawn herself up, and looking round with a flashing eye, announced, in her sternest voice:—

“I wish every girl in this room to turn the contents of her pocket on to her lap.”

From one to the other she went in silence, her back stiff, her head upright, her lips tightly closed in a new thin line, that meant anger, and more anger, and still more anger to come. Pocket after pocket was turned out, and, among all the queer collections, including such items as a doll's bonnet in pink wool, a pencil-sharpener, a white soap baby, a nail-brush, a little empty glass bottle, balls of crochet wool, innumerable beads and shells, there invariably fell into the lap, from the upturned pockets, a lump of chocolate ice, wrapped, or partially wrapped, in sticky paper, through which the black of the chocolate had worked its greasy way.

There were not two girls in the schoolroom who turned out no black-and-white. Never before, in all Miss Crispy's long life of sewing lessons, had she known a feast-on-the-sly so widely spread.

And it struck her with wonder that one article should constitute the whole menu of the feast. The total absence of Everton toffee, pink and white, French jellies, cocoanut jacks, cocoanut chips, eggs and bacon, chocolate sticks, caramels, and all other schoolgirl delights, was surprising among so many feasters. To find a whole school eating chocolate ice, at one and the same time, was a marvellous thing.

But none of these thoughts showed in her pink excited face and stern eyes, and the girls never dreamed that anything but anger was in her heart.

“I never knew anything so disgraceful!” she was saying. “Never! never! And as for you, Ella Hodson, and Marion Lascelles, and Kate Lowe, I am ashamed of you! *Ashamed* of you! The eldest girls in the class, and able to do such beautiful fancy work, sitting there with that *nasty* stuff in your mouths, I am *ashamed* of you. I could not have believed it. But I shall take

care that it does not happen again.”

She paused for breath, and the girls sat very meekly, and wondered uneasily what the punishment was to be.

“A girl who can eat sweets in sewing lesson does not deserve to do anything nice with her needle,” went on Miss Crispy. “I am not going to waste my time teaching all the beautiful things of fancy work to girls with sticky fingers and greedy hearts.”

There was another little pause; then:—

“Next Friday every girl in this room is to bring a fresh piece of calico, and start to work on a new plain-sewing square. You are to bring me your fancy-work after school to-day, Ella, Katie, Marion, and you others, and I will take it away and lock it up until such time as I see fit to let you go on with it. And till then, you are to do plain-sewing with the rest of the class!”

This was indeed an awful punishment. Only those who have worked through the hard paths, and uninteresting country of plain-sewing, can know the delight of wandering at will among the flowers, and buds, and butterflies of fancy-work. And then to leave it all; to go back with one leap from lace work and silk-worked flowers, to darning, and hemming, and back-stitching, and eyelet holes, after all the weary months of labour, and patience, and failures, and hard trying, was really too cruel a thing to contemplate.

But the mandate had gone forth, and there was nothing but to obey it.

But that was not quite all. This punishment fell heaviest on the fancy-workers, for many of the plain sewers had no objection to a clean new sampler. There was something worse to come—something that pricked and wounded every girl in the room.

“And, now, every girl leave her seat in turn, go down to the verandah, wash her hands, and return *immediately*,” was the next order.

While this was being carried out, and one girl after another came in and went out, Miss Crispy was collecting the sorry-looking remains of the revel into a big wastepaper basket.

“I am going to take this home to my fowls,” she said. The girls were too worried to laugh then, but they laughed heartily afterwards, when they thought of this unique diet for fowls.

At last, all the washing of hands was accomplished, and order reigned again. The basket was placed under Miss Crispy's table, and an uneasy silence crept over the school.

“Mabel James and Lennie Leighton, will you kindly get the slates and pencils, and hand them round the class!”

Slates! At sewing lesson!

“We shall have a little arithmetic,” said Miss Crispy, calmly, taking a

Hamblin Smith from the table drawer.

If she had said a little trip to the moon, the girls could not have been more astonished. They had never dreamed that Miss Crispy knew anything about arithmetic. They had imagined that plain and fancy work bounded all her knowledge.

But she had opened the book, and was reading out, in a clear voice, with no pity in it, this truly dreadful sum:—

“Multiply £83721 16s. 53/4d. by 798632519, and divide the result by 9876.”

It was after five o'clock when the last of the sewing class came down the stairs that famous Friday.

Chapter XII Out of Friends

In Australian school-life, there are more hot days than cold; with a leap comes winter, and before the bloom she flings into one's cheeks has time to settle there, is gone again. Through many months of the year, young limbs feel listless, and the brain only works with quickness by an effort of will.

To these school-girls came September, and an over early touch of the summer fell upon the city at the harbour's edge. It came in the formless guise of a north-east wind, which brought languid eyes and pale faces round the desks at the big brown school-house, and put an edge on the nerves of the men and women who taught these "young ideas how to shoot."

One particular Monday, Lennie and Mabel both came to school in that undesirable, but often unavoidable frame of mind, called bad temper.

With Lennie, everything had gone wrong from her waking; and even before. She had lain awake late the previous night, and had lost herself in a heavy slumber when the morning sun was high on the trees across the road. It was ten minutes past eight when she woke at last to Brenda's energetic shakings and shoutings.

"Why can't you let me sleep!" she mumbled, crossly. But when she was told the time, it was, still more crossly,

"Why ever didn't you wake me before?"

Then came a wild scramble through bath and dressing, a gulp of tea, and a mouthful of toast, a rush for school-books, basket, gloves, and finally a hurried departure five minutes after Bert had set out for the tram.

It was not until she was fairly seated in the car, her breath still uneven from her run, that there dawned on her a dreadful fact, a discovery almost unbearable in the face of a hurried breakfast and a long run for a tram.

She had forgotten her lunch. The package, neatly wrapped in its napkin, had lain on the side-board, all ready to be stowed away in a corner of her basket, but she had rushed off without it, and only discovered its absence now, when the tram was entering the city, and home was half an hour away.

If she went back, she would have her long walk over again, have to wait for trams perhaps, and come to school late by a couple of hours. And she was tired, and had a dull ache in her eyeballs, and a weak feeling at her knees, and could only sit still and be carried on in the tram to the school gate. Bert was away at the other end of the car with a crowd of schoolboys, and she could not even beg the loan of threepence from him. So, all the morning, she had before her the pleasing prospect of lunch hour and no

lunch for her. The only relief that presented itself to her sorrowful thoughts was the hope that Mabel would have a sandwich or two over to-day.

But Mabel, too, had begun the day badly. She had lost her gloves, lost her French exercise-book, in which, by a stroke of bad luck, she had also written her English composition for Miss Greyson, her composition-book proper, having suddenly come to its last blank page. The best part of breakfast-time had been spent in a distracted hunt among the boys' books, in odd drawers, behind tables and seats, even in the kitchen and the pantry for the precious red-backed exercise-book; but it could not be found anywhere. The composition had to be written again.

Then it was time, and past time, to leave, and, in desperation, her best gloves were seized upon, her hat stuck on at a dangerous angle, a wild rush similar to Lennie's made towards the tram, and in the tram she made the same discovery that had caused poor, pale Lennie, with the heavy eyes, such grief. She, too, had forgotten her lunch.

There was only one thing to hope for, that Lennie would have something specially nice to-day, and an extra quantity of it. Monday generally brought a piece of cake or cold pudding from Sunday, and something nice in the way of fruit, in Lennie's basket.

At half-past twelve they came with their baskets on their arms, and took their seats under the fig-trees. Neither of them had yet said a word about their lunches.

Mabel opened her basket slowly, peeped in a minute, then turned her head, and met Lennie's turning towards her.

"Oh, Mab, I've forgotten to bring my lunch!" just as Mabel had been about to explain, "Oh, Len, I've forgotten to bring my lunch!"

It was a minute before the pitiful situation was clear to them. Then they grasped it, and were quite silent for five minutes—silent from surprise, and disappointment, and nasty, irritating "hungriness."

In their moment of supreme need each had failed the other. They sat there side by side, under the fig-trees, their empty baskets in their laps, and looked round gloomily on their schoolfellows feasting away so greedily on sandwiches, and bananas, and sips of water. Their foreheads wore frowning expressions, and their mouths looked as if they had not smiled for a century. To be hungry, and to have one's last hope of lunch snatched away suddenly in this baulking manner was enough to make any school-girl of fourteen frown, and wear a gloomy mouth, and hide a heavy, heavy heart.

At last Mabel ventured a remark:

"That Mimi has had four mugs of water to-day; she must be having fish sandwiches."

To which Lennie replied, in a cross voice:

"I don't like fish sandwiches a bit. They are called fish, but they're only paste out of bottles."

"They're not always," said Mabel, quickly. "If they're paste they're called paste—anchovy or bloater, or whatever it is. Fish sandwiches are made of fish. I know that Mimi often has them. Their cook cuts them for her, with little bits of watercress or cucumber chopped up with them."

"Goodness! I shouldn't think they'd be very nice, then."

"Shouldn't you? Well, they are; they're *awfully* nice. I don't think you've ever tasted them."

"I have tasted them. I've often tasted them. I don't think they're a bit nice."

"Oh, well, I suppose it's a matter of opinion. What were those sandwiches made of that you had last Friday?"

"Last Friday? Egg and anchovy and butter all pounded together, and spread with French mustard. Why?"

"I only wondered."

"Didn't you like them?"

"Not much."

Lennie's answer to this was a queer little contortion of her mouth and nose.

"They had too much *something* in them," said Mabel. "I don't know what it was exactly; but *I* didn't like them."

"Pity you ate them, wasn't it?"

"I only ate one of them."

As they spoke, the lines in their foreheads, which had previously represented frowns, began to develop into lines of worry. Hunger, and the moisture-laden north-east wind were trying their tempers beyond endurance.

"I wish I had brought a note to go home," said Lennie, suddenly. "I'm so sick of school."

"It's English this afternoon," said Mabel. "I wouldn't miss it for anything. Miss Greyson will very likely ask me to parse, and I went through the whole piece on Saturday night, and know every word of it."

"She's just as likely to ask someone else," observed Lennie, flapping the lid of her basket.

"I didn't say she wasn't, did I?"

"You seem very cross to-day, Mabel."

"*You* seem cross. I'm not a bit cross."

"I'm sure I'm not cross; but you're as snappy as anything."

"I think *you're* snappy. I don't know what's the matter with you."

Schoolgirls' answers-back soon came to an end. Repartee has not developed in them, and the timidity of youth still keeps a light rein on their tongues. A silence came upon the friends, and for several minutes neither said a word.

Mabel began to hum a little inconsequent air under her breath. Lennie flapped her basket lid through six bars of it, then rose slowly, said, "I'm going to get some water," and went away. The rest of the lunch hour they passed apart from each other, Mabel under the trees with a history book, and Lennie with a group of girls on the step.

In the afternoon when the first lesson began, Mabel arrived in the class-room to find that Lennie had left her usual seat, and was sitting down in the front with Nell Neilly and Lulu La Roche. Later on, when school was over, Lennie disappeared without a word, and was in the tram when Mabel was coming down the stairs to her hat and basket.

The breach must have widened in some mysterious way during the night, for, although the quarrel had been so far of the slightest nature, it was a serious thing next day. These two friends, bound together by so many singular coincidences, passed each other without a word or look when they met in the playground next morning.

The news spread quickly through Class-room B. "Lennie and Mabel are not speaking" passed from one girl to another, and curious eyes followed all their movements. Lennie had taken her books from her desk and established herself in the front seat, where much confidential whispering went on between Lulu, Nell, and herself. Mabel sat at the end of her seat, with Lennie's vacant seat beside her. She did not invite anyone to fill it, but appeared to be wholly wrapped up in her lessons, and indifferent to Lennie's doings and the other girls' remarks.

"Why are you out of your seat, Lennie?" asked Miss Greyson.

"Will you let me sit next to Nell to-day, Miss Greyson?"

Miss Greyson glanced towards Mabel, and took in the situation with that glance.

