BY HONOUR BOUND

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A SCHOOL STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

AUTHOR OF
"DIANA CARRIES ON," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

WHAT DOROTHY SAW

Stepping out of the train in the wake of Tom, Dorothy was at once caught in the crowd on Paddington arrival platform. She was pushed and squeezed and buffeted, but her eyes were shining, and her face was all smiles, for she felt that she was seeing life at last.

"Whew! Some crowd, isn't it?" panted Tom, as a fat man laden with a great bundle of rugs and golf clubs barged into him from behind, while a lady carrying a yelling infant charged at him from the side, and catching him unawares, sent him lurching against Dorothy.

She was sturdy, and stood up to the impact without disaster, only saying in a breathless fashion, "Oh, Tom, what a lot of people! Where do you expect they all come from?"

"Can't say. You had better ask 'em," Tom chuckled, as he sprang for the nearest taxi, and secured it too, although a ferocious looking man, with brown whiskers like a doormat, was calling out that he wanted that particular vehicle.

Dorothy meanwhile secured a porter, and extricating Tom's luggage and her own from the pile on the platform, the things were bundled into the taxi; she and Tom tumbled in after them, and they were moving away from the platform before the angry person with doormat whiskers had done making remarks about them.

"That is what I call a good get-away," Tom sighed with satisfaction, lolling at ease in his corner. "You will have time to buy your finery now, without any danger of our missing the train."

"Bless you, I should have taken the time in any case, whether we lost the train or not," rejoined Dorothy calmly. Then she asked, with a twinkle in her eye, "Are you coming to help me choose the frock?"

"Not me; what should I be likely to know about a girl's duds?" and Tom looked as superior as he felt.

Dorothy leant back laughing. “Sometimes you talk as if you know a lot,” she said mischievously. “Do you remember Brenda Gomme and the marigold satin?”

Tom grinned, but stuck to it that he had not been so far wrong in calling the thing marigold, seeing that it was yellow, and marigolds were yellow.

“Roses are red—sometimes,” she answered crisply; “for all that we do not call all red things rose colour. Hullo! is this Victoria already? See, Tom, we will cloakroom everything we’ve got, and then we shall be able to enjoy ourselves.”

When this was accomplished, and the taxi paid, the two plunged into the busy streets outside Victoria, walking briskly along, and stopping occasionally to ask the way to the great multiple shop to which they were bound.

“There it is! Look, Tom!” There was actual rapture in Dorothy’s tone as she pranced along, waving her hand excitedly in the direction of the big plate-glass windows of Messrs. Sharman and Song.

At the door of the lift she paused to beg Tom to come with her; but he, his attention caught by a window filled with football requisites, was already engrossed, and turned a deaf ear to her pleading.

Dorothy was shot up in the lift to the next floor, and was at once thrilled and half-awed by the splendid vista of showrooms stretching away before her enchanted gaze. Then a saleswoman took her in hand, and she plunged at once into the business of buying a little frock for evening wear, with the tip kind old Aunt Louisa had given to her.

The frocks displayed were too grown-up and elaborate for a schoolgirl. Dorothy knew what she wanted, and was not going to be satisfied until she got it. The saleswoman went off in search of something more simple, and for the moment Dorothy was left alone staring into the long looking-glass, not seeing her own reflection, but watching the people moving about the showroom singly and in groups: it was so early in the day that there were no crowds.

She saw a girl detach herself from a group of people lower down the room, and wander in and out in an aimless fashion between the showcases. Suddenly the girl halted by a table piled with pretty and costly jumpers. Stooping over them for a moment she swiftly slid one out of sight under her coat, and with a leisurely step turned back past a big case to join her party.

She swiftly slid a jumper under her coat

Dorothy gave a little gasp of dismay. It had been so quickly done that at first she did not realize she had been watching a very neat piece of shoplifting. Then she sprang forward to meet the saleswoman, who was coming towards her with an armful of frocks. She was going to denounce that girl who was a thief, she was just opening her lips to cry out that a jumper had been stolen, she looked round to see where the girl was, but the light-fingered one had gone—vanished as completely as if she had never

been—and Dorothy was struck dumb. If the girl had escaped out of the room, of what use to accuse her? Even if she were still in the building she might easily have passed the stolen garment on to some one else. Then it would be her word against Dorothy's accusation. There would be an awful fuss, her journey would be delayed Tom would be furious, and——

"I think you will like these better, Moddom," the voice of the saleswoman cut into Dorothy's agitated thinking.

She hesitated, and was lost. She could not make a disturbance by telling what she had seen—she simply could not.

All the time she was choosing her frock she felt like a thief herself. Half her pleasure in her purchase vanished, and she was chilled as if the sun had gone behind a cloud, leaving the day drear and cold.

In spite of this the garment was as satisfactory as it could be, and the price was so reasonable that there was a margin left over for shoes and stockings to wear with the frock. Oh, life was not such a tragedy after all, and Dorothy hugged her parcel with joy as she went down in the lift to join Tom, who was still absorbed by the window filled with football things.

"Did you buy up the shop?" he asked, as they went off briskly in search of lunch.

"Why, no; it would have needed a pretty long purse to do that," she said with a laugh; and then she burst into the story of the shoplifting she had seen, asking Tom what he would have done if he had been in her place.

"Yelled out, 'Stop thief!' and have been pretty quick about it too," he answered with decision, as they settled down at a corner table in a quiet little restaurant for lunch.

"Oh, I could not!" There was real distress in Dorothy's tone. "The girl was so nice to look at, and she was well-dressed too. Oh, Tom, how could she have stooped to such meanness?"

"Women are mostly like that." Tom wagged his head with a superior air as he spoke. "It is very few women who have any sense of honour; I should say it is peculiar to the sex. When boys and girls have games together the girls always cheat, and expect the boys to sit down under it. It is the same in the mixed schools; the girls expect to get by thieving what the boys have to work hard for. When they are older, and ought to know better, it is still the same; they expect to have what they want, and if they can't get it by fair means, why, they get it by foul. They don't care so long as they get it."

Dorothy stared at him for a moment as if amazed at his outburst; then she laughed merrily, and told him he was a miserable old cynic, who ought to be shut up in a home for men only, and be compelled to cook his own food and darn his own socks to the end of the chapter.

"Well, in that case I shouldn't be going back to school to-day, with the prospect of being invited over to the girls' house every fortnight or so during the term—rather jolly that would be." Tom winked at his sister as he spoke, and then they laughed together.

"I should feel just awful at the prospect of Compton Schools if you were not going to be there too," she said with a little catch of her breath; and then she cried out that they must hurry, or they would certainly be late for the train.

It was a scramble to get their things out of the cloakroom, to get on to the platform, and to find a place in the Ilkestone train. At first they had to stand in the corridor, then a voice from farther along the corridor called to them "Tom Sedgewick, there is room for one here Is that your sister? Bring her along."

"Some of our crowd are down there; come along and be introduced," said Tom, catching Dorothy by the hand and hurrying her forward. "It is Hazel Dring, and Margaret Prime is with her. They are pals—if you see one, you may be sure the other is not far off."

Hazel Dring was a tall girl with fair hair and a very nice smile. Margaret Prime was smaller, a quiet girl with a rather shrinking manner, as if she was afraid of being snubbed, Both of them greeted Dorothy in the friendliest fashion. They made room for her to sit with them, although they were already crowded; and they were so kind that she had to be glad she had met them on the train, although secretly she would have chosen to be alone with Tom.

"You are not a scholarship girl, are you?" asked Hazel. "You look nearly grown up."

"I am not clever enough for a scholarship girl," Dorothy answered with a little sigh; "Tom has the brains in our family. I am seventeen, and I am to have one year at the Compton Schools."

"Just long enough to win the Lamb Bursary," cried Hazel eagerly. "I expect you will be in the Sixth, you are so big; and if you are, you will be eligible for the Mutton Bone."

“The Mutton Bone!” Dorothy looked puzzled, even frowning, as was her wont when perplexed.

Margaret laughed, then answered for Hazel. “That is what we call the Lamb Bursary—a term of affection, mind you. We would not cry it down for worlds; it is the top strawberry in the basket of the Compton Schools, and there are a lot of us going to have a try for it this year.”

“Oh yes, I know the Lamb Bursary is a prize worth having,” said Dorothy. “Tom has talked about it, and groaned a lot because there was not an equal gift for the boys. But I don’t suppose I should have much chance for it as I am not at all clever.”

“Oh, that does not matter so much if you are anything of a sticker at work,” said Hazel; “the Lamb Bursary goes to the best all-round scholar of the year. You might be very brilliant in some subjects, but if you were a duffer at others you would not stand a chance. For instance, you might stand very high in mathematics, you might be a prodigy in chemistry, but if you had not decent marks for languages, history, and music you would be left, for the judging is on the averages of all the subjects. It is really a very good way, as it gives quite an ordinary girl a chance.”

“What do you mean by judging on the averages?” asked Dorothy, frowning more than before.

“This way,” put in Margaret, whose business in life seemed to be to supplement Hazel. “You might get a hundred marks for maths; well, eighty would be a good average, so you would be put down for eighty. Say you only got twenty for history; the twenty left over from your maths average would be put to it, but it would not bring you up to your average of eighty, don’t you see? It is a queer way of judging, and must give the staff and the examiners no end of trouble, but it does work out well for the girl who is plodding but not especially clever. In most subjects one could hope to make eighty out of a hundred, but oh! it means swotting all the time. One can’t shirk a subject that does not make much appeal, because every set of marks must be up to the average.”

“I don’t mind work,” said Dorothy, her frown disappearing, “but I’m not brilliant anywhere, and that has been the trouble. The Bursary sends you to Cambridge, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, the full university course. Oh! it is well worth trying for, even if one has little or no chance of getting it.” Margaret’s face glowed as she

spoke, and Dorothy thought she was really nice-looking when she was animated.

"Webster and Poole are wedged into a corner along there; I am going to talk to them," said Tom, thrusting his head in from the corridor; and then he went off, and Dorothy did not see him again until the train slowed up at Claydon Junction, where they had to change for Sowergate.

Quite a crowd of boys and girls poured out of the London train, racing up the steps and over the bridge to the other platform where the little Sowergate train was waiting. Dorothy went over with Margaret, while Hazel and Tom stayed behind to sort out the luggage. There was a wait of ten minutes or so. The carriage was crowded out with girls, some of them new, like Dorothy, and others, old stagers, who swaggered a little by way of showing off. The talk was a queer jumble of what they had been doing in vac, of the hockey chances of the coming term, and what sort of programme they would have for social evenings. Dorothy sat silent now; indeed she was feeling rather lonely and out of it, for every one was appealing to Margaret, and Hazel was at the other end of the carriage, while Tom was nowhere to be seen.

"Rhoda Fleming has come back," said a stout girl who had flaming red hair, "I saw her at Victoria. She says she is going to stay another year, so that she can have a chance at the Mutton Bone."

"She will never win it," chorused several.

"She would stand a very good chance if only she would work," said Margaret quietly. "Rhoda is really clever, and she has such a good memory too."

"It is like you to say a good word for her, Meg, but she has snubbed you most awfully in her time." The red-haired reached out a friendly hand to pat Margaret on the shoulder, but Dorothy noticed that Margaret winced, turning a distressful red.

"I don't mind who snubs me, provided Hazel does not," she said with a rather forced laugh.

"There is not much danger of my doing that, kid." Hazel nodded her head from the other end of the carriage, and looked her affection for her chum.

Dorothy thrilled. How beautiful it must be to have a girl chum, and to love her like that. She and Tom had always been great pals, but she had never had a chum among girls. Her own two sisters, Gussie and Tilda,

otherwise Augusta and Matilda, were four years younger than herself, and being twins, were in consequence all in all to each other.

Just then the train ran out of tunnel number three, Dorothy caught sight of two flags fluttering amid groups of trees on the landward side of the railway track, and at that moment a great roar of cheering broke out along the train. The girls in the carriage yelled with all their might, handkerchiefs fluttered, and Dorothy wondered what was happening.

“See those flags?” cried Margaret, seizing her arm and shaking it violently. “They are the school flags, and we are saluting them. Now, then, yell for all you are worth!”

And Dorothy yelled, putting her back into it too, for was she not also a Compton girl?

CHAPTER II

A SHOCK

A string of vehicles were drawn up outside Sowergate Station—there were three taxis, two rather dilapidated horse cabs, the station bus, and four bath chairs. There was a wild rush for these last by the girls in the know, and when they were secured the fortunate ones set off in a race for the school, the chair-man who arrived first being promised double fare.

Dorothy, with Hazel, Margaret, the two Goatbys, and little Muriel Adams were squeezed into a taxi, and the luggage was taken up on a lorry. The girls were a tight fit, as Daisy Goatby was an out-size in girls; however, the distance was short, so crowding did not matter. They all cheered loudly when they passed the labouring chair-men, who were making very good way indeed, until one unlucky fellow, in trying to pass another, tipped his chair over in the ditch and spilled the passenger, though, luckily, without doing any damage.

Dorothy felt rather sore because Tom had gone off without even saying good-bye, but she was too proud to let the others know she was hurt. There was such a bustle and commotion on the platform and in the station that no one would notice the omission but herself. It was quite possible that Tom had forgotten that he had not said good-bye to his sister, and she strove to forget it herself.

There were no conveyances for the boys. Their school was so close to the station, they had only to race across the rails, and then over the road leading up to Beckworth Camp, and the school gates were in front of them. But it was nearly a mile up the steep little Sowergate valley to the funny old house under the hill where the girls had their school.

Dorothy thought she had never seen such a queer medley of buildings as the Compton School for girls. It was built round in a half-circle under the hill, and at first sight seemed to consist chiefly of conservatories; but that was because most of the rooms opened on to a conservatory which ran the whole length of the house, and served as a useful way of getting from room to room. The place was very big, and very rambling; it had lovely grounds, and the sixty girls were lodged in the extreme of comfort and airy spaciousness.

Dorothy was received by Miss Arden, the Head, and by her handed over to the matron, who allotted her a cubicle in No. 2 dormitory, in company with Hazel, Margaret, and seven other girls. It was half-past five by this time, and matron said dinner was at six o'clock: it was to be at this time to-day, as most of the girls had been travelling, and had had no proper meal since breakfast. By the time dinner was over the luggage would have arrived, and there would be unpacking to be done.

Dorothy was thankful to drop the curtains of her cubicle, and to find herself alone for a few minutes, it had been such a wildly exciting sort of arrival. Even as she sank down for a moment on the chair by the side of her bed a great burst of cheering broke out, and she looked out of the window to see that the first bath chair had turned in past the lodge gate, and was being uproariously welcomed by a group of girls who were lingering on the step of the hall door for that purpose.

She had to burst out laughing at the ridiculous sight the chair-man presented, decked out with coloured paper streamers round his hat and a huge rosette pinned to his coat. He was panting with his exertions, while his fare, still seated in the chair, was haranguing them all on her splendid victory, when two other chairs came in at the gate, and were presently followed by the last, which had been overturned.

There was only time for a wash and brush-up; then, as the gong sounded, streams of girls from various parts of the house poured in the direction of the dining-hall. They streamed along the conservatory that was so gay with all sorts of flowers, and turned into the dining-hall to meet another stream of girls coming from dormitories No. 4 and No. 5, which were reached by a different stairway.

Dorothy was with the girls coming through the conservatory, she was looking at the flowers as she was hurried along, and she was thinking what a lovely place it was. There seemed to be a great crowd of girls in the dining-hall, and because it was the first meal of term, they were a little longer getting to their places. The various form-mistresses were busy drafting them each to the right table, and Dorothy had a sense of whirling confusion wrapping her round, making all things unreal, while her vision was blurred, and the sound of voices seemed to come from ever so far away. Then the sensation passed. She was herself again, she was standing on one side of Hazel Dring, while Margaret stood on the other, and she lifted her eyes to look at her opposite neighbour.

A shiver of very real dismay shook her then, for in the tall girl confronting her across the table she recognized the girl who had stolen the jumper in the showroom of the London shop.

Oh, it surely, surely could not be the same! Dorothy stared at her wide-eyed and bewildered. Her gaze was so persistent and unwinking that presently the girl looked at her in annoyance, saying curtly,—

"What are you staring at? Have you found a black mark on my face?"

Dorothy flushed. "I beg your pardon, I was thinking I had seen you before." She stammered a little as she spoke, wondering what answer she would make if the girl should ask her where she had seen her.

"That is hardly likely, I should think," answered the girl. Then, as if with intent to be rude, she said coldly, "I have no acquaintance with any of the scholarship girls."

Dorothy gasped as if some one had shot a bowl of cold water in her face; she was fairly amazed at the rudeness and audacity of the girl, and she subsided into silence, while Hazel said crisply,—

"Dorothy Sedgewick is not a scholarship girl, and until after the examination to-morrow morning we do not even know whether she is a dunce or not, so you need not regard her as a possible rival until then."

"I am not afraid of rivals," said the girl with superb indifference; and Dorothy caught her breath in a little strangled gasp as she wondered what would happen if she were to announce across the table that she had seen this proud girl steal a silk jumper from the showrooms of Messrs. Sharman and Song only a few hours before.

Just then a girl lower down the table leaned forward and said, "I did not see you at Redhill this morning, Rhoda; which way did you come?"

The girl who had snubbed Dorothy turned with a smile to answer the question. "I came up to town with Aunt Kate, who was going to do some shopping, and then I came on from Victoria."

Dorothy's gaze was fixed on the girl again: it was just as if she could not take her eyes away from her; and Rhoda, turning again, as if drawn by some secret spell, flushed an angry red right up to the roots of her hair. But she did not speak to Dorothy—did not appear to see her even; and the meal went on its way to the end, while the girls chattered to each other and to the mistresses.

“Who was that girl sitting opposite who was so very rude?” asked Dorothy, finding herself alone for a minute with Margaret when dinner had come to an end.

“That was Rhoda Fleming,” answered Margaret; then she asked, “Whatever did you say to her to put her in such an awful wax?”

“I only said that I thought I had seen her before,” said Dorothy slowly.

“And had you?” asked Margaret, opening her eyes rather widely, for there did not seem anything in that for Rhoda to have taken umbrage about.

“I may have been mistaken.” Dorothy was on her guard now. She might have told Rhoda where she had seen her, had they been alone; but to mention the matter to any one else was unthinkable—it would be like uttering a libel.

“You succeeded in getting her goat up pretty considerably,” said Margaret with a little laugh. “You may always know that Rhoda is pretty thoroughly roused when she mentions scholarship girls—they are to her what a red rag is to a bull. I am a scholarship girl myself, and I have had to feel the lash of her tongue very often.”

“But why?” Dorothy’s tone was frankly amazed. “It is surely a great honour to be a scholarship girl—to have won the way here for yourself; I only wish I had been able to do it.”

“Oh yes, the cleverness part is all right, although very often it is not so much cleverness as adaptability, or luck pure and simple,” said Margaret, who hesitated a minute; and then, as if summoning her courage by an effort, went on, “You see, the scholarship girls often come up from the elementary schools. I did myself: it was my only chance of getting here, for my mother is a widow, and poor; she keeps a boarding-house in Ilkestone. I am telling you this straight off; it is only fair that you should know. Seeing me with Hazel Dring, you might think our social positions were equal, or at least not so far apart as they really are. Hazel’s people are rich. She has never in all her life had to come within nodding distance of poverty, or even of narrow means. But she chose me for her chum, and we never trouble about the difference in our positions.”

“Of course not; why should you?” Dorothy’s tone was friendly—she had even slipped her arm round Margaret’s waist—and was shocked to see how the girl shrank and shivered as she made her proud little statement of her position. “If you will let me be your friend too, I shall be very pleased and proud. My father is a doctor, and he has to work very hard indeed to feed,

clothe, and educate his six children, so there is certainly not much difference between you and me, whatever there may be between you and Hazel. But I am so surprised to find that your home is in Ilkestone—why, that is quite close, the next station on from Claydon Junction—and yet you came from London with Hazel."

"I have spent all the vac at Watley with Hazel. I was not very well last term," explained Margaret. "Mother is always so busy, too, during the long hols that I am something of an embarrassment at home; so it was an all-round benefit for me to be away with Hazel."

"I see." Dorothy's arm tightened a little round the slender figure of Margaret as she asked, "Then we are to be chums? I don't want to come between Hazel and you, of course."

"You would not," said Margaret, glowing into actual beauty by reason of her happy confidence in her friend. "Hazel and I have plenty of room in our hearts for other friends, and even for chums. I felt you were going to be friendly, that is why I screwed my courage to make a clean breast about myself."

"That was quite unnecessary where I am concerned, I can assure you." Dorothy spoke earnestly and with conviction; then she asked a little uneasily, "Do you expect that Rhoda Fleming will be in our dorm?"

"No," replied Margaret. "I am sure she will not. She will be in No. 1; it is the same size as ours, but there are better views from the windows. She was there last term, and will be certain to go back to her old place. She said she was going to leave, so we are surprised to find that she has come back for another year. Here comes matron; that means we have to go and get busy with unpacking."

It was later that same evening, and Dorothy was standing at the window of the corridor outside the door of the dorm watching the moon making a track of silver on the distant sea, when suddenly a tall girl glided up to her out of the shadows, and gripping her by the arm, said harshly,—

"Pray, where was it that you thought you had seen me before?"

The girl was Rhoda Fleming, and Dorothy could not repress a slight shiver of fear at the malice of her tone.

"I did not think; I knew," she answered quietly, and she was quite surprised to hear how unafraid her voice sounded.

“Well, where was it?” Rhoda fairly hissed out her question, and Dorothy shivered again, but she answered calmly enough, “It was in the showrooms of Messrs. Sharman and Song, a little before one o’clock to-day.”

The clutch on her arm became a vicious pinch, as Rhoda said in strident tones, “You are wrong, then, for I have not been near the shop to-day; in fact, I have never been there.”

“Very well, that settles it, of course,” said Dorothy quietly. “Please let my arm go, you are hurting me.”

“Rats! Is your skin too tender to be touched?” Rhoda’s tone was vibrant with scorn, but her fingers relaxed their grip as she went on, “Well, what was I doing when you saw me there?”

“That cannot possibly concern you, seeing that you state you were not there,” said Dorothy calmly, and then she moved away to join some girls who had come out from No. 2 dorm, and were on their way downstairs for prayers. She was feeling that the less she had to do with Rhoda Fleming the better it would be for her happiness and comfort at the Compton Schools. But how to avoid her without seeming to do so would be the problem, and she went her way down with the others, wearing a very sober face indeed.

CHAPTER III

PRIDE OF PLACE

Next morning directly after breakfast, Dorothy, in company with the other new girls—about a dozen of them—went off to the study of the Head, to be examined as to place in the form, and general capacity.

It was not usual for any girl, whatever her age, to be received at once into the Sixth, and Dorothy was accordingly given a Fifth Form paper to fill. When she had done this, and it had been passed to the Head by the form-mistress who was assisting her, Miss Arden, after reading down her answers, immediately passed her another paper—and this a Sixth Form one—to fill. This was a much stiffer matter, and Dorothy worked away with absorbed concentration, not even noticing that the other girls had all done, and left the room. But none of them had been given a second paper, so she was to be forgiven for being the last.

The Head was called for at that moment. It was a couple of hours later before Dorothy knew her fate. Meanwhile the whole of the Sixth and the Upper Fifth were gathered in the lecture hall for a lecture on zoophytes by Professor Plimsoll, who was the natural history lecturer for the Compton Schools. He was a young man, and very enthusiastic. Dorothy was so surprised to find how interesting the subject could be made that she sat listening, entranced by his eloquence, until a nudge from Daisy Goatby, sitting next to her, recalled her to her surroundings.

“Take notes, duffer, take notes,” whispered Daisy with quite vicious energy. “If you sit staring like a stuck pig at my lord, you will get beans when he has finished, and he has a way of making one feel a very worm.”

Dorothy made a valiant effort to scribble things on paper; but the next minute her head was up again, and she was staring at the professor, so absorbed in what he was saying that she quite forgot Daisy’s kindly warning anent the need of looking busy.

All round her the girls were bent over their notebooks industriously scribbling: some of them were taking notes in writing they would certainly not be able to read later. One or two were writing to friends, but the main of them were jotting down facts which should serve as pegs on which to hang their ideas when they had to write out what they could remember.

Professor Plimsoll was suave in his manner, a gentleman, but withal very hot-tempered, and a terror to slackers. He noticed Dorothy's absorbed attention, and was at first rather flattered by it; then observing that she took no notes, and that her gaze had a dreamy quality, as if her thoughts were far away, his temper flared up, and he determined to make an example of her. Nothing like beginning as he meant to go on. If he allowed such a flagrant case of laziness to pass unrebuked at the first lecture of the term, what sort of behaviour might he not have to put up with before the end of the course?

He was nearly at the end of his lecture, when he stopped with dramatic suddenness, pointing an accusing finger at Dorothy.

"The name of that young lady, if you please?" he said with a little bow to the form-mistress, who had come into the lecture with the girls.

"That is Dorothy Sedgewick," answered Miss Groome with a rather troubled air. She was sorry that the professor should fall upon a new girl at the first lecture of term; to her way of thinking it did not seem quite fair play.

"Miss Dorothy Sedgewick, may I beg of you to step up here?" The professor's tone was bland—he was even smiling as he beckoned her to come and stand by his side; but the girls who had attended his lectures before knew very well that he was simply boiling with rage, and from their hearts pitied Dorothy.

She rose in her place and walked forward. She was still so absorbed in what she had been listening to that she did not sense anything wrong. It did not even seem strange to her that she should be called forward. She was the only new girl present at the lecture, and she supposed it might be the ordinary thing for fresh girls to be called forward in this fashion.

"Will you permit me to see the notes you have taken?" he asked in a voice that was curiously soft and gentle, although his eyes were flashing. He held out his hand as he spoke, and Dorothy handed him her notebook, saying in an apologetic tone, "I am so sorry, but I have not taken any notes, I was so interested."

Professor Plimsoll permitted himself a smile, and again his eyes flashed, just as if they were throwing off little sparks. He glanced at the blank page of the notebook, then gave it back to her, saying in that curiously soft and gentle tone, "Since you have been too interested to take notes, perhaps you will be so very kind as to tell us what you can remember of the things I have

been telling you; especially I should be glad to hear what has interested you most."

Dorothy looked at him in surprise; even now, so restrained and controlled was his manner, she did not realize how furiously angry he was, but supposed that he had called her out because of her being a new girl, and that her position in the school would in some way be determined by what she could do now. It had been the custom in her old school for girls to have to stand up and talk in class; and although this was a much more formidable affair, she was not so much embarrassed as she would have been but for her training in the past.

Speaking in a rather low tone, she began at the beginning. In many places she quoted the professor's own words. Once she left out a little string of facts, and went back over her ground, marshalling them into the proper place, and then went steadily on up to the very point where the professor stopped so suddenly.

The silence in the lecture hall was such as could be felt; some of the girls, indeed, were sitting open-mouthed with amazement at such a feat of memory. But there was a ghost of a smile hovering about the lips of Miss Groome—she was thinking how the professor would have to apologize to the new girl for having so misjudged her.

If Professor Plimsoll was fiery in temper, he was also a very just man. The girls must have known he had been angry, even though Dorothy did not seem to have realized it, and it was due to himself, and to them, that he should make what amends he could.

"Miss Dorothy Sedgewick," he began, and he bowed to her as impressively as he might have done to royalty, "I have to beg your pardon for having entirely misunderstood you. When I saw that you took no notes I was angry at what I thought was your laziness, and new girl though you were, I determined to make an example of you, and that was why I called you forward in this fashion. I do apologize most sincerely for my blunder, and I am charmed to think that I shall have a student so able and painstaking at my lectures this term."

Great embarrassment seized upon Dorothy now. She turned scarlet right up to the roots of her hair as she bowed, murmuring something inaudible, and then she escaped to her seat amidst a storm of cheering from the excited girls.

Professor Plimsoll held up his hand for silence. The lecture went on to its end, but it is doubtful whether Dorothy got much benefit from the latter part. The girls all around her were showing their sympathy each after her kind, but she was angry with herself because she had lacked the penetration to see that she had really been an object of pity.

When the lecture was over, and they all streamed out of hall carrying their notebooks, they fell upon her, cheering her again, and patting her on the back with resounding thumps just by way of showing friendliness.

"Oh, Dorothy, you were great!" cried Hazel, struggling through the crowd to reach her. "It was priceless to see you standing there beside my lord, giving him back his old lecture on creepy-crawlies as calmly as if you had been brought up to that kind of thing from infancy. His eyes gogged and gogged until I thought they would have come right out of their sockets! And then to see the way he climbed down and grovelled at your feet, oh, it was rich!"

"Dorothy, how did you remember it all?" cried Margaret, thrusting several girls aside and coming eagerly close up to Dorothy.

"I don't know; I cannot always remember things so well," she answered. "But it was all so interesting, and the professor has such a way of ticking his facts off, it is so easy to keep them in mind."

"There is one comfort," said Hazel. "You will be certain to be in the Sixth after the little affair of this morning."

"I don't know about that," replied Dorothy, thinking of some of the questions on the paper she had filled in that morning.

A little later there came to her a message summoning her to the Head's private room, and she went in fear and trembling. If she was put in the Sixth, she would be able to enter for the Lamb Bursary; if she was not in the Sixth her chance would be gone for always, for she knew that it was quite impossible for her to stay at school for more than one year.

Miss Arden was very kind; she made Dorothy sit down, and drawing out the Sixth Form examination paper, began to talk to her about it.

"In many ways," began the Head, speaking in her calmly assured manner, "I do not think you are up to the level of the Sixth, but in other things you are very good indeed. I was still debating whether to put you straight into the Sixth, or to keep you for one term in the Upper Fifth to see how you would shape; but before I had really made up my mind, Professor Plimsoll came in and told me of what happened at his lecture. He was so

impressed with your ability that, acting on his suggestion, I am going to put you straight into the Sixth, and I hope that you will work hard enough to justify me in having done this. It is very unusual for a new girl to be put into the Sixth. Different schools have different methods of work, and a girl has usually to be with us a little time before we feel sufficiently sure of her. However, I hope it is all going to be quite right."

"Thank you very much; I will be sure to work," murmured Dorothy, and her eyes were shining like two stars at the prospect before her; then she asked in a low tone, her voice a little shaken, "May I enter for the Lamb Bursary, now that I am going to be in the Sixth?"

Miss Arden smiled. "You can enter if you wish. Indeed, I shall be very glad if you do. Even if you are not within seeing distance of getting it, the discipline and the hard work will be good for you. It will be good for the others too, for the more candidates the better the work that is done. Rhoda Fleming was to have left last term, but she has come back for the purpose of competing. I hope that next week, when the candidates are enrolled, a good number of the Sixth will offer themselves."

Dorothy went out from the presence of the Head, feeling as if she was walking on air. How wonderful that she was in the Sixth! How still more wonderful that it was really her humiliation at Professor Plimsoll's lecture which was the means of putting her there. It had not seemed a very awful thing to stand up beside the professor and repeat to him what she remembered of his lecture, but it had been a very keen humiliation indeed to find that he had considered her a time-waster, and had really called her out to shame her in the eyes of the others. She had suffered tortures while the girls were cheering her. Yet if all that had not happened, she would not have been in the Sixth now, with the possibility of winning the Lamb Bursary in front of her.

Rhoda Fleming was coming down the stairs as she went up. Just when passing, Rhoda leaned towards her, and smiling maliciously, murmured, "Prig!"

Dorothy's temper flared. It was an outrage that this girl who was a thief should call her names. She jerked her head round to hurl a scathing remark after the retreating figure, then suddenly checked herself. True pride of place was to hold one's self above the sting of insults that were petty. After all it did not matter who called her prig, provided she was not that odious thing.

CHAPTER IV

TOM IS DISAPPOINTING

The rest of the week passed in a whirl of getting used to things and of settling into place. Dorothy had to find that however good she might be at memory work, she did not shine in very many things which were regarded as essentials at the Compton Schools. She was a very duffer in all matters connected with the gym. She was downright scared at many things which even the little girls did not shirk. She could not swing by her hands from the bar, she looked upon punching as a shocking waste of strength, and even drill had no charm for her.

Miss Mordaunt, the games-mistress, was not disposed to be very patient with her. Miss Mordaunt was not to be beaten in her encouragement of little girls and weakly girls; she would work away at them until they became both fearless and happy in the gym. But a girl in the Sixth ought to be able to take a creditable place in sports, according to her ideas. She was really angry with Dorothy for her clumsiness and her ignorance, which she chose to call downright cowardice and laziness. She was not even appeased by being told that for the last five years Dorothy had walked two miles to school every day, and the same distance home again. In consideration of this daily four miles she had been excused from all gym work.

"One is never too old to learn, and you do not have to walk four miles every day now," Miss Mordaunt spoke crisply. She tossed her head, and her bobbed hair fluffed up in the sunshine. She was the very best looking of all the staff, and realizing the unconscious influence of good looks, she made the most of her attractive appearance, because of the power it gave her with the girls.

