



## Chapter Seven

AS ANNA WENT on attending the village school she liked it more and more. She made friends with other girls apart from Vreneli, and especially with Roesli, who sat next to her in class and was a little less sedate than the rest. The lessons were so easy that she was able to shine without any effort, and though Herr Graupe was not a very good teacher of the more conventional subjects he was a remarkable yodeller. Altogether what she liked best about the school was that it was so different from the one she had been to before. She felt sorry for Max who seemed to be doing very much the same things at the Zurich High School as he had done in Berlin.

There was only one thing that bothered her. She

## Chapter Seven

missed playing with boys. In Berlin she and Max had mostly played with a mixed group of both boys and girls and it had been the same at school. Here the girls' endless hopscotch began to bore her and sometimes in break she looked longingly at the more exciting games and acrobatics of the boys.

One day there was no one even playing hopscotch. The boys were turning cartwheels and all the girls were sitting demurely watching them out of the corner of their eyes. Even Roesli, who had cut her knee, was sitting with the rest. Vreneli was particularly interested because the big red-haired boy was trying to turn cartwheels and the others were trying to teach him, but he kept flopping over sideways.

'Would you like to play hopscotch?' Anna asked her, but Vreneli shook her head, absorbed. It really was too silly, especially as Anna loved turning cartwheels herself – and it wasn't as though the red-haired boy was any good at it.

Suddenly she could stand it no longer and without thinking what she was doing she got up from her seat among the girls and walked over to the boys.

'Look,' she said to the red-haired boy, 'you've got to keep your legs straight like this' – and she turned a cartwheel to show him. All the other boys stopped



turning cartwheels and stood back, grinning. The red-haired boy hesitated.

'It's quite easy,' said Anna. 'You could do it if you'd only remember about your legs.'

The red-haired boy still seemed undecided, but the other boys shouted, 'Go on - try!' So he tried again and managed a little better. Anna showed him again, and this time he suddenly got the idea and turned a perfect cartwheel just as the bell went for the end of break.

Anna walked back to her own group and all the boys watched and grinned but the girls seemed mostly to be looking elsewhere. Vreneli looked frankly cross and only Roesli gave her a quick smile.

After break it was history and Herr Graupe decided to tell them about the cavemen. They had lived millions of years ago, he said. They killed wild animals and ate them and made their fur into clothes. Then they learned to light fires and make simple tools and gradually became civilised. This was progress, said Herr Graupe, and one way it was brought about was by pedlars who called at the cavemen's caves with useful objects for barter.

'What sort of useful objects?' asked one of the boys. Herr Graupe peered indignantly over his beard. All sorts of things would be useful to a caveman, he said.

Things like beads, and coloured wools, and safety pins to fasten their furs together. Anna was very surprised to hear about the pedlars and the safety pins. She longed to ask Herr Graupe whether he was really sure about them but thought perhaps it would be wiser not to. Anyway the bell went before she had the chance.

She was still thinking about the cavemen so much on the way home to lunch that she and Vreneli had walked nearly halfway before she realised that Vreneli was not speaking to her.

'What's the matter, Vreneli?' she asked.

Vreneli tossed her thin plaits and said nothing.

'What is it?' asked Anna again.

Vreneli would not look at her.

'You know!' she said. 'You know perfectly well!'

'No, I don't,' said Anna.

'You do!' said Vreneli.

'No, honestly I don't!' said Anna. 'Please tell me.'

But Vreneli wouldn't. She walked the rest of the way home without giving Anna a single glance, her nose in the air and her eyes fixed on some distant point. Only when they had reached the inn and were about to separate, did she look at her briefly, and Anna was surprised to see that she was not only angry but nearly in tears.



'Anyway,' Vreneli shouted over her shoulders as she ran off, 'anyway, we all saw your knickers!'

During lunch with Mama and Papa Anna was so quiet that Mama noticed it.

'Anything bother you at school?' she asked.

Anna considered. There were two things which had bothered her. One was Vreneli's extraordinary behaviour and the other was Herr Graupe's account of the cavemen. She decided that the business about Vreneli was too complicated to explain and said instead, 'Mama, did the cavemen really pin their furs together with safety pins?' This produced such a flood of laughter, questions and explanations that they lasted until the end of lunch, and then it was time to go back to school. Vreneli had already left and Anna, feeling a little lonely, went on her own.

The afternoon lesson was singing again with a lot of yodelling which Anna enjoyed, and when it was over she suddenly found the red-haired boy standing in front of her.

'Hello, Anna!' he said boldly. Some of his friends who were with him laughed, and before Anna could answer they had all turned on their heel and marched out of the classroom.

'Why did he say that?' asked Anna.

Roesli smiled. 'I think you're going to have an escort,' she said and added, 'Poor Vreneli!'

Anna would have liked to ask her what she meant, but the mention of Vreneli reminded her that she must be quick if she did not want to walk home alone. So she said, 'See you tomorrow,' and ran.