"You should have asked me before you changed your seat," she replied; "but as you are there, you may stay there for the present."

She was as much surprised as anyone to notice how long that "for the present" lasted. She knew all about the warm attachment of these two pupils of hers for each other, though no one had ever told her a word about it, and she saw Lennie sit in the front for five days running, and Mabel remain in gloomy loneliness at the end of her seat for five whole days.

"When's Mabel coming?" Brenda was asking at home.

"I don't know," was Lennie's short reply.

"Is she coming on Saturday?"

“I don't know.”

“Well, are you going there on Saturday?”

“No.”

“Well, what's she going to do? Is she going somewhere else?”

“I don't know, Brenda. I don't know everything that Mabel does, silly.”

The little sisters discussed the matter between themselves. Could it be possible that Mabel and Lennie had quarrelled! They watched Lennie narrowly, and saw that she was pale and quiet, and had nothing to tell now, when she came home from school. She drank her tea in silence, and went off to her bedroom every afternoon, and read story-books till tea-time.

Five days, and in all that time Mabel and Lennie had not even looked at each other. They had turned their heads aside with childish ostentation whenever they met face to face. Lennie now knew all about Lulu La Roche's dresses, and sashes, and bangles, and was heartily sick of them. Mabel had read three reigns ahead in the history book. Both had lost something from their eyes and mouths—the sparkle, the pleasant flow of lines, the fun in their laughter. The break in their friendship had broken these things too.

On the evening of the fifth day, Lennie's mother noticed, as indeed she had noticed all along, her daughter's pale face, and quiet, listless ways. At bedtime she came to Lennie's room, and said that she had planned a little picnic to Manly next day, that Miss Middleton would take a holiday and stay at home, and that the Mother, Lennie, Floss, Mary, and Brenda would all have a day at the seaside, and breathe ozone on the long sea beach so dear to Sydney children.

“I will send a note to Miss Hammerton by Bert,” added the Mother. “I think a day's rest from lessons will do you good this unpleasant weather.”

Never a word about Mabel coming! The Mother knew too much to suggest such a thing, and next morning a party of five, with two baskets and a billy, and a book each, set off on the beautiful harbour journey that leads to “our village.”

They went to the baths first of all. Then they had hot cocoa and scones at the big confectioner's in the Corso. And the morning slipped away in rambling up and down the sandy beach, and the esplanade, and across the little bridge that crosses the lagoon at the far end of the ocean beach. When it was one o'clock, they bought threepenny worth of boiling water from one of the refreshment-rooms and made their tea, and sat under a pine-tree to eat the lovely chicken-pie the Mother's own hands had made for them.

But, after lunch, when the afternoon was golden, and the sea was lying lazily before her eyes, and the Mother was dozing a little over her book, the lightest thing in the way of novels, and Brenda, Mary, and Floss had all

gone off to start a castle in the soft sand lower down the beach, there crept over Lennie a miserable, lonely feeling that persisted in bringing tears to the brown eyes gazing seaward.

If Mabel were here, they would be side by side on their backs on the warm, dry sand, talking as only they two could talk. Or they would walk up and down the long, long stretch of beach, with their arms round each other's waists and their feet keeping step together, and the time would fly by like lightning. And then on the boat, going home, they would sit together and face the sunset, and feel the wind in their faces, and "Dream dreams and see visions," and let the touch of romance that was in them both speak in their faces and their voices.

That was what the day wanted, and the tears wet the book on her lap. Her heart seemed to flash open before her, and, looking in, she saw her love for Mabel as she had never seen it before—as a part of her life that must not be taken away from her.

At school, Mabel was finding the day interminable. Down in the front seat Lulu and Nell sat together, and no little brown head, with its long, brown pigtail, was between them. The absence of that head made all the difference to Mabel. It was one thing to have Lennie there and not to speak, and another to know that she was nowhere in the school, in the grounds—nowhere within reach of voice or glance. Every time the door opened Mabel looked up quickly; but morning and afternoon dragged by, and Lennie never came.

When Lennie was sitting on the sea-beach with wet eyes and that queer ache at her heart, Mabel was working quadratic equations with a hand that seemed to have lost its sprightliness, and was wondering what had happened to her comrade, and was thinking of the times they had sat together and worked quadratics, and taken quiet comparing glances at each other's slates, and was just as doleful as Lennie on the beach at Manly.

The change went on working in their feelings that night, and when morning came they both knew that they must make it up that very day. Whole volumes of things to tell each other had accumulated in these five days. Lennie was longing to tell Mabel how silly Lulu was; how many sashes she had, how many bangles; and various secrets that had been confided to her by Lulu. Mabel had a story of the boys and Jane all ready on her tongue.

They met inside the gate on their way across the playground, just before the bell rang. They stopped and shyly looked at each other, then walked on together.

"I went to Manly yesterday," said Lennie, hurriedly.

"Did you?" answered Mabel. "I wondered where you were."

And that was all that happened in the way of reconciliation.

They went upstairs together, sat next to each other again, and at lunch time their arms wound closely round each other's waists, and up and down the playground they walked, with toes turned out, the old light in their eyes, and a beautiful, warm, satisfied feeling at their hearts because they had come together again, and the time of "not speaking" was over.

"They have made it up," said the other girls. "We knew it couldn't last long."

Chapter XIII Something Quite New

IT was June when Lennie went to school. The first holidays came at Michaelmas, and lasted a week. Then the final quarter of the year began, the Christmas quarter.

There never was such a school for work as this one; but somehow, after each Michaelmas, the tension relaxed ever so slightly for a few weeks, and only tightened again when the Christmas examinations began.

The fact of the matter was, that, from January to September, the Junior and Senior University Examinations kept teachers and girls alike on the strain. The girls in Class-room A, who were going up for the Junior, and the girls who worked in an unnumbered class-room, and were going for the Senior, worked harder and harder as the months went by, until in August they were completely wrapped up in a world of old examination papers, and conjectures of coming ones.

But when September was over, and the Junior and Senior had both been faced, and there was nothing more to do but to wait till the results were published, the anxious expressions of the teachers softened a little, the girls felt that they might justly go a little slowly now, and through the whole school there crept a gentle, peaceful atmosphere, very grateful after all the rush and hurry and hard work of the past months.

Class-room B had not been up for the Junior, but the peaceful air stole into it nevertheless. For a few weeks everybody breathed freely.

They worked all the time, of course. But the atmosphere was calmer, and there was no excitement in the work.

In this little fallow time, before the Christmas examinations began to trouble them, the play-hours were full of fun.

The rival tennis clubs had a tournament, and had afternoon tea under the sheds when school was over. Mabel and Lennie were both invited. Mimi Dawson brought a big plum-cake, and her father made each of the tennis clubs a present of a set of afternoon tea-cups, with jug and basin and teapot, all complete. The days were getting longer, and the tea-party lasted till after five. Lennie brought a basket of home-made scones; Caroline brought the milk, Mabel the sugar, Nell Neilly the tea, and the caretaker gave them the hot water.

Neither Mabel nor Lennie had joined the tennis clubs yet, and they were full of joy at being invited to the tea-party, and to help in it with scones and sugar. It was getting dusk when they left the schoolground at last, and was quite dark when Lennie reached home.

The younger girls had wonderful games of hookey in the playground.

Mabel joined them sometimes, for she was a swift runner and fond of exercise. The game was played in this way:—One girl was on one side, and any number on the other. The one girl chased the opposite side about the ground until she had caught one; then she and the caught one joined hands and chased again until they had caught another. Then these three joined hands and rushed to catch a fourth: and so on. And the fun was very high when there were forty girls all holding hands and chasing one about the playground. The hands were not to be broken, and it was such fun to make a wide, swift rush from end to end of the ground, arms outstretched, hands clasped, then to curl suddenly into a circle and catch the last un-caught one in the midst.

Then, too, there were whispers of Christmas doings, of the gaieties for breaking-up day, stealing about among the girls. There was the wonder whether it would be a play, or a cake-and-apron fair this year. Last year it had been the latter. There would probably be theatricals and tableaux this time.

In the midst of all this fun, and flutter, and work, and sense of coming pleasure, an Unexpected Thing came suddenly into the lives of Lennie and Mabel.

Mabel wrote a poem. That was the beginning of the Unexpected Thing.

It was one Saturday night, after she had been to tea at Lennie's. She ought to have been in bed, but there was no one to mind how late she was, and she found herself sitting at the big desk in her bedroom long after eleven o'clock. Her cheeks were flushed, and her brown eyes shone with a strange brightness. Her exercise-book was open before her, and, from a fretwork of alterations and scratchings out, there emerged these verses—

The Schoolgirl's Dream

She fell asleep and dreamed a dream
No schoolgirl ever dared to dream before;
A dream of days to come,
When school and schoolbooks all should be no more;

A dream of no Grammar and Parsing;
A dream of no Milton to learn;
A dream of no heartrending sobbing,
At the thought that no marks we might earn;

A dream of the Algebras lying
By the side of the massacred roots;
A dream of Arithmetic flying,
While the Comuses quake in their boots;

A dream of a forest of pencils,
That justly have come to their end—
While the Histories burn in a bonfire,
And the Schneiders their long, red hair rend.

A dream of the Teachers' wild screaming
At the thought that their dear books must die;
A dream of sweet girl-faces beaming—
And foremost among them was I.
But, alas! 'twas but a dream.

Then the big scrawl, *Mabel Weldon James*, at the bottom.

This was taken to school on Monday, and at lunch hour, under the fig-tree, Mabel gave it to Lennie to read.

The colour ran up into Lennie's excitable cheeks as she read, and when she had finished it:—

“You *didn't* write it?” she cried

“I did, *truly*.”

“*All* yourself?”

“Every word.”

“But how *could* you?”

“I don't know.”

“Why Mabel, I think it's—just *splendid*.”

“Do you *really*, Lennie?”

“I do truly, Mab. I think it's just simply splendid. Oh, I wish I could write something.”

“I couldn't help writing that. It was late on Saturday, and I was supposed to be going to bed. I think I was taking off my shoes, when there seemed to come into my head that line:

“*She fell asleep and dreamed a dream*”.

“Yes?” Lennie was listening breathlessly.

“And I got up, and went over to the writing-table. The gas was high, the chair was in front of the table, and I sat down. The ink, and the paper, and all were there in front of me, and I took up the pen and wrote the line down, and looked at it, and wrote another line, and looked at it, and suddenly went on quite quickly. And then it was finished.”

“Goodness!” said Lennie, though her mother had often asked her not to use that exclamation.

“I didn't know I could do it till I did it.”

“Haven't you ever written before?”

“Well, I know I wrote one verse about eight years ago, about a bird in a tree singing.”

“You *never* told me about that.”

“I had forgotten all about it.”

“Oh, Mabel, I wonder could *I* write?”

“Of course you could. It's as easy as anything. Try to-night, and write a little story.”

“But what will it be about?”

“Oh, anything. Couldn't you write about fairies? They would be easy to write about.”

“Oh, I'd love to. I'll try to-night. Will any sort of a pen do?”

“Of course it will. But you want plenty of paper.”

“We have plenty of paper at home. I'll begin directly after dinner to-night.”

And then the poem was read again; and again Lennie said “Splendid!”

“Let us read it to Mimi and Ella,” she suggested.

“Let us wait till your story is written, and we'll read them both together. Try and have yours done to-morrow.”

“I wonder how much paper it will take?”

“That depends,” said Mabel, wisely.

“Will any sort of paper do?”

“Big sheets are the best.”

“I wonder how long it will take?”

“Oh, but, I wonder if I can do it!”

And all the afternoon her cheeks were flushed, and she was still wondering. It seemed as if the night would never come.

And another wonder was that she had never thought of doing this before.

At last, it was night-time. The evening dinner was over, she had practised her new piece for fifteen minutes, and her scales for fifteen more. The time for the story had come.

She locked her door, turned up her student lamp, and sat down at her table to write her fairy tale.

Chapter XIV Under The Fig Trees

Under the fig-trees the story was read aloud next day. It was called *A Swiss Legend*.