"Oh, I know I am rotten at this sort of thing," Dorothy admitted with an air of great humility, as she stood watching little Muriel Adams somersaulting in a way that looked simply terrifying.

Miss Mordaunt suddenly softened. She had little patience with ignorance, and none at all with indolence, but a girl who humbly admitted she was nothing, and less than nothing, had at least a chance of improvement.

"If you are willing to work hard, to start at the beginning, and do what the little girls do, I shall be able to make something of you in time." The air

of the games-mistress was distinctly kindly now; she even went out of her way to pay Dorothy a compliment which all the rest of the girls could hear. “The amount of walking you have had to do has had the effect of giving you a free, erect carriage, and you have an alert, springy step that is a joy to behold. I shall have long and regular walks as part of our course this term, just for the sake of improving the girls in this respect; the manner in which some of them slouch along is awful to behold.”

“I wish you had kept quiet about your long walks to school,” grumbled Daisy Goatby on Friday afternoon, when the long crocodile of the Compton Girls’ School swung along through Sowergate, and, mounting the hill to the Ilkestone promenade, went a long mile across the scorched grass of the lawns on the top of the cliffs, and then turned back inland, to reach the deep little valley of the Sowerbrook.

“Why? Don’t you like walking?” asked Dorothy, who had been revelling in the sea and the sky, and all the unexpectedness of Ilkestone generally.

“I loathe it!” Daisy said with almost vicious energy. She was so fat that the exercise made her hot and uncomfortable; she had a blowsed appearance, and was rather cross.

“That is because you are so fat,” Dorothy laughed, her eyes shining with merriment. “Why don’t you put in half an hour every morning punching in the gym, then do those bar exercises that Hazel and Rhoda were doing yesterday? You would soon find walking easier.”

“Why, I take no end of exercise,” grumbled Daisy. “What with tennis, and hockey, and bowls, and swimming, one is on all the time. My fat is not the result of self-indulgence; it is disease.”

“And chocolates,” laughed Dorothy, who had seen the way in which her companion had been stuffing with sweets ever since they had started out.

“I am obliged to take a little of something to keep my strength up,” Daisy said in a plaintive tone; then she burst out with quite disconcerting suddenness, “What makes Rhoda Fleming have such a grouch against you, seeing that you were strangers until the other day?”

Dorothy felt her colour rise in spite of herself, but she only said quietly, “You had better ask her.”

“Bless you, I did that directly I found out how she did not love you,” answered Daisy, breathing hard—they were mounting a rise now, and the

pace tried her.

"Well, and what did she say?" asked Dorothy, whose heart was beating in a very lumpy fashion.

"She said that you were the most untruthful person she had ever met, and it was not safe to believe a word you said," blurted out Daisy, with a sidelong look at Dorothy just to see how she would take it.

Dorothy flushed, and her eyes were angry, but she answered in a serene tone, "If I said I was not untruthful, it would not help much; it would only be my word against Rhoda's. The only thing to do is to let the matter rest; time will show whether she is right or wrong."

"Are you going to sit down under it like that?" cried Daisy, aghast. "Why, it will look as if she was right."

"What can I do but sit down under it?" asked Dorothy with an impatient ring in her tone. "If I were a boy I might fight her, of course."

"Talking of fighting," burst out Daisy eagerly, "Blanche Felmore, who is in the Lower Fifth, told me this morning that your brother Tom has had a scrap with her brother Bobby, and Bobby is so badly knocked out that he has been moved to the san. There is a bit of news for you!"

"Oh, I am sorry!" exclaimed Dorothy, looking acutely distressed. "I hate for Tom to get into such scraps, and it is horrid to think of him hurting some one so badly."

"Oh, as to that, if he had not hurt Bobby, he would have been pretty considerably bashed up himself," replied Daisy calmly. "Bobby Felmore is ever so much bigger than your brother—he is in the Sixth, and captain of the football team, a regular big lump of a boy, and downright beefy as to muscle and all that. The wonder to me is that Tom was able to lick him; it must have been that he had more science than Bobby, and in a fight like that, science counts for more than mere weight."

"What made them fight?" asked Dorothy, a shiver going the length of her spine. It seemed to her little short of disastrous that Tom should get into trouble thus early in the term.

Daisy gave a delighted giggle, and her tone was downright sentimental when she went on to explain. "Tom is most fearfully crushed on Rhoda Fleming; did you know it? We used to make no end of fun of them last term. Tom is such a kid, and Rhoda is nearly two years older than he is; all the same he was really soft about her. They usually danced together on social

evenings, they shared cakes and sweets and all that sort of thing, and they were so all-round silly that we got no end of fun out of the affair. Of course we thought it was all off when Rhoda was leaving; but now that she has come back for another year it appears to have started again stronger than ever."

"But how can it have started?" asked Dorothy in surprise. "We only came on Tuesday—this is Friday; we have not met any of the boys yet."

Daisy sniggered. "You haven't, perhaps, but Rhoda has, and Blanche too. It seems that the evening before last, Blanche, who had no money for tuck, ran down into the shrubbery beyond the green courts to see if the boys were at cricket; she meant to signal Bobby, and ask him to send her some money through his matron, don't you see. Rhoda saw the kid loping off, and wanting some amusement, thought she would go along too. Bobby saw the signalling, and knowing it was Blanche, came to see what she wanted. It seems that Tom also saw a handkerchief fluttering from the end of the shrubbery, and thinking it was Rhoda waving to him, came sprinting along after. He caught Bobby up, too, and passed him. Rhoda was at the fence, and so they had a talk, while Blanche told Bobby about having no money, and got him to promise that he would send five shillings by his matron that same evening. Things were pleasant enough until the girls were coming away; they expected the bell to go in a minute, and knew that they would have to scoot for all they were worth. Then Tom said something about thinking that Bobby was coming across to see Rhoda, and he was just jolly well not going to put up with it."

"Yes, what then?" said Dorothy sharply.

It was not pleasant to her to find out how little she really knew about the inside of Tom's mind. He was a year younger than herself; she regarded him as very much of a boy, and it was rather hateful to think that he was making a stupid of himself with a girl like Rhoda Fleming. Poor old Tom!

"Bobby Felmore said something rude," replied Daisy. "The Felmores are rather big in their way, and their pride is a by-word. Bobby remarked that he would not trouble to go the length of a cricket pitch at the call of a girl like Rhoda. Tom went for him then and spat in his face, or something equally unpleasant. After that it had to be a fight, of course, and they planned it for yesterday. When the boys' matron brought Blanche the five shillings she told her that Bobby was licked, and in bed in the san."

"Will Tom be very badly punished?" asked Dorothy with dilating eyes; her lively fancy was painting a picture of dire penalties which might result,

and she was thinking how distressed her father and mother would be.

Daisy laughed merrily. “When you see Bobby Felmore you will understand what a most astonishing thing it is that Tom should have whacked him. Oh no, Tom won’t get many beans over that. He may have an impot, of course; but he would get that for any breaking of rules. I should think that unofficially the masters would pat him on the back for his courage. He must be a well-plucked one to have stood up to Bobby, and to beat him. I wish I had been there to see.”

“I don’t; and I think it is just horrid for boys to fight!” cried Dorothy, and was badly ashamed of the tears that smarted under her eyelids.

“You are young yet; you will be wiser as you get older,” commented Daisy sagely; and at that moment the crocodile turned in at the lodge gates, and the talk was over.

Dorothy had furious matter for thought. She had been looking forward to Sunday because she knew that she would have a chance to talk to Tom for an hour then; and she had meant to tell him that the girl who did the shoplifting at Messrs. Sharman and Song’s place was at the Compton Schools in her form.

If Tom was so fond of Rhoda Fleming as to be willing to fight on her behalf, he would not be very ready to believe what his sister had to tell him.

“He might even want to fight me,” Dorothy whispered to herself, with a rather pathetic little smile hovering round her lips.

She went into the house feeling low-spirited and miserable; but there was so much to claim her attention, she had so many things to think about, and next day’s work to get ready for, that her courage bounced up, her cheerfulness returned, and she was as lively as the rest of them. After all, Tom would have to fight his own way through life, and it was of no use to make herself miserable because he had proved disappointing so early in the term.

CHAPTER V

TOM MAKES EXCUSE

The girls of the Compton Schools attended the church of St. Matthew-on-the-Hill, which stood on the high ground above the Sowerbrook valley. A grey, weather-worn structure it was, the tower of which had been used as a lighthouse in the days of long ago. It was a small place, too, and for that reason the boys always went to the camp church, a spacious but very ugly building, which crowned the hill just above their school.

To both girls and boys it was a distinct grievance that they were compelled to go to different churches; but St. Matthew-on-the-Hill was too small to contain them all, and the military authorities looked askance at the girls, so what could not be cured had to be endured.

The one good thing which resulted from this was that brothers and sisters were always together for a couple of hours on Sunday afternoons. If the weather was fine they went for walks together; if it was wet they were in the drawing-room or the conservatories of the girls' school.

That first Sunday, Dorothy was waiting for Tom. She was out on the broad gravel path which stretched along in front of the conservatory, for the girls had told her that the boys always came in by the little bridge over the brook at the end of the grounds, and she did not want to lose a minute of the time she could have with her brother.

She had imagined he would be in a tearing hurry to reach her, and she felt downright flat, after waiting for nearly half an hour, to see him strolling up the lawn at the slowest of walks, in company with a lumpy-looking boy whose face was liberally adorned with strips of sticking-plaster.

"Hullo, Dorothy, are you all on your own?" demanded Tom, looking distinctly bored; then he jerked his thumb in the direction of his companion, saying in a casual fashion, "Here is Bobby Felmore, the chap I licked the other day. Did you hear about it?"

"Yes, I heard," she answered, and then hesitated, not quite sure what to say. It would be a bit embarrassing, and not quite kind, to congratulate Tom on his victory, with the beaten one standing close by, so it seemed safest to say nothing.

“It was a bit rotten to be licked by a kid like Tom, don’t you think, Miss Sedgewick?” asked Bobby with a grin. “The fact was, he is such a little chap that I was afraid to take him seriously, and that was how he got his chance at me.”

“Hear him!” cried Tom with ringing scorn. “But he is ignorant yet; when he is a bit older and wiser he will understand that a lump of pudding hasn’t any sort of chance against muscle guided by science. Besides, he had to be walloped in the cause of chivalry and right.”

“You young ass!” exploded Bobby, and he looked so threatening that Dorothy butted in, fearing they would start mauling each other there and then.

“I think it is just horrid to fight,” she said crisply. “It is a low-down and brutish habit. Are you going to walk, Tom, or shall we sit in the conservatory and talk? It is nearly three o’clock, so we have not very much time.”

“I’m not particular,” said Tom with a yawn. “Where are all the others? If we go for a walk we have just got to mooch along on our own; but if we stay in the grounds or the conservatory we can be with the others, don’t you see?”

“Just as you please.” Dorothy could not help her tone being a trifle sharp. It was a real disappointment to her that Tom did not want to have her alone for a little while.

“Very well, then, let us go down to that bench by the sundial. Rhoda Fleming is there, and the Fletchers; we had a look in at them, and a bit of a pow-wow as we came up.” Tom turned eagerly back as he spoke, and Dorothy walked in silence by his side, while Bobby Felmore went on into the house in search of Blanche, who had a cold, and was keeping to the house.

So that was why Tom was nearly half an hour late in arriving! Dorothy was piqued and resentful; but having her share of common sense, she did not start ragging him—indeed, she was so quiet, and withal pensive, that Tom’s conscience began to bother him, and he even started to make excuse for himself.

“You see, Rhoda and I are great friends—downright pals, so to speak—and, of course, if we went for a walk she would not be able to come too.” He was apologetic in manner as well as speech, and he slipped his arm round her waist with a great demonstration of affection as they went slowly across the lawn.

It was because he was so dear and loving in his manner that Dorothy suddenly forgot to be discreet, and was only concerned to warn him of the kind of girl she knew Rhoda to be.

"Oh, Tom, dear old boy, I wish you would not be pals with Rhoda," she burst out impulsively. "I don't think you know what sort of girl she is, and, anyhow, she——"

Dorothy came to a sudden halt in her hurried little speech as Tom faced round upon her with fury in his face.

"You had better stop talking rot of that kind." There was an actual snarl in his tone, and his eyes were red with anger. "Girls are always unfair to each other, but I thought you were above a meanness of that sort."

Dorothy's temper flared—what a silly kid he was to be so wrapped up in a girl. She fairly snapped at him in her irritation.

"If you were not so young, so unutterably green, you would be willing to listen to reason, and to hear the truth. Since you won't, then you must take the consequences, I suppose."

"Don't be in a wax, old girl." He gave her an affectionate squeeze as he spoke, which had the effect of entirely disarming her anger against him.

"I am not in a wax; oh, I was, but it has gone now." She smiled up into his face as she spoke, deciding that come what might she could not risk losing his love by trying to point out to him what sort of a girl Rhoda was.

The September afternoon was very sunny and warm, and the group of girls on the broad wooden bench by the sundial were lazily enjoying the brightness and the heat as Dorothy and Tom came slowly along the path between the flower-beds at the lower end of the lawn.

Rhoda Fleming was there, Joan and Delia Fletcher, and Grace Boldrey, a Fourth Form kid who was Delia's chum. They all made room for Dorothy and Tom, as if they had expected them to come.

Dorothy found herself sitting between the two Fletchers, while Rhoda monopolized Tom, and the Sunday afternoon time, which she had looked forward to as being like a bit of home, resolved itself into an ordeal of more or less patiently bearing the quips and thrusts of Rhoda, who appeared to take a malicious pleasure in making her as uncomfortable as possible.

The affair of Professor Plimsoll's lecture was dragged out and talked about from the point of view of Rhoda, who, perching herself on the lower

step of the sundial, pretended she was Dorothy, standing up beside the professor, and repeating to him his own lecture.

Rhoda had a real gift of mimicry: the others rocked with laughter, and Dorothy, although she smarted under the lash of Rhoda's tongue, joined in the laugh against herself, because it seemed the least embarrassing thing to do.

She felt very sore a little later when Tom, in the momentary absence of Rhoda, said to her, "It was silly of you to make such an exhibition of yourself at the lecture. No one cares for a prig. I should have thought you would have found that out long ago."

"I could not help myself—I had to do as I was told; and, at least, I owe my place in the Sixth to having been able to remember." Dorothy was keeping her temper under control now, although of choice she would have reached up and slapped Tom in the face for daring to take such a critical and dictatorial tone with her.

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Every one to his taste, of course; myself, I would rather have waited until I was fit for the Sixth, than have got there by a fluke. You will find it precious hard work to keep your end up. For my own part, I would rather have been in the Upper Fifth until I was able to take my remove with credit."

"Why, Tom, if I had been put into the Upper Fifth I should have stood no chance of the Mutton Bone," cried Dorothy in a shocked tone.

Tom smiled in a superior and really aggravating fashion. "Going in for that, are you? Well, your folly be on your own head; you are more fond of the wooden spoon than I should be. For myself, I never attempt anything I'm not likely to achieve. You don't catch yours truly laying himself open to ridicule; but every one to his taste. Seeing that Rhoda has come back to school for another year, it goes without saying that she will win the Mutton Bone. She is no end clever, and you won't have much chance against her."

"I am going to have a try, anyhow," said Dorothy in a dogged tone; and at that moment Rhoda and Joan Fletcher came back, and the chances of any homey talk between brother and sister were over for that afternoon.

Rhoda and Tom started arguing about a certain horse that was to run at Ilkestone the following week, and Dorothy, sitting listening to Joan Fletcher's thin voice prosing on about the merits of knife pleated frocks, wondered what her father would have said if he could have heard Tom

discussing the points of racehorses as if he had served an apprenticeship in a training stable.

Later on, when she walked with him to the little gate at the end of the grounds, where the bridge went over the brook and the field path which led to the boys' school, Tom began to make excuses for himself for the depth of his knowledge on racing matters.

"A fellow has to keep his eyes open, and to remember what he hears, or he would get left at every turn, you know," he said, and again he slid his arm about his sister's waist.

"I don't think father and mother would approve of your keeping your eyes so wide open about horse-racing and that sort of thing."

Dorothy spoke in a rather troubled fashion. It was really difficult for her to lecture Tom for his good when he had his arm round her in that taking fashion.

"Oh, naturally the governor and mums are more than a trifle stodgy in their outlook. It is a sign of advancing years." He laughed light-heartedly as he spoke, then plunged into talk about football plans and his own chances of getting a good position in his team.

They lingered at the bridge until the other boys who had been visiting at the girls' school came pouring along the path at a run. Then the first bell sounded for tea, and Dorothy had to scuttle back through the grounds at racing speed, for she would only have five minutes in which to put herself tidy for tea.

"Did you have a pleasant afternoon?" asked Hazel, who had been out with Margaret.

"It was good to be with Tom for a time," Dorothy answered, hesitated, and then went on in a hurried fashion, "It would have been nicer, of course, if we had been alone together, or with you and Margaret, but Tom elected to spend the time with Rhoda and Joan Fletcher, and—and, well, it was not all honey and roses."

"I can't think what the silly boy can see in Rhoda," said Hazel severely. "I never cared much for her myself, and the way in which she has snubbed Margaret is insufferable. I am thankful that Dora Selwyn is head girl, and not Rhoda; it would be awful if she set the pace for the whole school."

"Dora Selwyn looks nice, but she is rather unapproachable," said Dorothy in a rather dubious tone.

Hazel laughed. “Don’t you know the secret of that?” she asked. “Dora is about the shyest girl alive, and her stand-offishness is nothing in the world but sheer funk. You try making friends with her, and you will be fairly amazed at the result.”

CHAPTER VI

RHODA'S JUMPER

The first social evening of term was always something of an event. The Lower Fifth, the Upper Fifth, and the Sixth of both schools joined forces for a real merry-making. The juniors had their own functions, and made merry on a different evening, and they had nothing to do with the gathering of the seniors.

The lecture hall was cleared for dancing; there were games and music in the drawing-room for those who preferred them, and supper for all was spread in the dining-room.

It had been a soaking wet day; the girls, in mackintoshes, high boots, and rubber hats, had struggled for a mile along the storm-swept sea front. They had been blown back again, arriving in tousled, rosy-cheeked, and breathless, but thoroughly refreshed by the blow.

The dressing-bell went five minutes after they reached the house, and there was a rush upstairs to get changed, and ready for the frolic.

Dorothy was very much excited. She was going to wear the new little frock which she had bought at Sharman and Song's place. She danced up the stairs and along the corridor to the dorm, feeling that life was very well worth living indeed.

Hazel and Margaret were just ahead of her, and the other girls were crowding up behind. They had been rather late getting in from their walk, and so there was not very much time before the boys might be expected to arrive.

With fingers that actually trembled Dorothy opened the wrapping paper, and taking out her frock, slipped it on. The looking-glass in her cubicle was not very big; she would have to wait until she went downstairs to have a really good look at herself. But oh! the lovely feeling of it all!

Admiring herself—or, rather, her frock—had taken time. Most of the girls were downstairs before she was ready. They were standing about the drawing-room in little groups as she came in through the big double doors, feeling stupidly shy and self-conscious, just because she happened to be wearing a new frock that was the last word in effective simplicity.

No one took any notice of her. The little group just inside the door had gathered about Rhoda Fleming, who was spreading out her arms to show the beauty of the jumper she was wearing over a cream silk skirt.

"Isn't it a dream?" Rhoda's voice was loud and clear; it was vibrant, too, with satisfaction. "I bought it at Sharman and Song's; they are not to be beaten for things of this sort."

Dorothy stood as if transfixed, and at that moment the crowd of girls about Rhoda shifted and opened out, showing plainly Dorothy standing on the outskirts of the group.

Rhoda paused suddenly, and there was a look of actual fear in her eyes as she stood confronting Dorothy. Then she rallied her forces, and said with a slow, insolent drawl, "Well, what do you want?"

"I—I don't want anything," faltered Dorothy, whose breath was fairly taken away by the calm manner in which Rhoda was exhibiting the jumper, which was a lovely thing made of white silky stuff, and embroidered with silver tissue.

"Then don't stand staring like that." There was a positive snarl in Rhoda's tone, and Dorothy turned away without a word. She heard one of the girls cry out that it was a shame of Rhoda to be so rude, but there was more fear than resentment in her heart at the treatment she had received. It was awful to see the malice in Rhoda's gaze, and to know that it was directed against herself, just because she had been the unwilling witness of Rhoda's shoplifting.

She would have known the jumper anywhere, even if Rhoda had not declared so loudly that it had come from Sharman and Song's, and she shivered a little, wondering how she would have felt if she had been in Rhoda's place just then.

"Oh, Dorothy, what a pretty frock! How perfectly sweet you look!" cried the voice of Hazel at her side, and then Margaret burst in with admiring comments, and Dorothy found herself surrounded by a cluster of girls who were admiring her frock and congratulating her on having an aunt with such liberal tendencies. But the keen edge of her pleasure was taken off by the brooding sense of disaster that would come to her every time she recalled the look in Rhoda's eyes.

Being healthy minded, and being also blessed with common sense, she set to work to forget all about the uncomfortable incident, and to get all the pleasure possible out of the evening.

The boys arrived in a batch. After the manner of their kind, they formed into groups about the big doors of the drawing-room and at the end of the lecture hall. But the masters who were with them routed them out with remorseless energy, and started the dancing. Bobby Felmore, very red in the face, and still adorned with sticking-plaster, led out the Head. He was most fearfully self-conscious for about a minute and a half. By that time he forgot all about being shy, for, as he said afterwards, the Head was a dream to dance with, and she was a downright jolly sort also.

Dorothy had danced with big boys, she had danced with cheeky youngsters of the Lower Fifth who aired their opinions on various subjects as if wisdom dwelt with them and with no one else, and then she found herself dancing with Bobby Felmore.

Bobby, by reason of having danced with the Head, was disposed to be critical regarding his partners that evening, and he began telling Dorothy how he had plunged through a foxtrot with Daisy Goatby, who was about as nimble as an elephant, and as graceful as a hippopotamus.

"She is quite a good sort, though, even if she is a trifle heavy on her feet," said Dorothy, who was hotly championing Daisy just because Bobby saw fit to run her down.

"I say, do you always stick up for people?" he asked.

"When they are nice to me I do, of course," she answered with a laugh.

"Well, you won't have to stick up for Rhoda Fleming, at that rate," said Bobby with a chuckle. "She seems to have a proper grouch against you. Tom was complaining as we came along to-night because you and Rhoda don't hit it off together."

"We do not have much to do with each other," murmured Dorothy, resentful because Tom should have discussed her with this big lump of a boy who, however well he might dance, had certainly no tact worth speaking of.

"Just what Tom complained of; said he couldn't think why his womenfolk didn't hit it off better: seemed to think that you ought to be pally with any and every one whom he saw fit to honour with his regard. I like his cheek; the Grand Sultan isn't in it with that young whipper-snapper." Bobby tossed his head and let out one of his big laughs then, and Dorothy thought it might be for his good to take him down a peg.

"Tom is rather small," she said, smiling at him with mischief dancing in her eyes; "but he is a force to be reckoned with, all the same."

“Now you are giving me a dig because of that mauling I had from him last week,” chuckled Bobby. “It isn’t kind to kick a fellow that is down.”

“I have not kicked you,” she answered; and her tone was so friendly that Bobby, rather red, and rather stammering, jerked out,—

“I say, I’m really awfully crushed on you, though I have only seen you about twice. Say, will you be pals, real pals, you know?”

Dorothy turned scarlet, for just at that moment she caught sight of Rhoda regarding her fixedly from a little distance. It was horribly embarrassing and uncomfortable, and because of it her tone was quite sharp as she replied, “I have got as many chums already as I can do with, thank you; but I am really grateful to you for not being nasty to Tom over that licking he gave you last week.”

“Oh, that!” Bobby’s voice reflected disappointment, mingled with scorn. “The licking was a man’s business entirely, and it need not come into discussion at all. I should like to be pals with you, and I’m not going to believe what Rhoda says about you.”

“What can Rhoda say about me?” cried Dorothy, aghast. “Why, I have not known her a week.”

“Bless you, what she doesn’t know she will make up,” said Bobby, who was by this time quite breathless with his exertions. “Don’t you trust her. If she tries to be friendly, keep her at arm’s length. I have warned Tom about her until I’m out of breath; but he will find her out some day, I dare say. Meanwhile he is not in as much danger of being scratched by her as you are.”

Dorothy did not dance with Bobby again that evening. Indeed, she did not dance much after that, for Margaret had a bad headache, and wandered off to a quiet corner of the drawing-room, where Dorothy found her, and stayed to keep her company.

“Just think, to-morrow by this time we shall be enrolled for the Lamb Bursary, and work will begin in earnest,” said Margaret, as she leant back in a deep chair and fanned herself with a picture paper.

“I think work has begun in earnest, anyway,” Dorothy said with a laugh. “I know that I just swotted for all I’m worth at maths this morning. I could not have worked harder if I had been sitting for an exam. I am horribly stupid at maths, and I can never find any short cuts.”

“I don’t put much reliance on short cuts myself in maths or anything else,” replied Margaret. “When a thing has to be done, it is the quickest process in the end to do it thoroughly, because the next time you have to travel that way you know the road. By the way—I hate to speak of it, but you are a new girl, and you are not so well up in school traditions as some of the rest of us—did you use a help this morning?”

“A help?” queried Dorothy with a blank face. “What do you mean?”

“Sometimes when a new girl comes she thinks to catch up in classwork by using cribs—helps they call them here, because it sounds rather better. Did you use anything of the sort this morning?” Margaret looked a little doubtful and apologetic as she put her question, but she meant to get at the bottom of the matter if she could.

“Why, no, of course I did not.” Dorothy’s tone was more bewildered than indignant; she could not imagine what had made Margaret ask such a question. “Do you think if I had been using a help, as you call it, that I should have to work as I do? Besides, do you not remember how Miss Groome coached me, and the pains she took, because I was such a duffer?”

Margaret laughed. “You are anything but a duffer, and you are a perfect whale at work. Oh! I wish they would not say things about you. It is so unfair on a new girl. You have enough to work against in having been put straight into the Sixth.”

“Who have been talking about me, and what has been said?” asked Dorothy quietly, but she went rather white. It was horrid to feel that her good name was being taken away behind her back.

“I do not know who started the talk,” said Margaret with a troubled air. “Kathleen Goatby was sitting here before you came. She said you had been dancing a lot with Bobby Felmore, but she expected he would have danced by himself rather than have been seen going round with you if he had known what was being said.”

“I shall know better whether to be angry or merely amused if you tell me what it is that is being said.” Dorothy’s voice was low, and her manner was outwardly calm, but there was a fire in her eyes which let Margaret know that she was very angry indeed.

“Kathleen said she heard Rhoda Fleming telling Joan Fletcher that you always used cribs, that you owed your position in your old school to this, and that you said it was the only way in which you could possibly get your work done. I told Kathleen she could contradict that as much as she liked,

for I was quite positive it was not true. Cribs may help up to a certain point, but they are sure to fail one in the long run."

"I have never used cribs," said Dorothy with emphasis. "What I cannot understand is why Rhoda should try so hard to do me harm."

"I think she is afraid of you." Margaret spoke slowly, and she turned her head a little so that her gaze was fixed on the ceiling, instead of on her companion's face. "It is possible she thinks you know something about her that is not to her credit, and she is fearing you will talk about it, so she thinks it is wise to be first at the character-wrecking business. You had better have as little to do with her as you decently can."

"Trust me for that; but even avoiding her does not seem very effectual in stopping her from spreading slanders," Dorothy said with a wry smile.

"Fires die out that are not tended," replied Margaret with a great air of wisdom. "There goes the bell. Well, I am not sorry the evening is over because of my beastly headache. I hope you have had a nice time?"

"Yes—no," said Dorothy, and then would say no more.

CHAPTER VII

THE ENROLLING OF THE CANDIDATES

The September sunshine was streaming in through the big stained-glass windows of the lecture hall next morning when, at eleven o'clock, the girls came trooping in from their Form-rooms, and took their places facing the dais. The Head was seated there in company with Mr. Melrose, who acted as governor of the Lamb Bursary, and two other gentlemen, who also had something to do with the bequest which meant so much to the Compton School for Girls.

When they were all in their places, Mr. Melrose stood up, and coming to the edge of the dais, made a little speech to the girls about Miss Lamb, who had been educated at the Compton Schools. "Agnes Lamb came to be educated here because her father, an officer, was at that time stationed at Beckworth Camp," he said in a pleasant, conversational tone, which held the interest even of those girls who had heard the story several times before. "She was in residence for three years, during which time she made many friendships, and formed close ties in the school. It was while she was being educated here that her father died suddenly, and Miss Lamb, already motherless, was adopted by an uncle who was very rich, and who at once removed her from the school. Although surrounded by every luxury, the poor girl seemed to have left happiness behind her when she left the school. Her desire had been for higher education. Her uncle did not believe in the higher education of women: all the poor girl's efforts after more knowledge were frowned upon, and set aside. She might have clothes in prodigal abundance, she might wear a whole milliner's shop on her head, and her uncle would not have complained; but when she wanted lessons, or even books, she was reminded that but for his charity she would be a beggar: and, indeed, I think many beggars had greater possibilities of happiness. The years went on. Miss Lamb, always a gentle soul, lacked the courage and enterprise to break away from her prison, and continued to languish under the iron rule of her uncle. Her youth passed in close attendance on the crabbed old man, who had become a confirmed invalid. She had her romance, too: there was a man who loved her, and she cared for him; but here again her uncle's will came between her and her happiness. The sour old man reminded her that he had kept her for so many years—that he had provided her with dainty food, and clothed her in costly array: now, when he was old and suffering, it would be base ingratitude for her to leave him,

especially as the doctors told him he had not long to live. Because she was so meek and gentle, so easily cowed, and so good at heart, Miss Lamb sent her lover away to wait until she should be free to take her happiness with him. But the old uncle lingered on for several years. The man, who was only human, got tired of waiting, and on the very day when the death of the old uncle set Miss Lamb free he was married to a woman for whom he did not particularly care, just because he had grown tired of waiting for the happiness that tarried so long. Miss Lamb never really recovered from that blow. She lived only a few years longer, but she filled those years with as much work for her fellows as it was possible to get into the time. When she died, and her will was read, it was found that her thoughts must have lingered very much on the happy time she had spent within these walls, for the bulk of her property came for the enrichment of the Compton Girls' School. In addition to this she left a sum of money which should, year by year, entitle one girl to the chance of a higher education."

Mr. Melrose was interrupted at this point by a tremendous outburst of cheering; indeed, it seemed as if the sixty girls must have throats lined with tin, from the noise they contrived to make.

Mr. Melrose did not check them; he merely stood and waited with a smile on his face, wondering, as he looked at the wildly cheering mob, if any one of them would have been as meek under burdens as had been the gentle soul whose memory they were so vigorously honouring.

The cheering died to silence, and then he began to speak again. "I have finished the story of how it was that Miss Lamb came to leave so much money to the school, and now I am going to ask Mr. Grimshaw to read the rules for the enrolment of candidates for the Lamb Bursary. You will please follow that reading very carefully, making up your minds as he proceeds, as to whether you individually can fulfil the terms of the bequest."

Mr. Grimshaw was an elderly gentleman of nervous aspect, with a thin, squeaky voice which would have upset the risibles of the whole school at any ordinary time; but the girls for the most part listened to him with gravely decorous faces, although one irrepressible Fourth Form kid rippled into gurgling laughter, that was instantly changed to a strangled cough.

The reading began with a tangle of legal terms and phrases as to the receiving of the money, and the way in which it was to be laid out, and then the document stated the requirements looked for in the candidate:—

> "Each candidate offering herself for the winning of the Lamb Bursary must be in the Sixth Form of the Compton Girls' School. She must be of respectable parentage, which is to say, that neither of her parents shall have been in prison. She herself must have a high moral character. No girl known to have cheated, or to have robbed her fellows in any way, is eligible as a candidate. It is furthermore required that each candidate shall take all the general subjects taught in the school, and no candidate shall be allowed to specialize on any particular subject; but each one to be judged on the all-round character of her learning. Candidates must be enrolled for three terms, the judging being on the marks made in that time. Each girl offering herself as a candidate will, with right hand upraised, declare solemnly, that she is a fit person to be enrolled as a candidate, and that she individually fulfils the conditions laid down in this document."

The squeaky voice ceased, and Mr. Grimshaw with some creaking of immaculate boots sat down, while a profound hush settled over the rows of bright-faced girls. A robin just outside one of the open windows sang blithely, and away in the distance a bugle sounded.

There was a stir in the long row of Sixth Form girls. Hazel rose to her feet, her face rather white and set, for she was the first to enroll, and the situation gripped her strangely; but her voice rang clearly through the hall as, with right hand raised, she said,—

"I, Hazel Dring, offer myself as a candidate for the Lamb Bursary. I promise to abide by the conditions laid down, and I declare myself a fit person to be enrolled."

