

DOROTHY'S DILEMMA

A SCHOOL STORY



ELSIE J. OXENHAN

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DOROTHY'S DILEMMA

A SCHOOL STORY

BY
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CHAPTER I. THE MYSTERIOUS COMPETITION.

The girls of 'Old Whitey' crowded in to supper, of eager speculations. The White House School, in the town between the sea and the Sussex Downs, had been 'Old Whitey' affectionately to three generations.

'I wonder what Willy has up her sleeve now!' said Merle, one of the Fifth. "'An announcement of special interest to the Fifth,'" she said. 'Why won't it interest the others too?'

'It's most mysterious,' Dorothy Cheyne agreed.

'She's going to tell us at once,' said her friend, Dorothy Bayne, as Miss Willcox, the head-mistress, appeared in the doorway.

An eager silence fell as she went to the platform. She told the girls to sit, and they obeyed, tense with expectation.

Miss Willcox laughed at sight of the questioning faces turned towards her. 'I have been asked to propose a competition, for those of you who are fifteen or sixteen years old. Mrs Warner of Hurst Manor wishes to give a prize for the best paper on certain subjects sent in by a girl of that age. The competition is voluntary; Mrs Warner insists upon that. I hope a number of you will enter; but she particularly requested that it be only for those girls, of fifteen or sixteen, who were interested enough to attempt it in addition to their ordinary school work. I am not allowed to tell you what the prize will be, but I assure you it is something very well worth working for. You will be required to write three short essays, or descriptive papers, on travel-subjects of some sort; I believe one is to be "A Holiday Adventure." I should like the names of those who will take up the challenge by Thursday.'

The competition was open only to the Fifth form. The Sixth were too old, as they were all seventeen; the Fourth were not old enough.

During the next few days there was much discussion of the project. Mrs Warner was a wealthy American, with one daughter, a delicate girl of fifteen, whom the school-girls knew by sight; she had recently come to live in Hurst Manor, the big house between the Downs and the sea, just outside the town, and was locally supposed to be a millionairess.

'The prize will be books, of course,' said Merle. 'But they'll be jolly good ones. Perhaps it will be five pounds to spend on books. I'd love to have a shot at it, but I never could write essays. It would be sheer waste of time. One of you two will get it, of course.'

'Oh, do try, Merle! Be a sport!' Dorothy Bayne urged. 'That's all rot; why should we? Try, anyway! The more the merrier!'

'I'd like to know what the prize is,' said Vi. 'I'm not going in unless I know. It might not be worth the fag.'

'Slacker!' Dorothy Cheyne mocked. 'It's sure to be worth it. Mrs Warner couldn't do anything mean. She's sure to give a decent prize.'

'Besides, you heard what Willy said—"Very well worth it." And anyway, prize or no prize, some of us must try. It would look fearfully slack if nobody rose to it,' Dorothy Bayne cried.

'If you and D.C. are going in for it, there's no chance for us,' said Vi.

'Idiot!' Both the Dorothys turned on her indignantly.

Dorothy Bayne had been in the school since she was ten. When she was twelve and in the Third, Dorothy Cheyne had appeared, twelve and in the Third also. The Staff solved the problem by calling the new-comer Dolly, to her disgust; but this was no help to the girls, since Dorothy Bayne had been Dorry all along, and Dorry and Dolly meant worse confusion. Before very long they were 'Dorothy B.' and 'Dorothy C.' to their class-mates, or even 'D.B.' and 'D.C.' They were also chums and recognised leaders in the Fifth.

Dorothy Bayne was the bigger of the two in every way, taller, and with fair hair cut in a round wavy bob. Dorothy Cheyne was slight and neat, her black hair smoothly shingled, her dark eyes bright and quick.

'Merle and Vi are going in, after all,' and Dorothy Cheyne sat down beside her friend on Wednesday evening. 'And of course Edie and Nell. So there will be six of us. I'm a bit funky about it, D.B.'

'Why on earth?' Dorothy B. looked up from her home-letter. 'It's in your line; you're keen on essays or any sort of writing.'