Nell, Mimi, Ella, and Caroline were all invited to listen to it. They brought their lunch-baskets, and ate their sandwiches while Lennie read. And the whole five of them said that the story was wonderful.

Lennie did not tell them, for she did not know it herself, that it was a story she had read years before in her childhood.

"It wasn't hard at all," said she.

"Tell us how you did it," Mimi asked. She was very much impressed.

"I just sat down and wrote it. It was as easy as A, B, C."

"Did you write it *out of your head*?" Mimi queried.

"Yes, but Mabel wrote a poem. That's much harder. Read it, Mab."

The Schoolgirl's Dream was read again.

It is not every poet that has as quick and warm an audience as Mabel. Their admiration was deep, and loud, and genuine. So deep indeed, that they asked for a second reading, and were even more enthusiastic than before.

"I think it's better than a book," said Mimi.

Mimi was very pretty, but Mabel suspected that she knew very little of books beyond their covers. Still, all praise was sweet, even Mimi's, who was no critic.

"Why don't you write a little book, you two together?" suggested Nell.

"A book of stories and poems," said Caroline.

She had not spoken before, but had laughed when the poem was funny, and had looked grave when the story grew tragic.

"Why don't you have a little paper, a little tiny one, every week?" said Mimi.

It was Mimi, pretty golden-headed Mimi, who made this suggestion. But she never got the credit of it, for Mabel seized on it suddenly, and cried:

"A little paper for school. Come out—every month. And all the girls would read it. Oh, Len-nie!"

And the others thought the idea had come from tall, quick Mabel.

Oh, the talk that went on under the fig-trees! They would have a paper—a little, dear little paper. It would come out every month, and they would all write for it.

"Oh, I can't," cried poor Mimi.

"Yes you can," cried Mabel. "You must."

"I think I could write an essay," said Caroline.

Out came paper and lead-pencil, and Mabel began to make lists.

“Caroline—an essay; Lennie—a story; Me—a poem; Mimi—(a pause, while Mimi gave a little frightened squeal)—well, Mimi—a letter to the editor, all papers have that.”

“But who's the editor?” interrupted Caroline.

“Lennie,” said Mabel.

“Mabel,” said Lennie.

“Lennie and Mabel,” said all the others.

“We'll be editors together, then. And Caroline—sub-editor; and Ella—treasurer; and Mimi—the staff.”

Mabel flew along with her arrangements, and the others followed.

“We must get it ready at once. Everybody must write something by next week.”

“Don't let us tell anybody, not a soul,” said Lennie, whose cheeks were red with excitement.

“But how can anybody else read it? Will it be printed?”

Pretty Mimi, again, with a practical question. Nobody had thought of that.

“That would cost about a pound,” said Caroline, solemnly. “We must not think of that.”

“Let us write it out ourselves, said Lennie, “Each write out one copy, in round hand. There will be six copies. We can lend them among the girls.”

All in one day, it was decided that the paper should come out; should be called *The Chronicle*; should be handwritten, and should be, oh, so very, *very* good.

Chapter XV The Pursuit of Literature

That night was a sleepless one for Mabel and Lennie. They tossed from side to side, made twenty plans in a minute, unmade them, and made twenty fresh ones, and wondered why they could not go to sleep. The fact was that they had *The Chronicle* on the brain.

Next day, more planning took place. Mabel's lead-pencil scrawled fresh lists, Lennie talked so quickly that her throat began to be husky. Mimi refused to be serious, and made little frivolous remarks, and laughed a great deal, but was warned by Mabel that she must do her share of the paper, and that she had better behave, or they would make her write an editorial.

The size of the paper had to be decided. Caroline thought it should be as big as a tract. Ella had no views at all. Mimi only knew that it ought to be a "tiny little thing." Lennie was for making it the size of a sheet of writing-paper. They decided on that.

Then the number of pages, and the paper it was to be written on, were arranged. There were to be twenty pages, and it was to be written on thick note-paper, with ruled lines. Each member of the quickly-appointed staff was to copy out one number. There was to be a meeting that day week, at twelve-thirty sharp, under the fig-trees, and everyone was to bring a contribution, in prose or verse.

When the day for the meeting came—although indeed there had been meetings every day in the meantime—the following members had their work ready:—Caroline, Mabel, Lennie, and, to everyone's surprise, Mimi.

Caroline had written two chapters of a long story, *Llandilla: a Tale of the Druids*. There would be about two hundred chapters when it was finished, Caroline stated, and *The Chronicle* would be able to depend on that for years. Mabel had her *Schoolgirl's Dream*, and the first chapter of another long story, *Kathleen Carewe*. This was going to be a lovely thing, she explained, vaguely. Lennie had brought her *Swiss Legend* (which was not hers at all, but an old fairy-tale teller's, in his grave for years), a long poem, *The Churchyard on the Hill*, and the opening chapters of a third serial story. But Mimi outshone everyone. She had brought three "Letters to the Editor." One urged the need of a school library, one called attention to the way the girls dawdled in the playground after the school-bell had rung, and one suggested that the matriculation class should be formed three months earlier than the custom was.

These were really very strange subjects for Mimi to write about. Everyone looked surprised; but Mimi smiled, and handed round chocolate

sticks, and said she thought it was going to be a splendid paper.

Ella was the only one who had failed. She said that she had tried every day, but she could not write a line. She did not know how it was done, this writing of stories and poems. Her good-natured face was troubled, and she looked annoyed when Mimi's letters were read out. She had expected that Mimi would have been her companion in doing nothing.

"Did you really *try*, Ella?" asked Mabel.

"I did," said Ella. "I tried as hard as ever I could. But I didn't even know how to try."

Everybody laughed at this.

Poor Ella looked distressed, and a little vexed. It was hard to be the only one who failed.

"Never mind," said Lennie. "I have an idea. Let Ella do the riddles. We must have riddles, and puzzles, and acrostics. That will make the girls want to see the next paper for the answers."

"But I can't write riddles; I can't write *at all*."

"Oh, but you can copy them," said Lennie, "out of a book, a *Chatterbox*, or a *Girl's Own*, or any of those papers. Now, really, Ella, you must try and do that. *Anyone* can copy."

Ella was obliged to confess that even she could do that, and promised to have a note-paper sheet of riddles ready for the following day.

Next day, Mabel brought a box of note-paper, and distributed it among *The Chronicle* Staff, giving ten sheets to each one. Then the contributions were arranged in order, and Caroline was asked to make the first copy of the paper, and promised to do it immediately.

This took longer than she had thought, though, and it was a week before she had finished.

But when, a week later, she took it out of her basket, and laid it on Lennie's lap, and all the heads bent down over it, and the words,

THE CHRONICLE,

stood across the front page in bold red and blue lettering, and the date in gold italics, and various curves and elegant lines in pink and gold, and their own names in dark sepia, they were beside themselves with pride. Each one clamoured for the task of making the second copy. Mabel won. Hers was even a more beautiful affair than Caroline's, for she had drawn angels' faces and tiny landscapes in the corners.

Caroline took a week for her copy. Mabel did it in one day. But nobody knew how far into the night her gas was burning.

Then it was Lennie's turn; then Ella's; and finally, Mimi's. And then all the copies were ready—the five of them. Each was written in a large, clear, round-hand, on one side of the paper. The backs were bound with slips of

blue ribbon. The title was printed in big letters on the back, and the names of the contributors were written below.

On Monday *The Chronicle* was launched on the sea of school-life. The five copies were distributed among five classes before school in the morning.

“Pass it on as soon as you've read it,” was the order given away with each paper.

When half-past twelve struck that day, and the girls came pouring down the staircase, it was evident that something exciting was happening. Little groups of girls clustered together about the playground, gathered round Mabel and Lennie, mobbed Mimi and Ella and Caroline, and rained down showers of inquisitive, eager questions, exclamations of wonder, cries of delight, shrieks of laughter, more questions, and still more questions.

Who had thought of it? How had they done it? Who had written it for them? Why had they done it? Could anybody write for it? Was there going to be another? Were there no more copies?

For the five copies of the little blue-ribboned thing were all too few for the three hundred readers who were clamouring with each other for “next read.” Everyone wanted it at once, and everywhere there were girls tiptoeing to see over the shoulder of someone, who, in her turn, was peering over another girl's shoulder at a copy of *The Chronicle*.

The excitement gathered, and grew deeper and deeper as the day went on. Nothing was talked of but this new wonderful paper, in which girls' names were mentioned with a pleasing frankness, and little bits of news about the school were scattered here and there through the pages. But it was *The Schoolgirl's Dream* that aroused the most enthusiasm. The lines were in everyone's mouth, for everyone understood it.

The next day, and the next day, and the next day, the fame of the paper went on spreading. The girls went on talking about it, and a feeling of pride spread itself through the school, and little girls in the lower classes went home and talked about “our paper at school,” and big girls told their fathers and mothers about it, and at last it came to the ears of Miss Hammerton, who had known nothing about it all this time.

Mabel and Lennie, Mimi, Ella, and Caroline were looked upon as wonders by the other girls—Mabel and Lennie in particular, for it was soon evident that they were the ringleaders. Besides, their names were written opposite the imposing title, “Editors.” It was the most wildly exciting time of their lives. Their heads swam with happiness and fame. Lennie lay awake every night till the small hours of the morning, and went through the day with dancing eyes, and flushed cheeks, and a tongue that could not go quickly enough for all the words it had to utter.

All day long it was *The Chronicle, The Chronicle*, with everybody. Its success was certain now. In fact, it had been successful beyond any of the writers' dreams.

Success very often means money, but in this case no one had made a penny. There had been no buying and selling, nor any thought of gain. The paper had been done for the love of doing it, and every girl in the school had asked for "another number soon," and Mabel and Lennie were wild with delight.

Caroline's story was considered very clever because it was historical. It was written in tiny chapters that each covered about a page of note-paper, and in print would have been nearly two inches square.

Kathleen Carewe, Mabel's story, promised well, the girls thought. Kathleen had shining golden hair, and eyes like stars, and was the daughter of a duke, and was, indeed, *Lady Kathleen Carewe*. The little girls loved this story.

The Churchyard on the Hill was very touching. The big girls looked sorrowful as they read the last verse:

And when at last my hour shall come—
God grant it soon, if it be His will—
Take away and lay me quietly
In the churchyard on the hill.

The little girls did not care for this at all.

But big and little admired *The Schoolgirl's Dream*; for big and little, lazy and busy, dull and clever—all could sympathize with its glowing sentiments.

Mimi's letters were read a little scornfully. Noses turned up slightly over them, and when it was known that Mimi had written them, a murmur went round the school that Mimi couldn't write two words of a composition without looking over her neighbour's shoulder. Everybody was doubtful about these letters. Even Mabel and Lennie had their suspicions; but Mimi gave no clue.

Ella's riddles were seized upon, and worked out instantly, and every day someone would come to her with an envelope, and hand it to her, saying: "The answers are in that."

Out of the riddles grew the Editors' Box. They must have some place where girls could leave contributions, answers to riddles, or questions they wanted answered. Mimi said her father would make her a box if she asked him. He was very pleased with the paper, said Mimi.

So the box was discussed one lunch hour. (Every lunch hour now flew by like lightning to the five girls under the fig-trees.)

It was decided to have a big box, a brown box, and a box with a hole in it for letters, and a key with which the Editors might open it or lock it.

Two days later it arrived. A carrier brought it to the top of the stairs, and Miss Hammerton happened to receive it.

On the front was printed in heavy gold letters, *Editors' Box*; on top was a long slit for letters; at the back was the keyhole, with a tiny bright key in it.

That very morning Miss Hammerton had heard of *The Chronicle* for the first time. A copy was lying on the table now, and a smile still lingered on her lips. She took the box from the man, and carried it into her own room.

After school that day she sent for Mabel, Lennie, and Caroline, to come to her room.

The three looked at each other in dismay.

"Whatever can she want us for?" said Lennie.

"It must be about *The Chronicle*," said Caroline, "or she would not send for us all together."

