



The New House at the Chalet School

Elinor M. Brent-Dyer

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Joey Bettany's last term at the Chalet School proves to be an unforgettable one. First, there is the opening of the new house and a bitter quarrel with its new matron.

Then the naughty Middles play a midnight hoax that backfires. There's a wild storm and a glorious picnic party before the term finally ends with an hilarious concert given by the newly formed and quite unmusical St. Clare's Orchestra.

The New House at the Chalet School Details

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From Reader Review The New House at the Chalet School for online ebook

Sally says

I LOVE those school stories where suddenly there's a dreadful new Matron!

Chris says

Head Girl Jo Bettany returns to the Chalet School for the summer term, her last one, only to find she is based at a newly built annexe called St Clare's. It will prove a momentous term for her, involving victimisation but also strengthened friendships, near death and hilarious goings-on, midnight escapades and chance encounters.

Boarding schools have long been a staple of children's fiction, from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to the Harry Potter books, and enthralled authors such as Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens and Enid Blyton, to name writers from just the British canon. Elinor Brent-Dyer's girls school was different: set up first in the Austrian Tyrol in the 1930s, it moved first to Guernsey and then to Herefordshire to escape the Nazis, next to Wales and then finally Switzerland in the 1950s.

Jo, the main focus of this particular title, happens to be the sister of the founder of this multinational establishment, but she will still have had to earn her place as Head Girl; no doubt this has been recounted in previous volumes, this being number 12 of some sixty volumes and published in 1935, three years before Hitler's *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938. There is, however, no hint of such clouds on the horizon in these pages.

As a newcomer to the series, I was initially a tad confused in trying to immerse myself into this rarified world. First was the profusion of names, at least eighty (I wrote them all down), a large number of which get mentioned in the first three or four chapters. Teachers, matrons, parents, family members, Middle School girls, Senior Girls, prefects and sub-prefects, even the odd local -- they all are there, with no real clue as to whether they will even make an appearance or take a significant part in the proceedings. But it was fun trying to picture them and work out their relationships.

Secondly, it wasn't easy at first to orientate oneself as, apart from Innsbruck, pretty much all the locations -- Tiernsee, Briesau and so on -- are fictional. A little research however reveals that Tiernsee is based on Achensee and Briesau on Pertisau near Jenbach in the Tyrol. Of course it's not essential to the enjoyment of the story to know these things but as the action does occasionally stray further afield it helps in establishing mental scenarios.

Jo is part of a quartet of friends who go back years: as Marie von Eschenau looks around at the others at the very end of the book she sees

Jo, tall and dark, and with that something about her that told of a great gift; Simone [Lecoutier], little, and dark, and keen; Frieda [Mensch], pretty as a picture in her white frock, with the coronal of plaits swung round her head. "Oh," she said, her voice quivering with the intensity of her feelings, "we have had beautiful schooldays here, we four. And we have had a beautiful friendship. Let us try to keep it always like his, even though other things come to us!"

There's then a valedictory note to this instalment in the series when the four aver that "Whatever comes to us,

nothing can alter our friendship," and that all their schooldays have been happy, with the girls being so much closer during the last term. But all this is but a rounding off, a confirmation of school supposedly being the best days of your life, after all the enmities, escapades and encounters that we've learnt about and that are to be expected in school stories.

What I found attractive was the sense of an international community, with boarders hailing from all over Europe (not just western Europe but also Hungary, for example) and North America. The Chalet School is also an ideal society: close but not closed off from the world, hierarchical yet governed by consent and common sense, liberal but never lax, and intent on preserving a balance between rights and responsibilities. And though many of the girls see their future roles solely as wives and mothers (maybe after a stint as teachers) these are young women brought up to think, to enquire, to innovate and to be good citizens.

Even after its slow start it's testimony to how much I enjoyed this tale that I'd certainly contemplate reading *at least* another title in the series; and maybe even one or two more! I can see the attraction: there is a good-humoured quality to both students and teachers that not only makes the reader feel good but also suggests these are *nice* girls whom you'd be pleased to meet. As a retired teacher I'd have been delighted to have more of these types of students in my classes.