'I know. But I don't seem to have any ideas!' Dorothy C. wailed. 'I'd write them down all right if I had them. I've never had any holiday adventures; we always have the tamest sort of holidays—Westgate, or Cromer, or Bournemouth. Nothing ever happens; we just go, and we bathe, and we explore, and we lie on the beach and read, and go for motor-charry rides. Nobody ever gets out of their depth and has to be rescued, or falls off the pier or out of a boat! And the charry never runs away down a hill, or tips over, or sticks on a level-crossing with an express racing towards it.'

'Good thing for you,' Dorothy B. remarked.

'There's only father and mother and me,' Dorothy C. continued her lament, 'and we can't afford anything splashy in the way of trips abroad, and so on. You're different. You go to the Lakes, and Scotland, and Wales, and Cornwall; and you have heaps of brothers and cousins. You'll only have to choose among your holiday adventures!'

'I've never been abroad. I'm dying to go,' Dorry admitted. 'But it costs too much. The boys must go to college. But we have quite jolly times all together.' Her eyes lit up in remembrance of past events.

'There! You see, you can think of holiday adventures by the dozen. I know what I'll do! You'll spare me one of yours, won't you, D.B.?'

'What do you mean?' Dorry asked, laughing. 'You silly goat, what are you hinting at?'

'Just one little adventure! You'd never miss it. You've heaps of others. Mrs Warner doesn't say the adventure must have happened to ourselves; "*A Holiday Adventure*," Willy said! I'll write that ripping story of you and your brother and the rescue of the shepherd who had gone to save his dog, up in the Lakes; you know, when your brother hung on to the old man, and the old man hung on to the dog, and you sprinted for help—a topping yarn! I could write that up rippingly.'

Dorothy Bayne knit her brows for a second. She had no doubt Dorothy C. could 'write up' the story excellently; D.C.'s ambition was to be a writer, while her own wishes were for the stage. Dorothy C. could always tell a good story and could make even a poor one sound well. But in original ideas she was less ready than her friend.

After a moment's pause Dorothy B. said, 'That's all right. I don't suppose it matters whom it happened to. I had thought of that myself, but I'll write about the storm at Morfa, and how our boat was washed out to sea and we found ourselves ashore at Nant Gwrtheyrn. That will do just as well.'

‘Oh, ripping! Yes, that’s just as good,’ Dorothy C. exclaimed.

Dorry knit her brows again. It had obviously never occurred to Dorothy C. that she could have any feeling in the matter. ‘I’m an idiot!’ she said to herself. ‘But D.C. knows she writes better essays than I do. And she knows she has fewer ideas. If she asks me for ideas, isn’t she taking away the one thing that might make us equal?’

She pondered the matter for the next few days. ‘It’s just like D.C.,’ was her final conclusion. ‘She doesn’t mean a scrap of harm. She doesn’t feel as I do about things. But it does seem to me there’s a speck of unfairness somewhere. If she wins the prize, I wonder how she’ll feel? I should feel horrible. But I don’t believe it will worry her. She’s like that; or rather, she isn’t like that! She hasn’t thought for one second about my side of it.’

She sighed. ‘D.C. doesn’t think, and that’s all about it. It’s no use worrying. But how different it would be if she did think now and then! I feel we might be better chums if she tried sometimes to see things as I do. But I can’t change her; and I must stand by her. If she’s satisfied, I’ll have to be satisfied too. She asked me to help, and I must do it.—She *didn’t* ask, as a matter of fact! She took it for granted!’ and D.B. laughed ruefully. ‘I hadn’t much chance to refuse. I suppose really it’s a huge compliment! I’ll try to look at it that way. But I do wonder if she’ll be *quite* comfy if she gets the prize?’

The essays were to be written after the term exams were over, about the end of July. The date had to be postponed once or twice, owing to school events, and finally it was fixed for the day before the girls left for the holidays.

‘The results would not have been announced until next term, in any case,’ Miss Willcox explained. ‘But it is possible the winner may hear direct from Mrs Warner during the holidays.’