"And we've never told her a word about it," said Mabel. "*Perhaps it's going to be stopped.*"

This was a dreadful thought, and one that had never occurred to them before. For some reason or other they had never shown this paper to any of the teachers—not even to Miss Greyson. It was, perhaps, the fear of being laughed at that had prevented them from doing so.

And now they were very frightened. Perhaps Miss Hammerton was going to expel them; to stop the paper; to punish them for writing it. All sorts of terrors came into their minds as they were going towards her door.

But when they found themselves standing beside her, as she sat at her little table with her long black pen in her hand, their fears all fled away.

Miss Hammerton had three little crinkles of fun at the corner of her eyes, and her voice was kind.

"I wanted you to come and take away your Editors' Box," she said, smiling. "It looks very grand, and imposing, and important, girls."

Caroline said meekly that it was new. The others said nothing at all.

"And so you are Editors. And have started a paper of your own. Is it hard work, Mabel?"

Mabel found her tongue.

"We love it, Miss Hammerton," she said.

"I have read it," went on Miss Hammerton. "Yes, though you never gave me a copy, I have read *The Schoolgirl's Dream*, Mabel, and *Llandilla: a Tale of the Druids*, Caroline, and (a faint twist on her lips) *The Churchyard on the Hill*, Lennie, and the letters to the Editor, and the riddles."

She paused and tapped her blotting-pad with her pen, and the girls drew in their breaths, and wondered what was coming.

“I want to give you this” (Miss Hammerton was opening her purse); “it is towards the funds of the paper.” She laid half a sovereign in Caroline's hand. “And I want you to have your next number printed.”

“I want you to have your next number printed.”

They could not believe their ears.

But there lay the half-sovereign in the palm of Caroline's hand, and Miss Hammerton was speaking again.

“It is getting near Christmas now, girls, and the school examinations are coming near. I want you to put the paper out of your minds for the rest of this quarter, and give all your thoughts to your lessons. But next quarter, after the holidays, you must get your next number ready—you can write as much as you like in the holidays—and we must have it printed, and get the girls to buy it. I believe that it will be the best thing in the world to foster the art of composition and the love of literature among the girls, and I am really very grateful to you three who have originated it.”

The girls went out of her room in a dream.

Chapter XVI Breaking Up

The half-sovereign was locked away in Caroline's drawer at home, and the paper was allowed to rest for a little while. It was not forgotten for one moment; but Miss Hammerton's order, enforced by her half-sovereign, was not to be disregarded.

It was now the end of November, and the yearly examinations for position in class were very near. Girls who had idled and laughed all the quarter went about with long faces, and books in their hands. Those who had worked, looked just as anxious, but not so unhappy. In their eyes was the light of excitement, for they knew how good were their chances of being high up in their classes.

Every night now Lennie was hard at work in her bare bedroom on the third storey; Mabel in hers, among the books and lovely pictures. For, as Lennie said, "It won't do for us to be bottom of the class now, Mab."

And Mabel's reply was very pointed:

"The Editors of *The Chronicle* must look to their laurels."

So they both buckled to, gave up story books, the writing of verses and serials, the dolls' house—all pleasures, in short—and for three weeks lost themselves in their work.

"But surely you need not work so hard, Lennie," the Mother said one afternoon.

Lennie had only been home an hour, and was settling herself already at her table with a pile of books and a pen. She was pale, and had dark lines under the eyes.

"I *must*, Mother; I have an enormous, tremendous lot to do."

"But why have you such a rush of work all at once?"

"I've got the whole History of England to learn in three weeks, Mother, from William the Conqueror to Victoria; and the whole of the French Grammar, and the whole of the English Grammar; and two books of Euclid, and half of Peter the Great, and all the Physical Geography, and all the Arithmetic, and all the Geography of the whole world, to learn in three weeks."

"But you've had six months to learn them in."

"I know, Mother; but you see——"

"Don't let *The Chronicle* come between you and your work, Lennie. I like your paper, and I think it is very nice for you to have it, but work should always come first."

Lennie said to Floss and Mary that night: "Mother thinks *The Chronicle* is play. No one but Mabel and myself know what hard work it is going to

be.”

And Floss, and Mary, and Brenda, who had been almost more excited about the paper than Lennie, looked quite indignant at the thought of *The Chronicle* being called “play.” To them it was a very serious piece of work, and grand, and wonderful, and delightful.

Lennie went on cramming, and grew paler and paler every day, till there was no colour at all in her cheeks.

Then the Doctor and Mrs. Leighton stopped the late hours in her bedroom, and the Mother came up every night and put the lamp out at nine o'clock, and tucked Lennie into bed with her own hands. And there was a whisper in the house of a trip to the Blue Mountains after Christmas to bring back Lennie's roses, and put fresh life into Floss, whose schooldays began next year.

At last the examinations commenced. They lasted a week, and during that week Lennie and Mabel hardly found time to breathe, so hard at work were they.

Then came a few days of anxious waiting, while everyone wondered, and made guesses, and each girl declared that she knew for certain she would be bottom of her class.

Then came the lists. They were pinned on to little notice boards hanging on the walls of the different classrooms. It was lunch hour when Miss Greyson carried in her lists, and pinned them to the boards in Classroom B. The girls were all down in the playground.

But somebody had come up for a book, had peeped in, and seen the long narrow strips of paper with lists of names on them. And somebody came running towards Lennie and Mabel as they were walking, with arms round each other, up and down the playground.

“The lists are out in Classroom B. You'll never guess who's top of the class.”

They started to run towards the stairs. They went quickly and still more quickly as the wooden staircase rang under their footsteps. They broke into a gallop at the top, and rushed with a mad race through the big schoolroom, and across the floor of Classroom B.

And there on the very first list they read their own names: head of the class, Lennie Leighton; second in the class, Mabel James. And on the next list, which was English: Lennie Leighton, Mabel James. And on the next, which was History: Lennie Leighton, Mabel James. And on the next, which was French: Mabel James, Lennie Leighton, equal.

But on the next, and the next, and the next, which were Arithmetic, Algebra, and Euclid, it was not till the bottom of the list that the names of Mabel James and Lennie Leighton appeared.

Then Geography, with Mabel top and Lennie second. And Physical Geography, with Mabel top and Lennie second. And the Special Composition, Lennie top again, Mabel second.

Poor Caroline was nowhere. That is to say, she was first in Arithmetic, Algebra, and Euclid, and a long way down in all other subjects.

Mimi had come third in French. She had been to Paris in her childhood, had a French maid at home still, and spoke French like a French girl. That was how she came to be third.

The Chronicle writers thought they had done brilliantly. The Editors and Staff were delighted. Caroline was a little downcast, but was quiet, and congratulated Mabel and Lennie on their victories. And it was a proud moment for Lennie when she burst into her mother's room, and cried, "Mother, Mother, I'm top of the class, and Mab is second!"

The next day the preparations for the breaking-up began. Miss Hammerton had decided on tableaux, in the big schoolroom, and a little play called "The Queen of the Flowers." She asked all the girls who had ideas for tableaux to come and tell her of them.

The tableaux were nothing to Brenda. She was not going to act in them. Perhaps she would not be asked to go and see them.

And yet it was Brenda who suggested the tableau which won more fame than all the others put together.

It was called "*Bluebeard's Wives*," and she had found it in a back number of an old magazine. She read it through a dozen times, learnt all the directions by heart, and then told it to Lennie.

And Lennie told Mabel, and, both together, they told Miss Greyson, and Miss Greyson laughed a great deal, and said it should be the special tableau for Classroom B, and that Lennie and Mabel should manage it all themselves.

And this is how they managed it. First of all, they picked out the seven wives. They went round in a mysterious manner to the girls from Classroom B who had long hair, and, stopping in front of these, looked hard at them for a minute, and said: "You'll do. Come to a meeting in our classroom after school this afternoon."

And the six girls, with Lennie herself for the seventh, and a pretty, dark girl called Jean McCree for Fatima, all met after school that day in the deserted classroom, and were let into the mystery.

The curtain was to go up on a scene in Bluebeard's chamber. Fatima, his newly-wedded wife, was to be standing in the middle of the room, the keys just fallen from her fingers, and her eyes were to be fixed in horror upon the heads of Bluebeard's seven wives. These heads were to be hanging by their hair from a rope stretched high across the room.

The seven wives were to be standing on a long table, and in front of them, just reaching to their necks, a big sheet was to be stretched. And on the sheet were to be scattered heavy drops of blood, and the blood was to come out of a bottle of red ink.

A little way above the tops of the heads a rope would go from one wall to the other. All the seven pigtails were to be tied to this rope.

Then, with the sheet in front hiding the table and their bodies, only the heads would show, and these would appear to be hanging by their hair from the rope above.

When the night came it was great fun to stand in a row on the table, and have all one's long hair tied to the rope, and to have powder all over the face, and the eyes half-shut, and to pretend to be dead, and to know that there was plenty of red ink on the sheet-wall beneath (put there by Mabel and Mimi), and to have a pale-green light thrown over all, and not to move an eyelash. It was great fun. The big schoolroom was crowded. All the mothers and fathers, and brothers, and sisters were there. Everybody was merry at heart that night. The teachers put away their school looks and came out with bright smiles and elegant gowns. The girls were all wild with glee at the thought of Christmas and long holidays and with the fun of breaking-up.

Shrieks of laughter greeted "Bluebeard's Wives."

Brenda, who was sitting on a back seat with Floss and Mary, stood up and cried in a shrill voice:

"Oh, *look* at our Lennie!"

It was all Lennie could do to keep her eyelids still, and her mouth quiet. For she heard the cry up there behind the sheet, and knew it was Brenda's voice.

Then the curtain went down with slow, uncertain jerks, and the heads came to life at once, and giggled in a quiet little repressed way, and all wanted to be untied from the rope at the same time. Loud clapping from the audience continued. The heads were commanded by Mabel, who was managing this tableau, to be dead again at once. Fatima posed quickly, up rolled the curtain, and another burst of clapping came from the rows of onlookers in front.

But while the cutrain was still up, and everybody was gazing, and laughing, and applauding, a most untimely thought came into Lennie's head.

Supposing Miss Hammerton, who was standing on the stage, at the left corner of the curtain, should tumble over, and fall head over heels into the middle of the audience!

And then, alas! Lennie's mouth lost all control of itself, twitched weakly,

and gave way to a great, leaping smile that seemed to her to spread from ear to ear. She forgot everything, opened her eyes, remembered, and with a wild jerk dragged her head down under the sheet just as the curtain began to fall.

The audience laughed until it was nearly sick. That smile on the dead wife's face was too comical for anything. They tried to clap the curtain up again, but in vain.

For all was disorder now on the stage. The seven wives were being let down from their hanging-rope; Mabel was scolding Lennie vigorously and Miss Hammerton was wiping her eyes, for she had a keen sense of the ludicrous.

"I couldn't *help* it," Lennie was saying. "It came. You don't know *what* I was thinking of."

"I have heard of the mourners thinking ridiculous things at funerals," said Miss Hammerton, "but never the corpse."

Later on in the evening came the great event of the year—the prizes.

There was a hush in the schoolroom as Miss Hammerton took her place behind a big table covered with a cloth. She lifted off the cloth, handed it to Miss Greyson, who was standing at her right hand, and under the cloth there lay piles and piles of beautiful new books.

Then the names were called out in Miss Hammerton's low, clear voice, and one by one the girls came forward to the table and received their prizes, and a smile from Miss Greyson, and a word or two, that lingered in their ears for days after, from the head mistress.

Three times the name, Lennie Leighton, was called. She had won the prize for being head of her class, the first prize for English, the first prize for History. Her face was still white with the powder from the tableau, and her hair hung loose, for she had not had time to plait it up again. She was a queer-looking little girl as she crossed and re-crossed the schoolroom three times in succession and finally squeezed herself into a tiny space at her father's side, and clasped her three books tightly to her heart.

And Mabel had three prizes also: French, Geography, and for being second in the class.