Mr. Melrose looked at the Head, who bowed slightly, then he said to Hazel, "Will you please come on to the dais and be enrolled."

She went forward, and the gentleman who had not spoken proceeded to spread a paper before her, which she had to sign. Meanwhile Margaret stood up, and raising her right hand, made the affirmation in the same way, and she was followed by Daisy Goatby.

Dorothy was thrilled to the very centre of her being. She rose to her feet, she lifted her right hand, while her voice rang out vibrant with all sorts of emotions.

"I, Dorothy Sedgewick, offer myself as a candidate for the Lamb Bursary. I promise to abide by the conditions laid down, and I declare

myself a fit person to be enrolled."

Again the Head bowed in response to the inquiring look of Mr. Melrose, who asked Dorothy to join the others on the dais, and she went forward, feeling as if she was treading on air. It seemed such a solemn ceremony, and there was the same sensation of awe in her heart that she felt when she was in church.

She was in the midst of writing her name when she heard the stir of another girl rising and then the words:—

"I, Rhoda Fleming, offer myself——"

Dorothy paused with her pen suspended, and her face went ashen white, as the glib tongue of Rhoda repeated the declaration that she was a fit person to be enrolled. Oh, how could she do it? Was it possible that Tom was right, and the average girl had no sense at all of honour, or moral obligation?

"Will you finish your signature, if you please, Miss Sedgewick." It was the quiet voice of the gentleman taking the signatures that broke in upon Dorothy's confused senses. Murmuring an apology, she finished writing her name, and went across to sit beside Daisy Goatby, while Rhoda came up to the dais to sign the enrollment paper. Joan Fletcher was the next, and she was followed by Jessie Wayne. Dora Selwyn, the head girl, did not compete; she was specializing in botany and geology, and did not want to be compelled to give her time to other subjects. There were seven candidates this year: last year there had been four, and the year before there had been eight. As Miss Groome, the Form-mistress remarked, seven was a good workable number, sufficient to make competition keen, but not too many to crowd each other in the race.

At the conclusion of the little ceremony the girls rose to their feet to sing "Auld Lang Syne," and then with a rousing three-times-three—the first for Miss Lamb of evergreen memory, the second for the school, and the third for the newly-enrolled—they swarmed out to the grounds, for the rest of the day was to be holiday. They were to have a tennis tournament among themselves, with a box of chocolates for first prize, and an ounce of the strongest peppermints to be bought in Sowergate as consolation to the one who should score the least.

The three gentlemen stayed to lunch, and sat at the high table in the dining-room with the Head and such of the staff as were not at the lower tables carving.

The seven candidates had been decorated with huge white rosettes, in recognition of their position, and the talk at table was chiefly about Miss Lamb and her unfortunate love story.

"I expect she was afraid if she had married the man her uncle would have cut her out of his will, and so she would have been poor," said Rhoda, who was very bright and gay.

Dorothy shivered a little. Rhoda's voice made her feel bad just then. It was to her a most awful thing that a girl who knew herself guilty of deliberate theft should rise and affirm with uplifted hand that she was morally fit to compete for the Lamb Bursary.

"Perhaps she didn't care over-much for him," said Daisy Goatby with a windy sigh. "Getting married must be an awful fag. She could look forward to being free when the old man died; but if she had married, she might never have been free, don't you see."

"I think she was a martyr, poor dear." Dorothy had the same vibrant sound in her voice as when she rose to affirm, and the other girls dropped silent to listen to what she had to say.

"Why do you think she was a martyr?" asked Margaret softly, seeing that Dorothy paused.

"Because she sacrificed everything to a principle." Dorothy flushed a little as she spoke; she was too new to her surroundings to feel at ease in making her standpoints clear, and she was oppressed also by Rhoda's bravado in affirming, in spite of that damaging incident at Sharman and Song's.

"There was no principle involved that I can see," grumbled Joan Fletcher with wrinkled brows. "There was self-sacrifice if you like, although, to my way of thinking, even that was uncalled for, seeing that the old man had the money to pay for any service he might require. I am not going to grumble at her for putting aside her happiness, because if I win the bursary I shall be so much the better off in consequence of her deciding to sacrifice herself for her uncle."

"I think Dorothy is right," chimed in Hazel crisply. "Miss Lamb made a principle out of her duty, real or supposed, to her uncle: she gave up her chance of married happiness because her sense of what was right would have been outraged if she had not."

"Then she was a martyr!" exclaimed Jessie Wayne. "I shall see her as a picture in my mind next time we sing 'The martyr first whose eagle eye.' "

“I dare say you will, goosey”—Dora Selwyn leaned forward past Dorothy to speak to Jessie, who sat at the end of the table—“meanwhile, you will please get on your feet, for the Head is rising.”

Jessie scrambled up in a great hurry, punting into Daisy Goatby, who sat on the other side of her. Daisy, heavy in all her movements, lurched against a plate standing too near the edge of the table, and brought it to the ground with a crash. But the crash was not heard, for Hazel, who saw it falling, and the gentlemen rising to leave the room at the same moment, swung up her hand for a rousing cheer, and in the burst of acclamation the noise of smashing was entirely lost.

“What a morning it has been!” murmured Dorothy, as she strolled down to the tennis court with Margaret for a little practice at the nets before the serious work of the tournament should begin.

“Yes.” Margaret spoke emphatically. She paused, and then said rather shyly, “I should not have been very happy about it all, though, if it had not been for the talk I had with you last night. Oh! I was worried about that rumour of your depending on helps that are not right for your work. I think I should have fainted, when you made your affirmation, if I had known that there was anything not right about it.”

“I do not expect you would have swooned, however badly you might have felt.” Dorothy’s tone was rather grim as she spoke, for she was thinking of Rhoda. “It is astonishing what we can bear when hard things really come upon us.”

“Perhaps so. Anyhow, I am very glad it was all right,” Margaret sighed happily, and slid her arm in Dorothy’s. “I even had a big struggle with myself when Rhoda Fleming stood up to affirm, and I forgave her again from the bottom of my heart for every snub she has ever handed out to me, for it seemed as if it would make her record sweeter if I did that.”

“I wish I were as good as you.” Dorothy’s tone was a little conscience stricken. There had been no desire in her heart to have Rhoda clean enough to affirm; she had been merely conscious of a great amazement at the girl’s audacity and callousness.

“Oh, rot, I am not good!” jerked out Margaret brusquely; and then, Sixth Form girl though she was, she challenged Dorothy to race to the nets.

It was a neck-and-neck struggle, and the victor was nearly squashed at the goal by the vanquished falling on to her, and they helped each other up,

laughing at the figures they must have cut, and the loss of hard-won dignity involved.

It was Dorothy who won, but that was only because she had a longer stride. She knew this right well, and Margaret knew it too.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TORN BOOK

The studies at the Compton Girls' School were at the top of the house, and consisted of three small rooms set apart for the use of the Sixth, and one fair-sized chamber that was used as prep room by the Upper Fifth. The private sitting-room of the Form-mistresses was also on this floor, the rooms all opening on to one long passage, which had a staircase at either end.

There were twelve girls in the Sixth, which gave four to a study. Hazel and Margaret had with them Dorothy, and also Jessie Wayne, who was a very quiet and studious girl, keeping to her own corner, and having very little to do with the others. The head girl, Dora Selwyn, had the middle study with three others, and the remaining four, of whom Rhoda Fleming was one, had the third room, which was next to the prep room of the Upper Fifth.

All the rooms on this floor were fitted with gas fires, and were very comfortable. To Dorothy there was a wonderfully homey feeling in coming up to this quiet retreat after the stress and strain of Form work. She shared the centre table with Hazel, while Margaret had a corner opposite to the one where Jessie worked.

One Friday evening at the end of October they were all in the study, and, for a wonder, they were all talking. The week's marks had been posted on the board in the lecture hall an hour before, and they had read the result as they came out from prayers.

It was Dorothy's class position which had led to the talking; for the first time since she had come to the school she was fourth from the top. Dora Selwyn, Hazel, and Margaret were above her, and Rhoda Fleming was fifth.

"Rhoda has been fourth so far this term," said Jessie Wayne. "She will not take it kindly that you have climbed above her, Dorothy. How did you manage to do it?"

"I can't think how I got above her," answered Dorothy, who was flushed and happy, strangely disinclined for work, too, and disposed to lean back in her chair and discuss her victory. "Rhoda is a long way ahead of me in most things, and she is so wonderfully good at maths, too, while I am a duffer at figures in any shape or form."

“You are pulling up though. I noticed you had fifty more marks for maths than you had last week,” said Hazel, who had been deep in a new book on chemistry, which she was annotating for next week’s class paper.

“Yes, I know I am fifty up.” Dorothy laughed happily. “To tell the truth, I have been swotting to that end. Indeed, I have let other things slide a bit in order to get level with the rest of you at maths. I have to work harder at that than anything.”

“Well, you jumped in Latin too; you were before me there,” said Margaret. “I should not be surprised if you have me down next week or the week after. You will have your work cut out to do it, though, for I mean to keep in front of you as long as I can.”

“I can’t see myself getting in front of you,” said Dorothy. “You seem to know all there is to be known about most things.”

“In short, she is the beginning and end of wisdom,” laughed Hazel. “But we must get to work, or by this time next week we shall find ourselves at the bottom of the Form.”

“What a row there is in the next study,” said Dorothy. “Don’t you wonder that Dora puts up with such a riot, and she the head girl?”

“The noise is not in the next study,” said Jessie, who had opened the door and gone out into the passage to see where the noise came from. “It is Rhoda and her lot who are carrying on. They do it most nights, only they do not usually make as much noise as this. I suppose they are taking advantage of the mistresses having gone to Ilkestone for that lecture on Anthropology; Dora has gone too, so there is no one up here to keep them in order to-night.”

“Well, shut the door, kid, and drag the curtain across it to deaden the noise. We have to get our work done somehow.” There was a sound of irritation in Hazel’s voice; she had badly wanted to go to the lecture herself, but she knew that she dared not take the time. If she had been free like Dora she would have gone, and not troubled about the fear of dropping in her Form; but in view of her position as an aspirant for the Mutton Bone, she dared not run the risk.

There was silence in the study for the next hour. Sometimes a girl would get up to reach a book, or would rustle papers, or scrape her chair on the floor; but there was no talking, until presently Jessie pushed her chair back, and rising to her feet, declared that she was going to bed, simply because she could not keep awake any longer.

“I am coming too,” said Hazel. “I am doing no good at all, just because I keep dropping asleep; I suppose it is because it has been so windy to-day. Are you others coming now?”

Margaret said that she would go—and indeed she was so pale and heavy-eyed that she did not look fit to stay up any longer; but Dorothy said that she wanted to finish the Latin she was doing for next day, and would stay until she had done it.

When the others had gone she rose and turned out the gas fire, fearful lest she might forget it when she went to bed, and there was a considerable penalty waiting for the girl who left a gas fire burning when she left the room.

The upper floor had grown strangely still. The Upper Fifth had gone downstairs to bed some time ago. There were no mistresses in their private room, which to-night was not even lighted. The noise in the third study had died away, and there was a deep hush over the place.

Dorothy worked on steadily for a time, then suddenly she felt herself growing nervous; there was a sensation upon her that some one was coming, was creeping along the passage, and pausing outside the door.

She stopped work, she held herself rigid, and stared fixedly at the door. The handle moved gently—some one was coming in. The horror of this creeping, silent thing was on her; she wanted to scream, but she had no power—she could only pant.

The door creaked open for perhaps half an inch. Dorothy sprang up, and in her haste knocked over a pile of books, which fell with a clattering bang on the floor. For a moment she paused, appalled by the noise she had made in that quiet place; and then, wrenching open the door, she faced the passage, which stretched, lighted and empty, to her gaze.

With a jerk she clicked off the electric light of the study, and with a series of bounds reached the top of the stairs, fleeing down and along the corridor to the dormitory. All the girls were in bed except Hazel, who looked out from her cubicle to know what was wrong.

“Nerves, I expect. Yah, I turned into a horrible coward, and when the door creaked gently open I just got up and fled,” said Dorothy, who was hanging on to the side of her cubicle, looking thoroughly scared and done up from her experience upstairs.

“I guess you have been doing too much; you would have been wiser to have come down when we did,” said Hazel calmly; and then, as her own

toilet was all but complete, she came and helped Dorothy to get to bed.

It was good to be helped. Dorothy was shaking in every limb, and she was feeling so thoroughly demoralized that it was all she could do to keep from bursting into noisy crying. She thanked Hazel with lips that trembled, and creeping into her bed, hid her head beneath the clothes because her teeth chattered so badly.

Sleep came to her after a time, for she was healthily tired with the long day of work and play. But with sleep came dreams, and these were for the most part weird and frightening. Some evil was always coming upon her from behind, and yet she could never get her head round to see what it was that was menacing her. Oh, it was fearful! She struggled to wake, but was not able; and presently she slid into deeper slumber, getting more restful as the hours went by. Then the old trouble broke out again: something was certainly coming upon her, the curtains of her cubicle were shaking, her bed was shaking, and next minute she herself would be shaken out of bed. Making a great effort she opened her eyes, and saw Margaret standing over her.

"What is the matter?" gasped Dorothy, wondering why her head was feeling so queer and her mouth so parched and dry.

"That is what I have come to ask you," said Margaret with a laugh. "You have nearly waked us all up by crying out and groaning in a really tragic fashion. Are you feeling ill?"

"Why, no, I am all right," said Dorothy, who began to feel herself all over to see if she was really awake and undamaged. "I have been having ghastly dreams, and I thought something was coming after me, only I was not able to get awake to see what it was."

"Ah! a fit of nightmare, I suppose." Margaret's tone was sympathetic, but she yawned with sleepiness, and shivered from the cold. "I found you lying across the bed with your head hanging down, as if you were going to pitch out on to the floor, so I guess you were feeling bad."

"What is the time?" Dorothy had struggled to a sitting posture, and was wondering if she dared ask Margaret to creep into bed with her, for there was a sense of panic on her still, and she feared—actually feared—to be left alone.

"Oh, the wee sma' hours are getting bigger. It is just five o'clock—plenty of time for a good sleep yet before the rising bell. Lie down, and I will tuck you in snugly, then you will feel better."

Dorothy sank back on her pillow, submitting to be vigorously tucked in by Margaret. She was suddenly ashamed of being afraid to stay alone. Now that she was wider awake the creeping horror was further behind her, while the fact that it was already five o'clock seemed to bring the daylight so much nearer.

She was soon asleep again, and she did not wake until roused by the bell. So heavy had been her sleep that her movements were slower than usual, and she was the last girl to leave the dormitory.

To her immense surprise both Hazel and Margaret gave her the cold shoulder at breakfast. They only spoke to her when she spoke to them. They both sat with gloom on their faces, as if the fog in which the outside world was wrapped that morning had somehow got into them.

Dorothy was at first disposed to be resentful. She supposed their grumpiness must be the result of her having disturbed the dormitory with her nightmare. It seemed a trifle rotten that they should treat her in such a fashion for what she could not help. She relapsed into silence herself for the remainder of breakfast, concentrating her thoughts and energies on the day's work, and trying to get all the satisfaction she could out of the fact that she had pulled up one again this week in her school position.

"Dorothy, the Head wishes to see you in her study as soon as breakfast is over." There was a constraint in Miss Groome's voice which Dorothy was quick to feel, and she looked from her to the averted faces of Hazel and Margaret, wondering what could be the matter with them all.

"Yes, Miss Groome, I will go," she said cheerfully; and she held her head up, feeling all the comfort of a quiet conscience, although privately she told herself that they were all being very horrid to her, seeing that she was so absolutely unconscious of having given offence in any way.

The Head's study was a small room on the first floor, having a window which gave a delightful view over the Sowerbrook valley, with a distant glimpse of the blue waters of the English Channel. There was no view to be had this morning, however—nothing but a grey wall of fog, dense and smothering.

Miss Arden was sitting at her writing table, and lying before her was a torn book—this was very shabby, as if from much use. There was something so sinister about the disreputable volume lying there that Dorothy felt her eyes turn to it, as if drawn by a magnet.

“Good morning, Dorothy; come and sit down.” The tone of the Head was so kind that all at once Dorothy sensed disaster, and the colour rushed in a flood over her face and right up to her hair, then receded, leaving her pale and cold, while a sensation seized upon her of being caught in a trap.

She sat down on the chair pointed out by the Head, trying to gather up her forces to meet what was in front of her, yet feeling absolutely bewildered.

There followed a little pause of silence. It was almost as if the Head was not feeling quite sure about how to tackle the situation in front of her; then she said in a crisp, businesslike manner, pointing to the torn book in front of her, “This book, is it yours?”

“No,” said Dorothy with decision. “I am sure it is not. I have no book so ragged and worn.”

“Perhaps you have borrowed it, then?” persisted the Head, fixing her with a keen glance which seemed to look right through her.

“I beg your pardon?” murmured Dorothy, looking blank.

“I asked, have you borrowed it?” repeated Miss Arden patiently. It was never her way to harry or confuse a girl.

“I have never seen it before that I can remember. What book is it?” Dorothy fairly hurled her question at the Head, and rose from her seat as if to take it.

The Head waved her back. “Sit still, and think a minute. This book was found with yours on the table of your study this morning. I have learned that you were the last girl to leave the study last night; your books were left in a confused heap on the table, and this one was open at the place where you had been working before you went to bed.”

“I was doing Latin before I went to bed,” said Dorothy, her senses still in a whirling confusion.

“Just so. This book is a key, a translation of the book we are doing in the Sixth this time,” said the Head slowly, “Now, do you understand the significance of it being found among your books?”

“Do you mean that you think I was using a key last night in preparing my Form Latin?” asked Dorothy, her eyes wide with amazement.

“No; I only mean that appearances point to this, and I have sent for you so that you may be able to explain—to clear yourself, if that is possible; if

not, to own up as to how far you have been depending on this kind of thing to help you in your work and advance your position in your form."

Dorothy sat quite silent. Her face was white and pinched, and there was a feeling of despair in her heart that she had never known before. It was her bare word against this clear evidence of that torn, disreputable old book, and how could she expect that any one was going to believe her?

"Come, I want to hear what you have to say about it all." The voice of the Head had a ring of calm authority, and Dorothy found her tongue with an effort.

"I have never used a key to help me with my Latin, or with any of my work, and I have never seen that book before," she said in a low tone.

"It was found among the books you had been using before you went to bed." There was so much suggestion in the voice of the Head that Dorothy gave a start of painful recollection.

"Oh! I left my books lying anyhow, and I shall have to take a bad-conduct mark. I am so sorry, but I was frightened, and ran away. I ought to have gone to bed when Hazel and Margaret went down, but I wanted to finish my Latin; it takes me longer than they to do it."

"What frightened you?" demanded the Head.

"While I was sitting at work, and the place was very still, I had suddenly the sensation of some one, or something, creeping along outside the door; I saw the handle turn, and the door creaked open for half an inch; I cried out, but there was no answer, and I just got up and bolted."

"There was not much to frighten you in the fact of some one coming along the passage and softly opening the door?"

The voice of the Head was questioning, and under the compelling quality of her gaze Dorothy had to own up to the real cause of her fear.

"The girls have said that the rooms up there are haunted—that a certain something comes along at night opening the doors, sighing heavily, and moaning as if in pain."

"Did you hear sighs and moans?" asked the Head, her lips giving an involuntary twitch.

"I did not stay to listen; I bolted as fast as I could go," admitted Dorothy. "That was why my books were not put away, or any of my things cleared up."

“Do you know why the girls say the rooms are haunted?” asked the Head, and this time she smiled so kindly that Dorothy found the courage to reply.

“I was told that a girl, Amelia Herschstein, was killed on that landing.” Her voice was very low, and her gaze dropped to the carpet. Standing there in the daylight it seemed so perfectly absurd to admit that she had been nearly scared out of her senses on the previous evening by her remembrance of a ghost story.

“You don’t seem to have got the details quite right,” said the Head in a matter-of-fact tone. “About twenty years ago, I have been told, the landing where the studies are was given up to the Sixth for bedrooms; girls were not supposed to need studies then—at least they did not have them here. There was no second staircase then; the place where the stairs go down by the prep room of the Upper Fifth was a small box-room which had a window with a balcony. Amelia Herschstein was leaning over this balcony one night to talk to a soldier from Beckworth Camp who had contrived to scrape an acquaintance with her, when she fell, and was so injured that she died a week later. I suppose that the idea of the haunting comes from the fact of the Governors making such drastic alterations in that part of the house immediately afterwards. I am sorry you were frightened by the story, and I can understand how you would rush away, forgetting all about your books. But your fright is a small matter compared with this business of the torn book.” As she spoke the Head pointed in distaste at the ragged, dirty book in front of her, and paused, looking at Dorothy as if expecting her to speak.

Dorothy had nothing to say. Having told the Head that she had never seen the book before, it seemed useless to repeat her assertion.

After a little pause Miss Arden went on: “Your Form-mistress says that she has always found you truthful and straightforward in your work. It is possible that you have an enemy who put the book among your things. For the present I suspend judgment. As the matter is something of a mystery, and others of the Form may be involved, I must also suspend the Latin marks of the entire Form to-day. Will you please tell Miss Groome that I will come to her room, and talk about this question of the day’s Latin, at eleven o’clock. You may go now.”

Dorothy bowed and went out, with her head held very high and her heart feeling very heavy.

CHAPTER IX

UNDER A CLOUD

Dorothy understood now the reason why Hazel and Margaret had treated her to so much cold shoulder that morning. There was a keen sense of fairness in her make-up, and while she resented the unfriendly treatment, in her heart she did not blame them for the stand they had taken. If they really believed she did her work by means of such helps as that torn book represented, then they were quite within their rights in not wanting to have anything to do with her. The thing which hurt her most was that they should have passed judgment on her without giving her a chance to say a word in her own defence. Yet even that was forgivable, seeing how strong was the circumstantial evidence against her.

She walked into her Form-room, apologizing to Miss Groome for being late, and she took her place as if nothing had been wrong. The only girl who gave her a kind look, or spoke a friendly word, was Rhoda Fleming, and Dorothy was ungrateful enough to wish she had kept quiet.

Work went on as usual. Dorothy had given the message of the Head to Miss Groome, who looked rather mystified, and was coldly polite in her manner to Dorothy.

Never had a morning dragged as that one did; it took all Dorothy's powers of concentration to keep her mind fixed on her work. She was thinking, ruefully enough, that she would not have much chance of keeping her Form position if this sort of thing went on for long. She blundered in her answers over things she knew very well, and for the first time that term work was something of a hardship.

Eleven o'clock at last! The hour had not done striking, and the girls were, some of them, moving about preparing for the next work, when the door opened, and the Head came in. She looked graver than usual; that much the girls noticed as those who were seated rose at her entrance, and those who were moving to and fro lined up hastily to bow as she came in.

Motioning with her hand for them to sit down again, the Head took the chair vacated for her by Miss Groome, and sitting down began to talk to them, not as if they were schoolgirls merely, but as woman to woman, telling them of her difficulty, and appealing to their sense of honour to help her out of her present perplexity.

“I am very concerned for the honour of the school,” she said, and there was a thrill of feeling in her voice which found an echo in the hearts of the listeners. “This morning the prefect on duty for the study floor found a pile of books lying partly on the table and partly on the floor in No. 1 study. Lying open on the table, partly under the other books, was a torn and dirty Latin key. The books were the property of Dorothy Sedgewick, who had been the last to leave the study overnight. The matter was reported to Miss Groome, who brought the book to me; and I, as you know, sent for Dorothy to come to me directly after breakfast. Dorothy says she has never used a key, and that she had never seen that ragged old book. She declares that it was not among her books overnight. When being frightened by some one stealthily trying to enter her room, she rose from her seat, and staying only to turn off the electric light, bolted for the dorm, and went to bed. Miss Groome says she has always found Dorothy straight in her work and truthful in her speech. This being so, we are bound to believe her statement when she says she has never seen that book, and that she has never used a key. But as books do not walk about on their own feet, we have to discover who put that book among Dorothy’s things. Can any of you give me any information on the mystery, or tell me anything which might lead to it being cleared up?”

There was dead silence among the girls. In fact, the hush was so deep that they could hear a violin wailing in the distant music-room, a chamber supposed to be sound-proof.

When the pause had lasted quite a long time, Hazel asked if she might speak.

“I am waiting for some of you to begin,” replied the Head, smiling at Hazel, though in truth her heart beat a little faster. Hazel had always been a pupil to be proud of, and it was unthinkable that she should be mixed up in a thing of this sort.

“There was no book ragged and dirty among Dorothy’s things when we went to bed. There could not have been a book of that sort in the room during the evening, for we had all been turning our books out and tidying them in readiness to start the fresh week of work. It was not more than twenty minutes after we had come down to bed that Dorothy came rushing down to the dorm, looking white and frightened. She was shaking so badly that she could hardly stand. I helped her to bed; but I don’t think she slept well, as she had nightmare, and woke most of us with her groaning and crying—she had plainly had a very bad scare. I have had a lot to do with her since the term began, and I have never known her say anything that was not true; she does not even exaggerate, as some girls do.”

The brow of the Head cleared, her heart registered only normal beats, and she said with a smile, “I am very glad for what you have said, Hazel. Schoolgirls have a way of sticking together in a passive way, keeping silent when they know that one is in the wrong, and that sort of thing; but it is wholly refreshing, and a trifle unusual in my experience, for them to bear testimony to each other’s uprightness as you have done.”

Dorothy’s head drooped now. It was one thing to hold it high in conscious innocence, when she was the suspected of all, but it broke down her self-control to hear Hazel testifying to her truthfulness.

Margaret, who was sitting at the next desk, turned suddenly and gripped Dorothy’s hand across the narrow dividing space, and Dorothy suddenly felt it was worth while to be in trouble, to find that she had the friendship of these two girls.

“Has any other girl anything to say?” asked the Head sweetly, and she looked from one to the other, as if she would read the very thoughts that were passing through their heads.

“Perhaps they would come to you quietly?” suggested Miss Groome.

“I shall be pleased to see them if they prefer that way.” The Head was smiling and serene, but there was a hint of steel under the velvet of her manner; and then in a few quiet words she delivered her ultimatum. “Pending the making plain of this mystery of how the torn book came to be among Dorothy Sedgewick’s things, the whole Form must be somewhat under a cloud. That is like life, you know; we all have to suffer for the wrong-doing of each other. If in the past Dorothy had been proved untruthful in speech and not straight in her dealings, then we might have well let the punishment fall upon her alone. As it is, you will all do your Latin for the week without any marks. You will do your very best, too, for the girl producing poor work in this direction will immediately put herself into the position of a suspected person. If the statement of Dorothy, supported by the testimony of Hazel, is to be believed, that the book was not in the study overnight, then it must have been put there out of malice, and it is up to you to find out who has done this thing.”

The Head rose as she finished speaking, and the girls rose too, remaining on their feet until she had passed out of the room.

Great was the grumbling at the disaster which had fallen upon the Form. Individual cases of cheating at work had occurred from time to time, but nothing of this kind had cropped up within the memory of the oldest

inhabitant—not in the Sixth Form, that is to say. It was supposed that by the time a girl had reached the Sixth she had sown all her wild oats, and had become both outwardly and in very truth a reliable member of society.

In this case there was malice as well as cheating. The girl who owned the key had not merely used it to get a better place in her form, but she had tried to bring an innocent person into trouble.

There was an agitated, explosive feeling in the atmosphere of the Form-room that morning. But, thanks to the hint from the Head concerning the character of work that would be expected of them, Miss Groome had no cause for complaint against any of them.

As Jessie Wayne sagely remarked, the real test concerning who was the owner of the torn book would come during the week, when the girl had to do her work without the help of her key; most likely the task for to-day had all been prepared before the book was slid in among Dorothy's things.

There was a good half of the girls who believed that Dorothy had been using the key when she was scared by the ghost who haunted that upper floor. They did not dare put their belief into words, but they let it show in their actions, and Dorothy had to suffer.

Her great consolation was the way in which Hazel and Margaret championed her. They had certainly given her the cold shoulder that first morning, but since she had asserted her innocence so strongly, they had not swerved in their loyalty. Jessie Wayne also declared she was positive Dorothy had never used the key, because of the trouble she took over her Latin.

The talk of the upper floor being haunted reached the ears of Miss Groome, making her very angry; but she went very pale too, for, with all her learning and her qualifications, she was very primitive at the bottom, and she had confessed to being thoroughly scared when the Head had a talk with her that day after Form work was over.

The Head had asked if Miss Groome suspected any of her girls in the matter of cribbing.

"I do not," replied the Form-mistress. "Dorothy Sedgewick has, of course, the hardest work to keep up with her Form, but she is doing it by means of steady plodding. She is not brilliant, but she is not to be beaten at steady work, and it is that which counts for most in the long run."

The Head nodded thoughtfully, then she asked in a rather strange tone, "Did you wonder why I did not bring that tattered book into the Form-room

when I came to talk about it?"

"Yes, I did," replied Miss Groome.

"I did not dare bring it because of the commotion which might have sprung up." The Head laughed softly as she spoke, and unlocking an inner drawer of her desk, she produced the torn old book which had made so much discomfort among the Sixth. "Look at this." As she spoke she put the dirty old thing into the hands of Miss Groome, pointing to a name written in faded ink on the inside of the cover.

The name was Amelia Herschstein, and when she had read it Miss Groome asked with a little gasp, "Why! what does it mean?"

"That is just what I want to find out," replied the Head crisply. "It looks as if we are up against a full-sized mystery."

CHAPTER X

FAIR FIGHTING

The weeks flew by. There had been no clue to the mystery of that torn book which had Amelia Herschstein's name written inside the cover, and in the rush of other things the matter had been nearly forgotten by most of the girls. The Head and Miss Groome did not forget; but whereas Miss Groome frankly admitted herself scared stiff by the uncanny character of the find, and refused to be left alone in the sitting-room on the upper floor when the others had gone to bed, the Head got into the habit of walking quietly up the stairs most nights, going along the passage, opening the doors of the different rooms, and coming down the other stairs.

She meant to get to the bottom of the mystery somehow, but so far she had not found much reward for her searching. When the governors had arrived on their monthly visit to the schools, and had come to lunch with the girls, she had invited the unsuspecting gentlemen into her private room, and had led the talk to the days of the past, and then had put a few searching questions about the tragedy of Amelia Herschstein, asking who she was, and how it came about that such an accident occurred. To her surprise she found they resented her questioning, and her attempts to get information drew a blank every time.

Then she took her courage in her hands, and faced the three gentlemen squarely. "The fact is," she said, speaking in a low tone, "I am up against a situation which fairly baffles me. If you had been willing to talk to me about this affair of the tragic fate of the poor girl, I might not have troubled you with my worries, or at least not until I had settled them. I have found that Amelia is said to walk in the upper passage where the studies are. This has the one good effect of making the Sixth Form girls very ready to go to bed at night. But I find that the mistresses do not take so much pleasure as formerly in their private sitting-room, which is, as you know, also on that passage. Then a week or two ago a girl, alone in a study up there, was frightened by the sensation of something coming; she saw the handle of the door turn, and the door come gently open for a little way. I am sorry to say she did not stay to see what would happen next, but bolted downstairs to the dorm as fast as she could go. The strange part of the affair was that there was found among that girl's books next morning a torn old book, a key to the Latin just then

being studied by the Form, and the name inside the book, written in faded ink across the inside of the cover, was Amelia Herschstein."

"Whew!" The exclamation came from the most formal looking of the governors, and taking out his handkerchief he hurriedly mopped his face as if he was very warm indeed.

"You understand now why I am anxious to know all there is to be known about the tragedy." The Head looked from one to the other of the three gentlemen as she spoke, and she noted that they seemed very much upset.

"It was a case which landed the school in heavy trouble," said the formal man, after a glance at the other two as if asking their consent to speak. "It was proved pretty clearly from things which came out at the inquest, and what the soldier afterwards admitted, that it was not because she had fallen in love with him that Amelia arranged meetings and talks with this soldier. She was trying to get from him details of a government invention on which he had been working before he came to Beckworth Camp. Now, a love affair of that sort was bad enough for the reputation of the school, but can you not see how infinitely worse a thing of this kind will prove?"

"Indeed I can." The Head was frankly sympathetic now, and she was taking back some of the hard thoughts she had cherished against the unoffending governors.

"It was proved, too, that the father of Amelia had been in the German Secret Service," went on the formal man. "Consideration for the feelings of the bereaved parents stopped the authorities from taking further proceedings. The soldier, a promising young fellow, and badly smitten by the young lady who was trying to make a tool of him, was sent to India at his own request, and was killed in a border skirmish a few months later. You understand now how it is we do not care even among ourselves to talk of the affair."

"I do understand," the Head replied. "But what you have told me does not throw any light on the mystery of how that book came to be with Dorothy Sedgewick's things in the No. 1 study."

"It only points to the probability of some of Amelia's kin being in the school, and if that is found to be the case they will have to go, and at once." The formal man shut his mouth with a snap as if it were a rat trap, and the Head nodded in complete understanding.