Keenly excited by the air of mystery surrounding the matter, the six girls sat down to write their essays, while the rest of the school was given up to the bustle of packing. Three subjects faced them, and they sat pondering them: ‘My Greatest Holiday Adventure’—‘My Summer Holiday Last Year’—‘The Beauty-Spot I Love.’

‘All holiday subjects! I suppose that’s because we break up to-morrow. Mrs Warner thinks we won’t be able to concentrate on anything else!’ Dorothy B. said to herself, and she glanced across the room at Dorothy C.

Her friend was frowning at the paper before her. But as Dorry looked at her she seized her pen and began to write, giving herself up, as Dorry knew, to the joy of telling a story.

Dorothy Bayne sighed and laughed under her breath. ‘She’ll win, of course. She writes so rippingly. Still—here goes!’ and she plunged into the story of the storm on the Welsh coast.

‘No need to ask about you!’ she greeted Dorothy C. afterwards. ‘You wrote at express speed! Didn’t you have cramp?’

‘I feel like a busted balloon!’ Dorothy C. exclaimed. ‘But it was topping! So much more fun than answering questions! I love describing things.’

‘I’d rather answer definite questions!’ Merle groaned. ‘I couldn’t think of any “beauty-spots.” I wrote about St Paul’s.’

‘Oh, Merle!’ cried Dorothy Bayne. ‘And the Downs so close to us! How could you?’

‘Did you write about the Downs, D.B.?’ Dorothy Cheyne asked eagerly.

‘Of course. I thought everybody would, but I chanced it. I described the Ring and the dew-pond. I’ve always been keen on them.’

‘Oh, good! You’d do that toppingly.—What did you choose, Vi?’

‘What was your own beauty-spot, D.C.?’ Dorothy Bayne asked.

But Dorothy C. had run after Vi to repeat her question. Dorothy B. was caught by Matron and dragged into the whirl of packing, and then was engrossed by the last-night dance, and she only remembered in the train on her way home that she had heard no details of Dorothy Cheyne's essays. 'She's sure to write and tell me,' she said to herself. 'She'll probably win the prize. Her writing's much better than mine; she describes things so well. She sometimes hasn't many ideas, but she looked happy enough yesterday.'

CHAPTER II. A CONFESSION.

It was three weeks before the expected letter from Dorothy Cheyne arrived. Dorothy B. had written twice, but had received only a postcard in reply—‘Frantically busy. Will write soon.’

But one day the post-gig brought Dorothy C.’s letter to the Welsh village where the Baynes were holiday-making. Dorothy was lying on the sand in her bathing-suit, sunning herself before her swim, when her cousin came down from the cottage laden with lunch and letters. ‘One for you, Dorry,’ and she dropped it beside her and went on.

‘D.C. at last! Bad child, to keep me waiting such *years!*’ and Dorothy sat up to read the letter.

When she had read it, she sat up straighter still, dropping the letter on the sand. ‘Well, of all the cheek! Oh, I say! If she wins the prize, how rotten it will be! What *shall* I feel like?’

‘Coming in, Dorry?’ called the cousins.

‘Not yet,’ Dorry replied.

‘Going to sun-bathe all day? Taking care of your complexion?’ somebody teased.

But Dorothy B. gazed out to sea and did not hear.

Dorothy Cheyne’s letter told of her rather tame holiday at Frinton; this time, however, the arrival of a boy cousin from South Africa had cheered her up considerably, and accounted for the ‘busyness’ she had pleaded on her card. After telling of their doings together, Dorothy C. reverted to school matters.