There was no sign of Vreneli in the playground. Anna waited for a while, in case she might be in the cloakroom, but she did not appear. The only people in the playground were the red-haired boy and his friends, who also seemed to be waiting for someone. Vreneli must have rushed off early specially to avoid her. Anna went on hoping a little longer, but at last she had to admit to herself that it was no use and set off on her own. The red-haired boy and his friends decided to leave at exactly the same time.

It was less than ten minutes' walk back to the Gasthof Zwirn and Anna knew the way well. Outside the school gates she turned right and walked down the road. After a few moments she noticed that the red-haired boy and his friends had also turned right outside the school. The road led to a steep path covered in gravel which joined another road and this in turn, after some twists and turns, led to the inn.

It was while Anna was walking down the gravel path



that she first began to wonder whether everything was as it should be. The gravel was thick and very loose and her feet made a loud crunching sound at every step. Presently she became aware of similar, more muffled crunchings behind her. She listened to them for a few moments, then glanced over her shoulder. It was the red-haired boy and his friends again. Their shoes were dangling from their hands and they were trudging through the gravel in their bare feet, apparently untroubled by the sharpness of the stones. Even Anna's brief glance had been enough to show her that they were all watching her.

She walked more quickly and the steps behind her quickened also. Then a little stone bounced off the gravel to one side of her. While she was still wondering where it had come from another little stone hit her leg. She turned round sharply and was just in time to see the red-haired boy pick up a bit of gravel and throw it at her.

'What are you doing?' she shouted. 'Stop it!' But he just grinned and threw another bit. Then his friends began to throw some too. Most of it missed her and any stones that did hit her were too small to hurt, but it was horrid just the same.

Then she saw a small bandy-legged boy hardly bigger than herself pick up a whole handful of gravel.

'Don't you dare throw that at me!' she shouted so fiercely that the bandy-legged boy automatically took a step backwards. He threw the gravel in her direction but deliberately aimed short. Anna glared at him. The boys stood staring back at her.

Suddenly the red-haired boy took a step forward and shouted something. The others took it up in a sort of chant. 'An-na! An-na!' they chanted. Then the red-haired boy threw another bit of gravel and hit her squarely on the shoulder. It was too much. She turned and fled.

Down the path, bits of gravel bouncing all round her, peppering her back, her legs. An-na! An-na! They were coming after her. Her feet slipped and slithered on the stones. If only she could get to the road at least they wouldn't be able to throw gravel at her. And there it was! Lovely smooth, hard asphalt under her feet. An-na! An-na! They were gaining ground. Now they were no longer stopping to pick up gravel they were coming on faster.

Suddenly a large object hurled past her. A shoe! They were throwing their shoes at her! At least they'd have to stop to pick them up. She rounded a bend and could see the Gasthof Zwirn at the end of the road. The last bit was downhill and she almost threw herself down the slope as with one final effort she reached the courtyard of the inn.



'An-na! An-na!' Boys right behind her, shoes raining all round . . . And there, like a miracle, like an avenging angel, was Mama! She shot out of the inn like a torpedo. She grabbed the red-haired boy and slapped him. She hit another one with his own shoe. She flung herself into the group and scattered them. All the time she was shouting, 'Why are you doing this? What's the matter with you?' That was what Anna wanted to know too.

Then she saw that Mama had got hold of the bandy-legged boy and was shaking him. All the rest had fled.

'Why did you chase her?' Mama was asking. 'Why did you all throw things at her? What had she done?'

The bandy-legged boy scowled and wouldn't say.

'I won't let you go!' said Mama. 'I won't let you go until you tell me why you did it!'

The bandy-legged boy looked hopelessly at Mama. Then he blushed and mumbled something.

'What?' said Mama.

Suddenly the bandy-legged boy grew desperate.

'Because we love her!' he shouted at the top of his voice. 'We did it because we love her!'

Mama was so surprised that she let go of him and he shot away from her, across the courtyard and away down the road. 'Because they love you?' said Mama to

Anna. Neither of them could understand it. But when, later, they consulted Max he did not seem very surprised.

'It's what they do here,' he said. 'When they're in love with anyone they throw things at them.'

'But, good heavens, there were six of them!' said Mama. 'Surely there must be other ways for them to express their love!'

Max shrugged. 'It's what they do,' he said and added, 'Really Anna should feel honoured.'

A few days later Anna saw him in the village, throwing unripe apples at Roesli.

Max was very adaptable.

Anna was not too sure about going back to school next day. 'Suppose they're still in love with me today?' she said. 'I don't want to have more things thrown at me.'

But she need not have worried. The boys had been so terrified by Mama that none of them dared so much as look at her. Even the red-haired boy kept his eyes carefully averted. So Vreneli forgave her and they were friends as before. Anna even managed to persuade her to try one cartwheel, secretly in a corner at the back of the inn. But in public, at school, they both stuck strictly to hopscotch.