"Yes, they would certainly have to go," she said, and then she deftly turned the talk into other channels; and being a wise, as well as a very clever

woman, she saw to it that the cloud was chased from their faces before they went away.

Now she knew where she stood, and it was with a feeling of acute relief that she set herself to the business of finding out the source from which that torn book came. The first thing to do was to have a talk with Miss Groome. Her lip curled scornfully as she recalled the terror displayed by the Form-mistress. Of what good was higher education for women if it left them a prey to superstitious fears such as might have oppressed poor women who had no education at all?

A big hockey match was engrossing the attention of every one during the last week in November. It was big in the sense of being very important, for they were to play against the girls of the Ilkestone High School, and the prestige of the school with regard to hockey would hang on the issue of the game.

It was the only game Dorothy played at all well; she was good at centring, and she was not to be beaten for speed. The games-mistress wanted her for outside right, and Dora Selwyn, who was captain, agreed to this. But she exacted such an amount of practice from poor Dorothy in the days that came before the one that was fixed for the match that other work had to suffer, and she had to face the prospect of her school position going down still lower.

Never once since that affair of finding the torn book among her things had Dorothy been able to reach the fourth place in her Form. The next week she had been fifth again, with Rhoda once more above her, and the week after that she had suffered most fearfully at finding Joan Fletcher also above her. All this was so unaccountable to her because she knew that she was working just as hard as before.

Sometimes she was inclined to think she was being downed by circumstances. She was like a person being sucked down in a quagmire—the more she struggled the lower down she went.

Of course this was silly, and she told herself that despair never led anywhere but to failure.

Her keenest trouble was that she knew herself to be, by some people, a suspected person—that is to say, there were some who said that she must have used cribs in the past, which accounted for her failures now that she might be afraid to use them. There was this good in the trouble, that it made

her set her teeth and strive just so that she might show them how false their suppositions were.

The reason her position had dropped was largely due to the fact that the other girls had worked so much harder. The words of the Head concerning the position of slackers had fallen on fruitful ground. No girl wanted to be looked upon as having used cribs to help her along. The others, all of them, had the advantage of being used to the work and routine of the Compton School. Dorothy, as new girl, was bound to feel the disadvantages of her position.

Rhoda Fleming had a vast capacity for work, and she had also a heavy streak of laziness in her make-up. Just now she was working for all she was worth, and the week before the hockey match she rose above Margaret, who seemed to shrink several sizes smaller in consequence. She had to bear a lot of snubbing, too, for so elated with victory was Rhoda, that she seemed quite unable to resist the temptation of sitting on Margaret whenever opportunity occurred.

It pleased Rhoda to be quite kind, even friendly, to Dorothy, who did not approve the change, and was not disposed to profit by it.

Two days before the hockey match Rhoda, encountering Dorothy who was lacing her hockey boots, offered to help with her work.

"I can't bear to see you slipping back week by week," she said with patronizing kindness. "Of course you are new to things. There is that paper on chemistry that we have to do for to-morrow's lab work—can I help you with that?"

Dorothy stared at her in surprise, but was prompt in reply. "No, thank you; I would rather do my work myself."

"Yet you use cribs," said Rhoda with an ugly smile.

Dorothy felt as if a cold hand had gripped her. "I do not!" she said quietly, forcing herself to keep calm.

Rhoda laughed, and there was a very unpleasant sound in her mirth. "Well, you don't seem able to prove that you don't, so what is the good of your virtuous pose? If your position drops again this week, don't say I did not try to help you."

The incident caused Dorothy to think furiously. She was sure that Rhoda had, somehow, a hand in her position dropping. Was it possible that she was boosting Joan Fletcher along in order to lower Dorothy, and so make it

appear that there could not be smoke without a fire in the matter of that old book?

She broke into a sudden chuckle of laughter as she sat on the low form in the boot-room lacing up her second boot. Rhoda had departed, and she believed herself alone. Then along came Margaret, wanting to know what the joke was; and leaning back with her head against the wall and her boot laces in her hand, Dorothy told her of Rhoda's kind offer, and the threat which followed.

"Bah! it is a fight, is it?" cried Margaret. "Well, let them rise above us week by week if they want to. But, mind you, Dorothy, we have got to keep our end up somehow. Hazel and I have been going through the marks—dissecting them, you know—and we find that both you and I have made our steady average week by week; we have not fallen back—it is the others who have pulled up. Hazel says she is pretty sure that Rhoda will pull above her next week. There is one comfort—it is awfully good for Miss Groome; and I am sure the poor thing looks as if she needs a little something to cheer her up, for she does seem so uncommonly miserable this term—all the fun is clean knocked out of her."

"I wish we could work harder," grumbled Dorothy. "Oh, this hockey match is a nuisance! Just think what a lot of time it wastes."

"Don't you believe it, old thing," said Margaret. "It is hockey, and the gym, and things of that sort that make it possible for us to swot at other things. It makes me mad to hear the piffle folks talk about the time at school that is wasted on games. If the people who talk such rot had ever worked at books as we have to work they would very soon change their tune."

"Oh! I know all that." Dorothy's tone was more than a trifle impatient, for she was feeling quite fed-up with things. "My complaint is that hockey makes me so tired; I am not fit for anything but to go to sleep afterwards."

"Just so. And isn't that good for you?" Margaret wagged her head with an air of great understanding. "Before I came here—when I was working for the scholarship—I should as soon have thought of standing on my head in the street as wasting my precious time on games. The result was that I was always having bad headaches, and breaking down over my work; and I used to feel so wretched, too, that life seemed hardly worth living. Indeed, I wonder that I ever pulled through to win the scholarship."

"All the same, this match is an awful nuisance," grumbled Dorothy; and then she was suddenly ashamed of her ill-temper and her general tendency

to grouch.

CHAPTER XI

DOROTHY SCORES

Dora Selwyn was a downright good captain. What she lacked in brilliance she made up in painstaking. She was always after individual members of her team when they were playing for practice, and she lectured them with the judgment and authority of an expert. A lot of her spare time was taken up in studying hockey as played by the great ones of the game. She had even gone so far as to write letters of respectful admiration to the players of most note; and these invariably replied, giving her the hints for which she had asked with such disarming tact.

The match with the first team of the Ilkestone High School meant a lot to her. That team had an uncommonly good opinion of themselves, and, doubtless, they would not have stooped to challenge the senior team of the Compton Girls' School but for the fact that they had just been rather badly beaten by a team of Old Girls, and were anxious to give some team a good drubbing by way of restoring their self-confidence.

The day of the match came, bringing with it very good weather conditions. If Dora felt jumpy as to results, she had the sense to keep her nervousness to herself, and fussed round her team with as much clucking anxiety as a hen that is let out with a brood of irresponsible chickens.

The match was to be played at Ilkestone. She would have been much happier if the fight had been on their own ground; but the arrangement had been made, and it had to stand.

Dorothy was nervous too, but she would not show it. This was the first time she had played in an outside match with the team, and she was very anxious to give a good account of herself.

Her position had been changed at the last minute—that is to say, at yesterday's practice. Rhoda had persuaded Dora to give her the outside right, which left Dorothy the position of outside left, which, as every one knows, is the most difficult position of the hockey field. Naturally, too, she smarted at being thrust into the harder task when she had made such efforts to train for her place.

Still, there is no appeal against the command of the captain, and Dorothy climbed into the motor charabanc that was taking them to Ilkestone, seating

herself next to Jessie Wayne, and smiling as if she had not a care in the world.

"My word, you do look brisk, Dorothy, and as happy as if you were going to your own wedding," said Daisy Goatby in a grudging tone, as the charabanc with its load of girls and several mistresses slid out of the school gates and, mounting the steep hill past the church, sped swiftly towards Ilkestone.

"Why shouldn't I look happy?" asked Dorothy. "Time enough to sit and wail when we have been beaten."

"Don't even mention the word, Dorothy," said the captain sharply; and she looked so nervy and uncomfortable that Dorothy felt sorry enough for her to forgive her for the changed position. She was even meek when Dora went on in a voice that jerked more than ever: "I do hope you will do your best, Dorothy. I am horribly upset at having to change your position, but Rhoda declared she would not even try if I left her as outside left. So what was I to do?"

"Is she going to try now?" asked Dorothy rather grimly. She was wondering what would have happened if she had done such a thing.

"Oh, she says she will, and one can only hope for the best; but I shall be downright glad when it is all over, and we are on our way back." Dora shivered, looking so anxious that Dorothy had to do her level best at cheering her, saying briskly,—

"I expect we shall all go back shouting ourselves hoarse, and we shall have to hold you down by sheer force to keep you from making a spectacle of yourself. Oh, we are going to win, don't you worry!"

"I wish I did not care so much," sighed Dora. Then she turned to give a word of counsel to another of the team, and did not lean over to Dorothy again.

The Ilkestone team were on the ground waiting, while the rest of the High School were drawn up in close ranks to be ready to cheer their comrades on to victory. Dorothy's heart sank a little at that sight. She knew full well the help that shouting gives.

Then Hazel rushed up to her. "Dorothy, your brother Tom has just come; he says the boys of the Fifth and Sixth are on their way here to shout for us. Oh! here they come. What a lark it is, for sure!"

And a lark it was. The boys came streaming across the stile that led into the playing-field from the Canterbury road; and although they were pretty well winded from sprinting across the fields to reach the ground in time, they let out a preliminary cheer as an earnest of what they were going to do later on, when play had begun.

The High School girls, not to be beaten, set up a ringing cheer for their side. Their voices were so shrill that the sound must have carried for a long way.

Play was pretty equal for the first quarter, then the High School team got a bit involved by the fault of the forwards falling back when the other side passed.

Time and again, when the backs cleared with long hits to the wings, their skill was wasted, for the wingers were not there.

Suddenly Dorothy's spirits went up like a rocket. She knew very well that once falling back of the forwards had begun it was certain to go on. For herself, she was doing her bit, and a very difficult bit it was, and there seemed no glory in it; but wherever she was wanted, there she was, and it was the outburst of shouting which came from the boys that told her the side was keeping their end up.

The play was fast and furious while it lasted, and the shouting on both sides was so continuous that it seemed to be one long yell.

Then suddenly, for Dorothy at least, the end came. She was in her place, when the ball came spinning to her from a slam hard shot. She swung her stick, and caught it just right, when there was a crashing blow on her head which fairly knocked her out. She tumbled in a heap on the grass, and that was the last she remembered of the struggle.

When she came to her senses again she was lying on the table in the pavilion, and a doctor was bending over her, while the anxious faces of Miss Groome and the games-mistress showed in the background.

"Why, whatever has happened?" she asked, staring about her in a bewildered fashion. "Did I come a cropper on the field?"

"Yes, I suppose that is about what you did do," replied the doctor, speaking with slow deliberation.

"It is funny!" Dorothy wrinkled her forehead in an effort to remember. "I thought I hit my head against something—a most fearful crack it seemed."

“Ah!” The doctor gently lifted her head as he made the exclamation; he slid off her hat, and passed his fingers gently through her hair.

“Oh! it hurts!” she cried out sharply.

Then he saw that the back of her hat was cut through, and there was a wound on her head. He called for various things, and those standing round flew to fetch them. He and Dorothy were momentarily alone, and he jerked out a sudden question: “Who was it that fetched you that blow?”

Dorothy looked her surprise. “I am sure I don’t know,” she said doubtfully; “there was no one quite close to me. I remember swinging my stick up and catching the ball just right, and then I felt the blow.”

“Some one fouled you, I suppose—a stupid thing to do, especially as yours was such a good shot.” He was very busy with her head as he spoke, but she twisted it out of his hands so that she could look into his face.

“Was it a good shot?” she asked excitedly. “Did we win the game?”

“Without doubt you would have won if it had been fought to a finish,” he said kindly. “Now, just keep still while I attend to this dent in your head, or you will be having a fearful headache later on.”

Dorothy did have a headache later on. In fact, it was so bad that she was taken back to Sowergate in the doctor’s motor, instead of riding in the charabanc with the others. She felt so confused and stupid that it seemed ever so good to her to lie back in the car and to have nothing to think about.

She protested vigorously, though, when the school was reached and she was taken off to the san, to be made an invalid of for the rest of the day.

“I really can’t afford the time,” she said, looking at the doctor in an imploring fashion. “My Form position has been going down week by week of late, and this will make things still worse.”

“Not a bit of it,” he said with a laugh. “You will work all the better for the little rest. Just forget all about lessons and everything else that is a worry. Read a story book if you like—or, better still, do nothing at all. If you are all right to-morrow you can go to work again; but it will depend upon the way in which you rest to-day whether you are fit to go to work to-morrow, so take care.”

Dorothy had to submit with the best grace she could, and the doctor handed her over to the care of the matron, with instructions that she was to be coddled until the next day.

“I had been watching the game—that was why I happened to be on the spot,” he said to the matron as he turned away. “I don’t think I ever heard so much yelling at a hockey match before. I’m afraid I did some of it myself, for the play was really very good. I did not see how the accident happened, though; but I suppose one of the players in lunging for the ball just caught this young lady’s head instead.”

Dorothy elected to go straight to bed. If her getting back to work to-morrow depended on the manner in which she kept quiet to-day, then certainly she was going to be as quiet as possible.

Meanwhile great was the commotion among the hockey team. All the riotous satisfaction the Compton Schools would have felt at the victory which seemed so certain was dashed and spoiled by the accident which had happened just when Dorothy had made her splendid shot. “Who did it?” was the cry all round the field. But there was no response to this; and although there were so many looking on, no one seemed to be able to pick out the girls who were nearest to Dorothy, and there was no one who admitted having hit her by fluke.

The High School team said and did all the correct things, and then they suggested that the game should be called a draw. Naturally the Compton Schools did not like this; but, as Dora Selwyn said, a game was never lost until it was won, so the High School team had right on their side, and after a little talking on both sides it was settled to call it a draw.

Even this raised the Compton team to a higher level in hockey circles; henceforth no one would be able to flout them as inefficient, and the High School would have to treat them with greater respect in the future.

“We should not have done so well if the boys had not come to shout for us,” Dora admitted, when that night she had dropped into the study where Hazel and Margaret were sitting alone, for Jessie Wayne had hurt her ankle in getting out of the charabanc, and was resting downstairs.

“Noise is a help sometimes,” admitted Hazel, who wondered not a little why the head girl had come to talk to them that night, instead of leaving them free to work in peace.

She did not have to wonder long. After a moment of hesitation Dora burst out, “Why does Rhoda Fleming hate Dorothy Sedgewick so badly?”

“Mutual antagonism perhaps,” replied Hazel coolly. “Dorothy does not seem particularly drawn to Rhoda, so they may have decided to agree in not liking each other.”

“Don’t be flippant; I am out for facts, not fancies,” said the head girl sharply. She paused as if in doubt; then making up her mind in a hurry, she broke into impetuous speech. “I have found out that it was Rhoda who struck Dorothy down on the hockey field. But I am not supposed to know, and it is bothering me no end. I simply don’t know what I ought to do in the matter, so I have come to talk it over with you, because you are friends—Dorothy’s friends, I mean.”

“How did you find it out? Are you quite sure it is true?” gasped Hazel. “It is a frightfully serious thing, really. Why, a blow like that might have been fatal!”

“That is what makes me feel so bad about it,” said Dora. “I had a bath after we came back from the match, and I went to my cubicle and lay down for half-an-hour’s rest before tea. No one knew I was there except Miss Groome; she understood that I was feeling a bit knocked out with all the happenings, so she told me to go and get a little rest. I think I was beginning to doze when I heard two girls, Daisy Goatby and Joan Fletcher, come into the dorm, and they both came into Daisy’s cubicle, which is next to mine. They were talking in low tones, and they seemed very indignant about something; and I was going to call out and tell them not to talk secrets, because I was there, when I heard Daisy say in a very stormy tone that in future Rhoda Fleming might do her own dirty work, for she had entirely washed her hands of the whole business, and she did not intend to dance to Rhoda’s piping any more—no, not if next week found her at the bottom of the Form. Then Joan, in a very troubled fashion, asked if Daisy were quite sure—quite absolutely positive—that Rhoda aimed at Dorothy’s head instead of at the ball. Daisy sobbed for a minute in sheer rage, it seemed to me, and then she declared it was Dorothy’s head that was aimed at. There was some more talking that I could not hear, then some of the other girls came up, Joan went off to her own cubicle, and that was the end of it.”

“Good gracious, what a shocking business!” cried Hazel, going rather white, while Margaret shivered until her teeth chattered. “Dora, what are you going to do?”

“What can I do?” cried the head girl, throwing up her hands with a helpless gesture. “Suppose I went to the Head and made a statement, and she called upon Daisy to own up to what she knew, it is more than likely that Daisy would vow she never said anything of the sort. She would declare she did not see Rhoda strike Dorothy, and in all she said Joan would back her up. It would be two against one.”

“Daisy would speak the truth if she were pushed into a corner,” put in Margaret, who had not spoken before.

“She might, and again she might not.” Dora’s tone was scornful. “For all her size, Daisy is very much of a coward. Her position, too, would be so unpleasant that really it would take a good lot of real courage to face it. All the girls would point at her for telling tales, and Rhoda would pose as a martyr, and get all the sympathy she desired.”

“What are you going to do, then?” asked Hazel.

“I don’t see that anything can be done, except to wait and to keep our eyes open,” said Dora. “I wish you could find out what it is that Dorothy has over Rhoda—that might help us a little. It will be rather fun when this week’s marks come out if Daisy does go flop in her Form position.”

“Dorothy will have scored then, even though her work may be hindered,” said Margaret.

CHAPTER XII

DOROTHY IS APPROACHED

Dorothy rested with such thoroughness, that when the doctor came to see her next day he told her with a laugh that she was a fraud so far as being an invalid was concerned, and that she could go to work again as soon as she liked.

Her head was fearfully sore, of course, and if she moved quickly she had a queer, dizzy sensation, but otherwise she did not seem much the worse, and she was back in her Form-room before the work of the morning had ended.

Every one was very nice to her. There was almost an affectionate ring in Rhoda's tone when making inquiry as to how she felt, and Dorothy was a little ashamed of her own private feeling against Rhoda. Then Daisy Goatby giggled in a silly fashion, and Rhoda's face turned purply-red with anger.

Work went all the more easily because of the rest she had had, and Dorothy thought the doctor must be something of a wizard to understand so completely what was really best for her. There was more zest in doing to-day, and the hours went so fast that evening came even more quickly than usual.

Jessie Wayne's foot was still bad, and she had not come up to the study. The other girls had taken her books down to her, and she was given a quiet corner in the prep room of the Lower Fifth; so the three girls were alone upstairs.

Being alone, the chance to find out Dorothy's position with regard to Rhoda was much too good to be passed by, and sitting at ease in a low chair by the gas fire, Hazel started on her task.

Dorothy listened in silence, and in very real dismay, while they told her what Dora had overheard; but she sat quite still when they had done, making no attempt at clearing the matter up.

"Why don't you say something, Dorothy?" Hazel's tone was a trifle sharp, for there was an almost guilty look on Dorothy's face, as if she were the culprit, and not Rhoda at all.

“There is nothing I can say.” Dorothy wriggled uneasily in her chair, and her hands moved her books in a restless fashion, for she wanted to plunge into work and forget all about the disagreeable thing which always lurked in her mind with regard to Rhoda.

“You do admit you know something which makes Rhoda afraid of you?” persisted Hazel.

“Oh, she need not be afraid of me; I shall not do her any harm.” Dorothy spoke hurriedly. She was afraid of being drawn into some admission which might give away her knowledge of what Rhoda had done.

“I think you ought to tell, Dorothy,” Hazel said. “It is all very well to keep silent because you don’t like to do Rhoda any harm; but when a girl sets out to work such mischief as Rhoda tried to do yesterday, it is quite time something is done to stop her.”

“You can’t call it real proof that Rhoda did give me that knock-out blow yesterday,” said Dorothy slowly. “Or even supposing that she did, you can’t be certain it was anything but an accident. When one is excited—really wrought up, as we all were—there is not much accounting for what happens.”

“Still, she might have owned up.” Hazel meant to have the last word on the subject, and Dorothy made a wry face—then laughed in a rather forced manner.

“It would not have been an easy thing to have owned up if it had been an accident; while, if the blow had been meant to knock me over, it would have been impossible to have explained it. In any case, she would think that the least said the soonest mended.”

“What about her coaching Daisy and Joan, so that your Form position should be lowered?” Hazel’s brows were drawn together in a heavy frown; she left off lounging, and sat erect in her chair looking at Dorothy.

“Rather a brainy idea, don’t you think?” Dorothy seemed disposed to be flippant, but she was nervous still, as was shown by her restless opening and shutting of her books. “When I want to get you and Margaret lowered in your Form position I will prod a couple of girls into working really hard, and then we shall all three mount in triumph over your diminished heads. Oh, it will be a great piece of strategy—only I don’t quite see how I am going to get the time to do my work, and that of the other girls too. That is the weak point in the affair, and will need thinking out.”

“Look here, Dorothy, you are just playing with us, and it is a shocking waste of time, because we have got our work to do before we go to bed.” Margaret slid a friendly hand into Dorothy’s as she spoke. “Will you tell us what you know about Rhoda? You see, she is a candidate for the Mutton Bone; she is climbing high in the Form, and it is up to us to see that the prize goes only to some one worthy of it.”

“It is because she is a candidate that my tongue should be tied,” answered Dorothy. “When Rhoda asserted that there was nothing to prevent her from being enrolled she took all the responsibility for herself into her own hands, and so I have nothing to do with it.”

“You will keep silent, and let her win the Lamb Bursary?” cried Hazel in a shocked tone.

“I won’t let her win the Lamb Bursary if I can help it. I jolly well want to win it myself,” laughed Dorothy; and then she simply refused to say any more, declaring that she must get on with her work.

There was silence in the study after that—a quiet so profound that some one, coming and opening the door suddenly, fled away again with a little cry of surprise at finding it lighted and occupied.

Dorothy turned as white as paper. She was thinking of the night when she had been up there alone, and had been so scared at the opening of the door.

“Now, who is playing pranks in such a silly fashion, I wonder?” said Hazel crossly, and jumping up, she went into the passage to find out.

Dora Selwyn had two girls in with her; they declared that they had heard nothing—but as they were all talking at once when Hazel went into the room, this was not wonderful.

In the next study Rhoda Fleming was busily writing at the table, while Daisy dozed in a chair on one side of the gas fire, and Joan appeared to be fast asleep on the other side.

These also declared that they had heard nothing; and as the room of the Upper Fifth was empty, and there was no one in the private room of the mistresses, the affair was a bit of a mystery.

Hazel had sharp eyes; she had noticed that Rhoda’s hand was trembling, and that her writing was not clear and decided. She had seen Daisy wink at Joan, and she came to certain conclusions in her own mind—only, as she had no proof, it seemed better to wait and say nothing. So she went back to

the study to tell Margaret and Dorothy that evidently some one had come to play a silly prank on them, only had been scared to find that they were all wide awake and at work.

Dorothy stayed awake a good long time that night, thinking matters over, and trying to find out what was the wisest course to take. She was disposed to go to Rhoda and tell her what she had heard, and to say that there was no need for Rhoda to fear her, as there was no danger of her speaking.

When morning came this did not look so easy, and yet it seemed the best thing to do. The trouble was to get the chance of a few quiet words with Rhoda, and the whole day passed without such a thing being possible.

It was two days later before her chance came. But when she tried to start on something which would lead up to the thing she wanted to say, Rhoda swung round with an impatient air, speaking sharply, "You and I do not care so much for each other that we need to hang round in corners gossiping."

"There is something I wanted to say to you rather badly," said Dorothy, laying fast hold of her courage, and looking straight at the other.

Rhoda flinched. "Well, whatever it is, I don't want to hear it—so there you are." She yawned widely, then asked, with a sudden change of tone, if Dorothy's head was better, or if it was still sore.

"It is getting better, thank you." Dorothy spoke cheerfully, and then she burst out hurriedly, "I wanted to say to you that there is no need for you to be afraid of me, or—or of what I may say."

"What do you mean?" demanded Rhoda, with such offence in her tone that Dorothy flushed and floundered hopelessly.

"I—I mean just what I say—merely that, and nothing more." Dorothy looked straight at Rhoda, who flushed, while a look of fear came into her eyes, and she turned away without another word.

After that, things were more strained than before. There was a thinly veiled insolence in Rhoda's way of treating Dorothy which was fearfully trying to bear. But if they had to come in contact with each other when people were present, then there was a kind of gentle pity in Rhoda's way of behaving which was more exasperating still.

Dorothy carried her head very high, and she kept her face serene and smiling, but sometimes the strain of it all was about as much as she could stand up under.

One thing helped her to be patient under it all. Her Form position was mounting again. Daisy Goatby and Joan Fletcher had dropped below her, and by the last week of term she had risen above Rhoda again. Great was the jubilation in the No. 1 study on the night when this was discovered. Hazel and Margaret made a ridiculous paper cap, with which they adorned Dorothy, and Jessie Wayne presented her with a huge paper rosette in honour of the event.

"I foresee that you will have us down next term, Dorothy, and then, instead of celebrating, we shall sit in sackcloth and ashes, grousing over our hard lot in being beaten," laughed Hazel, as she settled the paper hat rakishly askew on Dorothy's head, and fell back a step to admire the effect.

"There won't be much danger of that unless we get to work," answered Dorothy, and then they settled down to steady grind, which lasted until bedtime.

Next morning there was a letter from Tom for Dorothy, which bothered her not a little.

Twice already that term Tom had come to her for money. They each had the same amount of pocket-money, but he did not seem able to make his last. He was always in a state of destitution; he was very often in debt.

The letter this morning stated that if she could not let him have five shillings that day he would be disgraced, the family would be disgraced, and the doors of a prison might yawn to let him in.

That was silly, of course, and she frowned at his indulging in nonsense at such a time. She had the five shillings, and she could let him have it; but it seemed to her grossly unfair that he should spend his own money and hers too.

The boys were coming over that evening, and Tom asked that he might have the money then. Dorothy decided that the time had come for her to put her foot down firmly on this question of always standing prepared to help him out when he was stoney.

That afternoon they were busy in the gym practising a new set of exercises, and Dorothy was endeavouring to hang by one hand from the cross-bar, while she swung gently to and fro with her right foot held in her left hand—she was succeeding quite well too, and was feeling rather proud of herself—when a chance remark from Blanche Felmore caught her ear.

"The boys are having a fine run of luck this term," said Blanche, as she poised lightly on the top of the bar to which Dorothy was clinging. "Bob

sent me ten shillings yesterday as a present; he says he has won a pot of money this week."

"How did he do it?" asked a girl standing near.

"They get up sweepstakes among themselves, and they get a lot of fun out of it too," said Blanche. "Bob told me that half of the boys are nearly cleaned out this week, and——"

Just then Dorothy's hold gave way, and she fell in a heap, hearing no more, as Blanche fell too.

CHAPTER XIII

WHY TOM WAS HARD UP

Dorothy had come to nearly hate that pretty evening frock of hers, because it seemed to her the buying of it had been at the root of most of her troubles since she had been at the Compton School. She argued to herself that if she had not been on the spot when Rhoda stuffed the jumper under her coat, most of the unpleasant things could not have happened.

Of choice Dorothy would not have worn the frock again that term, but when one has only a single evening frock, that frock has to be worn whenever the occasion demands it. The rules of the school were that each girl should have one evening frock, and only one, so it was a case of Hobson's choice. Dorothy slipped the frock over her shoulders on the evening when the boys were coming over, and felt as if she would much rather go up to the study, and grind away at books until bedtime.

Such a state of mind being a bit unnatural, she gave herself a shake, which served the double purpose of settling her frock and her mind at the same time; then she went downstairs, and cracked so many jokes with the other girls, that they all wondered what had come to her, for she was usually rather quiet, and not given to over-much in the way of fun-making.

When the boys came trooping in Bobby Felmore made straight for her—he mostly did. Dorothy received him graciously enough, but there was a sparkle in her eyes which should have shown him that she was out to set things straight according to her own ideas.

"How many dances are you going to let me have to-night?" he asked, bending closer to her and looking downright sentimental.

Dorothy laughed softly, and her eyes sparkled more than ever as she murmured in a gentle tone, "This one, and never another, unless——"

"Unless what?" he demanded blankly.

"Blanche says you have been winning a lot of money in a sweepstake of some sort in your school during the last week or so. Is it true?" she asked.

"You bet it is true," he answered with a jolly laugh. "I just about cleaned out the lot of them, and I'm in funds for the rest of the term, with a nice little margin over to help me through the Christmas vac."

“I think you are a horrid, mean thing to take my money, that I had saved by going without things,” she said, with such a burst of indignation, that Bobby looked fairly knocked out by her energy.

“There were none of the girls in this sweepstake—at least I did not know of any,” he said hurriedly.

“Perhaps not; and if there had been, I should not have been one of them,” she answered coldly. “It would not have been so bad if I had put down the money—I should have felt that at least I had spent it myself, and I had chosen to risk losing it. As it is, I have to go without the things I want, just to fill your pocket—and I don’t like it.”

“I can’t see what you are driving at yet,” he said, and he looked blanker than ever.

“You are teaching Tom to gamble,” she said coldly, “and Tom is not satisfied with risking his own money, but he must needs go into debt, and then come to me to help him out. It would have been bad enough if he had bought more than he could afford to pay for, but it is unthinkable that he should go and stake more money than he has got. A stop must be put to it somehow; I could not go home and look my father in the face, knowing that I was standing by without raising a finger to stop Tom from being ruined.”

“Oh, he is all right,” said Bobby, who looked rather sheepish and ill at ease. “All kids go in for flutters of this sort, and it does them no end of good to singe their wings a bit. He’ll learn caution as he gets older—they all do. Besides, if he had won, you would not have made any stir.”

“Perhaps if Tom had won I should not have known anything about it,” Dorothy said a little bitterly. “It is not merely his own wings that Tom has singed, it is my wings that have been burned. I am not going to sit down under it. You are the cause of the trouble, for it is you who have got up the sweepstake. Blanche said so, and she seemed no end proud of you for doing it, poor dear little kid. But I am not proud of it. I think you are horrid and low down to go corrupting the morals of boys younger than yourself, teaching them to gamble, and then getting your pockets filled with the money you have won from them. I don’t want anything more to do with you, and in future I am going to cut you dead. Good evening!”

Dorothy slid away from Bobby as she spoke, and slipping round behind an advancing couple, she was out of the room in a moment, and fleeing upstairs for all she was worth.

She had made her standpoint clear, but she felt scared at her own audacity in doing it. She could not be sure that it had done any good, and she was downright miserable about Tom.

Of choice, she would have gone to the Head, and laid Tom's case before her. But such a thing was impossible. She could not submit to being written down sneak and tell-tale, and all the rest of the unpleasant titles that would be indulged in.

Staying upstairs as long as she dared, trying to cool her burning cheeks, Dorothy stood with her face pressed against the cold glass of the landing window. Presently she heard a girl in the hall below asking another where to find Dorothy Sedgewick; and so she came down, and passing the big open doors of the lecture hall where they were dancing, she went into the drawing-room, intending to find a quiet corner, and to stay there for the rest of the evening if she could.

Margaret found her presently, and dragged her off to dance again. She saw Bobby Felmore coming towards her with a set purpose on his face, but she whirled round, and cutting him dead, as she had said she would, she seized upon Wilkins Minor, a small boy with big spectacles, and asked him to dance with her.

"That is putting the shoe on the wrong foot; you ought to wait until I ask you," said the boy with a swagger.

"Well, I will wait, if you will make haste about the asking," she answered with a laugh; and then she said, "You dance uncommonly well, I know, because I have watched you."

Wilkins Minor screwed up his nose in a grin of delight, and bowing low he said, with a flourish of his hands, "Miss Sedgewick, may I have the pleasure?"

"You may," said Dorothy with great fervour. Then she and the small boy whirled round with an abandon which, if it was not complete enjoyment, was a very good imitation of it.

Tom was waiting for her when she was through with Wilkins Minor—Tom, with a haggard look on his face, and such a devouring anxiety in his eyes that her heart ached for him.

"Have you got that money for me?" he asked. He grabbed her by the arm, leading her out to the conservatory to find a quiet place where they could talk without interruption.

“What do you want it for?” she asked. “See, Tom, this is the third time this term you have come to me to lend you money you never attempt to pay back. You have as much as I have, and it does not seem fair.”

“Oh, if you are going to cut up nasty about it, then I have no more to say.” Tom flung away in a rage. But he did not go far; in a minute he was back at her side again, pleading and pleading, his face white and miserable. “Look here, old thing, you’ve always been a downright good sport—the sort of a sister any fellow would be glad to have—and it isn’t like you to fail me when I’m in such an awful hole. Just you lend me that five shillings, and you shall have a couple of shillings for interest when I pay it back.”

“How can you be so horrid, Tom?” she cried in great distress. “You are making it appear as if it is just merely the money that is worrying me. I know that you have been gambling. You know very well that there is nothing in the world that would upset Dad more if he found it out, while Mums would pretty well break her heart about it.”

