

Where There  
is a Will  
There is a Way

Lucy Maud Montgomery  
1934

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# Where There is a Will There is a Way

Lucy Maud Montgomery

First published 1934

Gordon heard the key click in the lock. He sprang to the door.

“Aunt Mary—Aunt Mary!” he called.

There was no answer—nothing save the sound of his aunt’s heavy boots clattering down the back stairs.

Gordon sat down on a broken-backed chair and looked grim. He knew, as he expressed it, what he was up against. Aunt Mary had evidently determined that he should not take part in the debate. And he had promised Mr. Leckie that he would be there without fail.

He felt no particular indignation against Aunt Mary. It was just what he might have expected, and he should have been on his guard. Anyway, he had no time or energy to waste in being angry. The first thing to do was to find a way to escape and keep his promise. Nevertheless, he felt that Aunt Mary had not treated him fairly. She had never forbidden him to take part in the debate, although she let it be seen plainly that she thought it all rank foolishness. And now, when he had run down the hall to the little box-room to look for a certain book, she had snatched the chance to lock him in. Aunt Mary did things like that.

Gordon went to the little square window and looked out into the bleak November night. The ancient creeper, with stems as thick as his arm, wandered over the side of the house. Nobody had ever tried to climb down it before, but there had to be a first time for everything. Gordon thought he might risk it. But the clothes problem was more serious. He had nothing on but his underclothes and his socks. Now it was manifestly out of the question to appear on the auditorium platform of the high school in such a costume, even if one could walk four miles on a cold night in it. To be sure, he might borrow something from the Ewarts. But the Ewarts were no friends of Aunt Mary’s, and Gordon would not ask favours of them on that account.

Aunt Mary Holland was what was known locally as a “character.” She was a gaunt woman of sixty-five, who ran her own little farm with Gordon’s assistance, and seemed to be on bad terms with all her neighbours. She had “raised” Gordon’s father and, after his death and his wife’s death, she had “raised” Gordon. She was the only relative he had and, in spite of her queer ways and her grimness, he was rather fond of her. She did not seem to be at all fond of him, and he knew exactly what opinion she had of his father. She had sent him to the public school until he was fourteen, and these past three years she had let him go to the high school in Exeter. But she gave him to understand that would be all. No college nonsense for her.

“If you’d help me to get a start, Aunt Mary,” said Gordon, “I’d be able to work my own way through.”

“Your father was always going to do wonderful things,” said Aunt Mary. “Only, somehow, he never did ’em. Mark Abbey will want a clerk in his dry-goods store next summer. I think that’s about your measure. You’ll go there when the year ends.”

Gordon had not made many friends at the high school. Aunt Mary disapproved of all amusements and sports, and he would not anger her by going in for them. But his teachers liked the quiet, studious lad, and Mr. Leckie, the principal, had taken a special interest in him ever since he had found out that Gordon had the makings of a good debater. When the Croyden High School had challenged the Exeter school to a debate Gordon was chosen to open it. He had worked hard over his speech and his “points,” and he knew Mr. Leckie depended on him to win the debate.

“I’ve got to be there,” said Gordon.

The only clothes in the box-room were a dark green serge dress of very ancient vintage and an old shabby “duster” hanging on the wall. Gordon put on the dress. He was tall and Aunt Mary was short, so that the dress came no further than his knees. The duster covered it very well and, being longer, came well below the tops of his socks. Gordon found a pair of his own discarded boots in a box. They were worn and unpolished, but no better were to be had. Perhaps if he could get to Exeter in time he might call at Tom Purdee’s, explain his predicament, and borrow something decent. Tom was the only high-school boy Gordon knew at all well.

“And now,” said Gordon, “the best way to get there is to start.”

The window went up stiffly. The creeper-stems were tough, and Gordon soon found himself on the ground. The kitchen light burned, so there was no use in thinking of trying to slip into the house and get some clothes. Besides, he had very little time. Only an hour—and it would take him all that to walk into Exeter. It was four miles by the road.

Then Gordon thought of the winter short-cut over the fields and across the river. It was used only when the river was frozen. But if he could cross on one of the stringers of the old dismantled bridge, he could save fifteen minutes, and fifteen minutes would allow him to call at Tom’s. Nobody had ever crossed on the stringer that he knew of, but he thought it could be done. It would, of course, be more difficult at night, but there was a moon.

When he arrived at the river his grit almost failed him. Suppose he fell off! There was every chance that he would. But to go all the way back and around by the road meant that he would be half an hour late.