‘I say, old chap, about those essays! I meant to tell you, but it was crowded out in all the bustle at the end. I’m sure you won’t mind; you’re too jolly decent! You know I used your adventure in the Lakes to make into a story for one of the answers? It made a ripping yarn, as I knew it would. I must tell you about the other two. I couldn’t think of any “beauty-spots,” any more than Merle could. I’ve thought of heaps since, but I never can remember things when I want them. Somehow I forgot the Downs; I tried to think of something I’d seen at home, or on holidays. Then something did come into my head, and it was Templeton Church, where you took me at half-term. I’d never have noticed it myself; I don’t see things as you do. But you showed me, and explained things, and told me about the arches, and the vaulting, and the font, and the blocked-up devil’s door—oh, and everything! And you showed me the queer-shaped tower that I’d never have understood for myself. It made a ripping thing to describe, with the woods behind, and the lane to the Downs, and the village! I was just afraid you might have thought of it, too; but as you did the dew-pond and the Ring, that was all right. I’m awfully much obliged to you for showing it to me, for I’d never have thought much about it if it hadn’t been for you. It was a top-hole “beauty-spot”; thanks awfully, old chap!

‘As for the other one—last year’s summer holiday—such a joke, D.B.! I really had a brilliant idea, for once! I simply *couldn’t* make anything decent out of last summer. We went to St Leonards; I’ve told you about it. We didn’t do one exciting or interesting thing; just a few bus-rides into the country, and a lot of bathing and

listening to the band, and a concert or two. D.B., how could I make that into an essay? Especially for an American millionairess, who probably travels all round the world every year or two! I had to have something more thrilling than that. I knew you'd write about your month in Wales; but you had that ripping fortnight in Buckinghamshire first, at the farm near Missenden, with your cousins; and you told me all the fun you had, and all the jolly places you saw—the Penn country, and Jordans, and the Hampdens, and Whiteleaf, and all that. I thought that was just the sort of thing to appeal to an American! They love those old English historical places. So I just turned myself into you for half an hour, and described that fortnight as if it had happened to *me*. It was quite easy. You'd told me such a lot about it. I knew you wouldn't mind. Wasn't it a topping idea?

‘With love from, Your own, D.C.’

Dorothy Bayne stared at the mountains across the bay, and knit her brows, and hugged her knees, and wondered. *Did* she mind?

‘If D.C. takes the prize, she'll have won it on *my* ideas,’ she said at last, half-aloud. ‘Every single thought in her papers is cribbed from me. . . . She'd own up, of course, if she won it. If she doesn't win, it doesn't really matter. But she *has* poached! I couldn't have done it. . . . That's all rot about St Leonards. She told me about it, and she had a jolly good time. She went to Pevensey and saw the Castle ruins, and to Battle; and there's Hastings, with its ruins and the caves, and the cliffs, and Ecclesbourne Glen; and they had rough seas and glorious waves. *I* could have made a story out of St Leonards! But it's just like Dorothy; she never thinks there's anything interesting in a place or thing till it's shown to her. Then she goes crazy about it—as she did over that old church. She'd seen it before, but it hadn't struck her as even curious until she went with Merle and Vi and me. She can make ripping stories out of things, but she doesn't see them for herself. I wonder if it matters? Those papers of hers aren't quite the thing; not quite fair, somehow.’

She wrinkled her brows again and frowned at the three-peaked ‘Rivals’ beyond Nevin Bay.

‘I don't see that it matters,’ she said at last. ‘I'd rather D.C. hadn't done it, of course. But she didn't think; she didn't plan to use my brains and do it deliberately. It was on the spur of the moment. It's never occurred to her that I might mind. If she wins the prize, of course she'll explain, and then Miss Willcox and Mrs Warner will have to decide. I can't imagine whether they'd disqualify her or not. It depends on Mrs Warner, I suppose. If she just wanted the best-written essays, there wouldn't be any reason why D.C. shouldn't have the prize. She's sure to have written ripping papers; what does it matter where her ideas came from? And what else could Mrs Warner want?’

She pondered this for a while, unheeding the calls from the water, where the rest of the party were swimming and diving from their boat.

‘If by any chance Mrs Warner wanted answers that would tell her what we're like, in ourselves, then D.C.'s essays are no use. They aren't genuine; they aren't D.C.—they're *me*. They'd give quite a wrong idea of her. She hasn't thought of that. They're all about the things *I* like to see and do, and the things that *I* notice, and that appeal to *me*. They aren't D.C.; the way they're put down on paper is Dorothy, but that's all. If Mrs Warner had any idea of *that* sort, D.C. would have to own up. But why should an American want to know about us? That's a crazy idea of mine; I don't know where it came from! She's kind, and she wants to give a

prize to the girls who are about the same age as her Evangeline, and she thought of essays. D.C.'s will be far and away the best; her essays always are. She'll have the books; poets or classics, I suppose. It will be quite fair, and that's the end of it.'