“It wasn’t gambling; it was only a sweepstake that Bobby Felmore got up. All the fellows are in it, and half of them are as badly bitten as I am,” he explained gloomily. “Of course, if I had won it would have been a different matter altogether. I should have been in funds for quite a long while; I could have paid you back what I have had, and given you a present as well. You wouldn’t have groused at me then.”

“You mean that you would not have stood it if I had,” she corrected him. Then she did a battle with herself. Right at the bottom of her heart she knew that she ought not to let him have the money—that she ought to make him suffer now, to save him suffering later on. But it was dreadful to her to see Tom in such distress; moreover, she was telling herself perhaps she could safeguard him for the future by making him promise that he would never gamble again.

“Well, are you going to let me have it?” he demanded, coming to stand close beside her, and looking down at her with such devouring anxiety in his eyes that she strangled back a little sob.

“I will let you have it on one condition,” she said slowly.

“Let’s have it, then, and I will promise any mortal thing you like to ask me,” he burst out eagerly, his face sparkling with returning hope.

“You have got to promise me that you will never gamble again,” she said firmly.

“Whew! Oh, come now, that is a bit too stiff, surely,” growled Tom, falling back a step, while the gloom dropped over his face again.

“I can’t help it. They are my terms; take them or leave them as you like,” she said with decision. But she felt as if a cold hand had gripped her heart, as she saw how he was trying to back out of giving the promise for which she asked.

“Do you mean to say that you won’t give me the money if I don’t promise?” he asked, scowling at her in the blackest anger.

“I do mean it,” she answered quietly, and she looked at him in the kindest fashion.

“Well, I must have the cash, even if I have to steal it,” he answered, with an attempt at lightness that he plainly did not feel. “I promise I won’t do it again; so hand over the oof, there’s a good soul, and let us be quit of the miserable business.”

“You really mean what you say—that you will not gamble again?” asked Dorothy a little doubtfully, for his manner was too casual to inspire confidence.

“Of course I mean it. Didn’t I say so? What more do you want?” His tone was irritable, and his words came out in jerks. “Do you want me to go down on my knees, or to swear with my hand on the Bible, or any other thing of the sort?”

“Don’t be a goat, Tommy lad,” she said softly, and then she slipped two half-crowns into his hand, and hoped that she had done right, yet feeling all the time a miserable insecurity in her heart about his keeping his promise to her.

He made an excuse to slip away soon after he had got the money, and Dorothy turned back into the drawing-room in search of diversion. She quickly had it, too—only it was not the sort she wanted.

Bobby Felmore was prowling round the almost empty room, studying the portraits of the founders of the Compton Schools, as if he were keenly interested in art; but he wheeled abruptly at sight of her, and came towards her with eager steps.

“I’ve been nosing round to find you. Where have you been hiding?” he said, beaming on her. “Come along and have another dance before chucking-out time. I thought I should have had a fit to see that young bantam chick, Wilkins Minor, toting you round.”

“I said I did not intend dancing with you again, and I meant it,” she said coldly.

“You said ‘unless,’ but you did not explain what that meant.” He thought he had caught her, and stood smiling in a rather superior fashion.

Dorothy coloured right up to the roots of her hair. The thing she had to say was not easy, but because she was in dead earnest she screwed up her courage to go through with it, and said in calm tones, “The ‘unless’ I spoke about was, if you had seen fit to pay back what you have had from the boys for that sweepstake you got up.”

“A likely old story, that I should be goat enough to do that, after winning the money!” He burst into a derisive laugh at the bare suggestion of such a thing.

Dorothy turned away. There was a little sinking at her heart. She really liked Bobby, and they had been great pals since she had come to the Compton School. If he could not do this thing that she had put before him as her ultimatum, then there was no more to be said, and they must just go their separate ways, for, having made up her mind as to what was right, she was not going to give way.

“You don’t mean that you are going to stick to it?” he said, catching at her hand as she turned away.

“Of course I mean it, and you know that I am right, too,” she said, turning back so that she could stand confronting him. “You know as well as I do that gambling in any shape or form is forbidden here, and yet you not only do it yourself, but you teach smaller fellows than yourself to gamble, and you fill your pocket by the process. You are about the meanest sort of bounder I have seen for a long time, and I would rather not have anything more to do with you.”

“Well, you are the limit, to talk like that to me,” snarled Bobby, who was as white as paper with rage, while his eyes bulged and shot out little snappy lights, and Dorothy felt more than half scared at the tempest she had raised.

But she had right on her side. She knew it. And Bobby knew it too, but it did not make him feel any nicer about it at the moment.

Just then a crowd of girls came scurrying into the room. The foremost of them was Rhoda, and she called out in her high-pitched, sarcastic voice, “What are you two doing here? The other fellows are just saying good night to the Head, and you will get beans, Bobby Felmore, if you are not there at the tail end of the procession.”

For once in her life Dorothy was downright grateful to Rhoda. Bobby had to go then, and he went in a hurry. Dorothy could not comfort herself that she had had the last word, since it was really Bobby who had spoken last. But at least it was she who had dictated terms, and so she had scored in that way.

She did not encounter Bobby again until the next Sunday afternoon. It was the last Sunday of the term, and only a few boys had come over to see their sisters. It was a miserable sort of day, cold wind and drizzling rain, so that nearly every one was in the drawing-room or the conservatory, and only a few extra intrepid individuals had gone out walking.

Dorothy was looking for Tom. She could not find him anywhere, and was making up her mind that he had not come over when she encountered Bobby coming in at the open window of the drawing-room, just as she was going out to the conservatory in a final search for Tom.

Bobby jerked his head higher in the air at sight of her, and stood back to let her pass, but he took no more notice of her than if she had been an utter stranger. Dorothy's pride flamed up, and with a cold little bow she went past, walking along between the banks of flowering plants, and not seeing any of them. It was horrid of Bobby to treat her like that. Of course she had said that she would cut him dead—she had done it too—but that was a vastly different matter from being cut by him.

"Still, I had to speak, and I am glad that I did. I don't want to have anything to do with any one who will teach younger boys to break rules, and then will get rich at their expense," she whispered to herself in stormy fashion.

She went the length of the conservatory, and was just coming back, deciding that for some unknown reason Tom had not come over, when Charlotte Flint of the Fourth called out to her,—

"Your brother Tom has gone out for a walk with Rhoda Fleming. I saw them go; they slipped out of the lower gate, and went down the road as if they were going on to the Promenade."

Dorothy groaned. She did not want to go out walking that afternoon; the weather was of the sort to make indoors seem the nicer place. But if she did not go, there would be trouble for Tom, and for Rhoda too. So she scurried into the cloakroom, and putting on boots and mackintosh, let herself out by the garden door, meaning to slip out of the lower gate as they had done.

Miss Groome came into the hall as she was going out by the garden door, and she said, “Oh, Dorothy, do you know it is raining? Are you going for a walk?”

“I am going a little way with Tom, only he has started first,” she answered with a nod and a smile; and then she scurried away, grateful for the Sunday afternoon liberty, which made it possible for a girl to take her own way within certain limits.

It would not be pleasant walking with Rhoda and Tom, for Rhoda would certainly say malicious things, and Tom was not feeling pleased with her because of the promise she had exacted from him. But the only way to save Rhoda from getting into trouble was for her to be there.

There was to be a breaking-up festivity over at the boys’ school on Tuesday night. If Rhoda was hauled up for breaking rules to-day, she might easily be shut out from that pleasure.

Rhoda and Tom were sheltering from the rain under the railway arch at the bottom of the lane; it was too wet and windy to face the Promenade. They walked back to the school with Dorothy, but neither of them appeared the least bit grateful for her interference.

CHAPTER XIV

TOP OF THE SCHOOL

The Christmas vacation went past in a whirl of merry-making. It was delightful to be at home again, and to do all the accustomed things. Dorothy hugged her happiness, and told herself she was just the most fortunate girl in the world.

Tom at home was a very different person from Tom at school, swanking round with Rhoda Fleming. Dorothy felt she had her chum back for the time, and she made the most of it. Her common sense told her that when they were back at school once more he might easily prove as disappointing as he had done in the past, so it was up to her to make the most of him now that he was so satisfactory.

One bit of news he told her three days after they got home which interested her immensely. She was sitting by the dining-room fire in the twilight making toast for her father's tea, because he was out on a long, cold round in the country.

Tom was lolling in a big chair on the other side of the fire, when suddenly he shoved his hands deeper in his pocket, and pulling out two half-crowns, tossed them into her lap, saying with a chuckle, "There is your last loan returned with many thanks. I did not have to pay up after all."

"What do you mean?" she asked, as she picked up the money and looked at it.

Tom laughed again. "Some sort of a microbe bit Bobby Felmore, and bit him uncommon sharp, too. He suddenly turned good, and paid back all the money he had won from the sweepstake, treated us to a full-blown lecture on the immorality of gambling, and announced that in the future he stood for law and order, and all the rest of that sort of piffle. Of course we cheered him to the echo, for we had got our money back, but we reckoned him a mug for not having the sense to keep it when he had got it."

Dorothy felt the colour surge right up to the roots of her hair; she was very thankful it was too dark for Tom to see how red her face was. Then, because she had to say something, she asked, "What made him do that?"

"He had got a bee in his bonnet, I should say," answered Tom with an amused laugh. "It was great to hear old Bobby lecturing us on what sort of

citizens we have got to be, and rot of that sort. Of course we took it meekly enough—why not? We had got our money back, and could do a flutter in some other direction if we wished. Oh, he is a mug, is Bobby. He doesn't think small beer of himself either. They are county people, the Felmores. In fact, I rather wonder that they come to the Compton Schools. But they say that old Felmore has great faith in boys and girls being educated side by side, as it were, and allowed to mix and mingle in recreation time. There would be more sense, to my way of thinking, if the mixing and the mingling were not so messed up and harassed by silly little rules."

"I think it is awfully decent of Bobby to give the money back," said Dorothy, and then she had to turn her attention to the toast, which was getting black.

"So do I, since I am able to pay you back, and get free of that stupid promise you insisted on," answered Tom, lazily stretching himself in the deep chair.

Dorothy picked up the two half-crowns and held them out to him. "You can have the money, and I will hold your promise still. Oh, it will be cheap at five shillings. Take it, Tommy lad, and go a bust with it; but I have your promise that you will not gamble, and I am going to keep you up to it."

"Not this time you are not," he said, and there was a surly note in his voice. "You worried the promise out of me when I was fair desperate. Now, I have paid the money back, and I will not be bound."

Dorothy realized the uselessness of urging the point, and pocketed the money. She tried to comfort herself that she would exact the same promise if Tom appealed to her for help again, yet could not help a feeling of disquiet because of the tone he had taken.

It was wild weather when they went back to the Compton Schools. There was deep snow on the ground that was fast being turned into deep slush, and a fierce gale was hurtling through the naked woods.

Dorothy went to work with a will. Indeed, she had contrived to do quite a lot of work during the vacation, and it told immediately on her Form position. Week by week she rose, and when the marks were put on the board at the end of the third week of the term she was at the top of the school.

The girls gave her a great ovation that night; the row they made was fairly stupendous. She was carried in a chair round and round the lecture hall, until the chair, a shaky one, collapsed and let her down on to the

enthusiasts who were celebrating her victory, and they all tumbled in a heap together.

The next week she was top again; but now it was Rhoda Fleming who was next below her, and Rhoda was putting her whole strength into the task of beating Dorothy.

The next week was a really fearful struggle. Dorothy worked with might and main; but all along she had the feeling that she was going to be beaten. And beaten she was, for when the marks were put up on the board it was found that Rhoda was top.

There was another ovation this week, but it lacked the whole-hearted fervour of the one given to Dorothy.

Rhoda Fleming was not very popular. Her tendency to swank made the girls dislike her, and her fondness for snubbing girls whom she considered her social inferiors was also against her. Still, there can mostly be found some who will shout for a victor, and so she had her moment of triumph, which she proceeded to round off in a manner that pleased herself.

Meeting Dorothy at the turn of the stairs a little later in the evening, she said, with a low laugh that had a ring of malice in it, "I have scored, you see, Miss Prig, in spite of all your clever scheming, and I shall score all along. I have twice your power, if only I choose to put it out; and I am going to win the Lamb Bursary somehow, so don't you forget it."

Dorothy laughed—Rhoda's tendency to brag always did amuse her. Then she answered in a merry tone, "If the Mutton Bone depended on the striving of this week, and next, and even the week after, I admit that there would not seem much hope for the rest of us; but our chance lies in the months of steady work that we have to face."

Rhoda tossed her head with an air of conscious power, and came a step nearer; she even gripped Dorothy by the arm, and giving it a little shake, said in a low tone, "I suppose you are telling yourself that I am not fit to have the Mutton Bone; but you would have to prove everything you might say against me, you know."

Dorothy blanched. She felt as if her trembling limbs would not support her. But she rallied her courage, and looking Rhoda straight in the face, she said calmly, "What makes you suggest that I have anything to bring against you? Of your own choice you enrolled for the Bursary. You declared in public that there was no reason why you should not enrol; so the responsibility lies with you, and not with me."

It was Rhoda's turn to pale now, and she went white to her very lips. "What do you mean by that?" she gasped, and she shook Dorothy's arm in a sudden rage.

"What are you two doing here?" inquired a Form-mistress, coming suddenly upon them round the bend of the stairs.

"We were just talking, Miss Ball," replied Rhoda, with such thinly veiled insolence that the Fourth Form mistress flushed with anger, and spoke very sharply indeed.

"Then you will at once leave off 'just talking,' as you call it, and get to work. No wonder the younger girls are given to slackness when you of the Sixth set them such an example of laziness. I am very much inclined to report you both to your Form-mistress." Miss Ball spoke with heat—the insult of Rhoda's manner rankled, and she was not disposed to pass it by.

"Pray report us if you wish, and then Miss Groome can do as she pleases about giving us detention school; it would really be rather a lark." Rhoda laughed scornfully. "I am top of the whole school this week, Dorothy was top last week and the week before; so you can see how necessary it is for us to be reported for slackness."

"You are very rude." Miss Ball was nearly spluttering with anger, but Rhoda grew suddenly calm, and she bowed in a frigid fashion.

"We thank you for your good opinion; pray report us if you see fit," she drawled, then went her way, leaving Dorothy to bear alone the full force of the storm which she herself had raised.

It was some tempest, too. Miss Ball was a very fiery little piece, and she had often had to smart under the lash of Rhoda's sarcasm. She was so angry that she completely overlooked the fact of Dorothy's entire innocence of offence, and she raged on, saying all the hard things which came into her mind, while Dorothy stood silent and embarrassed, longing to escape, yet seeing no chance to get away.

"Is anything wrong, Miss Ball?" It was the quiet voice of the Head that spoke. She had come upon the scene without either Miss Ball or the victim hearing her approach.

"I have had to reprimand some of these girls of the Sixth for wasting their own time, and teaching, by example, the younger girls to become slackers also," said Miss Ball, who looked so ashamed at being caught in the act of bullying that Dorothy felt downright sorry for her.

“I don’t think we can write Dorothy down a slacker,” said the Head kindly, and there was such a twinkle of fun in her eyes that Dorothy badly wanted to laugh.

“Example stands for a tremendous lot,” said Miss Ball. “The Sixth are very supercilious, even rude, in their manner to the Form-mistresses, and it is not to be borne without a protest.”

“Ah! that is a different matter,” said the Head, becoming suddenly brisk and active. “Do I understand that you are bringing a charge against the Sixth collectively, or as individuals?—Dorothy, you can go.—Miss Ball, come into my room, and we will talk the matter out quietly and in comfort.”

Dorothy was only too thankful to escape. It was horrid of Rhoda to treat a mistress in such a fashion. It was still more horrid of her to go away leaving all the brunt of it to fall upon Dorothy, who was entirely unoffending.

Hazel and Margaret soothed her with their sympathy when she reached the haven of the study, and even Jessie Wayne tore herself out of her books to give her a kindly word. Then they all settled down to steady work again, and a hush was on the room, until a Fifth Form girl came up with a message that the Head wanted to see Dorothy at once.

“As bad as that?” cried Hazel in consternation. “Oh, Dorothy, I am sorry for you!”

“I expect I shall survive,” answered Dorothy with a rather rueful smile, and then she went downstairs to the private room of the Head.

“Well, Dorothy, what have you to say about this storm in a teacup?” asked the Head, motioning Dorothy to a low seat by the fire, while she herself remained sitting at her writing table. A stately and gracious woman, she was, with such a light of kindness and sympathy in her eyes that every girl who came to her felt assured of justice and considered care.

“I think it was rather a storm in a teacup,” Dorothy answered, smiling in her turn, yet on the defensive, for she did not know of how much she had been accused by Miss Ball.

“What were you doing on the stairs just then?” asked the Head; and looking at Dorothy, she was secretly amused at the thought of catechising a girl of the Sixth in this fashion.

“I was going up to the study,” said Dorothy. “I met Rhoda, who was coming down from her study; we stopped to speak about her having ousted

me from the top. We were still talking when Miss Ball came, and—and she said we were slackers, and setting a bad example to the rest of the girls."

"That much I have already gathered," said the Head. "But I am not quite clear as to what came after. What had you said that caused such a storm of angry words from Miss Ball?"

Dorothy smiled. She really could not help it—she had been so completely the scapegoat for Rhoda.

"I had said nothing," she answered slowly. Then seeing that the Head still waited, she hesitated a moment, then went on. "I think Miss Ball was just pouring out her anger upon me because Rhoda had slipped away, and only I was left."

"Rhoda was rude to Miss Ball?" asked the Head.

"I think she was more offensive in manner than in actual words," said Dorothy, very anxious to be fair to Rhoda, just because of the secret repulsion in her heart, which had to be fought and to be kept down out of sight.

"I thought perhaps that was what it was all about." The Head heaved a little sigh of botherment—so it seemed to Dorothy—and then she said in her sweetly gracious manner, "Thank you for helping me out. I knew I should get the absolute truth from you."

CHAPTER XV

AT HIGH TIDE

Sowergate felt the full force of a south-westerly gale; sometimes heavy seas would be washing right over the Promenade, flooding the road beyond, and rendering it impassable.

It was great fun to go walking by the sea at such times. There was the excitement of dodging the great waves as they broke over the broad sea-wall, and there was the sense of adventure in braving the perils of the road, which at such times was apt to be strewn with wreckage of all sorts.

In the early part of February the weather was so stormy that for three days the girls could not get out, their only exercise being the work in the gymnasium. Of course this meant fresh air of a sort, since they had the whole range of the landward windows open, and the breeze was enough to turn a good-sized windmill. But it was not out of doors by any means, and it was out of doors for which every one was pining.

On the fourth day the wind was still blowing big guns—indeed, it was blowing more than it had been; but as it did not rain, the whole school turned out to struggle along the Promenade. Miss Mordaunt, the games-mistress, was for going up the hill to the church, and taking a turn through the more sheltered lanes beyond. But the mud was deep in that direction; moreover, every girl of them all was longing to see the great waves at play: and, provided they kept a sharp look-out in passing Sowergate Point, it was not likely they would get a drenching. So the crocodile turned down the hill outside the school gates, and took its way along the Promenade in the direction of Ilkestone.

There were very few people abroad this morning; the bus traffic had been diverted during the heavy weather, and sent round by way of the camp. The crocodile had the road to themselves, and great fun they found it.

It was quite impossible to walk on the Promenade, for it was continually being swept by heavy seas. Even on the path at the far side of the road they had to dodge the great wash of water from breaking waves. Then the crocodile broke into little scurrying groups of girls, there were shrieks and bubbling laughter, and every one declared it was lovely fun.

Miss Mordaunt was in front with the younger ones; it was very necessary that a mistress should be there to pick the road, to hold them back when a stream of water threatened them, and to choose when to make a rush to avoid an incoming wave. Miss Groome was at the other end of the crocodile, and those of the Sixth out walking that morning were with her.

They had reached as far as the point where the flight of steps go up to the Military Hospital, when a taxi came along the road at a great rate, mounting the path here and there to avoid the holes in the road which had been washed out by the battering of the sea-water.

Miss Mordaunt promptly herded the front half of the crocodile on to the space which in normal times was a pleasant strip of garden ground. The other half fell back in a confused group round Miss Groome, while the taxi came on at a rate which made it look as if the driver were drunk or demented.

The group squeezed themselves flat against the railings—time to run away there was not. Indeed, to stand still seemed the safest way, as the driver would at least have a better chance of avoiding them.

Suddenly they saw that there was purpose in his haste. A tremendous wave was racing inshore, and he, poor puny human, was trying with all the power of the machinery under his control to run away from it.

He might as well have tried to run away from the wind. With a swirling rush the big wave struck the sea-wall, mounted in a towering column of spray, and dashing on to the Promenade, struck one of the iron seats, wrenched it from its fastenings, and hurled it across the road right on to the bonnet of the taxi at the moment when it was passing the huddled group of girls.

The wind screen was smashed, splinters of glass flying in all directions. The driver hung on to his wheel in spite of the deluge of broken glass; he put on the brakes. But before he could bring the car to a stand the door was wrenched open, and a stout woman, shrieking shrilly, had hurled herself from the car, falling in a heap among the startled girls.

Dorothy was the first one to sense what was happening, and being quick to act, had spread her arms, and so broken the fall of the screaming woman. The force of the impact bowled her over; but as she fell against the thickly-clustered group of girls, no great harm was done. The wind was fairly knocked out of her, for the woman was bulky in size, and in such a fearful

state of agitation, too, that it was as if she had been overwhelmed by an avalanche.

"Oh, oh, oh! What a truly awful experience, my dear! I should have been killed outright if it had not been for you!" cried the poor lady; and then, slipping her arms about Dorothy's neck, she half-strangled her in a frantic sort of embrace.

"It was surely a great risk for you to take, to jump in such a fashion," said Miss Groome severely. As she spoke she came close to the frightened woman, who was still clinging fast to Dorothy.

"I had to jump—I was simply rained upon with splinters of broken glass. See how I am bleeding," said the unfortunate one, whose face was cut in several places with broken glass. She was elderly, she was clad in expensive furs, and was unmistakably a lady.

The taxi-driver reached them at this moment; his face was also cut and bleeding. He reported that his car was so badly damaged that he would not be able to continue his journey.

"Oh, I could not have gone any farther, even if the car had escaped injury. I am almost too frightened to live," moaned the poor lady, who was trembling and hysterical.

The taxi-driver treated her with great deference and respect. Seeing how shaken she was, he appealed to Miss Groome to know what was the best thing to be done for the comfort of his hurt and badly frightened fare.

"Here is the police station; she could rest here while you find another car to take her back to Ilkeston," said Miss Groome.

"That will do very nicely, and thank you for being so kind," said the lady, who was still clinging fast to Dorothy. "I wonder if you would be so kind as to permit this dear girl, who saved me from falling, to go with me to my hotel? I am staying at the Grand, in Ilkestone. The car that takes me there could bring her back. I feel too shaken to go alone."

"Dorothy could go, of course," said Miss Groome. But her tone was anxious; she did not like allowing even a grown-up girl of the Sixth to go off with a complete stranger. "Would you not rather have some one a little older to take care of you? Miss Mordaunt would go with you, or I can hand the girls over to her, and go with you myself."

"No, no, I would not permit such a thing!" exclaimed the lady, waving away the suggestion with great energy and determination. "You have duties

to perform; your absence even for a couple of hours might mean serious dislocation of machinery. But this dear girl—Dorothy, did you call her?"

"My name is Dorothy Sedgewick," said Dorothy, her voice having a muffled sound by reason of one arm of the lady being still round her neck.

"Are you a daughter of Dr. Randolph Sedgewick of Farley in Buckinghamshire?" demanded the lady in great excitement, giving Dorothy a vigorous shake.

"Yes—that is my father." Dorothy smiled happily into the face that was so near to her own—it was so pleasant to encounter some one who knew her father.

"My dear, your father is a very old friend of mine. I am Mrs. Peter Wilson, of Fleetwood Park, near Sevenoaks. It is quite possible you may not have heard him speak of me by my married name; but you have surely heard him talk of Rosie O'Flynn?"

"That wild girl Rosie O'Flynn, is that the one you mean?" asked Dorothy, smiling broadly at the recollection of some of the stories her father had told of the madcap doings of the aforesaid Rosie.

"Yes, yes; but I have altered a good deal since those days," said Mrs. Wilson with a gasping sigh. "I should have welcomed an experience of this sort then, but now it has shaken me up very badly indeed."

"May I go with Mrs. Wilson to the Grand?" asked Dorothy, turning to Miss Groome with entreaty in her eyes. What a wonderful sort of adventure this was, that she should have had her father's old friend flung straight into her arms!

"Yes, certainly you may go," said Miss Groome, who was decidedly relieved at hearing of the social status of the lady. "But, Dorothy, you must come back in the car that takes Mrs. Wilson to the Grand, for I am sure you must be wet. It will be very unsafe for you to be long without changing. Ah! here comes the driver, and he has another car coming along after him; that is fortunate, because Mrs. Wilson will not have to wait."

"If I have to send Dorothy straight back to-day, may I have the pleasure of her company to tea to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock?" asked Mrs. Wilson, holding out her hand with such friendliness that Miss Groome at once gave consent.

The driver had secured a taxi from the Crown Inn at Sowergate, and the driver of the fresh car took his way with infinite care along the wreckage-

strewn road to Ilkestone.

Mrs. Wilson was fearfully nervous. She kept crying out; she would have jumped out more than once during the journey if Dorothy had not held her down by sheer force of arm, beseeching her to be calm, and promising that no harm should come to her.

"Oh, I know that I am behaving like a silly baby; but, my dear, I have no nerve left," said the poor lady, who was almost hysterical with agitation. "I am not very well—I ought to be in peace and quiet at Fleetwood—but I had to come on rather unpleasant business about a nephew of mine who is at the Gunnery School at Hayle. I suppose I shall have to go back to Sevenoaks with the business undone, unless I can do it from Ilkestone, for certainly I cannot make another journey along that wreckage-strewn road beyond Sowergate. Oh! it was awful."

"It was rather grand and terrible; I have never seen anything like it before," replied Dorothy, who had been really thrilled by the sight of the tremendous seas.

"I can do without such sights; I would rather have things on a more peaceful scale," sighed Mrs. Wilson, whose face was mottled with little purply patches from the shock of the accident.

Dorothy helped her out of the car when they reached the Grand. She went up in the lift to the suite of rooms on the first floor which Mrs. Wilson occupied. She handed the poor fluttered lady into the care of the capable maid, and then came back to Sowergate in the car.

CHAPTER XVI

A STARTLING REVELATION

Once—that was in her first term—Dorothy had gone with Hazel and Margaret to tea with Margaret's mother at Ilkestone; but with that exception she had had no invitations out since she had been at the Compton School, so that it was really a great pleasure to be asked to take tea with Mrs. Wilson at the Grand next day.

She reached the hotel punctually at four o'clock. She was shot up in the lift, and was met at the door of Mrs. Wilson's suite by the same very capable maid whom she had seen the day before.

She told Dorothy that Mrs. Wilson was still very unnerved and shaken from the effects of the previous day's happenings.

"The doctor says she must not be allowed to talk very much about it, if you please, miss; so if you could get her interested in anything else it would be a very good thing." The maid spoke rather anxiously, and she seemed so concerned, that Dorothy cheerfully undertook to keep the lady's mind as far away from Sowergate as possible.

Mrs. Wilson was lying back in a deep chair, and she looked pale and ill. She roused herself to welcome Dorothy, and began to talk of the previous day's happenings.

"Do you think I am like my father?" Dorothy asked, as soon as she could get Mrs. Wilson's thoughts a little away from the forbidden subject.

"A little, but the likeness is more of manner than of feature. I suppose you take after your mother, for you are very nice looking, which your father never was." Mrs. Wilson surveyed Dorothy with a critical air, seeming to be well pleased with her scrutiny.

Dorothy flushed an uncomfortable red; it looked as if she had been asking for compliments, whereas nothing had been farther from her thoughts.

"Tell me about my father, please," she said hurriedly, intent on keeping the talk well away from recent happenings, yet anxious to avoid any further reference to her own looks.

“Oh, he was a wild one in those days!” Mrs. Wilson gurgled into sudden laughter at her remembrances. “Your father, his cousin Arthur Sedgewick, with Fred and Francis Bagnall, were about the most rackety set of young men it would be possible to find anywhere, I should think. By the way, where is Arthur Sedgewick now?”

Dorothy looked blank. “I do not think I have ever heard of him,” she answered slowly.

“Ah! then I expect he died many years ago, most likely before you were born. A wild one was Arthur Sedgewick. But your father ran him close, and the two Bagnalls were not far behind. I was rather in love with Fred Bagnall at the time, while he fairly adored the ground I walked upon. Ah me! I don’t think the girls of the present day get the whole-hearted devotion from their swains that used to fall to our lot. We should have made a match of it, I dare say, if I had not gone to Dublin for a winter and met Peter Wilson there. Oh, these little ifs, what a difference they make to our lives!”

Mrs. Wilson was interrupted at the moment by the entrance of the maid, who started to lay the table for tea.

“You need not stop to wait on us, Truscot,” said Mrs. Wilson, who already looked brighter and better from having some one to talk to. “Miss Sedgewick will pour out the tea for me, and you can get a little walk; you have had no chance of fresh air to-day.”

Truscot departed well pleased, and Mrs. Wilson sank back in her chair absorbed in those recollections of the past, which had the power to make her laugh still.

“Where did father live when you knew him?” asked Dorothy. “Had he settled in Buckinghamshire then?”

“Oh no,” said Mrs. Wilson. “He was on the staff at Guy’s Hospital when I first knew him, and afterwards he was in Hull. That was where I became acquainted with the Bagnalls and with Arthur Sedgewick. Oh, the larks we used to have, and the mischief those young men got into!” Mrs. Wilson’s laughter broke out again at the recollection, but Dorothy looked a little bit disturbed. This was quite a new light on her quiet, hard-working father, and she was not at all sure that she liked it.

“It is so strange to hear of Dad playing pranks,” she said, and a little chill crept over her. To her Dr. Sedgewick stood as an embodiment of steadfastness and power—the one man in the world who could do no wrong

—the man who could always be depended on for right judgment and uprightness of conduct.

Mrs. Wilson's laughter cackled out again, and suddenly it grew distasteful to Dorothy, She wished she had not come; but it was rather late in the day for wishing that now. The lady went on talking. "I remember the time when we had all been to a dance at Horsden Priory. Mrs. Bagnall was chaperoning me—we had chaperones in those days, but we managed to dodge them sometimes. I did it that night, and we came home in a fly by ourselves. The Bagnalls and I were riding inside; your father and his cousin were on the box. We painted the town red that night, for we raced the Cordells and the Clarksons. We ran into the police wagonette, and the upshot of it all was that your father had to go to prison for fourteen days; for, besides the police wagonette being smashed up, an old woman was knocked down and hurt. There was a fine commotion at the time, but it was hushed up, for the Bagnalls were county people, and my father was furious because I was mixed up in the business."

"Do you really mean that my father went to prison?" asked Dorothy in a strained voice.

"Yes, my dear, he did; the others deserved to go—but, as I said before, the business was hushed up as much as possible. Oh, but they were great times! It was living then, but now I merely exist."

Dorothy heard the lady prosing on, but she did not take in the sense of what was being said. She was facing that ugly, stark fact of her father having been in prison, and she was trying to measure what it meant to her personally.

There was a picture before the eyes of her mind of the lecture hall at the Compton School: she saw the Head sitting with several gentlemen on the dais; she heard again the voice of one of the gentlemen reading the conditions for the enrolment of candidates for the Lamb Bursary, and she heard as if it were the actual voice speaking in her ear, "Whose parents have not been in prison—" She had smiled to herself at the time, thinking what a queer thing it was to mention in reference to the highly respectable crowd of girls gathered in the lecture hall.

If she had only known of this escapade of her father's in the past she would not have dared to enrol. She did not know, and so she had become a candidate with full belief in her own respectability. But now that she knew

Mrs. Wilson prosed on. She was talking now of that winter she spent in Dublin, when she met Peter Wilson, to whom she was married later on.

Dorothy was conscious of answering yes, and no, at what seemed like proper intervals. She seemed to be sitting there through long months, and years, and she began to wonder whether she would be grey and bent with age by the time the visit was over. Then suddenly there was a soft knock at the door. Truscot entered, and said that a lady had come for Miss Sedgewick.

This was Miss Mordaunt, and Dorothy came down in the lift to join her in the entrance hall.

"Why, Dorothy, what is the matter with you?" asked the games-mistress in consternation. "Do you feel faint?"

"I think the room was hot," murmured Dorothy in explanation, and then she turned blindly in the direction of the great entrance door, longing to feel the sweeping lift of the strong wind from the sea.

Without a word Miss Mordaunt took her by the arm, and led her out through the vestibule to the open porch, standing with her there to give her time to recover a little.

How good the wind was! There was a dash of salt spray in it, too, which was wonderfully reviving.