It was easy to see that Mabel was a favourite. The girls made their hands smart with clapping her as she went forward to the table, her tall figure stooping slightly, but her brown, curly head held well back. They knew that she was true and plucky, and full of fun; warm-hearted, a good friend, and a good fighter; bright and clever with it all; a girl to be depended on by girls—a born leader.

After the prizes came supper.

Then the breaking-up began.

Some of the senior girls had their last farewells to make to the school. There are always these good-byes at Christmas time. Friends bade good-bye to friends. Invitations for the holidays flew about in the air. Miss Hammerton had a mob of girls round her; Miss Greyson had all her pupils close to her.

It was "Good-bye," "Good-bye," from everyone. A beautiful feeling came into Lennie's heart, half sad, half glad. She did not understand it; but when it was her turn to say good-bye to Miss Greyson, she looked up and saw that there were tears in the fine grey eyes above her, and she knew then that she was not alone in her feelings.

There is no time brighter and merrier than the breaking-up at school. But it has its sadness. Some of the girls have left their school-days behind them for ever that night, and are turning from the lovely land of girlhood to face the strange and unknown country of womanhood.

At last the lights were out, and a little party was making its way along the road leading to the house that Lennie called "home."

There were the Doctor and the Mother, and Lennie, and Brenda, and Floss, and Mary, and Bert.

The Doctor was speaking.

"Every year," he was saying, "I used to borrow a silk handkerchief and take it away to the school sports. It was to wrap my silver cups in."

"Used you to get them every year?" asked Brenda, who was hanging to her father's arm.

"I never got one at all, darling. That was the sad part of it."

Lennie hugged her books closer to her with one hand, and tightened the other round her father's arm.

"And I've got *three!*"

She gave a few ecstatic little skips.

"I'm the luckiest girl in the world, Father," said she.

"Are you, little girl?" he answered. "Then I suppose you wouldn't like to ask that tall Mabel of yours to come to the Blue Mountains with us for a month's fresh air?"

"Oh, *Father! Mother!*"

"We've taken a cottage for a month, and we go the day after Christmas," said the quiet Mother's voice, with the love-note in it.

Chapter XVII The Mountains That Were Not Blue

A six-roomed, weatherboard cottage at Blackheath held them all—the whole eight of them.

For there were eight, although at the last minute the Doctor had been kept in Sydney by his work, and had been obliged to let them go without him.

But in his place there had come with Mabel a tall boy of twelve, with curly, black hair and dancing eyes, who answered to the name of Aubert.

“Let us ask a boy for Bert,” Lennie had suggested, when the Doctor said sadly that he could not go with them.

And when they began to think of a boy their thoughts went suddenly to Mabel's brothers.

“It would be nicer to have a brother and sister with us,” Lennie said, reflectively. “They wouldn't want to go together then.”

So the Doctor himself called one morning on Mr. James, and said he had come to beg a boy and a girl from him. And he learned that Charlie and Siddie had gone to stay with an aunt in the country, and that Aubert was the only boy at home. Also, that he had not been invited by the aunt because his spirits were too high, and was moping about the house now, looking forward to long, dreary holidays.

He and Mabel were carried away next day, and if the weatherboard cottage trembled when it saw Aubert's dancing eyes, it kept quite still and said never a word.

And the Mountains were pleased to have anyone to wake their grand old echoes.

Those holidays were like a piece out of fairyland to the seven young people. The Mother loosened all her little mother-reins, gave few commands, and let them do what they liked for four whole weeks. The two boys chummed together speedily, although there were six years between them; and Brenda also became great friends with Aubert. Floss, and Mary, and Lennie, and Mabel kept together, and the two little sisters were happy all day long.

Sometimes Lennie wanted Mabel to herself, and threw out hints for Floss and Mary to go away. But Mabel always broke in with “Oh, let them stay, Lennie,” and they generally stayed, and said to each other afterwards, “*Mabel* wanted us, if Lennie didn't.”

But Mabel and Lennie had each other away from everyone else when night came. They slept together in a big bed in a little room, and under the counterpane long talks went on hours after the rest of the cottage was asleep. They talked, and talked, and talked, and still they had more to talk

about. They were never done, never came to the end of all the things they had to say to each other, and they were often late for breakfast in the morning because they had been chattering so far into the night.

Not that it mattered about being late for breakfast. The Mother herself was often late, and if she was tired after an excursion she had her breakfast in bed next day.

And one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning everyone in the cottage, with the exception of Emma, the servant, had breakfast in bed. Emma brought tea and toast and eggs round to them all, and the table was not even laid for breakfast in the dining-room. They had been to the bottom of one of the lovely fern-gullies the day before, and had walked seven miles there and seven miles back, and the Mother said to herself, "They are tired this morning, and it will be such a treat to them," and she called Emma softly, and bade her give them all they wanted in the way of toast and eggs in their own bedrooms. Nobody got up till eleven o'clock that Sunday.

This was all very different from the life in Sydney, when the first bell rang at seven, and the second at eight, and the Mother was never a minute late in taking her seat behind the teapot at the end of the table.

And then those long, red mountain roads, where one never walked in the summer without meeting simply-dressed ladies and children from the city, all full of fun and merriment, and bent on getting all the pleasure possible from their mountain visit.

There was one thing that troubled Brenda and Mary. The mountains were not blue at all.

From Sydney they had often looked towards the west and seen a line running darkly along the horizon, and they had been told that that misty line was the beautiful Blue Mountain Range. But now that they were here, right up in the mountain heights, the grass turned out to be green; the gum-trees grey, and green, and red; the ferns pale yellowy-green, and shining olive, and dark myrtle. There was no blue anywhere, except in the sky. The roads were red. The great, bare rocks round Govett's Leap were brown, and russet, and sombregrey.

It was a disappointment to the little girls. They agreed between themselves that grown-up people give strange names to places, and they never lost the feeling of surprise at finding grass and trees and earth and rocks up here of the same colours as they were round Sydney.

Oh! the long, long walks, with billy tea at the end of them, that the little party took day after day. The Mother had a short serge frock, a straw hat and thick boots, and the children told her she was just like a little girl as she tramped over all sorts of wonderful places, scrambled down gullies where ferns were higher than any man or woman, and scoured the

mountain-woods for wild flowers, blackberries, and maiden-hair.

When they went picnicking, Aubert and Bert carried the baskets and the billy, and made the fire for them.

Aubert grew wilder and gayer every day, and Mrs. Leighton's heart often leapt into her mouth as he danced along the edge of the great ravines, and skipped, and slipped down the sides of the gullies in a mad, reckless way. He played tricks on everybody, too—apple-pied all their beds, hid their boots and their hats, and led quiet, easy-going Bert into all manner of mad scrapes.

So it was no wonder that the girls left him out of the most delightful things of all their long succession of delights.

One afternoon they were sitting on the seat that looks down into Govett's Leap—the great, mysterious valley that the highest rocks of the mountains guard. It was all in shadow; the sun had moved across to the west, and was setting there, away on the other side of the railway line. The tremendous trees and ferns at the bottom of The Leap were a mass of dark shadow. There was no light in the sky behind, and none for the leaping waterfall on the right to catch and weave into its curves and waves.

The five girls were all silent. Their eyes, with the dreams of youth in them, were gazing out into the great, silent stretches of mountains rolling back against the sky.

“Oh! to see this place with the sun behind it,” cried Mabel, suddenly. “If we could only see the sun rise there beyond those great, dark boulders, and make all the sky turn red. That's what it wants—colour behind it. By the time we get down here in the daytime the sun has gone away from it, and it's all dull and heavy-looking.”

“What time does the sun rise?” asked Lennie, fired with the warm glow of Mabel's vivid imagination.

“Oh, ever so early.”

“In the middle of the night,” said Brenda.

“It can't be the middle of the night,” said Floss. “It must be morning when the sun rises, silly.”

“What do you say,” cried Lennie, “if we all come down and see it rise tomorrow morning? Oh, how lovely it would be!”

The little sisters echoed her.

“How lovely!”

“How lovely!”

“But do you think Mrs. Leighton would let us come?” asked Mabel. “You see, it takes an hour to walk from your house to here, and if the sun rises at half-past four we should have to leave the house at half-past three. It might be dark.”

“We could have a lantern.”

“There might be a moon.”

“The stars would be out.”

“It couldn't be so very dark if it was just going to get light.”

“And we could bring a billy and make tea,” cried Lennie.

And then she stopped and looked blankly at the others.

“We *couldn't* bring the boys,” she said.

“Indeed we couldn't,” said Mabel. “It wouldn't be safe, unless Mrs. Leighton was with us. I am always miserable when Aubert goes near the railings, and sometimes he hangs over just to frighten me. And if Mrs. Leighton was not there, he would be frightening the lives out of us, and it would be horrid.”

“We won't tell the boys anything about it. We'll keep it a secret. I'm sure Mother will let us come. I'm sure she won't come herself, though. Mummie likes her sleep up here.”

And after tea that night they got their Mother into her own bedroom, shut the door mysteriously, and told her what they wanted to do—to see the sun rise at The Leap. They kept their voices down, for fear Aubert might be hiding somewhere.

“To see the sun rise?” said the Mother. “You will have to get up very early for that.”

“Oh, but we can wake ourselves,” said Lennie. “And we won't make a noise.”

“And you will all be very careful?”

“Oh, Mother, of *course* we will.”

And then the Mother said yes, she thought that they might go.

So that same night most secret preparations went on in the kitchen; the billy was packed with tea, sugar, and a little bottle of milk. Mabel cut sandwiches of bread and butter and hard-boiled eggs, and wrapped them in a damp cloth, and made them into a parcel, all ready for the morning. Lennie polished the glass of the lantern, and put a new candle in it.

Then they borrowed the alarm clock from Emma, set it for three, and went quietly to bed, an hour before their usual time.

Mabel and Lennie had been in bed about half an hour, but had not succeeded in going to sleep, when they heard their door-handle turn gently, and saw, through the dark, a white figure at their bedside.

It was Brenda.

“Lennie,” she whispered, “is it three o'clock yet? I went to sleep, and did not know what time it was. I think we ought to get up.”

Mabel and Lennie went into a wild burst of laughter—they were both over-excited with the thought of the coming adventure. Then Mabel struck

a match, and looked at the clock.

The hands were at half-past eight!

Poor little anxious Brenda went shamefacedly back to bed, where she had been asleep for ten minutes.

At the proper time the alarm went off, and Mabel and Lennie woke up immediately. Lennie crept into the room where the three little sisters slept, woke them briskly, but quietly, and in a quarter of an hour, everyone was dressed ready to go out.

It was just half-past three o'clock, and very dark. As they opened the back door, and stepped out into the yard, the black darkness confronted them, and they all had little thrills of fear running up and down their nerves. They closed the back door silently, went through the yard, and out of the back gate, into the dark world.

For the back gate, when it closed behind them, seemed to shut them out of all reach of the shelter of home. The Mother was sleeping soundly in a front bedroom, quite unconscious that her daughters were stealing through the piece of rough bush that led down to the road.. When she had said "to see the sun rise," she had not realized that they would be leaving home in the middle of the night, as it were.

But the lantern burned brightly. They gathered all their courage together, stepped out bravely, and were soon down on the long, red road that led to Govett's Leap. And once out of the bush, their hearts beat more easily, and the thrills of fear were less sharp and less frequent.

Up in the sky there were many stars, and from them came all the light that there was, except the lantern's beams. Tramp, tramp, tramp, the footsteps of the five rang clearly and evenly on the air.

On either side of the road the bush was black and still and shadowless. But from it there came stealing, every time the wind moved, sweet, pure tree-scents and leaf-odours, the scent of cherry-wood, of sharp grey gums and mountain musk, and the delicate wild clematis that hid the nakedness of poor old ring-barked trees under its long, white arms of blossom.

And sweeter than everything else was the smell of the earth under foot.

"It smells as if it had just been washed," Lennie whispered, breathing it in with long, hard gulps.

Perhaps it was the dew that had washed the sweetness of it into the atmosphere.