She sprang up and went leaping down the sands and splashed into the rippling tide, resolved to think no more of the matter.

When, later on, she sat down in a corner among the rocks to write her letter, she was conscious of a new sense of discomfort, however. She wrote frankly to Dorothy C. about the competition—'Glad to have been of use! You'd make a ripping story out of that farm fortnight, and I'd have liked to read your description of Templeton. I know it would be poetical and perfectly splendid.' So far the letter was easy enough to write. But when it came to telling of her own holiday doings, she found an unexpected obstacle, a new distrust of her friend. Dorry hesitated, played with her pen, poked a crimson anemone in a pool; she put down her pad and wandered over the pile of flat boulders, and gazed out over the bay at Nevin Point and the 'Rivals.'

Then she took up her letter again, her face sober. 'You know,' she addressed a small crab unhappily, 'I can't help it, but you *don't* feel quite the same once a thing like this has happened. You don't write the same sort of letters; you can't! I can't tell D.C. all that we're doing here. I—I don't know what use she'd make of it! It sounds a beastly thing to say, but there it is—she's done it once and she might do it again. I *can't*!'

She stared unhappily out to sea, where Holyhead showed dimly on the horizon. At last she ended her letter rather quickly, saying simply that she was having a jolly time with her cousins and that they were doing 'all the usual sort of things.' She sighed, as she folded the page. 'I'd have liked to tell D.C. about that adventure with the young bulls in the field over by Abergeirch. It *was* funny! She'd love it. But it's just exactly the sort of thing that would make a ripping holiday essay, and we're sure to have to do one at the beginning of next term. I can't go on supplying her with stuff for her essays! It isn't sensible; and I suppose it would be bad for her. She ought to find her own subjects. No, I mustn't write to her as I used to do. I'm sorry! It seems an awful pity.—I wonder,' she said to herself, as she took her letter to the post, 'if D.C. will notice anything wrong with my letter? I haven't written as much as I usually do. Somehow I don't believe she'll see any difference. I hope she won't.'

She was right, for she understood her friend. Dorothy Cheyne, unperceptive and self-centred, full of enjoyment of her new cousin's company, saw nothing strange about the letter, and was soon too busy to think at all about Dorothy B., in the amazing happening which came upon her about the end of August.

CHAPTER III. THE PRIZEWINNER AND THE PRIZE.

Dorothy B., arriving at school for the autumn term, went racing upstairs in search of Dorothy C. 'Where's D.C.? The rotter only wrote to me once during the hols. Hasn't she come yet?'

'Haven't seen her,' said Merle. 'But there's a new infant in your room. D.C. must be going to sleep somewhere else. Such a joke, D.B.!'

But Dorry, with an incredulous outcry—'What rot! D.C. and I have always slept together!'—went flying to her own room, and did not stay to hear about the joke.

Instead of Dorothy Cheyne, with her laughing face and dark shingled head, a fair curly-haired baby of nine sat weeping on the second bed.

'Well, of all the outrageous things!' Dorry exploded. 'Where on earth have they put D.C.? And why has Willy done it? She knows—I say, kid! Do stop howling! You'll feel all right by to-morrow morning; honestly, you will! Who sent you up here? And what's your name?'

'D-D-Dorothy D.,' sobbed the child.

Dorothy B. stared. This sounded like impudence, but 'Dorothy D.' did not look in a mood to be trying to be funny.

'What cheek! What do you mean, infant? What *is* your name?'

'Dorothy Denton. But downstairs they laughed, those big girls, and said I'd have to be "Dorothy D." I don't know why.'

'They would,' Dorothy B. agreed. 'Look here, you'll be called Dot, see? There are two Dorothys already. If you show a certain amount of sense, you *may* not be turned into Dotty. That depends on yourself. I shall call you Dot. Were you told you were to sleep here? By whom? Matron? Or has Merle or Vi been pulling your leg?'