Out in the stormy west there was a rift of colour yet, where the clouds had been torn asunder, while a star winked cheerfully out from a patch of sky that was clear of cloud.

It was all very pleasant and very normal, and Dorothy had the sensation of just waking up from a particularly hideous nightmare.

The trouble was that the very worst part of the nightmare was with her still. She could not wake up from that, because it was a reality and no dream.

"Feel better, do you?" asked Miss Mordaunt kindly, as she noted a drift of colour coming back to the pale face of Dorothy.

"Oh yes, I am better now, thank you. I shall be quite all right after we have walked for a little way in the air. What a nice night it is."

"I was going to take a bus, but we will walk if you would like it better," said Miss Mordaunt.

"I should like to walk; it is so cool and fresh out here." Dorothy was drawing long breaths and revelling in the strong sweep of the wind.

“It is funny how these elderly ladies will have their rooms so fearfully overheated,” remarked Miss Mordaunt; and then she asked a string of questions about Dorothy’s visit, the condition of Mrs. Wilson after her shock, and that sort of thing, to all of which Dorothy returned mechanical answers.

Her mind was in a whirl still. She felt quite unable to think clearly, and her outstanding emotion was intense dislike to Mrs. Wilson, whose bread and butter she had so recently been eating.

“Bah, it is just horrid!” she exclaimed aloud.

“Is it the mud you don’t like, or are you tired of walking?” asked Miss Mordaunt a little anxiously.

“I don’t think there is any mud—none to matter, at least—and I simply love walking at night,” replied Dorothy. “I was thinking of Mrs. Wilson, and of the perfumes in which she is soaked, and the joss sticks that were burning in the room most of the time that I was there. Oh! the air was thick.”

“Of course you would feel bad in such an atmosphere. Forget about it now. Think of clean and wholesome things, of wide spaces swept by wind and drenched with rain. Mind is a mighty force, you know, and the person who thinks of clean things feels clean, inside and out.”

“What a nice idea!” cried Dorothy, and then suddenly her hope roused again and began to assert itself. For to-night, at least, she would forget that ugly thing she had heard. She would fix her mind on the path she meant to climb, and climb she would, in spite of everything.

For the rest of the walk back to Sowergate, and then up the hill to the Compton School, she was merry and bright as of old, and Miss Mordaunt was thankful indeed for the restoring power of that walk in the fresh air.

Rhoda Fleming was crossing the hall when they went in, and she turned upon Dorothy with a ready gibe. “It is fine to be you, going out to take tea with county folks, and swanking round generally. The one compensation we stay-at-homes have is that we can get on with our work, while you are doing the social butterfly.”

“Even that compensation will seem rather thin if I can work twice as fast, just because I have been out,” answered Dorothy, smiling back at Rhoda with such radiant good humour that Rhoda was impressed in spite of herself.

“Going out seems to have bucked you up, and I suppose you have had the time of your life,” she said grudgingly. “For my own part, I felt thankful yesterday because the good lady chose to hang round your neck instead of mine, but going to tea with her at the Grand, Ilkestone, puts a different aspect on the affair. I begin to wish she had clawed me instead of you after all.”

“History would have been written differently if she had.” Dorothy’s laugh rippled out as she spoke, but as she went upstairs to the study she wondered what would have happened if Mrs. Wilson had told Rhoda of that wild doing of her father in those days of long ago. Would Rhoda have held the knowledge over her as a whip of knotted cords, or would she have blurted the unpleasant story out to the whole school without loss of time?

What a clamour there would have been! Dorothy shivered as in fancy she heard the wild tale going the round of the school, of how Dr. Sedgewick had been in prison for a fortnight in his reckless youth.

The secret was her own so far. She could hide it until she had time to sort things out in her mind. Meanwhile she would work. Ah, how she would work! She must win that Lamb Bursary. She must! Yet would she dare to keep it?

Would she dare?

CHAPTER XVII

SETTING THE PACE

Hazel Dring, one of the most good-natured of girls, was beginning to grumble. Margaret Prime was beginning to despair. Both of them were so much below Dorothy and Rhoda in the matter of marks that their chances of winning the Mutton Bone grew every week more shadowy.

Sometimes it was Rhoda who was top of the school, more often it was Dorothy. Professor Plimsoll talked with perfect rapture in his tone of the pleasure it was to lecture for the Compton Girls' School, now that there were such magnificent workers there. Miss Groome was having the time of her life, and even the Head declared that the strenuous work of the Sixth must make its mark on the whole of the school.

The Head was quite unusually sympathetic in her nature. That is to say, she was more than ordinarily swift to sense something hidden. It was not according to nature, as she knew schoolgirl nature, for two girls to work at the pressure displayed by Dorothy and Rhoda. She knew Rhoda to be lazy by nature, and although ambitious, by no means the sort of girl to keep up this fierce struggle week after week. Dorothy was a worker by nature, but the almost desperate earnestness that she displayed was so much out of the common that the Head was not satisfied all was right with her.

The days were hard for Dorothy just then. She lived in a constant strain of expecting to hear from some one that the story told by Mrs. Wilson had become public property. It was just the sort of gossip a talkative person would enjoy spreading. Dorothy writhed, as in fancy she heard her father's name bandied from mouth to mouth, and the scathing comment that would result. She even expected to hear her position as candidate for the Lamb Bursary challenged.

She was not at all clear in her own mind about it being right for her to remain a candidate. She had enrolled in ignorance of there being any impediment, she was entirely innocent of wrong in the matter, and as it was by the purest accident she had learned the true facts of the case, it seemed to her that there was no need for her to withdraw, or to make any declaration about the matter.

Still, she was not at rest. The way in which she eased her conscience on the matter savoured a good deal of drugs and soothing powders. When she

felt most uneasy, then she just worked the harder, and so drowned care in work.

The term wore on. February went out in fierce cold, and March came in with tempests one day, and summer sunshine the next. Dorothy went down then with a sharp attack of flu, and for a week was shut up in the san fretting and fuming over her inability to work, and was only consoled by discovering that Rhoda had sprained her right wrist rather badly at gym work, and was unable to do anything.

Hazel mounted to the top of the school in marks that week, and the week following Margaret took her down. The two declared it was just like old times back again. But, strangely enough, they were not so elated by their victory as they might have been. Dorothy had become in a very real sense their chum, and her disaster could not fail to be something of a trouble to them.

Rhoda was unpopular because of her unpleasant trick of snubbing. Dorothy had a way of making friends; she was sympathetic and kind, which counted for a good deal, and really outweighed Rhoda's splashes of generosity in the matter of treating special friends to chocolates, macaroons, and that sort of thing.

Dorothy came back to work looking very much of a wreck, but with undiminished courage for the fray. She could not recapture her position at first. Hazel was top most weeks, or was edged down by Margaret. Rhoda was finding her sprained wrist a severe nuisance. Being her right wrist, she could not write, and having to trust so largely to her memory with regard to lectures and that sort of thing, found herself handicapped at every turn.

There was one thing in Rhoda's limitation that was a great comfort to Dorothy, and that was the inability of Rhoda to write to Tom. It had come to Dorothy's knowledge, that although Bobby Felmore was putting down sweepstakes among the boys with a vigorous hand, gambling in some form or other was still going on, and Tom was mixed up in it.

Rhoda openly boasted in the Form-room of having helped some friends of hers to win a considerable sum of money by laying odds on Jewel, Mr. Mitre's horse that ran at Wrothamhanger. Two days later, when Tom came over to see Dorothy, he was more jubilant than she had ever seen him, and he offered to pay back the money he had borrowed from her last term.

"How did you manage to save it?" she asked, with a sudden doubt of his inability to deny himself enough to have saved so much in such a short time.

“I did not save it, I made it,” he answered easily. “The great thing with money is not to hoard it, but to use it.”

“How could you use it, just a little money like that, to make money again?” she asked in a troubled tone.

He laughed, but refused to explain. “Oh, there are ways of doing things that girls—at least some girls—don’t understand,” he said, and refused to say anything more about it.

Dorothy handed the money back. “I think I had better not take it,” she said with brisk decision. “If you had made it honourably you would be willing to say how it had been done. If it is not clean money, I would rather not have anything to do with it, thank you.”

“Very well, go without it, then—only don’t taunt me another day with not having been willing to pay my debts,” growled Tom, pocketing the money so eagerly that it looked as if he thought she might change her mind, and want it back again.

“Tom, how did you make that money?” she asked. She was thinking of the boast Rhoda had made of having helped a friend to land a decent little sum of money.

Tom laughed. He seemed very much amused by her question. He would not tell her how it had been done, but poked fun at her for saying she would not take it because she was afraid it had not been made in an honourable fashion.

“It is great to hear a girl prating about honour, when every one knows girls have no sense at all of honour in an ordinary way.” He spread himself out and looked so killingly superior when he said it, that she felt as if she would like to slap him for making himself appear so ridiculous.

“I shall know better how to respect your sense of honour when I have heard how you made that money,” she said quietly.

Tom flew all to pieces then, and abused her roundly, as brothers will, for being a smug sort of a prig. But he would not tell her anything more about it, and he went away, leaving Dorothy to meditate rather sadly on the way in which Tom had changed of late.

There was another matter for thought in what he had said. He had gibed at her again about a girl’s sense of honour being inferior to that of a man, and she, with that rankling, secret knowledge of what had happened to her father, began again to worry, and to wonder what really she ought to do.

“Perhaps I shall not win the Mutton Bone, and then it will not matter,” she murmured to herself. Yet in her heart she knew very well that she was going to strive with all her might to win it.

The next day Miss Groome called her aside, and put the local newspaper into her hand. “Read that, Dorothy. I am so glad you had a chance to be kind to the poor lady that day on the front.”

The paragraph to which Miss Groome pointed was an announcement of the death of Mrs. Peter Wilson, of Fleetwood Park, Sevenoaks.

“Dead, is she?” gasped Dorothy, her face white and a great awe in her heart. Then suddenly it flashed into her mind that if Mrs. Wilson were dead, there would be no danger of that disastrous fact leaking out of her father having been in prison.

How good it was to be able to draw her breath freely again! Dorothy went upstairs to the study feeling as if she trod on air.

No one could know how she had dreaded that Mrs. Wilson would gossip about that ugly fact of the past to some one who would bring the story to the school, and make it public there.

Now, now, the danger was past! That garrulous tongue was stilled, and the past might lie buried for always. How good it was!

Dorothy drew long breaths of satisfaction as she sat down in her accustomed chair. How good life was! How glorious it was to work, and to achieve! Perhaps she would win the Lamb Bursary. Then she would go to the university. She would have her chance of making a mark in the world, and—and——

By a sudden movement of her arm one of the books piled round her on the table was sent spinning to the floor. It opened as it fell, and as she stooped to reach it she read on the opened page—

> “That which seemeth to die may only be lying dormant, waiting until the set time shall come, when it shall awake and arise, ready to slay, or to ennoble, according as it shall be written in the Book of Fate.”

“Humph! There does not seem to be much comfort in that!” muttered Dorothy under her breath.

“What is the dear child prattling about, and what gem of knowledge has it lighted on from that old book, which might well have been used to light a

fire, say, a generation ago?" Hazel leaned over from her corner of the table to look curiously at the shabby old volume Dorothy was holding in her hands.

"Oh, it is not so very old," said Dorothy, with a laugh. "To have consigned it to the fire a generation ago would have been to burn it before it had a being. It is only a dictionary of quotations, and the one the book opened at seemed to give the lie direct to the thing I was thinking about. That is why I made noises with my nose and my mouth, disturbing the studious repose of this chamber of learning."

"Chamber of learning be blowed! What is the quote?" and Hazel stretched herself in a languid fashion as she held out her hand for the book.

She read the quotation aloud, then in keener interest demanded, "What do you make of it anyhow? 'To slay, or to ennoble, according as it shall be written in the Book of Fate'—the two ideas seem to knock each other over like the figures in a Punch and Judy show."

"I don't know what it means," said Dorothy slowly. "It gave me the sensation of there being a dog waiting round the corner somewhere, to jump out and bite me."

"Don't be a silly sheep, Dorothy; the meaning is plain enough," put in Margaret, who had left her seat, and was leaning over Hazel, staring down at the quotation. "What it just means is this: we have in us wonderful powers of free will, and the ability to make our own fate. The thing that lies dormant, but not dead, is the influence upon us of the things we come up against in life. If we take them one way they will slay us—that is, let us down mentally, and morally, and every way; if we take them the other way—perhaps the very much harder way—they will lift us up and make us noble."

"Well done, old girl; you will be a senior wrangler yet, even if Dorothy or Rhoda snatch the Mutton Bone from your trembling jaws," cried Hazel, giving Margaret a resounding whack on the back, while Jessie Wayne clapped her hands in applause, and only Dorothy was silent.

The old quotation had hit her hard. Margaret's explanation of it hit her harder still. She was thinking of the thing which had seemed to fade out of life with the death of Mrs. Wilson, and she was wondering what its effect would be on her, and what was the writing for her in the book of Fate.

Margaret turned to her books again; but before she plunged into them she said slowly, "I think we are our own Fate—that is, we have the power to

be our own Fate.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT DAY AT HOME

The term ended with Dorothy at the top of the school, and she went home feeling that the Lamb Bursary might be well within her grasp, if only she could keep up her present rate of work. The girl who was running her hardest was Rhoda. Hazel and Margaret, very close together in their weekly position, were too far behind to be a serious menace.

The first thing which struck Dorothy when she reached home was the careworn look of her father. Dr. Sedgewick had not been very well; some days it was all he could do to keep about, doing the work of his large practice.

"Mother, why doesn't father have an assistant to tide him over while he is so unfit?" asked Dorothy.

She had been home three days, and on this particular morning she was helping her mother in sorting and repairing house-linen, really a great treat after the continuous grind of term.

"Times are bad, and he does not feel that he can afford the luxury of an assistant," said Mrs. Sedgewick with a sigh. "Dr. Bowles is very good at helping him out: he has taken night work for your father several times, which is very good of him. I think that professional men are really very good to each other."

"Dr. Bowles ought to be good to father; think how father worked for him when he had rheumatic fever—so it is only paying back." Dorothy spoke with spirit, then asked, with considerable anxiety in her tone, "Is it the expense of my year at the Compton School that is making it so hard for father just now?"

Mrs. Sedgewick hesitated. Of choice she would have kept all knowledge of struggle from the children, so that they might be care free while they were young. But Dorothy had a way of getting at the bottom of things—and perhaps, after all, it was as well that she should appreciate the sacrifice that was being made for her. "We had to go rather carefully this year on your account, of course. Tom is an expense, too, for although he has a scholarship there are a lot of odds and ends to pay for him that take money. But we shall win through all right. And if only you are able to get the Lamb Bursary you

will be set up for life—you may even be able to help with the twins when their turn for going away comes."

"Mother, if I did not go in for the Lamb Bursary, I could take a post as junior mistress when I leave school; then I should be getting a salary directly." Dorothy spoke eagerly; she was suddenly seeing a way out, in her position with regard to the Mutton Bone—a most satisfactory way out, so she said to herself, as she thought of the horrible story of her father's past that had been told to her by Mrs. Wilson.

A look of alarm came into the face of Mrs. Sedgewick, and she broke into eager protest. "Don't think of such a thing, Dorothy. A mistress without a degree can never rise above very third-rate work. Your father and I are straining every nerve to fit you to take a good place in the world; it is up to you to second our efforts. You have got to win the Lamb Bursary somehow. If you can do that your father's burden will be lifted, and he will have so much less care. Oh! you must win it. We sent you to the Compton School because of that chance, and you must not disappoint us."

Dorothy shivered. Next moment a hot resentment surged into her heart. She was doing her best to win it, and it was not her fault that in real truth she was not eligible for it.

She had told her mother of her meeting with Mrs. Wilson. What she did find impossible to tell Mrs. Sedgewick was about the stories Mrs. Wilson had told her of her father's past; there was a certain aloofness about Mrs. Sedgewick—she always seemed to keep her children at arm's length.

Greatly daring, Dorothy did try to find out what she could about those old days, and she ventured to ask, "Mother, what has become of that cousin of father's, Arthur Sedgewick? Mrs. Wilson spoke of him to me."

"Then try and forget that you ever heard of him." Mrs. Sedgewick spoke harshly; she seemed all at once to freeze up, and Dorothy knew that she would not dare to speak of him to her mother again.

She sighed a little impatiently. Why could not mothers talk to their daughters with some show of reasonable equality? She was nearly a woman; surely her mother might have discussed that old-time story with her, seeing she had been compelled to hear of it from an outsider.

There was a sort of desperation on her that morning—she did so badly want some sort of guidance on the subject of her fitness to work for the Lamb Bursary. Presently she brought the talk back to the subject of the Bursary. She described the enrolment ceremony for her mother's benefit,

and she watched keenly to see the effect it would produce. She told how the provisions of the Bursary read that no girl could be a candidate whose parents had been in prison; she said no girl might enrol who knew herself guilty of cheating or stealing. She waxed really confidential, and told her mother of one girl whom she had seen stealing who had yet dared to enrol.

"That was very wrong of her," said Mrs. Sedgewick, who was looking rather pale. "Should you not have told about her, Dorothy?"

"Oh, mother, I could not! They would have called me a sneak!" cried Dorothy in distress.

"Well, see to it, then, that the girl does not get a chance of winning the Bursary, or you will be compounding a felony." Mrs. Sedgewick spoke brusquely, so it seemed to Dorothy, who felt that she could dare no more in the way of extracting guidance in her present dilemma. Several times she tried to say, "Mother, Mrs. Wilson told me about father having to go to prison—was it true?" but the words stuck in her throat—they positively refused to be uttered.

Then a doubt of her mother's sense of honour crept into her mind. Tom declared that women had no hard-and-fast standpoints with regard to honour, and that it was second nature with them to behave in a way which would be reckoned downright dishonourable in a man.

Was it possible Tom was right? Dorothy set herself to watch her mother very carefully for the remainder of the vacation; but she got no satisfaction from the process, except that of seeing that her mother never once deviated from the lines of uprightness.

She was out with her father a great deal during those holidays. He was old-fashioned enough to still use a horse and trap for most of his professional work. Dorothy drove him on his rounds nearly every day. This should have been Tom's work; but Tom was choosing to be very busy in other directions just then, and as Dorothy loved to be out with her father, she was quite ready to overlook Tom's neglect of duty.

Never, never did she dare to ask him the question which she had tried to ask her mother. She spoke to him of Mrs. Wilson, and although his face kindled in a gleam of pleasure at hearing of an old acquaintance, he did not seem to care to talk about her, or of the part of his life in which she figured, and again Dorothy was up against a stone wall in her efforts at further enlightenment on that grim bit of history.

Then came the morning before the two went back to school, and, as usual, Dorothy was out with her father, whose round on this particular day took him to Langbury, where he had to see a patient who was also an old friend. He was a long time in that house; but the spring sunshine was so pleasant that Dorothy did not mind the waiting.

She was sitting with her eyes taking in all the beauty of the ancient High Street, when a car came swiftly round the corner, hooting madly, and missing the doctor's trap, which was drawn up on the right side of the road, only by inches.

Dorothy heard herself hailed by a familiar voice, and saw Rhoda Fleming leaning out and waving wildly to her as the car went down the street.

Dr. Sedgewick came out at the moment and stood looking at the fluttering handkerchief which was being wagged so energetically.

"Was that some one you know?" he asked. "Downright road hogs they were, anyhow. Why, they almost shaved our wheel as they shot past. It was enough to make a horse bolt. It is lucky Captain is a quiet animal."

"The girl who was waving her handkerchief was Rhoda Fleming, one of the Sixth, and a candidate for the Lamb Bursary," said Dorothy, as she guided Captain round the narrow streets of Langbury, and so out to the Farley Road.

"Where does she come from?" asked Dr. Sedgewick, and he frowned. Rhoda's face had been quite clear to him as she was whirled past in the racing car, and he had been struck by a something familiar in it.

"Her people live at Henlow in Surrey, or is it Sussex?" said Dorothy. "Her father is a rather important person, and has twice been mayor of Henlow."

"I know him—Grimes Fleming his name is—but I do not know much good about him." The doctor spoke rather grimly, then asked, "Is this girl a great chum of yours?"

"Not exactly." Dorothy laughed, thinking of the openly avowed dislike Rhoda had displayed for her. "I think Tom and she are great pals; but I do not know that she is particularly good for him."

"Seeing she is her father's daughter, I should say that she is not. Can't you stop it, Dorothy?" There was anxiety in her father's tone that Dorothy was quick to sense.

“I have tried, but Tom won’t listen to me,” she said in a troubled tone. “He is like that, you know; to speak against her to him would only make him the more determined to be friends with her.”

“Oh yes, Tom is a chip off the old block, and in more senses than one, I am afraid.” The doctor sighed heavily, thinking of the abundant crop of wild oats which he had sown in those back years. Then he went on, taking her into confidence, “I am a bit worried about Tom: he seems to have got a little out of the straight; there are signs about him of having grown out of his home. He asked me, too, if I could not increase his allowance so that he could spread himself a little for the benefit of his future.”

“Oh, father, what did you say to him?” Dorothy’s tone was shocked. She thought of all the evidence of sacrifice that she had seen since she had been at home, and she wondered where Tom’s eyes were that he had not seen them too.

“I laughed at him.” The doctor chuckled, as if the remembrance was amusing. “I told him he would best advance his future by sticking at his work rather tighter, and leave all ideas of spreading himself out of count until he was in a position to earn his own living. Why does he want a girl for a pal? Are there not enough boys at the Compton School to meet his requirements?”

“Oh, lots of the boys and girls are pally. It is rather looked upon as the right thing in our little lot; and Rhoda is enough older than Tom to be of great use in rubbing down his angles, if she chose to do it,” Dorothy answered, and her cheeks became more rosy as she thought of the part she herself had had in putting down gambling in the boys’ school, by her influence over Bobby Felmore.

“Humph, there is sense in the idea certainly,” the doctor said. “Of course it depends for success on what sort of a girl a boy like Tom gets for a pal. I should not think a daughter of Grimes Fleming would be good for Tom. Do what you can to stop it, Dorothy. Remember, I depend on you.”

“Oh dear, I am afraid you will be disappointed, then,” sighed Dorothy. “I do not seem to have any power at all with Tom. I am older than he is, but that does not count, because he says he is the cleverer, as he won a scholarship for Compton and I did not. I suppose he is right, too, for he has won his way where I have had to be paid for.”

“It looks as if you are going to beat him now, if you keep on as you have done for the last two terms,” said her father. “We are looking to you to win

that Lamb Bursary, Dorothy. You have got to do it, for our sakes as well as your own. It will mean a tremendous lot to your mother and me."

Something that was nearly like a sob came up in Dorothy's throat and half-choked her. She realized that her father was actually pleading with her not to fail. In the background was that damaging story told to her by Mrs. Wilson. Because of that she was in honour bound not to go in for the Lamb Bursary. What was the right thing to do? If only—oh! if only she knew what was the right thing to do!

The hard part was that she could find no help at home, and she had to face going back to school with her question unsolved.

CHAPTER XIX

A SUDDEN RESOLVE

The first three weeks of term slipped away with little to mark their going. Rhoda was sweetly polite to Dorothy in public, but on the rare occasions when the two met with no one else within sight or hearing, then the ugly spirit that was in Rhoda came uppermost, and words of spite slipped off her tongue. It was almost as if she was daring Dorothy to speak of that incident which occurred in the showrooms of Messrs. Sharman and Song. For the first two weeks Dorothy had been top, but the third week Rhoda was above her—a fiercely triumphant Rhoda this time, for it had been a heavy struggle, and by nature she was not fond of work.

Dorothy had not been able to do her best at work that week; the term was going so fast—the end was coming nearer and nearer. She felt she could win the Bursary if only she could be free in her mind that she had a right to it. It was the fear in her heart that she was in honour barred from the right to strive for it which was doing her work so much harm just now.

Her mental trouble had to be kept to herself—it would have done no good to go about wearing a face as long as a fiddle. This would have excited comment directly: it would probably have ended in the doctor being called to see her, and he would have stopped her work. Oh no! She had just to wear a smiling face and carry herself in a care-free manner, taking her part in every bit of fun and frolic that came her way.

It was in the early mornings that the trouble hit her hardest. She would wake very early, when the day was breaking and all the birds were starting their day with a riot of bird music. Then she would lie sleepless until the rising-bell rang, and she would search and grope in her mind for a way out of the muddle.

She was lying in this fashion one morning while a cuckoo called outside her window and a blackbird trilled from the top of an elm tree growing just outside the lodge gate. What a cheerful sort of world it was, with only herself so bothered, so fairly harassed with care!

Suddenly a wild idea flashed into her mind. She would tell the Head about it, and then the responsibility would be lifted from her shoulders. What a comfort it would be to cease from her blind groping to find a way out!

With Dorothy to resolve was to do. But for that day at least she had to wait, for the Head had gone to London on business and did not return until the last train.

It was a little difficult even for one of the Sixth to get a private interview with the Head. Try as she would, Dorothy could not screw her courage to the point of standing up and asking for the privilege. In the end she wrote a note begging that Miss Arden would permit her to come for a private interview on a matter that was of great importance to herself. Even when the letter was written there was the question of how to get it into the hands of the Head. But finally she slipped it with the other letters into the box in the hall, and then prepared to wait with what patience she could for developments.

These were not long in coming. She was in the study with the others that evening, and she was trying hard to write a paper on English literature—a subject that would have been actually fascinating at any other time—when Miss Groome, on her way to the staff sitting-room, put her head in at the door, saying quietly,—

"Dorothy, the Head wants to see you in her room; you had better go down at once."

Dorothy rose up in her place; her heart was beating furiously and her senses were in a whirl.

"Oh, Dorothy, what is the matter? Have you got into a row?" asked Hazel kindly, while Margaret looked up with such a world of sympathy in her eyes that Dorothy was comforted by it.

"No, I'm not in a fix of that sort," she managed to say, and she smiled as she went out of the room, though her face was very pale.

Her limbs shook and her teeth chattered as she went down the stairs and along the corridor to the private room of the Head.

"Silly chump, pull yourself together!" she muttered, giving herself a shake; then she knocked at the door, feeling a wild desire to run away, now that the interview loomed so near.

"Come in," said the Head, and Dorothy opened the door, to find Miss Arden not at the writing table, which stood in the middle of the room, but sitting in a low chair by the open window.

Dorothy halted just inside the open door; she was still oppressed by that longing to run away, to escape from the consequences of her own act. She looked so shrinking, so downright afraid, as she stood there, that a grave fear

of serious trouble came into the heart of the Head as she pointed to another low chair on the other side of the window, and bade Dorothy sit down.

"It is such a lovely evening," she said in a matter-of-fact voice. "Look through that break in the trees, Dorothy; you can just see the sun shining on the sea."

"It is very pretty," said Dorothy; then she sat down suddenly, and was dumbly thankful for the relief of being able to sit.

"What is the trouble?" asked the Head.

Her manner was so understanding that Dorothy suddenly lost her desire to run away, the furious beating of her heart subsided, and she was able to look up and speak clearly, although her words came out in a rather incoherent jumble because of her hurry to get her story told.

"I am not sure that I have any right to keep trying for the Lamb Bursary —I mean I am by honour bound to tell you everything, and then you will decide for me, and tell me what I have to do."

"Do you mean that when you enrolled you kept something back?" asked the Head gravely. She was thinking this might be a case of having been unfit at the first, and refusing to own up to it.

"Oh no," said Dorothy earnestly. "When I enrolled I had no idea there was anything to prevent me from becoming a candidate."

"Then it is nothing to do with yourself personally?" There was a throb of actual relief in the heart of the Head. She was bound up in her girls; the disgrace of one of them would be her own disgrace.

"No." Dorothy hesitated a minute; it was fearfully hard to drag out that story about her father. She had a vision of his dear careworn face just then, and it seemed to her a desecration—even an unfilial thing—to say a thing of his past which might lower him in the esteem of the Head.

"If it is not yourself, then at least you could not help it." The Head spoke kindly, with a desire to make Dorothy's task easier.

"Do you remember the day of the very high tide, when an accident happened on the front, and I met a lady, Mrs. Wilson, of Sevenoaks, who asked me to take tea with her at the Grand, Ilkestone, next day?" Dorothy spoke in a sort of desperate burst, anxious to get the story out as quickly as possible.

“Yes, I remember.” The Head smiled in a reassuring fashion. “Mrs. Wilson was an old friend of your father’s, I think?”

“Yes; she used to know him when he was a medical student. She said that he and his cousin, Arthur Sedgewick, with two others named Bagnall, were a very wild lot; they did all sorts of harum-scarum things. They were coming home from a dance one night, and father was driving a cab that was racing another cab. Father’s cab collided with a police wagonette, which was badly smashed up, and an old woman was hurt. For that father had to go to prison for a fortnight.” It was out now—out with a vengeance. Dorothy fairly gasped at her own daring in telling the story.

The Head looked blank. “This was not pleasant hearing for you, of course. Still, I do not see how it affects your standing.”

“Oh! don’t you remember the rules that were read out at the enrolment ceremony?” cried Dorothy, with a bright spot of pink showing in both her white cheeks. “It was read out that no girl was eligible whose parents had at any time been in prison.”

“Of course; but I had forgotten.” There was a shocked note in the tone of the Head, her eyes grew very troubled, and she sat for a moment in silence.

A moment was it? To Dorothy it seemed more like a year—a whole twelve months—of strained suffering.

“Dorothy, are you quite sure—quite absolutely sure—that this is a fact?” Miss Arden asked, breaking the silence.

Choking back a sob, Dorothy bowed her head. Speech was almost impossible just then. But the Head was waiting for a detailed answer, and she had to speak. “Mrs. Wilson was there—she was in the cab—so she must certainly have known all about it. She told the story to me as if it were a good joke.”

“You have been home since then—did you speak of this to your father and mother?” The Head was looking so worried, so actually careworn, that Dorothy suddenly found it easier to speak.

“I tried to ask my mother about it, but she would not discuss it with me.” Dorothy’s tone became suddenly frigid, as if it had taken on her mother’s attitude.

“Did you speak to your father about it?” The Head was questioning closely now in order that she might get at the very bottom of the mystery.

“Oh, I could not!” There was sharp pain in Dorothy’s tone; her father was her hero—the very best and bravest, the very dearest of men. Something of this she had to make clear to the Head if she could, and she went on, her voice breaking a little in spite of her efforts at self-control. “Daddy is such a dear; he is so hard-working; he is always sacrificing himself for some one or doing something to help some one—I just could not tell him of that awful old story. He would have felt so bad, too, because he kept urging me to win the Lamb Bursary if I could.”

“Did you tell him of that rule—that stupid, foolish rule—about no one being eligible whose parents had been in prison?” asked the Head.

Dorothy put out her hands as if to ward off a blow. “Oh, I could not! Why, it would have broken his heart to think that any action of his in the past was to bar my way in the future. I did tell mother about it.”

“What did she say?” The insistent questioning of the Head was beginning to get on Dorothy’s nerves; then, too, it was so unpleasant to be obliged to own up to the stark truth.

“Mother said nothing,” she answered dully. And then the interview became suddenly a long-drawn-out torture: she was racked and beaten until she could bear no more, while all the time she could hear the cynical words of Tom about woman having no sense of honour.

Perhaps the Head understood something of what Dorothy was feeling, for her tone was so very kind and sympathetic when she spoke.

“I think we will do nothing in the matter for a week. I will take that time to think things round. But, Dorothy, I am very specially anxious that this talk shall make no difference to your work or your striving. Go on doing your very utmost to win the Bursary. I cannot tell you what a large amount of good this hard work of the candidates is doing for the whole school. You are not working merely to maintain your own position—you are setting the pace for the others. Don’t worry about this either. Just put the thought of it away from your mind. It may be I can find a way out for you—at least I will try.”

Dorothy rose to her feet. The strain was over, and, marvel of marvels, she was still where she had been—at least for another week.

CHAPTER XX

PLAYING THE GAME

It was a wonderful relief to Dorothy to have her burden of responsibility lifted. She could give her whole mind to her work now, without having to suffer from that miserable see-saw of doubt and fear about her right to work for the Lamb Bursary.

So good was it, too, that she had no longer to pretend to be cheerful. She could be as happy as the other girls now, and the week that followed was one of the happiest she had ever spent at the Compton School. As was natural, her work gained a tremendous advantage from her care-free condition, and when the marks for the week were posted up on the board she found that she was top again, a long way ahead of Rhoda this time, while Hazel and Margaret were lower still.

"It looks—it really does—as if Dorothy Sedgewick was going to cart off the Mutton Bone," said Daisy Goatby with a tremendous yawn, as she came sauntering up to the board to have a look at the week's marks. Dorothy had already gone upstairs, and for the moment there was no one in the lecture hall except Daisy and Joan Fletcher.

"There is one thing to be said for her—she will have earned it," answered Joan. "Dorothy must work like a horse to get in front of Rhoda—and she hasn't had Rhoda's chances, either, seeing that she only came here last autumn. I think she is the eighth wonder of the world. It makes me tired to look at her."