Sue says

Eleventh in the lengthy Chalet School series, a book I had not read for at least twelve years, maybe more. It features Jo Bettany's last term at the Chalet School, where she is Head Girl. She and her four closest friends are shocked to find themselves moving to a new chalet as the most senior prefects. A new matron works there, who does not understand how the school works, and clashes with Jo. Despite being the abridged version, this was one of the better Chalet School books, with interesting sub-plots, and some good characterisation.

Donna Boulton says

Another great book. Love the line "Great caesar's bath mat", I mean where does that come from!! Hilarious antics as usual, and another dodgy matron. Rather subdued ending, with it being Jo's last days at school.

Readsandeats says

I was back in my childhood and really enjoyed the experience.

This book covers the last term of Jo, Simone, Frieda and Marie at the Chalet School and how the changes of the school represent the changes that will happen to the girls when they leave the school. There was a repetition of an idea from the 3rd book in the series but it did not detract from the story as a whole.

I always enjoy the descriptions of the areas of Austria that the school is based in, and the areas the girls visit on excursions. The food they have on their outings sound so good, it makes you wish you were there.

I would recommend this whole series to anyone.

Shawne says

Always one of my favourite Chalet School books - ahhh, for the good old days in the Tiernsee, when Jo Bettany was a mere schoolgirl and not the mother of 5,000 children - The New House holds up rather well through the years. Jo's reluctance to grow up and become an adult forms the larger story arc connecting the mostly episodic boarding school hijinks that serve as the basis for most of Elinor M Brent-Dyer's series, and in this instance, is particularly poignant as it really does mark the end of an era. Yes, Jo returns very quickly in the next novel, but it will never be the same again. Here, you see the original Quartet (Jo, Marie, Frieda and Simone) transferred to St Clare's, the new House for the middles as the Chalet School expands its grounds, missing the old school and settling down to new responsibilities, new mischief, and a new enemy in the form of the ridiculously self-important Matron Besly.

There might be occasions when Jo's sainthood (as declared unofficially by Brent-Dyer) comes rather too strongly to the fore; certainly the new Matron is not entirely blameless for the way in which she takes umbrage with Jo. But, at this point, the character remains charming rather than annoying, and it is rare in a series of books for schoolgirls that you get to witness the evolution of a main character from childhood through to the cusp of adulthood, as you do Jo (and in fact, many of her contemporaries).

As a devoted fan, there is nothing quite like reading about the middles' midnight exploit on the St Clares' rooftop, or of the secret that Cornelia and Evadne decide to put into motion to make their house special... Brent-Dyer even harks back to the earliest of the books in her series, as she allows the girls trips back to see the Tzigane and to again climb the Mondscheinspitze as a weekend treat.

Muriel McIvor says

You just cannot beat Chalet School series for goodhearted moral wholesomeness delivered to the reader in a bygone English manner. This is Jo last term and definitely feels like the end of an era. Sad and exciting coming of age scenario. Cannot wait to see what happens in the not so distant future.

Deborah says

This book is complicated for me because my copy has lost two pages, the first one covering the description of the new house, the second when Jo's toothache starts. Who does that? Who tears two random pages out of a book? They don't know that it will eventually be owned by somebody who has already read it enough times that she can fill in the gaps herself, so it's just cruel.

It's another book packed with incidents which get referred to many times later in the series: who can forget Bidy's stories, the concert, Baby Voodoo, the arrival of Margot, or the missing fruit? I'm entirely with middles on the subject of Matron Besly - she *does* spoil Jo's last term and I can't understand why she was appointed in the first place. But there's enough else going on that this final term isn't actually *ruined*, and it was always going to be difficult for Jo just by virtue of being her last one.