As they walked along they talked a little in whispers; wondered if they would be there in time; wondered if Aubert and Bert had missed them; wondered if the sunrise would be a red one; wondered if ever five girls had gone down to The Leap to see it before.

Then a pale, weak light crept out into the darkness, the trees in the bush

around were not quite so black, and the road in front began to show faintly white.

And from all around there came a stir, then a twitter, and a movement of little wings stretching themselves. The twitter swelled, and grew fuller and louder as the little birds everywhere began to awake. At last it burst into such song as our wild birds know. Above all the others rang the musical notes of the magpies. The glittering paroquets chattered and twittered. The bell-birds and the coach-whips, the lumpy brown laughing-jackasses, the merry jacky-winters, and the little red-breasted robins, all were singing in the new day with their own delicate, tremulous song. The noise of them all was deafening. There seemed to be an orchestra of birds in every tree; behind every leaf a tiny, delicate treble voice.

Turn after turn of the long, red road went by. All the time the light was strengthening, and the lantern's beam was paling.

One more turn, and the white fence at the head of The Leap came into view. They hurried on, their cheeks blooming with the roses of health and early morning, and dropped their basket and the billy on the steps of the look-out shed.

Then they seated themselves on the steps and watched. They were just in time.

First, the sky beyond The Leap turned pale, pale pink. Then a dazzling zig-zag line of gold wrote itself right across the pink. It was like a flash of golden lightning come to stay.

A great red ship came sailing into the pink and gold. After it floated a crimson castle. Seas, and rivers, and mountains rose from some mysterious place, and rolled across the sky; the golden islands, and purple, clear lagoons, and the pink tinge deepening in the background, roamed dreamily overhead.

Then some long, thin spikes of light, just where the mountains touched the sky.

Then a small, bright, yellow thing, rising from behind a far-off peak. Slowly, and yet quickly, it went up into the sky. All in a moment a flood of light burst out over the eastern mountains, the yellow thing was round and dazzling, the sky was one sea of crimson. The eyes that watched were blinded, and looked down a minute, and the sun had risen.

And The Leap was no longer the dull, grave Leap of the noon and afternoon. The light was pouring down through it, and its mists were tinted with old gold, and rose, and tender saffron, and regal purple.

On the mountain sides the leaves of the trees were like diamonds. Over the rocks rolled the waterfall in a fall of jewels. The rocks themselves stood out against a crimson background. A transfiguration, more wonderful

even than the sunset's had overswept the world.

The five little girls sat on the steps, and watched with eager eyes. They sighed, and breathed hard, and sighed again, and never took their eyes from the sky for a moment. For the wonder was all new to them—the fair wonder of a mountain dawn.

The sun rose higher and higher over the top of The Leap, and the colour in the sky changed to what Brenda called “only sunlight.”

Then their voices all broke out at once.

“Oh, how lovely!”

“How *glorious!*”

“Wasn't it red!”

Wasn't the sun gold!”

“Wasn't the sky beautiful!”

“I wouldn't have missed it for *anything* in the world,” declared Lennie.

“Neither would I,” said Mabel, just as solemnly, and of course the little sisters echoed.

The fire was made, the billy boiled, and tea and egg sandwiches were eaten on the wooden steps, with the mountains rolling out before them. It was the sweetest breakfast they had ever known. They were all ravenously hungry. The billy-tea was as nice as billy-tea always is, the sandwiches were delicious, and, above all, it was five o'clock in the morning, and they were miles away from home, in the heart of the Blue Mountains.

Bert and Aubert said all sorts of crushing things to them afterwards. Called them “mean,” and “sly,” and “sneaks;” but the girls only smiled. They had seen the sun rise over the mountains that were not blue. How could anything else matter?

Chapter XVIII Mr. Poppleton

The holidays were over. Christmas was away in the Past; or still further away in the Future. Another year of school had begun.

Floss was one of the new girls now. She had passed the examination, and was two classes lower than Lennie. She was tasting the delicious novelty of school-life at last, and Mary and Brenda had the dining-room and Miss Middleton to their little, disconsolate selves.

Everywhere there were new faces, and old ones missing. But Caroline, Mimi, Ella, Mabel and Lennie had all come back, and the very first day they gathered under the fig-trees at lunch time, and the question of *The Chronicle* leapt into life again.

Six weeks of holidays, and yet not one of the five had written a line for the paper.

"I had so much to do," said Mimi, shaking her head, "I really couldn't write. I had to buy Christmas cards, and send them off, and then I had to go to three Christmas parties. And after Christmas I had a cousin to stay with me for a fortnight, and when she went home Mother and I went over to Melbourne for a fortnight. So I had no time for writing, had I?"

It was the same with everyone. Even Mabel and Lennie had done nothing more substantial than make plans, and dream dreams.

But everyone promised to set to work at once, and that same day Mabel, Lennie, and Caroline went to Miss Hammerton's room after school, taking the half-sovereign with them, and asked her what she would advise them to do.

Miss Hammerton was very busy. Her table was piled with papers, and letters, and lists, and there were half a dozen mothers of new girls waiting in the lobby to interview her about their daughters.

"I have no time to think of it now," she said.

"Will you let us manage it ourselves, Miss Hammerton?" said Mabel. "We could find out from our fathers about the printing, and how much it would cost."

"Well, let me know what you are doing," Miss Hammerton replied, and then a mother who could not wait any longer opened the door and walked in, and the girls were obliged to go away.

It seemed as if everyone who could have helped them was busy at this time. The Doctor was out early and late, and Lennie never got a chance of speaking to him. Mabel's father went to Melbourne on business, and was away three weeks. Caroline's father knew nothing about printers; he was captain of one of the coasting steamers.

And Mimi and Ella were not asked to get advice on the subject.

“They wouldn't understand what their fathers told them, and we should only be muddled,” Mabel said.

As no one seemed able to help them, Lennie and Mabel resolved to help themselves. The half-sovereign was bright and safe, and they felt sure that they could have fifty copies of their paper printed for half a sovereign.

But how to find a printer?

“Let us go and look for one,” suggested Lennie, boldly. “We will go this afternoon, after school.”

About four o'clock that day two schoolgirls dressed in dark blue cambric, with wide shady white hats, and their baskets on their arms, stopped in front of a large warehouse, in one of Sydney's quiet streets, and stared at a name on a brass business-plate:

WILLIAM POPPLETON,
PRINTER.

Why, it was the easiest thing in the world to find a printer. They had come straight to the very door of one.

But it was not so easy to go through that open doorway, and up those dark stairs, and to ask of everyone they met, “Will you please tell us where Mr. Poppleton is?”

Everyone directed them to go further up. The stairs seemed as if they would never end. The girls' hearts beat quickly, and yet they felt as if they were doing a very grand and courageous thing. At last they reached a door that stood wide open, and, looking in, they could see a dozen great machines, and could hardly hear their voices for the deafening noise.

They stood in the doorway, and looked in. A man saw them, and came forward to ask them what they wanted.

“Can we see Mr. Poppleton?” Mabel asked, in as grown-up a voice as she could manage.

“I am Mr. Poppleton,” said the man. He smiled, and looked surprised, and shy, all at the same time.

Then all the words in the English language went out of the heads of these two brave business women. They stood there in front of the shy printer, and looked at each other, and looked at the floor, and tried to speak, but could not think of a word to say.

A little nervous giggle took possession of them at last, and Mr. Poppleton became more and more surprised and shy.

“Did you want to see me?” he asked.

But the giggle refused to be repressed. For fully two minutes it had its own way with them, though they bent their heads down low to hide it. At last, with a great effort of will, Mabel found her tongue. She lifted her

head, and looking up at him she blurted out:

“We want to know if you'll print a paper for us. It's a school-paper. It's not a very big one.”

“Yes?” said Mr. Poppleton. “A school-paper? A girls' school-paper, I suppose. I print a paper for a boys' school. What size is yours to be?”

Mabel drew a copy of the first number from her basket, and handed it to him. He put on his spectacles, and looked through it interestedly. And the girls looked at him, and saw that he was a little man, with red hair, and a wild red beard, and kind brown eyes, and they said to themselves that it was really a wonderful thing that they should have found a printer who was used to printing papers such as theirs, and, above all, a printer with kind brown eyes.

“It seems very nice,” said he, at last. “It is a *very* little paper, though. The smallest one I have ever seen. *The Miltonian* is three times the size of it. In print this would cover about three pages.”

“And how much would it cost to print it? We want to know could you do it for us for half a sovereign?”

Mr. Poppleton looked at them over his spectacles.

“*Half a sovereign!* Why, *The Miltonian* pays me six pounds for a hundred copies.”

Their hopes were all dashed to the ground. Six pounds! It was out of the question then.

“But *couldn't* you do it for less?” asked Lennie. “If ours is three times smaller than *The Miltonian*, you could do it for less than six pounds. We have only got ten shillings.”

“But you would sell your paper if it were printed,” Mr. Poppleton replied. “Sixpence a copy is what *The Miltonian* sells for. And then you would have that money to pay for the printing. If you sold forty copies you would have a pound.”

“Could you do it for a pound?”

Mr. Poppleton smiled a little nervously.

“I don't see how I could.” He took a pencil and a bit of white cardboard from his pocket, and began to scribble figures on it. “Well, if you didn't have a cover, and if you only had four pages, I could do it for two pounds a hundred.

“But we don't want a hundred.”

“That doesn't make much difference to the price, Miss,” he said. “Besides, you might be able to sell them.”

“But two pounds! We would have to make thirty shillings! Sell sixty copies! And supposing we couldn't do it?”

“I think we could,” said Lennie, in a low voice. “I think we'd better, Mab.

He's a good man, and knows how to print papers like ours.”

“Are you sure you would do it well?” asked Mab, with gathering boldness.

“Well, I think so, Miss,” very meekly.

“Of course, it must be done *very* nicely; the girls won't buy it if it doesn't look nice.”

“I'll give you a ‘ighly ornamental paper,’ ” said Mr. Poppleton, as meekly as before, but with the suspicion of a grin at the corner of his lips. “That is to say, if you give me good enough copy.”

“Oh, our paper isn't copied,” cried Lennie. “We all write every word of it ourselves.”

“Does *The Miltonian* copy?” asked Mab.

“When I say ‘copy,’ ” Mr. Poppleton explained, “I mean the stuff—the matter—you all write yourselves. This is a technical term, Miss, and you'll soon get to know it if you're going in for literature.”

They had some further talk with him, and at last it was decided that they should bring him their paper in a fortnight, that he should print it for them a fortnight from then, and that he should wait for his thirty shillings till sixty papers were sold.

They then paid him the half-sovereign, received a receipt, which they had not asked for, and went away.

Mr. Poppleton told himself that they were the strangest clients he had ever had.

The only person who was told of this adventure was Caroline. She thought it a most brave and clever thing of them to do, and promised, a little fearfully, to go with them when they took the paper to be printed.

But the paper had now to be written.

Suddenly, Mimi deserted. She stayed away from school for two days, and when she returned she did not come to the fig-trees at lunch time. Instead, she went away with a new girl, with whom she had made a quick friendship, and ate her lunch on the verandah steps. And whenever Mabel or Lennie approached her, she quietly slipped out of their way.

Mabel caught her at last. She and Mimi happened to be kept in for the same lesson, and were alone together in Classroom B, waiting for Miss Greyson to come to hear their repetition.

Mabel took her book, and went and sat next to Mimi.

“I've caught you at last,” she said. “Now, why don't you come to the meetings? And what did you mean by telling Ella that you were not going to do any more for *The Chronicle*?”

Pretty Mimi smiled sweetly at her.

“Oh, Mab!” she said, “I can't write any more.”

“But why not?” said Mabel. “It's very mean to desert us just now, when we're going to—I mean when there's so much to do. I think it's very mean of you, Mimi, really I do. You know we don't want to have other girls in with us. Why did you do it?”

Mimi began to draw lines on her slate.