"Won't Rhoda just be in a wax when she sees how much she is down?" Daisy gurgled into delighted laughter, her plump cheeks fairly shaking with glee.

"I don't mind what sort of a wax she is in, if it does not occur to her to coach us into getting ahead of Dorothy," said Joan with a yawn. She was tired, for she had been playing tennis every available half-hour right through the day, and felt much more inclined for bed than for study. But she was in the Sixth—she was, moreover, a candidate for the Lamb Bursary—so it was up to her to make a pretence of study at night, even if the amount done was not worth talking about.

“I don’t think Rhoda will try that old game on again—at least I hope she won’t,” said Daisy, as the two turned away to mount the stairs to the study. “I never had to work harder in my life than at that time. I expected to have nervous breakdown every day, for the pace was so tremendous. If she had kept it up, I believe I should have stood a chance of winning the Mutton Bone—that is to say, if Dorothy had not been in the running. Rhoda is a downright good coach; she has a way of making you work whether you feel like it or not. The trouble is that she gets tired of it so soon. She dropped us all in a hurry, just as I was beginning to feel I had got it in me to be really great at getting on.”

“I know why she dropped us.” Joan shrugged her shoulders and glanced round in a suddenly furtive fashion, as the two went side by side up the broad stairs, and the June sunshine streamed in through the open windows.

“Why?” sharply demanded Daisy, scenting a mystery, and keen to hear what it was.

“I can’t tell you now,” said Joan hastily. “I am afraid some one might catch a word, and it is serious. I’ll tell you to-morrow when we are resting after a bout of tennis.”

“To-morrow? Do you think I am going to wait until then? Come along into the prep room—the Upper Fifth are not at work to-night. See, there is no one here. We will sit over by the window, then only the sparrows can hear what you have to say. Now, then, out with it; I hate to wait for anything.”

“Rhoda had to leave off using cribs—that is why she left off coaching us,” said Joan, jerking her shoulders up in a way peculiar to her in moments of triumphant emotion.

“Cribs wouldn’t be of much use in a good bit of our work,” said Daisy scornfully. “For instance, what sort of a crib could you use to remember one of old Plimsoll’s lectures?”

“Don’t be an idiot,” snapped Joan. “There are plenty of things we have to do where cribs would be useful—Latin, French, mathematics—oh! heaps of things. It was Rhoda who had that old book of Amelia Herschstein’s that was found in the No. 1 study among Dorothy’s things.”

“I was quite sure of that.” Daisy nodded and chuckled in delight. “I was not quite so fast asleep as I was supposed to be that night, and I knew that Rhoda had been out of the room, although she did go and come like a cat. But what I want to know is what made her have Amelia Herschstein’s book

in her possession. Did she find it anywhere about the premises, do you think?"

"Now, in the name of common sense is it likely that a book of that sort would be left lying round for any girl to pick up and use if she felt so inclined?" Joan fairly snorted with disgust at Daisy's want of understanding. "That book was in the school because Rhoda brought it here. I never could imagine why she chose to stuff it among Dorothy's things, except from blind spite, because, of course, she has had to work much harder since she has had to do without its help."

Daisy looked the picture of bewilderment. "How did it come about that she had the book at all?" she gasped, staring open-mouthed at Joan.

"Ah! do you know what I found out last vac?" Joan pursed up her mouth in a secretive fashion. She nodded her head, and looked wise, and so smug with it all, that Daisy forgot the dignity due in one of the Sixth, and actually fell upon her, cuffing her smartly, while she cried, "Out with it, then, or I will bang your head against the window-frame until you see stars and all that sort of thing."

"Don't behave like a Third Form kid if you can help it, and, for pity's sake, don't make such a noise, or some one will spot us, and then we shall get beans for not being at work," protested Joan, wresting herself free from the rough grip of Daisy, and patting her hair into place. Joan was beginning to revel in being nearly grown-up, and she was very particular about her hair being just right.

"Tell me, tell me quickly!" said Daisy, with a stamp of her foot. "If you don't, I will ruff your hair all up until it is in a most fearful tangle, and I will throw your ribbon, your combs, and those lovely tortoise-shell pins all out of the window. A nice sight you will look then, old thing."

"And nice beans, a regular boiling of them, you would get for doing it," laughed Joan, who loved to tease Daisy into an exhibition of this sort.

"Tell me, tell me!" cried Daisy, with another stamp of her foot.

"My father told me," said Joan, nodding her head. "He said that Grimes Fleming—Rhoda's father, you know—was closely related to the Herschsteins. It has been kept very dark, because, of course, no one in any way connected with that family would have been received at the Compton Schools if it had been known. Dad would not have told me about it if I had not insisted that this floor was haunted by Amelia's ghost, and that the spirit actually left books in the studies. I thought my dad would have had a fit

then, he was so choked with laughing. That is when he told me, and he said I was to keep it dark, for it did not seem fair that Rhoda should have the sins of those who went before fastened on her shoulders to weigh her down."

"It isn't playing the game, though, to let a girl like that win the Lamb Bursary," said Daisy in a tone that was fairly shocked.

"Just what I said to my dad. But he told me it was up to me to stop her doing it by jolly well beating her myself. I think I would have a real vigorous try to do it, too, if it were not for Dorothy. I might beat Rhoda if I tried hard enough, and kept on trying. Dorothy is a different matter; she is forcing the pace so terribly that I can't face the fag of it all. Rhoda would not put out her strength as she does if it were not for her spite against Dorothy."

"Why does she hate Dorothy so badly?" asked Daisy, whose excitement had subsided, leaving her more serious than usual.

"Ask me another," said Joan, flinging up her hands with a gesture that was meant to be dramatic. "I think it would need a Sherlock Holmes to find that out. I have pumped her—I have watched her—but I am no nearer getting to the bottom of it. It is my belief that Dorothy knows something about Rhoda, and Rhoda knows she knows it. Oh dear, what a mix up of words, but you know what I mean."

"I don't think she ought to be allowed to win the Lamb Bursary—it was not meant for a girl of that sort." Daisy sounded reproachful now, for it did seem a shame that the chief prize of the school should go to one who was unworthy.

Joan wagged her head with a knowing air. "I know how you feel, for it is just my opinion. I am keeping quiet now, as I promised my dad I would. If Dorothy or Hazel or any one else wins the Bursary, then there will be no need to say anything at all; but if Miss Rhoda comes out top, then I am going to say things, and do things, and stir up no end of a dust."

It was at this moment that two of the Upper Fifth came scurrying up to their prep room, and the two who had been talking there had to get out in a hurry.

Rhoda was carrying things before her in the Sixth. She had contrived to chum up a great deal with Dora Selwyn, who by reason of being head girl was a power in the place. Dora was rarely top of the school in the matter of marks; the fact that she was specializing naturally tended to keep these down. But in every other sense she was top, and she was leader—in short, she was IT, and every one realized this.

Dora had fallen foul of Rhoda a good many times during the years they had both been at the Compton School, but they had seemed to get on better of late. Right down at the bottom Dora was fearfully conservative. To her way of thinking it was quite wrong that a new girl like Dorothy Sedgewick should have been put straight into the Sixth. It was, in fact, a tacit admission that education in another school might be as good as it was at the Compton Schools—a rank heresy, indeed! Dora would have got over that in time, perhaps, if Dorothy had been something of a slacker; but it did not please her that the new girl—that is to say, the comparatively new girl—should be mounting to the top of the school in the matter of marks week by week, so she veered round to the side of Rhoda and championed her cause.

The days simply flew now. The summer term was always delightful at Sowergate. There was sea-bathing; there was tennis and golf; frequent picnics livened things up for all who cared for that sort of thing; there were bicycle trips; some of the girls were learning to ride; two were having motor lessons—so that, taken all round, every one was so full of affairs that each night as it came was something of a surprise, because it had arrived so speedily.

Dorothy seemed to live only for the end of the week, when the Head was to give her decision. In some ways it was the longest week she had ever lived through; in many other ways it was so short that Dorothy felt fairly frightened by the speed with which it went.

It was evening again when she was summoned to the private room of the Head, and she rose up in her place to obey the call, feeling as if she were going to the place of execution.

“Dorothy dear, I am so sorry for you!” murmured Margaret, jumping up to give her a hug as she went out of the room, while Hazel nodded in sympathy, and Jessie Wayne from the far corner blew her a kiss.

It was good to feel that she had the sympathy of them all, but a wry little smile curved Dorothy’s lips as she went downstairs. She was thinking how they would all have stared if she could have told them what was the matter —and then, indeed, they would have been sorry.

She was sorry for herself, except when she thought of her father; and then, in her pain for him, she forgot to suffer on her own account.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HEAD DECIDES

Miss Arden was writing at the table in the middle of the room when Dorothy entered. She looked up and motioned to a low chair near the window. “Sit there for a few minutes, Dorothy; I shall not be long before I am free to talk to you.”

Dorothy sat down, and instinctively her glance went out to that bit of shining sea visible through the gap in the trees, which the Head had pointed out to her a week ago. It was an evening just like that one had been, with the sun shining on the water, and the trees so still that they did not sway across that little patch of brightness.

Presently the Head finished writing, rang the bell for the letters to be taken away for posting, and then, leaving her writing table, came over to sit by Dorothy at the open window.

“How has your work gone this week?” she asked a little abruptly. Then, seeing that Dorothy seemed puzzled, she went on speaking in her crisp tones, “I was not asking in reference to your school position—I know all about that. I wanted to know how you had felt about your work, and whether it was easier because of our talk last week.”

Dorothy’s face flashed into smiles, and she answered eagerly, “Oh, it was much easier, thank you. I have had no worry of responsibility, you see. I have been free to keep on working without any wonder as to whether I had the right to work in that special way.”

The Head nodded in sympathetic fashion, and was silent for a few minutes, as if she were still considering that decision of hers; then she asked, “Are you willing to trust the responsibility to me for the rest of the term?”

Dorothy looked blank. “I don’t think I quite understand,” she said. “It is for you to decide what I have to do.”

The Head laughed, then flung out her hands with a little gesture of helplessness as she answered, “I know the decision rests with me. The trouble is that I cannot at the present see any light on the situation. Until that comes you have just to go on as you are doing now. You have to make the very bravest fight you can. You have to work and to struggle—to do your

very best; and having done this, you have to wait in patience for the issue of it all."

"I can do that, of course," said Dorothy; but her tone was a little doubtful—it was even a little disappointed. It was a hard-and-fast decision she craved: a pronouncement that could not be set aside—which put an end to hope and fear, and that left her nothing to be anxious about.

"I want you to do it, feeling that it is the best—and, indeed, the only way." The Head spoke with a slow deliberation which carried weight. "You see, Dorothy, you have to think not merely of yourself and your own sense of honour, which is a very fine one; but you have to think also of your father and the effect it might have on him and his career if you withdrew from your position as a candidate now. You know very well how serious it is for a doctor to be talked about in such a way as would inevitably occur if this story became common property. A doctor smirched is a doctor destroyed. We have to be very careful on his account."

"I know; I had thought about that," said Dorothy in a curiously muffled tone.

"That is good. Your consideration for him will help you more than anything else." The Head smiled with such kindly approval that Dorothy was thrilled. "I am not even going to suggest that you may not win the Lamb Bursary; to fail in doing that, through any lack of striving on your part, would be the coward's way out of a difficulty, and that could never be the right way. Your chance of winning is very good. Rhoda Fleming is your most serious rival. In some ways she has the advantage, because she has been here so much longer that she has been better grounded on our lines of work. On the other hand, you have an advantage over her of steadier application. You keep on keeping on, where she goes slack, and has to pull herself up with extra effort. This may succeed where the struggle is a short one, but will not be of much use in a long strain."

"I can't work by starts like that," said Dorothy. "I should soon get left if I did not keep straight on doing my utmost."

"It is the only way to real success," the Head remarked thoughtfully. Then she went on, hesitating a little now, picking her words very carefully, "In the event of your winning, then I should think it best to call the governors of the Bursary together, and make a plain statement of the case to them. If they decided that you were unfit to receive the benefit of the Bursary, the matter could be kept from becoming public. The story about

your father need never leak out, and although he would have the pain of knowing all about it, the outside world would not be any the wiser."

"Oh! it would hurt him so dreadfully to know it was his action which had shut me out from the chance of a university training!" cried Dorothy, shrinking as if the Head had dealt her a blow.

"I know, dear, and it is painful even to think about it. But the governors, taking all things into consideration, may even decide to let you take it, in which case your father may be spared ever hearing of the affair. I cannot think why such a strange provision was put into the rules for enrolment. It might have been that poor Miss Lamb had been compelled to suffer in her time at the hands of some girl whose parent, one or the other, had been in prison, and so it was a case of avenging herself at the expense of the girls who might come after her. Such things do happen. Then, too, it is not as if your father had been in prison from any deliberate attempt at law-breaking. If he had embezzled money—if he had set himself up against what was right and honourable—it would have been a different matter. I think the punishment was far in excess of the wrong-doing, which appears to have begun and ended in an outburst of larkiness and high spirits; but I suppose it was the old woman being hurt which caused the sentence to be imprisonment."

"Would the governors have the power to set aside that old rule?" asked Dorothy, whose eyes had brightened with a sudden stirring of hope.

"I fancy the governors have all power to do as seems wisest to them," the Head replied; and then she said, with a low laugh, "As they are men, it would be no question of their sense of honour being shaky."

Dorothy gave a start of pure amazement at such an utterance from the Head; she was even bold enough to ask, "Do you think that women are less honourable than men?"

"Now, that is a rather difficult question to answer," replied the Head. "Taken in the broadest sense, I should be inclined to think that the great mass of women are less honourable than men. But that is the result of long ages of being regarded as irresponsible beings—the mere appendage or chattel of man—with no moral standing of their own. Taken in the individual sense, I believe that when a woman or a girl is honourable, she is far more so than a man—that is to say, she would be honourable down to the last shred of detail, while a man under like conditions would be honourable in the bulk, but absolutely careless of the smaller details. That is largely theory, however, and does not concern the present business in the least. We

have talked about it enough, too, and now we will leave it alone. I do not forget—and I am sure the governors will not forget—that you, of your own free will, came to me with this uncomfortable fact from your father's past, and that you offered to withdraw, or to do anything else which I might decide was best."

Dorothy rose to go. There was one question she had to ask, a fearfully difficult one, but she screwed her courage to the attempt. "Supposing I came out top in the running for the Bursary, but the governors decided I might not take it, would they give the Bursary to the girl who was next below me?"

The Head looked thoughtful—she even hesitated before replying; then she said slowly, "I do not know. I do not think such a case as this has ever arisen before. They might even decide not to give the Bursary at all this year. Why did you ask?"

The hot colour flamed over Dorothy's face, it mounted to the roots of her hair, she was suddenly the picture of confusion, and stammered out the first answer which came into her head, "I—I just wanted to know."

"Dorothy, what is it that you know against Rhoda Fleming, which would put her out of the running for the Bursary if you told?"

The voice of the Head was so quiet, so curiously level, that for a moment Dorothy did not grasp the full significance of the question. Then it flashed upon her that she held Rhoda in her hand, and, with Rhoda, her own sense of honour also.

"Oh! I could not tell you—I could not. I beg of you do not ask me," she cried, stretching out her hands imploringly, then questioned eagerly, "How did you even guess there was anything?"

"By the way Rhoda has treated you all the term; but I could not be sure until I had asked you a point-blank question at a moment when you were not expecting it," replied the Head; and then she said kindly, "Why can you not trust me with your knowledge, Dorothy?"

The colour faded from Dorothy's face. She was white and spent; indeed, she looked as if tears were not far away as she stood with her back to the door and the strong light of the sunset full on her face. "The knowledge I have came to me without my seeking," she said in a low tone. "I have no means of proving what I know, and if I told you it would seem like taking a dishonourable way of downing a rival in work."

"I understand that," said the Head. "Why did you ask me about Rhoda, if she would have the Bursary if you were not allowed to keep it?"

Dorothy moved uneasily. Her tongue felt so parched that speech was difficult; then she said in a low tone, “I spoke to my mother when I was at home, without, of course, giving her facts or names, and I asked her what I ought to do.”

“What did she say?” The Head was smiling, and Dorothy took heart again.

“Mother told me to make such an effort to win the Bursary for myself, that it would not matter in the end whether the girl was fit or unfit to have enrolled as a candidate.”

“Very good advice, too. But I see your position again. If you speak you let your rival down; from your point of view, it would not be playing the game. If you keep silent, and win the Bursary, but yet because of this story of your father’s past you are passed over and it is given to Rhoda, the irony of the situation will be fairly crushing.” The Head was looking at Dorothy with great kindness in her manner, and Dorothy was comforted because she was understood.

“You will not force me to speak?” she asked, greatly daring, for the Head was by no means a person to be trifled with.

“No; I will even admire you for your desire not to do so, though it makes me feel as if I were compounding a felony.” The Head laughed as she spoke; then, becoming suddenly grave, she went on, “If it should turn out that you win the Bursary, and the governors will not let you take it, I shall require of you that you tell me and tell them of this thing you are keeping to yourself. The honour of the school demands this at your hands. It is not fair that the Lamb Bursary should go to a girl who has won it by a trick or by any keeping back of that which should be known.”

“No, it is not fair,” admitted Dorothy, and a dreadful dismay filled her heart to think that she might have to tell of what she had seen in the showroom of Messrs. Sharman and Song.

“Good night, and now let us leave all these problems for the future to solve,” said the Head, holding out a slim white hand for Dorothy to shake.

Such a wave of gratitude flowed into the heart of Dorothy, to think she had not to betray Rhoda, that, yielding to impulse, she carried that slim white hand to her lips, kissing it in the ardour of her devotion and admiration. Then she went out of the room with her head carried high, and such a feeling of elation in her heart that it was difficult to refrain from dancing a jig on the stairs.

“Dorothy, you are a fraud!” cried Hazel, as Dorothy came into the study, smiling, radiantly happy, and looking as if it were morning instead of nearly bedtime. “Here have Margaret and I been snivelling in sympathy with you, because we thought you were having a ragging from the Head for some misdemeanour or other, instead of which you come prancing upstairs as if the whole place belonged to you.”

“That is how I feel,” said Dorothy blithely. “The Head—bless her—has not been ragging me; she has only been laying down rules for my conduct in future, and that, you know, is why we come to school, to be taught what we do not know.”

“It looks as if you are having us on,” said Margaret, glancing up from her work.

“Never mind, we will go to bed now, and sleep it off,” answered Dorothy, and then would say no more.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CUP

Just below the stained-glass window which was at the back of the dais in the lecture hall stood a silver cup of great beauty. Other and lesser cups were ranged on each side of it, and all of them were protected by a glass case of heavy make.

This principal cup had been in the girls' school for two years now. It had to be fought for on the tennis courts each year at the end of the summer term. Until two years ago the boys had won it for six or seven years in succession, and great had been the jubilation among the girls when at last they had succeeded in winning it for themselves. Having had it for two years, they were preparing to fight for it again with might and main when the time for the struggle should come round again.

Realizing that the best players were not always to be found in the Sixth Form, the contest was fought by the united efforts of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Forms, the finals being fought amid scenes of the wildest enthusiasm.

The struggle was fixed for just one week before the end of term, and was indeed the beginning of the end—the first break of the steady routine of the past three months. Fortunately the weather was all that could be desired, and every one was in wild spirits for the fray.

The Fourth and the Fifth of both schools were early on the ground. The excitement at the courts was tremendous. Exasperated by having lost the cup for two years in succession, the boys had been working hard at tennis this summer, and they were out to win—a fact the girls were quick to realize.

The games had already started when the Sixth of the boys' school came pouring out from their school premises across the cricket field to the courts of the girls' school, where the battle was being fought. Two minutes later the girls of the Sixth also arrived on the scene. They were a little late because of a history exam which had held them until the last minute.

The governors of the schools left nothing to chance, and the exams of the last two weeks of the summer term were things of magnitude.

Dorothy came down to the courts with Joan Fletcher. Hazel and Margaret, her special chums, were in front, but Dorothy had been delayed by

Miss Groome, and was the last on the scene—or would have been if Joan had not waited for her.

"What a jolly old day it is!" exclaimed Joan, anxious to show a friendly front. Both she and Daisy Goatby had completely veered round in these last weeks, and showed themselves very anxious to be on friendly terms with Dorothy.

"Oh, it could not be better!" Dorothy flourished her racket, and executed a festive skip as she hurried along. "It is just perfect weather for tennis, and I think—I really think we shall beat the boys if we play hard enough. And oh! we must keep that cup if we can, for the honour of the school."

"What a lot you think of honour." Joan half turned as she hurried along, and she surveyed Dorothy closely, as if trying to find out what made her so keen on upholding the traditions of the place.

"Why, of course! But that is only right and natural. Don't you think so?" There was surprise in Dorothy's tone, for Joan seemed to be hinting at something. Her scurrying run had dropped to a walk, and Dorothy slowed up also.

"It isn't what I think that matters very much in this case," burst out Joan explosively. "I was only thinking what a pity it is that some of the rest of our crowd are not as keen on the honour of the school as you are."

"Now, just what do you mean by that?" Dorothy halted abruptly, staring at Joan.

They were just at the edge of the nearest court now, and the shouts and yells from boys and girls resounded on all sides.

Joan looked up at the sky, she looked down at her white tennis shoes, and then her gaze went wandering as if she were in search of inspiration. Finally she burst out, "I hate to have to tell you, but Daisy and I tossed up as to which should do it, and I am the unlucky one: your brother has mixed himself up in a particularly beastly sort of scrape."

"Tom is in a scrape?" breathed Dorothy, and suddenly she felt as if it were her fault, for she had seen so little of Tom this term, and when she had seen him he had not cared to be in any way confidential.

Joan nodded in an emphatic fashion. "A silly noodle he must be to be cat's-paw for a girl in such a silly way."

"What has he done?" asked Dorothy, striving to keep calm and quiet, yet feeling a wild desire to seize and shake the information out of her.

“I don’t know the real rights of it,” said Joan. “I know a little, and guess a lot more. Rhoda has dropped quite a considerable lot of money lately in hospital raffles and in the sweepstakes that were got up to provide that new wing for the infirmary. As she has helped Tom to so many plums in the way of winning money in the past, it was only natural that she turned to him when she got into a muddle herself. She was in a rather extra special muddle, too, for she was holding the money we raised for the archery club, and when the time came to pay it over, lo! it was not, for she had spent it, and her dump from home had not arrived. To tide her over the bad bit she applied to Tom. He said he had no money, and did not know where to get it. She, in desperation—and Rhoda knows how to scratch when she is in a corner—wrote to Tom that if the money was not forthcoming in twenty-four hours, she would tell his Head of the doings at the night-club.”

“What night-club?” demanded Dorothy, aghast.

“Oh, I don’t know. Boys are in mischief all the time, I think,” said Joan impatiently; and then she went on, “The time-limit passed; Rhoda got still more desperate and still more catty. Finding Tom did not pay up—did not even send to plead for longer time, or take any other notice of her ultimatum—Rhoda wrote her letter to Tom’s Head, and actually posted it. This letter had not been in the post half an hour when her money from home arrived. She was able to get out of her fix, but she was not able to stop having got Tom into an awful sort of row. And now she is so mad with herself, that the Compton School is not big enough to hold her in any sort of comfort.”

“This night-club, what is it exactly?” Dorothy turned her back on the tennis players, and faced Joan with devouring anxiety in her eyes.

“I don’t know really; I think it is got up by some of the young officers at the camp. Lots of them are Compton old boys, you know. I think they meet somewhere at dead of night to drink and play cards, and go on the burst generally. They call it going the pace. I suppose they let some of our boys in for old sake’s sake, though it would be kinder to the boys if they did not. Anyhow, it is all out now. The boys will get in a row, the young officers may get court-martialled, or whatever they do with them up there, and all because a girl lost her temper through not being able to twist Tom round her little finger.”

“Joan, I am ever so grateful to you for telling me all this, even though I can’t see any way of helping Tom,” said Dorothy; and then she asked, “Does he know that Rhoda has told Dr. Cameron?”

“He did not. The letter did not go until yesterday, you see,” replied Joan. “The trouble for Tom will be that he will not only get beans from the authorities, but the boys will cut him dead for having been such a donkey as to trust a girl with a secret.”

“I don’t see why a girl should not be trusted as well as a boy,” said Dorothy, who always felt resentful at this implied inferiority of her sex.

“You may not see it, but your blindness does not alter the fact,” said Joan bluntly. “There goes Rhoda, holding up her head with the best because she can pay up the money she copped to pay for her old raffles. I wonder how she feels underneath, when she thinks how her letter to Tom’s Head will make history for the Compton Boys’ School, and for the camp as well? You see, she has let the whole lot into it, and there will be no end of a dust up.”

“Even scavengers have their uses,” said Dorothy, feeling suddenly better because she realized that Tom would have entirely lost faith in Rhoda; and although he might have to suffer many things at the hands of his outraged companions, he would learn wisdom from the experience, and come out of the ordeal stronger all round.

“It is our turn—come along,” cried Joan with an air of relief. She was thankful indeed to have got her unpleasant task over, and to find that Dorothy did not look unduly upset.

The struggle for the cup was being put through amid displays of wild enthusiasm. The first sets were played by boys against boys, and girls against girls, and the yelling grew fairly frantic when the semi-finals were reached.

The girls for the semi-final were Dora Selwyn and Rhoda against Dorothy and a Fifth Form girl, Milly Stokes, who had carried all before her in previous sets, though she was small, and younger than most of her Form.

It was rather hard for Dorothy to have to play against Dora and Rhoda, and she had little hope of surviving for the final. Rhoda was a good all-round player; she was great, too, at smashing and volleying; while Dora, with no great pace in her strokes, was very accurate, and always inclined to play for safety first.

There was no holding Milly Stokes. She behaved like one possessed. She sent the balls flying with a reckless abandon which looked as if it must spell ruin, yet each time made for success. Dorothy was wrought up to a great pitch. It was not tennis she seemed to be playing; it was the contest between right and wrong—she and Milly Stokes pitted against Rhoda and

the head girl. She was not nervous. That story of Tom's impending disgrace had so absorbed her that she could not think about herself at all. She was standing for what was upright and ennobling, so she must play the game to win.

Louder and louder grew the cheering; now she could hear the shouting for "Little Stokes" and "Sedgewick of the Sixth."

They had won, too, and now Milly Stokes rushed at her, flinging a pair of clinging arms round her, and crying, "Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy, you are a partner worth having! We have beaten those two smashers, and surely, surely we can beat the boys!"

"We will have a good try, anyhow," answered Dorothy with a laugh; and then she went off to the little pavilion to have a brief rest while the boys played their last set for semi-final.

So far she had not caught a glimpse of Tom, but as she came out of the pavilion with Milly Stokes and went across the court to her place, she saw him standing by the side of Bobby Felmore.

Her heart beat a little faster at this sight. She knew that he and Bobby had not been on good terms lately; that they should be together now, made her jump to the conclusion that Tom's punishment at the hands of the boys had begun, and Bobby was proving something of a refuge for him.

"Bless you, Bobby!" she murmured under her breath as she nodded in their direction; and she was very glad to think that Bobby had not survived to the final, so that she would not have to beat him.

Their opponents were a long, sandy-haired youth, perspiring freely, and a dark boy of uncertain temper and play to match. It was a fine struggle. Milly dashed about more wildly than ever, but Dorothy played with a gay unconcern that surprised even herself. She had vanquished the wrong in the semi-final, and this last bit of struggle was merely for the glory of the school. They won, too, and the shrill cheering of the girls frightened the birds from the trees, while the boys booed with a sound of malice in their tone, which was partly for the loss of the cup, but still more for the loss of the dubious privilege of their night-club.

CHAPTER XXIII

TROUBLE FOR TOM

Dorothy and Milly Stokes were chaired round the courts by ardent admirers, and they were cheered until their heads ached from the noise.

As soon as Dorothy could escape she went in search of Tom. It was some time before she could find him; and when she did run him down he was in a temper that was anything but sweet.

"Oh, Tom! I am so sorry for the trouble," she burst out with ready sympathy. Tom usually wore such a happy face, that it was just dreadful to see him looking so glum.

"It is pretty rotten," he growled. "We are to be hauled up before the Head in the morning, and goodness knows what will happen then. There is one comfort—I am not the only one in the soup; there are about twenty-five of us involved. The thing that passes my comprehension is how it all came out."

"Don't you know?" gasped Dorothy, so amazed at his words that she had no time to think of being discreet.

"How should I know?" he said blankly. "Why, you might have knocked me down with a feather when Clarges Major told me we'd been spotted, and that the game was up so far as our night-club was concerned. It has been such a jolly lark, too! We used to go about three nights a week, and get back about three o'clock in the morning. Some club it was, too, I can tell you! Say, Dorothy, how did you know anything about it?"

"Joan Fletcher told me. She told me how Rhoda had written all about the club to your Head, because you would not lend her the money when she was in a hole about the archery club subscriptions." Dorothy spoke in a quiet tone; she was determined that Tom should know the true facts of the case. But she quailed a little when he turned upon her with fury in his face.

"Rhoda told because I would not lend her the money! What on earth are you driving at? That time when she talked to me about being so short, I told her then that I was in the same boat—absolutely stoney."

"It was because you did not answer her letter, when she gave you twenty-four hours to find some money to help her out of her fix." Dorothy

stopped suddenly because of the surprise in Tom's face. "Didn't you have that letter?" she asked.

"I have never set eyes on it," he answered. "When did she send it, and how?"

"I don't know," answered Dorothy. "Joan told me that Rhoda was so angry and so very desperate because you did not answer her letter, that, to pay you out for leaving her in the lurch, she wrote a letter to Dr. Cameron, telling him about the night-club. A little after her letter went she got the money she wanted from home, and she would have recalled her letter to your Head then if she had been able to do it, but, of course, it was too late."

"The insufferable little cad, to blow on us like that out of sheer cattish spite!" growled Tom. Then he asked, with sharp anxiety in his tone, "Has it leaked out yet among our crowd that Rhoda told?"

"I am afraid so," answered Dorothy, and again she quailed at the look in his eyes. "Didn't you hear all the booing when we won the cup?"

"Of course. I booed myself with might and main; but that was only because we had lost it," said Tom.

Dorothy shook her head. "I am afraid it is more than that—there was such a lot of malice in the noise. Hazel told me that some one threw a bag of flour at Rhoda, and written across the bag were the words 'For a sneak'; so it looks as if they knew."

"If that is the case, you bet I am in for it right up to my back teeth," growled Tom; and turning he walked away with never another word to Dorothy, who reflected sorrowfully that he was much more concerned at the prospect of losing the goodwill of his fellows than because he was implicated in such a serious breach of rules and regulations.

Dorothy did not see him again that day. She did not see him on the next day either; but rumours were rife in the girls' school that the boys involved in the night-club business were in for a row of magnitude.

The work of the week was so exacting and absorbing that Dorothy found herself with but little time for thinking of Tom and his troubles.

On Sunday—the last Sunday of term it was—Tom appeared with the other boys in the gardens of the girls' school; but he looked so miserable that Dorothy had a sudden, sharp anxiety about him.

"Oh, Tom, what is it?" she cried.

“Don’t you know?” he said, looking at her with tragic eyes. “The Head has sent for the governor, and I don’t feel as if I could face him when he comes.”

“For the governor?” echoed Dorothy blankly, and in the eyes of her mind she was seeing those grave frock-coated gentlemen who had sat on the dais in the lecture hall that day last autumn, at the enrolment of the candidates for the Lamb Bursary. She wondered why Dr. Cameron had thought it necessary to send for one of the school governors about a case of school discipline.

“Father, I mean, and he is coming to-morrow.” Tom spoke impatiently, for he thought Dorothy was much more thick in the head than she ought to have been.

“Father coming to-morrow?” Dorothy’s voice rose in a shout of sheer ecstasy. “Why, Tom, we will make him stay over Wednesday, and then he will be present when the Bursary winner is declared!”

No sooner had she uttered that joyful exclamation than a cold chill crept into her heart. How dreadful for her father to be present if she had really won the Mutton Bone; for he would have to be told perhaps that she could not be allowed to keep it because of that ugly fact of his past, which had landed him in prison for fourteen days.

What a shame that there should be any clouds to mar his coming—and it was really a cloud of an extra heavy sort that was the reason of his being obliged to come.

“It is pretty rotten that he should have been sent for,” growled Tom. “All the fathers have been asked to come. So you see Rhoda raised a pretty heavy dust when she butted in.”

“Why have they all been sent for?” asked Dorothy in dismay. To her way of thinking such extreme measures boded very ill for the culprits.

“The fathers and the masters are going to confer as to what is to be done with us,” explained Tom, who was leaning against a tree and moodily kicking at the turf. “Dr. Cameron has got a bee in his bonnet about the gambling stunt going on in the schools; he is making a bid to wipe it out for always—don’t you wish he may do it? He thinks the best way is to let our governors take a hand in the business. He told us that if it had only been a question of our sneaking out of dorm when we were supposed to be fast asleep in bed, he would have dealt with the matter himself, and taken care that we had so much work to do that we would be thankful to stay in bed when we had a chance to get there.”