What doesn't make sense is what Jo is going to do next. She's not going to be Elisaveta's maid any more, because Madge needs her to help with the babies. Except Madge *doesn't* need her to help with the babies,

because she has an excellent nurse and is engaging a governess *as well*. So Jo is really bothered about not really having anything to do when she leaves school. Bonkers. Why not go to Elisaveta then?

Well, because Jo is much too strong a character to be shoved over to Belsornia, that's why; and there's also a tiny hint here that EBD has figured out who she can marry. But mostly this book is all about schoolgirls being schoolgirls, and EBD portrays this brilliantly. Joey's school career definitely ends on a high, and re-reading them now I can see why the books covering her period as head-girl were the ones I first collected in hardback.

Sian Taylor says

lovely

Sarah Adamson says

This is a really enjoyable book - the 11th in the series. This features Joey and co moving to the new house - the Middles house. Adventures with a new and difficult matron, a jazz band and the usual exploratory adventures around the neighborhood!

Carolynne says

The New House is St. Clare's, where Jo and her pals Frieda, Marie, and the insufferable Simone are assigned as prefects to the middles who reside there. The new officious Matron Besley makes things difficult for the prefects during their last year at the Chalet School. Jo, who finally has to face beginning to grow up, was more interesting as a schoolgirl than as a grown up mother of three, four, five--actually 11 children. A bittersweet entry in the series.

Vanessa Collier says

Usually award a standard 3 to Chalet books because, much as I love them, they just do the job they set out to do. But this is one of my favourites, basically because it handles the theme of growing up so sensitively

Sarah says

Jo's last term has finally arrived - as has a new matron who takes an almost instant dislike to her and to the established rules of the school (honestly, the Chalet School does have terrible trouble finding junior matrons who last more than a term). It's all change in the school, as the older girls are split between two houses, and as a result Jo, Simone, Frieda and Marie spend their final term in the new house, as resident prefects in

charge of the Middles, rather than in the original Chalet.

Again, this is a Chalet School book in which no one has a direct brush with death (despite the best efforts of Ilonka et al. to poison Matron Besley and, later, Anne Seymour almost falling down a rockface into a river), but there are plenty of adventures - Jo and Frieda bump into Jem's estranged sister and her children in Innsbruck, and there are, of course, a number of run-ins with the new Matron. And it goes without saying that the Middles get up to their usual levels of mischief, including the revival of the Society for the Suppression of Matron (which nearly leads to some very serious consequences - see above comment re poisoning), and the creation of the St Clare's Orchestra, which consists of a random selection of jazz instruments which they (attempt to) teach themselves to play, and the inaugural concert of which provides an amusing final scene for the book.

Jo's development over the last three books has been well done. At the start of her year as Head Girl she was trying her best to deny that she was growing up and heading towards the end of her schooldays; by the end of this book she has accepted her inevitable fate and is even growing her hair! There is a nice reflection towards the end of the book on the difference between Jo's anticipated future and that of her contemporaries - Simone and Marie have clear plans for the next few years, but Jo doesn't, unless you count Simone's assumption that she'll work on her singing and write a book or three.

This really does feel like the end of an era. I don't know how I feel about the Chalet School without Jo as a pupil - after 11 or 12 books (depending on how you count them) with her at the centre of events, it's odd to think of her not being there (even though I know that this isn't the last we'll see of her, because I do remember that much from my long-ago first reading of the series).

Celia says

The 11th book is Jo's last term at school, and she finds that she and the rest of the quartet are to move into the new chalet that has been built, along with the middle school. To make up for the change (which Jo is cranky about, of course) she and the other prefects have their own private rooms.

They have a new Matron in the new chalet, who tries to institute new rules, and plenty of pranks are played on her. The Matron ends up holding a grudge against Jo, a cardinal sin in the Chalet world.

On a trip to Innsbruck, Jo & Frieda discover a relative of Dr Jem's (and Jem acts like a dick when he gets the news), the Middles start an orchestra (one of the funniest moments in the book) and then Marie has some news which she confides in her friends - awww. Jo, for once, refrains from her "growing up sucks" tirade.