“Look here, Mab,” she said at last. “Will you promise not to tell a soul, if I tell you something? You promise? Not even Lennie Leighton, mind? Well, you know those letters, I wrote——” She dropped her pencil, and smiled up frankly into Mabel's face. “Well, I didn't write them at all. No, my father wrote them for me.” I asked him to, because you said I had to do something, and I couldn't. And he's gone up the country on business now, and so, of course, I couldn't do any more for you. That's the reason, Mab.”

“Oh, Mimi! You little—— And you pretended you wrote them.”

“I know, but it doesn't matter. Have some chocolate? Don't tell anyone, will you?”

And that was the explanation of those three finely-worded letters to the Editor: “My father wrote them for me.”

In the end, Lennie, and Mabel, and Caroline wrote the paper themselves. There was only one thing by a stranger, a little poem that someone had slipped into the Editor's Box. It began:

I remember, I remember

The day-school large and square.

The rest of *The Chronicle* was made up of the serial stories and paragraphs about school work. There was also an editorial, written by Caroline.

When the paper was ready, these three girls took it to Mr. Poppleton, and begged him to make it look as nice as he possibly could.

There was then nothing to do but to wait till it came out, and to spread the news abroad among the schoolgirls that the next number of *The Chronicle* would be out in a fortnight, would be sold for sixpence, and would make its appearance in print.

Chapter XIX The War of Two Pens

It must be understood that A was the highest class in the school; B was only second.

And all this time the girls in A, who considered themselves much superior intellectually to the girls in B, had allowed some girls from the lower class to manage what might become a great institution some day—the school paper.

True, the girls in B had thought of it, and the girls in A had not.

But some of the A girls had lately felt sure that they would have thought of it, if those B girls had not been before them with the idea.

And when they heard that the second number of the paper was to be printed in black and white, just like a book, they felt that it was time for them to bring themselves forward, for the sake of their dignity.

There was a girl in A who had just been up for the Junior, and passed well. Her name was Leah Cohen, and she was the eldest girl in a Jewish family. She was very bright and quick, had a wonderful memory, and was said by the teachers to be the best “all-round” girl the school had ever known.

She made up her mind that she would start a rival paper, and would have the cleverest girls in A to help her, and would show Mabel and Lennie how a paper ought to be done.

They knew nothing about this till one day, a week before *The Chronicle* came out, Leah took hold of Lennie's arm as they were coming down the stairs at mid-day.

“I want to speak to you, Lennie,” said Leah. “Will you come down to the end of the verandah with me. I don't want anyone to hear.”

Lennie followed her in great surprise. “Sit here on the steps,” said Leah.

When they were seated she leaned forward and looked at Lennie with her pretty black eyes, and smiled.

“I don't want to do the thing in an underhand way,” said she, “so I thought I would tell you about it to-day. We girls in A have started a paper. We began to write it at the beginning of the quarter, and it is already now, and comes out next week.”

“You *haven't!*”

Lennie went quite pale with excitement and indignation.

“Oh, how *mean!*”

“No, it isn't,” said Leah. “Why is it mean? We have as much right to have a paper as you and Mabel James.”

Lennie jumped up suddenly.

“Stay here till I get Mabel,” she said.

Mabel was looking for her chum at the other end of the playground, when she came darting towards her in hot haste.

“Mabel, Mabel, come quick,” she said, breathlessly. “What do you think! What do you think! That Leah Cohen girl has got a paper. They've started a paper in A just like *The Chronicle*.”

“Who? who? what?” cried Mabel, beginning to run with Lennie towards the verandah steps where Leah was sitting.

“Here she is,” cried Lennie; “here's Mabel. Tell *her* about it, and see what she says.”

“How silly you are, Lennie,” said Leah. “You are a little stupid to get so excited over it. Why shouldn't other girls have a paper as well as you?”

But when Mabel understood, she was even more indignant than Lennie.

“It's *mean*,” she said. “You only copied us. We started first, and did all the work, and you've copied our idea.”

“Our paper will not be in the least like yours,” said Leah, calmly.

Between the two angry little editors Leah had a bad quarter of an hour. But she sat on the steps quietly, and never lost her temper for a minute.

“There's one thing,” said Mabel, hotly; “the girls won't read your paper.”

“Won't they?” said Leah. She laughed a quiet, unconcerned laugh. “That will be all the better for yours, won't it?” said she.

“Oh, it won't make any difference to ours,” said Lennie, grandly. “Not the slightest.”

“Well, why are you both so cross?” asked Leah. “If it won't make any difference to your paper, I don't see why you need trouble about it.”

“Because it's so *mean*,” said Mabel.

That word was their great stand-by; but, alas! it availed them little.

A week later, on a Wednesday, *The Chronicle*

came out. It was a poor little thing of six pages, and had no cover, and it looked much thinner in print than it had done in writing. But the girls were eager to see it, and in the lunch hour Lennie and Mabel began a brisk sale of copies.

They sold forty that day. Twenty more, and the thirty shillings would be ready for Mr. Poppleton.

“We are sure to sell forty more to-morrow,” said Mabel, cheerfully jingling her sixpences.

But, alas! Next morning, when they arrived at school, they found Leah Cohen and two girls from A waylaying the schoolgirls as they came through the gate, and pressing some fluttering blue thing on them.

“A presentation copy for each of you,” cried Leah, kindly, as Mabel and Lennie came through the gate. She pushed a blue paper into the hand of

each, and they realized that the rival paper was really out.

And, Oh! It had pale-blue dainty covers, and the name across the back in heavy ornamental letters:

THE BLUEBELL

And it was wider than *The Chronicle* and twice as long, and had three times the number of pages. And it was printed on thick, shiny paper, and as Mabel and Lennie rushed through the pages, their eye caught quaint headings to inviting-looking little stories, and columns of bright little personal paragraphs, and poems set in a special print of their own.

If it had been possible, they would have turned green that day.

For in one morning they saw the whole school go over to Leah's paper.

They saw *The Chronicle* deserted, and heard on all sides, "*The Bluebell's* ever so much better."

And, indeed, as they were obliged to own to themselves, *The Bluebell* was well done. It was full of nice little things. How to make Everton toffee, and lemon syrup, and Turkish delights; the names of the girls who had done best at the last examination; an account of a picnic Miss Greyson had given on Clarke Island. There was no solemn serial in tiny chapters, like *Llandilla: a Tale of the Druids*, and no long-worded editorial.

The school was especially charmed with *The Bluebell's* social column. This told about parties at which schoolgirls had been present, and the girls were mentioned by name, and their dresses were described in full.

It made their hearts flutter with pleasure to read that at Mimi's birthday party May Jones wore white nun's veiling and a pink sash; Mimi Dawson, paleblue liberty silk, and white shoes, and sash, and a white pearl necklace; Jean McCree, cream Indian muslin and pink rosebuds.

"We would scorn to put in things like that," said Mabel and Lennie.

But the girls loved "things like that," and bought *The Bluebell* without a murmur, and that very day Leah announced that she was sold out.

And Mabel and Lennie had only sold two more of those twenty *Chronicles* that must be disposed of to make up Mr. Poppleton's thirty shillings.

They looked at each other blankly that afternoon, and had a dreadful vision of Mr. Poppleton taking them away to prison because they could not pay his bill.

"How could Leah have got such a big paper?" said Lennie, looking through *The Bluebell* for the fiftieth time "It must have cost her six times as much as ours, and I heard her say she had two hundred copies."

"I don't know," said Mabel, sadly. "Perhaps somebody helped her."

The world seemed dark to them that day.

Next day it grew darker. They went about with anxious faces, begging

the girls to buy *The Chronicle*, but not one copy was disposed of.

Three more days went by, and it was clear that the sale of *The Chronicle* had come to a dead stop. The girls would not even buy it for threepence."

"We'd rather have *The Bluebell*," was always the answer.

Mabel and Lennie, who shared the downs of life as well as the ups, now went from misery to fear. There were still nine shillings wanting for Mr. Poppleton, and there seemed to be no chance of making them.

Little Mr. Poppleton, with his spectacles, and red, untrimmed beard, became a fearful giant in their mind's eye. They could not sleep for thinking of him, and in the daytime they were nervous and irritable, with the fear that he would come to the school to look for them.

They told no one, not even Caroline.

It seemed to them that there was a disgrace in failing to sell their sixty copies, and they hugged their worry closely to themselves, and were all the more miserable because of their secrecy.

Whenever a messenger was sent into B, to say that one of the girls was wanted by her mother, Lennie and Mabel trembled, and looked fearfully at each other, and silently framed with their lips the word "*Poppleton!*"

Some time before *The Chronicle* came out, Miss Hammerton had suffered severely with neuralgia, and had been ordered by the doctors a month's change and a sea-trip. She had gone to Tasmania for the change and the sea-trip combined, and Miss Greyson had been left to manage in her place.

When she came back, looking bright and strong again, copies of the two papers were lying on her desk. It was a great surprise to her to see that they were both in print.

She sent for Lennie and Mabel that same day. Their hearts beat nervously, and, of course, "*Poppleton!*" rushed to their lips. The twenty-one shillings were hidden away in Mabel's desk. They had been afraid to take them to him without the rest, and as they walked towards Miss Hammerton's room, their faces were quite white with anxiety.

"I see you have got your paper into print," said Miss Hammerton. It struck her that the two girls were not looking well. "I am very glad to see it. And so Leah Cohen has started a paper, too. Hers is a much more important-looking production than yours, but I see that she has advertisements on her covers, and those help her to pay for the printing. Her father is a printer, too, I believe, so it was easy work for her, no doubt. And now I want to know all about *The Chronicle*. Whom did you get to print it, and how much did it cost? It is a modest-looking little thing, and cost very little, I am sure. I suppose it pays its way."

To Miss Hammerton's intense surprise, they both began to cry.

“Why, Lennie! Mabel! What is the matter with you, girls?”

But it was one thing to ask “what is the matter?” and another to get an answer from the two broken-down Editors. They sobbed, and choked, and whenever they tried to speak, the sadness of the case struck them afresh, and brought another rush of tears, and another choke in the throat.

“Can't you tell me *anything*, girls?” cried Miss Hammerton, at her wits' end. “Mabel, you are the eldest, do try and tell me what is distressing you so.”

After a pause,

“*The C-c-c-chronicle*—oh-h-h-h!—g-g-g-got into d-d—oh-h-h!”

“What do you say? *The Chronicle* got into the dirt?”

“W-w-we had to d-d-do it—oh-h-h-h!—all our-s-s-selves—oh-h-h-h!”

“Oh-h-h-h” does not in the least express this heart-rending sound, but it must pass, for the English language cannot express everything, and you will understand that they breathed it out with a wail that lasted nearly half a minute.

“Mr. P-p-p-p-poppleton d-d-doesn't—oh-h-h-h!” So they went on, and it says well for Miss Hammerton's patience that she never once spoke crossly to them. Had she been a little less kind, the dreadful scene that followed might have been averted.

Suddenly Mabel threw her head back, and burst into a loud, shrill laugh, that jarred disagreeably on the ear, then, just as suddenly, changed her laughter into an equally silly and noisy burst of crying; while Lennie dropped into an armchair, and lay back, white and rigid, with her mouth open, and her eyes shut.

Miss Hammerton sprang to her feet.

“One is in hysterics, and the other is fainting!” she cried, and rang the bell on her table with such a clangour that Miss Greyson and two other teachers came rushing in, in alarm.

Then there was much water thrown, and a hard, unsympathetic voice scolded Mabel, in what seemed to the girls who had come stealing out of their classes, and were now half in, half out, of the doorway, like absolute cruelty, for Mab was sobbing loudly, and the tears ran down her cheeks as heavily as the water from Miss Hammerton's water-jug ran off Lennie's.

“How can she be so cruel!” they murmured.

Curiosity led them on, step by step, till they were all well inside the door. Then Miss Hammerton noticed them for the first time, and sternly ordered them all back to their classes.