Gordon wrapped his draperies closely around him and crossed on the right-hand stringer. Fortunately the night was calm. Twice he almost slipped off. There was a dew of perspiration on his face when he reached the other side.

“I don’t believe I’d want to do that again,” he said, as he sprang ashore.

He had saved half an hour. With luck he could get to Exeter in time to hunt up Tom Purdee and borrow a pair of trousers.

As he emerged from the woods beyond the river and climbed the fence to the highway he saw something black and furry stretched by the roadside. It was a dog that whined as Gordon bent over it. The poor beast had something wrong with its leg—probably broken by some passing car.

Gordon sighed. But it never occurred to him that he could leave the poor creature there to suffer. He picked it up carefully in his arms and started on again. He knew he could not get to Tom’s now. He must take the dog to old Doctor Vernon, the veterinary, who lived at the other end of the town. When this was done and the kindly old man had promised to do his best for the dog, it was ten minutes past eight by the town clock and the debate was to have begun at eight. It took Gordon ten more minutes to reach the school. He found the rather excitable Mr. Leckie half frantic.

“What on earth kept you, Gordon? Everybody is waiting.”

“I was unfortunately delayed,” said Gordon calmly.

“Well, you are here at last, thank goodness. Hurry up and get your coat off and get in.”

“I think I’ll keep my coat on,” said Gordon, moving along.

Mr. Leckie stared. Then shrugged his shoulders and started after Gordon resignedly. The fellow was as queer as his old great-aunt. But he had brains and he could debate and Mr. Leckie expected him to wipe up the floor with the Croyden team. Not that Mr. Leckie, even in thought, used such an expression, but that was the gist of it.

Gordon knew what sort of a figure he cut on the platform in that shabby old duster and those terrible shoes. He knew his fellow debaters were ashamed of him, and he saw the derision and contempt in the eyes of the Croyden boys. They considered the debate as good as won.

Well, he would show them.

Nevertheless, when he stood up, he had a few moments of panic. He could think of nothing but the old green dress under the duster. It seemed as if everybody could see it. Mr. Leckie fairly groaned with impatience. Suppose the fellow flunked at this last moment! That shabby old duster! Hadn’t the boy a decent overcoat? But the face above the frayed collar was flushed and handsome and strong-jawed, with a mane of black hair over it. If he would only open his mouth!

Just then Gordon saw Aunt Mary at the back of the auditorium. What ever had

brought her there? She despised such goings-on. Yet there she sat, in a ridiculous old bonnet and an equally ridiculous old velvet mantle. And yet, although Aunt Mary always wore ridiculous things, she never looked ridiculous. Her face was too strong and vigorous for that.

Well, he was not going to fail before Aunt Mary. Gordon got his mouth open at last.

They talk of that debate yet. At least, Exeter people do. The Croyden folks don't. They hadn't the ghost of a chance when Gordon got going. He forgot his serge dress and the duster and the hole in the toe of his boot. And everybody else forgot them—or what they could see of them. Such a speech had never been made in Exeter High before.

"I knew you could do something, but I didn't know you could do *that*," said Mr. Leckie, as he wrung Gordon's hand at the close.

Aunt Mary pushed up through the crowd. "I've got the horse and the buckboard here," she said curtly, "if you want to drive home."

They drove home in absolute silence. Gordon wondered if Aunt Mary were very angry. One could never tell. When he had put away the horse and gone in he found her standing in the kitchen.

"Well, you kept your promise," said Aunt Mary. "I didn't think you had it in you. Your father never kept a promise—*that* I know to my cost. And he sat down and wept over every little difficulty. As for pride—he'd never have gone to Exeter in my old serge dress and that duster. When I found you'd got out—I was out by the duck-house when you came sprawling down the vines—I hitched up and started for Exeter. I thought maybe you'd something worth saying since you were so set on saying it. How come I didn't overtake you on the road?"

"I went by the old river road."

"The old river road? But the ice hasn't made yet."

"I crossed on a stringer of the old bridge."

Aunt Mary stared at him. "My stars, think of that! You crossed on a stringer! Why, weren't you scared?"

"Of course," said Gordon.

Aunt Mary smiled in her usual grim fashion. "If you'd said you weren't frightened I'd have known you for a liar. But to be scared *and* cross it! Well, you'd be wasted behind a counter. I'll sell that piece of pine wood. It'll give you a start—and I ain't afraid any longer that you wouldn't keep on. No, the only trouble'd be to stop you."

[The end of *Where There is a Will There is a Way* by L. M. (Lucy Maud)]

Montgomery]