“Oh, Tom, how I wish you had never given way to betting and that sort of thing!” cried Dorothy, dismayed at the turn things had taken.

“You’ll have to be more sorry still if I have to lose the scholarship,” said Tom with a savage air.

“It won’t—it surely won’t come to that!” said Dorothy in dismay. Again a pang smote her as she thought of the double trouble there might be in store for the dear father. It did not even comfort her at the moment to remember how wholly innocent she was of any hand in bringing on the trouble which might arise on her account.

“It may do.” Tom’s tone was gloomy in the extreme. “On the other hand, it may tell in my favour that I am a scholarship boy. The authorities may argue that there must be good in me because I have worked so well in the past. They will say that, as I am one of the youngest of the crowd, I was doubtless led away by the seniors. Oh, there is certain to be a way out for me.”

“I am not sure that you deserve to have a way out found for you,” she said severely. “Oh, Tom, how could you bring such trouble on them at home!”

“Don’t preach,” burst out Tom impatiently. “I get more than enough of that from Bobby Felmore.”

“Bobby wasn’t in with the night-club crowd?” questioned Dorothy.

“Not he.” Tom snorted in derision of Bobby and Bobby’s standpoints. “He is too smug for anything these days. Downright putrid, I call it. I’ve no use for mugs.”

“Here comes Rhoda!” cried Dorothy with a little gasp of fright. “Oh, Tom, what are you going to say to her?”

“Nothing,” he answered with a snarl. “If she were a boy I would fight her. Seeing she is a girl, I can’t do that; so the only thing to be done is to look right through her and out the other side without taking any further notice of her.”

Rhoda bore down upon them with a little rush, her hands held out in imploring fashion. “Oh, Tom,” she cried, “I am thankful to see you here! Why have you not answered my letters? I have fairly squirmed in the dust at your feet, begging forgiveness for my cattish temper. But I was fairly desperate, or I should never have been so mad as to let you down, and your crowd as well. Words won’t say how sorry I am——”

She broke off with a jerk, for Tom, after looking at her with a cold and steady stare, turned on his heel and walked away, calling over his shoulder as he went,—

"So long, Dorothy, old girl; see you later."

For a moment Rhoda stood staring at Tom's retreating figure as if she could not believe her eyes, then she turned upon Dorothy with fury in her face.

"This is your work, then?" she cried shrilly. "I always knew you were jealous because Tom thought so much of me. A fine underhand piece of work, to try and separate me from my friend!"

"I have not tried to separate you from Tom; it would not have been any use," said Dorothy calmly. "The separating, as you call it, was your own work. Tom will have to bear such a lot from his crowd because of your letter to his Head that he says he will not speak to you again."

"Oh, he will come round," Rhoda said, and tried to believe it; but she was hurt in her pride—the more so because she had the sense to see that she had brought the whole disaster on herself.

Dorothy turned away. She was feeling pretty sore herself because of the trouble that was bringing her father to the Compton Schools just then. It took away all her joy at the prospect of seeing him, to think how he might have to suffer on her account before he went away. She could not even comfort herself with the thought that she might not win the Bursary, because if she did not win it herself, the probabilities were that Rhoda would win it, in which case she was pledged to the Head to reveal that thing against Rhoda which she had seen in the showrooms of Messrs. Sharman and Song. What a miserable tangle it all was, and what a shame that people could not be happy when they so badly wanted to be free from care.

Monday came with hours of examination work. Happily, she was so absorbed in it that she hardly noticed how the hours went by. There was an archery contest in the afternoon. The younger boys came over, and some of the seniors, but there were big gaps in the Fifth and the Sixth of the boys' school. None of the luckless twenty-five were present, they being gated for that day and the next—that is to say, until the council of fathers and masters had determined on what to do with them.

Dorothy guessed that she would not see her father that day. Tom had told her he would reach Sowergate by the six-thirty train, and as he would go straight to the boys' school to dine with Dr. Cameron, and would have to be

at the council afterwards, there would be no chance of seeing him until next morning.

She heard the train run in to Sowergate station, and there was a thrill in her heart to think of her father being so near. The worst of it was that she felt so bad on his account, because of what he would have to face both for Tom at the boys' school, and for herself at the girls' school.

She was so tired that night when bedtime came that she fell asleep directly her head touched the pillow, and she slumbered dreamlessly until morning. It was early when she woke, and sitting up in bed she thought of all the things that were before her in the day. She wondered what she would say to her father, and whether she ought to tell him of the arrangement the Head had made with her. It did not seem fair that he should have to face a situation of such gravity without some preparation.

"I can't tell him! Oh, I can't tell him!" she murmured distressfully, and then, because lying still and thinking about it was so intolerable, she sprang out of bed, beginning to dress with feverish haste. It was such a comfort to pitch straight into work, and to lose sight for a little while of the things which bothered her so badly.

The whole of the Sixth were to work at term finals from eleven o'clock until one that day, and they set off down to the beach at half-past nine, to bathe and get back for a little rest before the time for the exam. The Fourth Form girls had already gone down; the Fifth were sitting for their finals, and would go to bathe when their work was done.

As the group of girls with Miss Groome turned out of the school gates, they met Dr. Sedgewick coming in. Dorothy's heart gave a great bound when she saw him, for he looked so tired and so very careworn.

Miss Groome stayed with her to speak to him, while the rest of the girls went on.

"I have not come to see you at this moment, Dorothy," he said, with his hand on her shoulder, while his gaze travelled over her with great content. "Your Head has sent a message asking to see me, and I am going to her now. If you are back from the beach in good time, I may have a few minutes with you; and then later in the day, when your finals are over, we will have a great time together, and a regular pow-wow. You are looking fine; it is evident that work agrees with you."

"Dorothy is a very good worker," said Miss Groome graciously; and then she hurried on with Dorothy, to catch up with the girls who were in

front, while Dr. Sedgewick walked on to the hall door for his interview with the Head.

CHAPTER XXIV

DOROTHY TO THE RESCUE

The girls of the Compton School bathed from the strip of beach just beyond the steps and in front of the lock-house. It was a steep and not very safe bit of shore. But all the girls could swim fairly well, while some of them were really expert.

The Fourth Form girls had two mistresses with them, and they were all in the water, splashing about with tremendous zest, when the Sixth, who had come to bathe, arrived on the scene.

Coming up the steps from the lock-house, they reached the Promenade, and were just going to spring down the wall to reach the tents when a shrill cry rang out that Cissie Wray was drowning.

There was instant commotion. Some of the girls who were in the water came hurrying out, scrambling up the beach in a panic; others launched themselves into deep water with a reckless disregard for their own safety, and swam out to help in the rescue.

Dorothy, standing on the edge of the wall, and looking out over the water, saw an arm shoot up, then disappear. She saw Miss Mordaunt, the games-mistress, and Miss Ball, the mistress of the Fourth, making wild efforts to reach the place where Cissie Wray was in trouble; she saw the girls who were in the water crowding together, getting in the way of the rescuers, endangering themselves, and adding to the confusion. Acting on impulse, she sprang from the wall, then running down the steep beach, and tearing off her skirt as she ran, she kicked off her shoes, and running still, took to the water as lightly as a duck, going forward with long, even strokes that carried her swiftly on.

“Go back! go back!” she shouted to the small girls who were bobbing up and down in the water, anxious to help. “Get out of the deep as quickly as you can, and get ready to make a chain to pull us up.”

Chain-making for rescue was one of the most usual swimming exercises. Sometimes half the chain would be straggling up the beach, and the other half in deep water; then the last one of the chain would drop limp and passive, while the chain struggled shorewards with the helpless one in tow.

Dorothy's quick wit had seen that the great hope of rescue lay in the chain. The tide was running in fast, and the beach at this point rose so steeply that a swimmer with a burden was most fearfully handicapped. Oh! a rescue in such a sea would be a task of magnitude, and she suddenly realized that Cissie must have been very far out. Miss Ball was nearest to the place where Dorothy had seen the arm flung up. She was swimming with desperate haste, but she was not saving her strength in the least possible way. She was not a strong swimmer, either, and even if she reached the little girl, she would not be able to do more than hold her up in the water.

Miss Mordaunt had been right away at the outer edge of the group. She had been helping the younger ones to get more confidence in their own powers; she had to see these headed for safety before she could come to the help of Miss Ball and Cissie, so she was behind Dorothy.

Miss Ball shot forward, gripped hold of Cissie by the bathing-dress, and was holding her fast, when poor, frantic Cissie, with a thin shriek of pure panic, seized Miss Ball in a frenzied grip, clinging with all her might, and choking the Fourth Form mistress by the tightness of her clutch.

Dorothy made a wild effort and shot forward. Would she ever cover the distance that separated her from the two who were in such dire peril? She almost reached them—she shot out an arm to grip Miss Ball, who was nearest; a great wave heaved up and swept the Fourth Form mistress farther to the left. Dorothy put out another spurt; she flung every ounce of strength she had into the effort; she summoned all her will power to her aid, and suddenly, just as she was feeling that she simply could not do any more, Cissie Wray was flung into reach of her groping fingers, and she had the little girl fast.

Cissie was still clinging with might and main to the neck of Miss Ball, who, strangled and helpless in that suffocating grip, was slowly beginning to sink.

Treading water to keep herself afloat, Dorothy hung on to Cissie's bathing-dress with one hand, and with the other she wrenched the little girl's hand from its frantic clasp of Miss Ball's throat. Quite well she realized her own danger in doing this, but she trusted to her swiftness of movement to be able to elude Cissie's clutching fingers. She had seized Cissie well by the back of the bathing-dress, and was keeping her at arm's length. But the trouble now was with Miss Ball, who, having been so badly choked, could not regain the strength that had been squeezed out of her, and was being sucked down into the water.

Dorothy made a clutch at her, and catching her by the arm, held her fast. “Buck up!” she said sharply. “Buck up and strike out, or we’ll all be drowned. Keep afloat a minute; help is coming.”

Miss Ball had done her bit, and there was no more do in her. She flung out her hands with a feeble and spasmodic effort, which amounted to nothing as far as helping herself went.

Dorothy was in despair. Her own strength was waning, her heart was beating in a choking fashion, there was a loud singing in her ears, and her arms felt as if they were being dragged out of their sockets. She could not stand the strain another moment. Where was Miss Mordaunt, and why did she not come to the rescue?

Miss Ball was sinking—oh! she was surely sinking. Dorothy felt she could not hold the poor thing up for another second, for she was having to keep Cissie afloat too, and Cissie was squirming and kicking in the most dangerous fashion.

“Courage, Dorothy, I am here!” panted a voice close to her, and realizing that Miss Mordaunt was close at hand, Dorothy’s courage began instantly to revive.

Miss Mordaunt laid hold of Miss Ball, who was by this time limp and unconscious.

“Can you hold Cissie until I come?” panted Miss Mordaunt, who was moving rapidly to get the helpless Miss Ball ashore.

“I can manage,” Dorothy called out cheerily. She put every bit of courage she possessed into her voice so that Miss Mordaunt might be helped. There is nothing like courage to inspire courage, and although the others were doubtless swimming out to their help, there was a good distance to cover, and it was a very choppy sea.

Dorothy shifted Cissie, because the little girl’s face was so low down that it kept getting under water.

Cissie, feeling the movement, and believing that her rescuer was letting her go, made a sudden, despairing effort, and gripped Dorothy round the shoulders. Lucky for Dorothy it was that the choking grip did not get her round the throat. It was bad enough as it was, for she could not move her arms, and was dependent on her feet for keeping herself and Cissie from drifting farther out to sea.

“Cissie, let go; leave yourself to me—I will save you!” she panted. But Canute ordering the waves back from the shore was not more helpless in altering their course than she was in making any impression on poor, frantic Cissie. The child clung like a limpet to a rock; Dorothy had never felt anything like the clutch of those thin arms.

She could not hold up against it. She was being dragged down in spite of her struggles. Oh! it was awful, awful. Scenes from her past flashed into the mind of Dorothy as she felt herself slipping, slipping, and felt the thin arms about her neck clutching tighter and tighter.

Then suddenly a great peace stole into her heart; if she had to die in such a way, at least it would solve the problem of to-morrow. If she were not there to win the Lamb Bursary, the governors would not have to be told of that ugly bit in her father’s past which would shut her out from taking the Bursary even after she had won it. Supposing that she did not win it, and it came to Rhoda, if she were dead there would be no one to remind Rhoda that she might not have the Bursary because she was not fit to hold it. Perhaps her death was the best way out for them all. Anyhow, she had no longer strength to struggle—no more power to hold out against the cramping clutch of Cissie’s arms; and it was a relief, when one was so weary, to drop into peace which was so profound.

CHAPTER XXV

SAVED BY THE CHAIN

There was a wild commotion on the shore. Following the example of Dorothy, the Sixth dropped their skirts as they ran, and kicking off their shoes at the edge of the water, plunged in. But they were all under control and acting in concert—no one girl made any attempt to branch out on her own. They were acting now under the orders of Miss Groome, who, also skirtless and shoeless, was standing in the shallow of the water, directing the work of the chain.

"Keep to the left, Hazel," she called—"more to the left; keep within touch of the Fourth's chain, but don't foul them—don't foul them, whatever you do."

Hazel was the first of the chain; clinging to her was Joan Fletcher, a powerful swimmer, and calm in moments of crisis—an invaluable helper at a time like this. Following her came Daisy Goatby, blubbering aloud because of the peril of those out there, a girl who turned pale and ran away when a dog yelped with pain at being trodden upon. She hated to be obliged to look on suffering—the thought of any one in extremity made a coward of her—but she could obey orders. Miss Groome had ordered her into the chain, and she would cling to the girl who was in front of her even though she felt her life was being battered out of her. Dora Selwyn was behind her. Rhoda was also somewhere at the back of that wriggling procession, with Margaret and Jessie Wayne. They had reached the chain of plucky Fourths; they were encouraging the kids to hold on, and bidding them not come farther, but rest, treading water until the time for action came. The Sixth pushed ahead with all their strength. They could not swim so fast, hampered by each other; but it was safety first, and they had to obey orders if their work was to succeed.

Miss Mordaunt struggled towards them, holding the unconscious Miss Ball in a tense grip.

"Can you get her ashore, girls? I must go to Dorothy," she panted; and thrusting Miss Ball within the grabbing clutch of the two first girls, she struck out again to reach Dorothy, who was dropping low in the water, dragged down by the grip of poor Cissie.

Hazel, with a dexterous twist of her arm, passed Miss Ball to Joan, who did not release her grip of the unconscious mistress until Daisy had hold of her and was passing her to Dora. This passing was the extreme test of the power of the chain. It would have been a comparatively easy thing to have towed her ashore. In that case, however, they would not have been on hand to help Miss Mordaunt with Dorothy and Cissie. So they had to pass their burden, and to do it as quickly as they could.

Hazel never looked behind her—she did not speak even; but, lightly treading water, she waited until Miss Mordaunt could reach her. Even then she would have to hold her place, for Cissie would have to be passed before they could tow Dorothy ashore. And it took time—oh, what an awful time it took!

Miss Mordaunt was coming towards them. She was holding Dorothy, to whom Cissie clung with the fierce clutch of despair.

"We cannot pass Cissie along—she is too frightened," panted Miss Mordaunt, as she reached Hazel with her burden, and clung to the chain for a minute to get back her breath. "Dorothy is so frightfully done, too; but she will bear that clutch until we can get her ashore."

"We can pass Dorothy along, with Cissie clinging to her," said Hazel, raising herself a little in the water, and reaching out her hand to get a grip of Dorothy. "Can you swim alongside, Miss Mordaunt, to see that Cissie does not slip away?"

"That will be best," agreed Miss Mordaunt, and striking out, she swam slowly along the chain of girls as they one after the other accepted and thrust forward the helpless two. When Dora, fourth from the end, laid hold of Dorothy, Hazel swung slowly round in the water, and swimming up behind Dorothy seized her on the other side, holding on to her, and helping to push her from girl to girl as the chain accepted and passed her on.

Cissie was not struggling at all now, though the tightness of her clutch never relaxed; she was realizing that she was being rescued, and her panic was dropping from her. She was acutely conscious, and her black eyes looked so frightened and mournful that no one had the heart to reproach her for all the peril into which her wild panic had brought the others.

The Fourth had managed to hold the chain without a break, and mightily proud they were of their prowess. They even raised a cheer when the last of the Sixth came out of the water; but it died away as they saw Dorothy lying

helpless on the beach, while Miss Ball, at a little distance, was being wrapped in blankets by the woman from the lock-house.

Dorothy was not unconscious; she was only so battered and beaten by the struggle in the water that just at the first she could not lift a finger to help herself.

Miss Ball was coming round, so the woman from the lock-house said, and she offered her own bed for the use of the two who had suffered most.

Miss Groome felt that, having borne so much, it was better for them to bear a little more, and be carried to where they could have more comfort. She issued a few crisp orders. The girls, still in their wet clothes, ran to obey. Then, while the Fourth dived into their tents to dress with all the speed of which they were capable, the Sixth in their wet garments loaded Miss Ball, Dorothy, and Cissie on to three trucks which were standing under the wall of the lifeboat house, and harnessing themselves to them, started at a brisk pace for the school. They had no dry clothes on the shore to change into, and so it was wisdom to move—and to move as quickly as they could. The woman from the lock-house had lent them blankets to cover the half-drowned ones; on to these blankets they spread skirts; then each girl wrapping her own skirt round her, they set off from the shore at the best pace they could make.

Dorothy was bumped along on that fearful hand-truck. She felt she could not bear much of such transport, and yet knew very well that she had no strength to walk. She was so tired—so fearfully weary—that she simply could not bear anything more.

When she had been in such danger of drowning, dragged down by Cissie's frenzied clasp of her shoulders, it had seemed such deep peace and rest, she had not even wanted to struggle. Then had come the confusion of Miss Mordaunt's rough grip, and the girls dragging her here and pulling her there as they passed her along. Then had come the moment when she was hauled to safety up the steep shingly beach. How the stones had hurt her as she lay! Yet even that was as nothing to this. At least she had been able to lie still on the stones, but now the life was being bumped out of her! She could certainly stand no more! She must shriek—she must do something to show how intolerable it all was——

"Why, Dorothy, it looks as if you had been getting it rough. Have you been competing for a medal from the Humane Society, or just doing a swimming stunt off your own bat?"

Dorothy opened her eyes with a little cry of sheer rapture. “Oh, Daddy, Daddy, I had forgotten you were here! I can’t bear this old truck one minute longer—I can’t, oh, I can’t!” she wailed.

Dr. Sedgewick had been warned by the girl who had run on ahead of the procession to tell matron of what was coming, and he had met the girls and the hand-trucks down the lane a little beyond the school grounds. He gave a rapid glance round to size up the possibilities of the situation. Catching sight of the little gate into the grounds which would cut off a big piece of the way, he called to them to open it, and stooping down, he lifted Dorothy from the truck, swinging her over his shoulder.

“Guide me by the shortest way to the san,” he said to the nearest girl; and while she ran on ahead of him, he followed after her, carrying Dorothy.

“I am so heavy, you will never manage it,” she protested, yet half-heartedly, for it was such a delightful change to be borne along like this after that awful bumping on the truck.

“I think I shall be able to hold out,” he answered, laughing at her distress, and then he passed in at the door of the san, where the matron met him, and showed him where to carry Dorothy.

The hours after that were a confusion of pain and weariness, a succession of deep sleeps and sudden, startled wakings. Then presently Dorothy came out of a bad dream of being dragged down to the bottom of the sea by Cissie, and awoke to find a light burning, and her father sitting in an easy-chair near her bed, absorbed in a paper—or was it a book?

Her senses were confused—she did not seem as if she could be sure of anything; and there was something bothering her very badly, yet she could not quite remember what it was.

“Daddy, is it really you?” she asked half-fearfully. It was in her mind that she might be dreaming, and that it was not her father who was sitting there, only a fancy her imagination had conjured up.

Dr. Sedgewick dropped the paper he had been reading, and came quite close to the bed, stooping down over her, and slipping his fingers along her wrist in his quiet, professional manner.

“Better, are you?” he asked cheerfully, and his eyes smiled down at her, bringing a choking sob into her throat. The heavy sleep was clearing from her now, and she was remembering the big trouble which lay behind.

“Oh, Daddy, I can’t bear it!” she wailed.

“What is the matter?” he asked in sudden concern. “Have you pain anywhere?”

“Oh, I am all right; there is nothing the matter with me,” she burst out wildly. “It would have been better if I had gone down with Cissie, when I was so nearly done; it would have saved all the explaining that would have to come after.”

“What explaining?” he asked quietly, and then he dragged his chair closer to the bed, and leaning over her, gently stroked the hair back from her forehead.

She lay quite still for a few seconds, revelling in the peace and comfort that came from his touch. Then, wrenching her head from under his hand, she asked anxiously, “Daddy, you have seen the Head—do you think I shall win the Lamb Bursary?”

“I very much hope you will,” he answered. “The Head, of course, could make no hard-and-fast pronouncement, but there seems not very much doubt about the matter.”

Dorothy’s brows contracted—there was such a world of misery in her heart that she felt as if she would sink under the weight of it. “Oh, I wish I had not enrolled! I wish I had not come to Compton!” she burst out distressfully.

“Why do you wish that?” he asked quietly. “I thought you had been so happy here, and you have certainly done well—far, far better than Tom.”

“Ah, poor Tom! What have you done with him and with all the others?” she asked, catching at anything which seemed as if it might put off for a minute the necessity of explaining to her father her trouble about the Lamb Bursary.

Dr. Sedgewick laughed, and to her great relief there was real amusement in the sound. “We all agreed—and there were fifteen of us to agree, mark you—that we had absolute confidence in Dr. Cameron’s methods in dealing with boys. We felt the affair was a problem we would rather leave him to solve free-handed, and we have left their punishment to him. They are all to return next term, and he will decide on what course to take with them.”

“Won’t they be punished in any way now?” she asked in surprise.

“Yes, in a way, I suppose,” he answered. “They will, of course, lose all conduct marks, because they were acting in known defiance of regulations—that goes without saying. The great majority of us were in favour of

flogging, but our suggestion met with no encouragement from the Head. He told us there were some things for which flogging was a real cure, but gambling was not one of them. The only real and lasting cure for gambling was to lift the boy to a higher level of thought and outlook—in short, to fill his life so full of worthier things that the love of gambling should be fairly crowded out. He argued, too, that if it were crowded out in youth, it would not have much chance to develop later on in life."

"It sounds like common sense," said Dorothy, turning a little on her pillow, and looking at the shaded night lamp as if the softened glow might show her a clear way through her own problems. Then she asked, with a timid note in her voice, "So you are not being anxious about Tom any more?"

"I did not say that," Dr. Sedgewick answered quickly. "You know, Dorothy, a doctor never gives up hope while there is life in a patient; so one should never give up hope of recovery of one suffering from—what shall I call it?—spiritual disease. We will say that Tom has shown a tendency to disease. But checked in its first stages—arrested in development—he may be entirely cured before he reaches full manhood. That is what I am hoping, and what those other fathers are hoping and believing too. We feel that the discipline of school is the best medicine for them at the present stage, and that is why we are so content to leave the whole business in the hands of Dr. Cameron."

Dorothy lay silent for a minute or two, and again her eyes sought the soft glow from the lamp. Then making a desperate effort, she made her plunge. "Daddy," she whispered, catching at his hand and resting her cheek upon it, "Daddy, I have got a trouble—a real, hefty-sized trouble."

"I know you have," he answered gravely, and then he sat silent, waiting for her to speak.

How hard it was! Why did he not help her? She held his hand tighter still. Oh! if only she could make him understand how it hurt her to speak of that old story to him! And yet it had to be done! She could not in honour take the Bursary, knowing herself disqualified for it.

"Had you not better out with it, and get it over, Dorothy?" he asked quietly.

She gasped, and suddenly burst out with a jerk, "Daddy, Mrs. Wilson told me you had been sent to prison for a fortnight when you were a young

man, and the rules of enrolment for the Lamb Bursary candidates state specially that girls cannot compete whose parents have been in prison."

It was out now—out with a vengeance—and Dorothy hid her face so that she might not have to see the pain she had caused. So strained was she that it seemed a long, long time before her father spoke, and when he did, his voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"Mrs. Wilson made a little mistake; it was not I who went to prison, but my cousin Arthur," he was saying. "It was Arthur who was driving home from the dance that night, and I was sitting beside him trying to hold him back from his mad progress. You would have spared yourself a lot of suffering, Dorothy, if you had come to me with that old story when you were home last vacation."

"Then you have never been in prison?" cried Dorothy, her voice rising in a shout of sheer joyfulness. "And I can have the Mutton Bone!"

"You have to win it first," Dr. Sedgewick reminded her.

CHAPTER XXVI

DOROTHY GETS THE MUTTON BONE

In consequence of the trouble at the bathing place, and the tired and chilled condition of the Sixth, the examination for finals was put off until next morning at eight o'clock.

Dr. Sedgewick had said that Dorothy would certainly not be fit to sit for it; but when the Sixth went into early breakfast at seven o'clock Dorothy joined them. She was a bit shaky still, and she looked rather white, but there was such radiant happiness in her eyes that she seemed fairly transfigured by it.

The examination was over by ten o'clock, and the girls dispersed to amuse themselves in any way they liked best. Cissie Wray fell upon Dorothy as she came out of the examination room—literally fell upon her—hugging her with ecstasy.

"Dorothy, Dorothy, are you better? Oh, I want to say 'Thank you!'—I want to shout it at you; and yet it does not seem worth saying, because it is so little to all I feel inside—for your goodness in saving me yesterday."

"Poor Cissie, you were badly scared," said Dorothy, and she shivered a little even in the warm sunshine as she thought of the frenzied clutch of Cissie's thin arms and the agony in her big black eyes.

"Oh, it was dreadful, dreadful! I don't ever want to go into the sea again, though I am not afraid in the swimming bath."

"How is Miss Ball?" asked Dorothy, wanting to get Cissie's attention away from the previous day's terror.

"She is better, but she is not up yet. And the girls say I nearly drowned her as well as myself, and that we should both have been dead if it had not been for you! Oh dear, how awful it was! I can't bear to think about it!"

"Then don't think about it," said Dorothy, looking down at Cissie with kindness in her eyes. "I can see my father coming by the shrubbery path—shall we go and meet him?"

"Oh, rather!" cried Cissie, skipping along by the side of Dorothy. "Dr. Sedgewick is a dear; he took such lovely care of me yesterday, and teased me about wanting to be a mermaid. I think he is the most wonderful doctor I

have ever seen. But I have never had a doctor before that I can remember—so, of course, I have not had much experience."

Cissie seized upon one of the doctor's arms, while Dorothy held the other, and they took him all round the grounds. They showed him the gymnasium, the archery and tennis courts, the bowling green, and all the other things which made school so pleasant. Then Cissie had to go off to a botany examination, which was the last of the term's work for the Fourth, and Dorothy strolled with her father to the seat under the beech tree that overlooked the boys' playing-fields.

"I have sent a wire to your mother to say that I shall not be home until the night train," said Dr. Sedgewick, slipping his arm round Dorothy as she sat with her head resting against his shoulder. "Your Head says that I must stay for the prize-giving this afternoon. If I skip tea, I think I can manage the five o'clock train, which will put me in town with time to catch the last train to Farley."

"Then Tom and I shall get home to-morrow. Oh! how lovely it will be." Dorothy nestled a little closer in her father's arm, and thought joyfully that now there was no shadow on her joy of home-coming.

"Yet you have been very happy here?" The doctor looked round upon the grounds and the playing-fields as he spoke, and thought he had never seen a pleasanter place.

"Indeed I have—it has been lovely!" said Dorothy with satisfying emphasis. "It has been good to be near Tom. Only the worst of it has been that he did not seem to need me very much."

"Tom will be happier when he has cut his wisdom teeth," said Dr. Sedgewick. "By the way, Dorothy, what other fairy stories did Mrs. Wilson tell you of my past? I should think the poor lady's brain must have been weakening, though, in truth, it was never very strong."

"I don't think she told me any others," answered Dorothy. "I thought she seemed very fond of your cousin, Arthur Sedgewick, by the way she spoke of him. Daddy, why did you never tell us anything about him, and why did mother refuse to talk about him when I mentioned the matter to her?"

"He turned out such a detrimental, poor fellow, that your mother hated the very mention of him, especially as it laid such a burden on my shoulders for years. When he died he left debts, and he left an invalid wife. For the sake of the family honour the debts had to be paid, and the poor wife had to be supported until she died. There was good reason for your mother's

unwillingness to talk about him. It was getting into bad habits as a boy that was his undoing." The doctor sat for a while in silence, and then he said, "It is because of Arthur having made such a mess of life that I am so glad to leave Tom here for another couple of years—he will have learned many things by that time."

The lecture hall was crammed to its utmost capacity. Many visitors occupied the chairs in the centre of the hall, while round the outskirts, in the corners, along the front of the dais, and everywhere that it was possible to find a place to sit, or stand, girls in white frocks were to be seen. Prize-giving for the boys had been the previous afternoon—a function shorn of much of its glory, for the double reason that the disaster on the beach in the morning had taken away much of the joyfulness of the girls, and the fact that twenty-five of the boys would not receive even the prizes they had earned, because of the trouble in regard to the night-club.

The boys who had come over to the prize-giving at the girls' school were accommodated in the gallery. There were not so many of them present as was usual on such occasions, but those who had come did their loudest when it came to the cheering. The wife of the M.P. for the division gave away the prizes; and as she was gracious and kindly in her manner, she received a great ovation.

Dorothy had the conduct medal—she had also the first prize for English Literature; but that was all. The fact of having to be an all-round worker was very much against the chances of winning prizes.

It seemed a fearfully long time to wait until all the prizes had been given. Then the wife of the M.P. sat down, and the legal-looking gentleman who managed the Lamb Bursary stepped on to the dais. He had a paper in his hand; but he had to stand and wait so long for the cheering to subside that the Head rose in her place and came forward to the edge of the dais, holding up her hand for silence.

At once a hush dropped on the place—a hush so profound and so sudden that it gave one the sensation of having had a door shut suddenly on the great noise of the past few minutes.

Then, in his quiet but penetrating voice the governor of the Bursary read the names of the candidates in the order in which they had enrolled, with the total of marks to each name.

Dorothy sat white and rigid. As the names were read out she tried to remember them, to determine, which girl had the most, but she was so confused that she could not hold the figures in her head. When the seven names had been read there was a pause, and again the hush was so profound that the humming of a bee in one of the windows sounded quite loud by contrast.

"I have therefore great pleasure," went on the cool, rather didactic tones of the governor, "in stating that the Lamb Bursary for this year goes to Dorothy Ida Sedgewick, who has won it, not by a mere squeeze, but with a hundred marks above the candidate nearest to her in point of number."

Now indeed there was a riot of cheering, of clapping, and of jubilation generally, until, standing up, the whole crowd of white-frocked girls burst into singing,—

"For she's a jolly good fellow,
Who well has earned the prize."

Then they linked hands, joining in "Auld Lang Syne," in compliment to their visitors, this merging at the end into the National Anthem, after which the visitors were to be entertained to tea on the lawn. But Dr. Sedgewick had to hurry away to catch his train.

Dorothy went with him as far as the little gate at the end of the grounds through which she had been carried the previous day.

She had not much to say for herself, but the radiant content of her face was just the reflection of the happiness in her heart. She was thinking how differently she would have felt but for that talk with her father last night.

"It will be good news for your mother, Dorothy. You have made us very happy," said Dr. Sedgewick in a moved tone as he bade her good-bye at the gate.

"Daddy, it is just lovely, and I am so happy about it all," she said. "Of course it is hard for Margaret that she did not win; but she is going to stay at Compton another year, so she will have her chance again."

"It was not Margaret who was next to you, but that rather bold-looking girl, Rhoda Fleming," her father said, thinking she had made a mistake as to who was next to her.

Dorothy smiled. "Oh, I am not sorry for Rhoda—I did not want her to win," she said quietly. "Perhaps I should not have worked so hard myself if

it had not been because I knew I had to beat her somehow, for the honour of the school."

"Well, she was your friend if she inspired you to greater effort," he answered, and dropping another kiss on her forehead hurried down the road to catch his train.

Dorothy went back to the others. She did her part in waiting on the visitors. She was here, she was there—and everywhere it was kindly congratulation she had for her hard work.

Later on, when the visitors were taking leave of the Head, Dorothy, alone for a moment, was pounced upon by Rhoda, who said sharply, "So you did beat me after all—I was afraid you would."

"I was bound in honour to beat you if I could," Dorothy answered, looking her straight in the face. "My father says I ought to be grateful to you for making me work so hard. And I am. I am very grateful to you."

Rhoda went very red in the face. A look of something like shame came into her eyes as she turned away in silence.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

[The end of *By Honour Bound* by Bessie Marchant]