And now, in the schoolrooms, nothing was talked of but that scene in Miss Hammerton's room. What was the matter with them? Why was Lennie Leighton lying back in the chair with her mouth open? Why was

Mabel James having hysterics? No one ever discovered (unless Floss did) how the girls solved the mystery; but certain it is that, before lunch-hour that same day, everyone in the school knew that the failure of *The Chronicle* was at the bottom of it all.

A wave of self-remorse swept over the playground. Lunch baskets were neglected, and everyone was watching, and wondering when the two poor Editors would make their appearance. *The Chronicle* was the first paper, and it was a *shame* it had been let to fail! Who knew how many copies had been sold? Ten! Twenty! Then no wonder it had failed! Why had not everyone bought it instead of *The Bluebell*? Those who *had* bought it felt virtuous, and those who had not, felt wicked; and soon the whole school was so moved, that it was ready, even longing, to buy every copy of the despised *Chronicle* twice over. Poor Lennie! poor Mabel! was on everyone's lips.

In the meantime, Miss Hammerton had brought her two invalids round again, and was slowly learning the whole pitiful story.

How they had gone, with such fortitude, to a Mr. Poppleton, and managed all the business affairs of the paper themselves, as well as the literary; how certain they had felt of selling sixty copies; how Leah had come along with her *Bluebell*, and all the girls had basely deserted *The Chronicle* for the new, blue paper; and how there were still eighteen copies to be sold before Mr. Poppleton could be paid; to say nothing of the fifty papers lying in a brown-paper parcel in Lennie's desk.

The recital was a very touching one, and yet Miss Hammerton found herself resisting a smile every now and then. But their handkerchiefs kept dabbing at their eyes, and they did not notice.

"The nine shillings must certainly be paid," she said, "and at once. I should like to buy those eighteen copies from you, so that will set you right. But we must manage differently next time. I think the two papers must amalgamate. Or *The Chronicle* must come out at the beginning of the month, and *The Bluebell* at the end. I must see this Mr. Poppleton myself. I think you had better come with me one day this week."

"Next time we'll make *The Chronicle* quite different," said Mabel, dolefully. "We know now what the girls like. They don't like solid writing, like the editorial and *Llandilla*; they like to see their names in print, and read about their dresses."

"Now, Mabel, Mabel. You must not let yourself be bitter. *The Bluebell* is a very good little paper—very good indeed. So is *The Chronicle*."

"We'd rather give it up than go in with *The Bluebell*," said Lennie. They would want us to do everything in their way."

"And you would want them to do everything your way?"

“Our paper was out first. *We* thought of it.”

Miss Hammerton saw that this was a serious matter to them, and one not to be lightly treated of.

“I will think it over,” she said, kindly. “We must devise some means of putting *The Chronicle* on its feet again. And now, you had better go downstairs and have your lunch.”

They walked slowly down the staircase, found their baskets, and went out in the playground a little shyly, conscious of their red eyes, although not aware that the school had been looking in on their misery through Miss Hammerton's door. On their way to the fig-trees, a little girl from a lower class ran up to them, and asked: “Can I buy the last number of *The Chronicle*, please?”

Lennie had a copy in her basket—a copy she had carried about till she had given up all hope of selling it. She handed it out, received the little girl's sixpence, and looked at Mab in surprise.

“How funny she should buy it to-day,” she said, in her poor little voice, still husky from her tears.

But when they were seating themselves on the roots of their fig-trees, Jean McCree and Katie Alpine strolled up.

“Have you two copies of the last *Chronicle*?” they asked, in a casual kind of way.

“Why, yes,” said Mab, her voice husky too. “I think we have *two* copies,” bitterly. “Do you want them?”

“Yes, we want to buy them.”

“They are in my desk,” said Lennie; “I'll run up and get them.”

“While you are getting them,” called out Jean, “bring some more; I know a few of the other girls want some.”

Lennie returned with the brown-paper packet, which held fifty copies, and had never been even opened, and while she tore off the covers, Jean and Katie took comprehensive and pitying glances at the huge pile of unsold papers. They said nothing, however—merely paid their sixpences, and went away—and next minute two more girls appeared, with the same question on their lips: “Have you any copies of *The Chronicle*?”

Mab and Lennie were bewildered. How extraordinary that *five* girls should suddenly want to buy the paper—five girls who had been begged to buy it dozens of times before, and always refused! But they had no time to wonder, for from that moment until the school-bell rang, as they sat there under the fig-trees, they were handing out *Chronicles*, and receiving sixpences, as fast as they and the girls could give and take.

At two o'clock, every copy was sold—even the nineteen Miss Hammerton had generously offered to buy.

“What *is* the matter with *The Chronicle*?”

“What *is* the matter with the girls?”

And they sat and stared at each other, and were very nearly bursting into tears again. The bell was ringing, and the great mass of girls was moving slowly, unwillingly, towards the verandah, and they two were alone there under the fig-trees.

“I feel *so* sick,” said Mab, in weak tones.

“Oh, so do I,” said Lennie, her voice equally broken down.

“I can't eat any lunch to-day.”

“I can't eat mine either.”

“What do you say if we go home?”

“I couldn't go up and ask permission.”

“Neither could I. Let us go without asking.”

And in two minutes they were stealing through the gate, and up the street to the tram, and in half an hour they were both in Lennie's bedroom. There they counted up their sixpences, and had a few pleasing tears, and a great many laughs, and presently some tea and bread and butter. And finally, when they had bathed their eyes, and tidied up generally, back they went into town, and up those long, dark flights of stairs they climbed to Mr. Poppleton.

“We've come to pay you all we owe you.”

Oh, that beautiful moment! They saw their worry rushing from them like a huge stone down a mountain, and if the girls who had bought so nobly of the paper (which they had all previously read) could have seen into the hearts of these two, they would have purred with pride at the good deed they had done. It seemed to Mab and Lennie as if their hearts, which had been so tortured, would burst with relief.

Mab poured the money out of an old kid glove, and asked him proudly to count it up.

And what do you think Mr. Poppleton said—Mr. Poppleton, who had figured in their minds as a harpy, a monster, waiting to claw them in his clutches, a giant on his way to haul them off to gaol.

“*I never expected you young ladies to pay me this side of Christmas!*”

Chapter XX Adieu!

The sale of the fifty copies had made *The Chronicle* rich, and Mab and Lennie now were full of plans for the dear thing's welfare. They might get advertisements. They must make their reading matter lighter. They would give up Editorials forever. They could, they would, they must, keep on, and outdo *The Bluebell*.

But all their plans were suddenly broken up.

One Monday Mabel did not come to school. Lennie was lonely, and had a headache, and as soon as school was over she went home with Floss in her twenty-to-four tram.

And when she walked into the dining-room, there was Mabel sitting on the sofa, talking quietly with Mrs. Leighton.

“Mab!”

“Lennie!”

“How nice! I didn't know you were going to be here, Mab.”

“Mabel didn't know herself,” said the Mother. “She came to have a little talk with me before you came home. Then she meant to have a little talk with you, no doubt.”

“Why, what is there to talk about?” asked Lennie.

She was a little pale to-day, and the Mother's heart smote her as she looked at this little eldest daughter of hers.

Mabel did not answer. She was playing with the tassel of a cushion.

“What is there to tell?” Lennie asked again, standing with one hand on the table.

“Tell her, Mabel dear,” said Mrs. Leighton.

“I'm going to Paris,” Mabel blurted out.

Her eyes and Lennie's looked straight into each other's.

“To Paris? What?”

“Aunt Janet and Uncle Seymour are going the week after next, and they have asked Father to let me go with them. And it's all settled. I'm going, next Monday week.”

Lennie stood in the middle of the room and stared. Her eyes never left Mabel's.

The Mother was watching. She saw great drops come into her daughter's eyes, and blur all their brightness. She saw Lennie's mouth go up and down in a queer way.

For a minute the girls gazed at each other in silence.

Then Lennie turned, and walked out of the room.

And Mabel dropped her head into the sofa cushion, and burning tears

flowed into her cushion's dull blue serge. And the Mother had a lump in her throat that she could not swallow.

She sat there, breathing a little quickly, and thinking what a beautiful thing was the love of these little schoolgirls for each other. And she remembered a girl-friend of her youth, dead long years.

Lennie lay on the rug in her bedroom, and sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed. At first she cried quietly; then she began to sob with a little moan. It seemed to comfort her a little to listen to these piteous sounds she was making, but she knew that her heart was broken, it ached horribly; so did her head.

She was a sad little figure, lying there on the floor, and sobbing her heart out because the girl who sat next to her in school was going to Paris.

It was the greatest grief that had ever come into her fourteen years. She felt that she could lie there moaning for ever.

By and by the door opened, and someone came in. The door was closed again, and Mabel threw herself on the rug beside Lennie.

"I don't want to go a *bit*," she sobbed.

Lennie made a queer noise, that was meant for "Yes, you do."

"I don't. I don't want to go a *bit*."

"Yes, you do," again.

They sobbed together, each one in a more subdued key than before. They did not speak again. Their broken voices made them feel ashamed.

Nearly an hour later Mrs. Leighton came gently into the room with a lamp. On the hearthrug lay those two pathetic figures, their heads on their arms. They were both sound asleep.

The mother felt that lump in her throat again. She threw a rug over them, and went quietly away to the kitchen. There she and Floss, and Mary and Brenda, who were all full of sympathy, and had pale pink rims to their eyes, made ready a little tray. They put hot buttered toast on it, and eggs, and honey, and a little brown teapot, and sugar basin and milk jug, and cups and saucers for two. When all was ready the Mother herself carried the tray upstairs to the bedroom on the third storey, and Floss went before her with a candle.

The sound of the cups and saucers, as the Mother placed the tray on Lennie's little writing-table, woke the two poor sleepers.

"I've brought you some tea, dears," said the Mother; "I think it will do you good."

She moved about the room, lighting Lennie's lamp and drawing down the blinds, while the girls came out of the stupor that tears and sleep together had laid on them.

"Mabel must stay here to-night," said the Mother. "I will send word to

Mr. James. You have both slept in this big bed before. Now, come and have some tea, while the toast is hot.”

That night they had their longest talk. They were both sleepless, and their voices only began to flag when the milkman came in the early morning.

There was so much to say and think about, and a fortnight is a short, short time.

“I’ll give up *The Chronicle*,” Lennie said. “I don’t care now what happens to it. I expect it will stop. I think I’ll work for the matriculation next time, and go to the University. Mother would like me to, and I’m *tired* of school.”

“I expect we’ll be away about two years,” said Mabel. “Perhaps three. I may have to go to school in England for a while.”

“How little we thought this day last year that this would happen.”

And they did not remember that “this day last year” they had never seen each other. It seemed to them that they had been friends for ever.

“I’ll write every week,” Mabel said.

“I’ll write *every* week,” Lennie promised.

“Tell me *all* about *everything*.”

“I’ll tell you *everything*; every single thing.”

“Do you remember the day we went to the Gardens instead of going to school?”

“Oh, yes; and do you remember the first night I went to your place, and Aubert brought in those big green apples? And we read all the afternoon and all the evening.”

“And do you remember the day we went for a swim at Manly Beach, and I lost father’s watch?”

“And do you remember the picnic we had to Coogee, when we all rode on the donkeys?”

So they went on through the night.

In the morning nobody woke them. The Mother said they were to be left alone, and they went on sleeping till the clocks were striking twelve.

But the Mother thought of that girl-friend of her youth, and had only gentle words for them when they came downstairs with heavy eyes to lunch. She knew it was the last time for years that they would talk together all night.

When the fortnight was over—and it was one of the short fortnights, with every moment counted and measured, not one of the long ones, when the days go slowly because little happens in them—and when the black Monday had taken Mabel, and her childless Aunt and Uncle away from the city on the harbour out into the great unknown world, Lennie, in her loneliness, turned again to the faithful little sisters and the changeless dolls’

house. She had put them aside of late for Mabel's company, but when she turned to them for comfort, she found them ready for her, waiting to give her all she might ask.

And, later on, came Mabel's letters; but there never came another friend to take her place—never, never.