Matron had brought small Dorothy there herself, it appeared. Dorothy Bayne frowned, and bade her go on with her unpacking. 'I must see about this. The first point is, where have they put poor old D.C.?'

She began a hurried search in the other bedrooms, but nobody had seen Dorothy Cheyne.

'She can't have come yet,' said Vi. 'You'll have to break the news to her that she's deposed, D.B.'

'I'm going to ask Matron if I need have that kid,' Dorry said determinedly.

The tea-bell rang at that moment, however, and she had to postpone her inquiries. She raced upstairs, with a hurried, 'Must fetch my baby! It won't have an idea where to go,' and came down again with little Dorothy clinging to her hand.

'This will be your table, kid.—Enid, look after her; she's scared stiff. Her name's Dot. Cheer her up somehow.'

And Dorry left Dot to make friends with Enid and the other juniors, and went to her own place, next to Dorothy C.'s empty seat.

'D.C. must have lost her train. Awfully careless, but just like her,' said Merle. 'She'll turn up about seven.'

'She's had a new cousin, a boy from South Africa, staying with her. Perhaps she couldn't tear herself away,' said Dorothy B. 'He must be awfully fascinating, for she's had no time to

write. Nobody seems to have heard from her for weeks. I must catch Matron, and see if she won't put that infant somewhere else.'

'It would be rotten for you and D.C. to be in different rooms,' Vi agreed.

'Horrible! We've been together for ages. I don't see how Matron *can!*'

'Here's Willy,' said Merle, as Miss Willcox entered. 'Go to her about your infant, D.B.!'

'I'll try Matron first. Willy has something to say,' said Dorry. 'I wonder what's up? Must be important!'

Miss Willcox stood beside the mistresses' table, waiting to make an announcement. The girls gazed at her eagerly, much mystified.

'Girls!' said the Head. 'I have a piece of pleasant news, which I am sure will interest you all. The Senior School will remember the essay competition set to the Fifth by our good neighbour, Mrs Warner, at the end of last term. We promised to let you know the result as soon as you came back.'

A thrill of excitement ran through the Fifth. 'I'd forgotten the prize!' Merle murmured. 'It seems ages ago!'

'So had I, absolutely. Poor D.C. will only hear about it second-hand. Willy might have waited till to-morrow, when everybody would be here,' Dorothy B. whispered in reply.

'Serves D.C. right for losing her train. Everybody else is here; all of ours, anyway,' Vi remarked. 'It matters most to us.'

'It's you or D.C., Dorry,' said Merle. 'We said so all along.'

'It's sure to be D.C.,' Dorothy B. retorted. 'I do think Willy might have waited. She must know D.C. isn't here.'

She coloured, at a sudden thought. The fact that Miss Willcox had not waited for Dorothy Cheyne to be present surely indicated that someone else was more likely to be the winner. Merle? Vi? Herself?

Miss Willcox had paused, as if to allow everybody to recall the competition. July seemed so very long ago! Now she went on, with the eyes of the whole school fixed on her.

'Mrs Warner was delighted with the six essays sent in, and thought them all of a very high standard. I now have her permission to explain the prize she has been kind enough to give to the winning girl. The winner has been invited to join Mrs Warner and her daughter on a six-months' trip to the Continent, visiting Switzerland, the Italian Lakes and cities, Rome, Sicily, the Riviera, and the cities of Provence. Mrs Warner will pay all expenses; she feels that her daughter, who is fifteen, will enjoy the travelling much more if she has a companion of her own age.'

The Fifth form looked at one another, wild excitement in every face. The head-mistress's use of the past tense, 'The winner *has been* invited,' had passed unnoticed as the greatness of the prize dawned on them.

Dorothy B.'s cheeks were flaming. Oh, if only——! A winter abroad! How she had longed to see those lakes and mountains, and the wonderful romantic cities! But—but——! A horrible doubt was beginning to assail her when Miss Willcox spoke again.

'Mrs Warner would have liked to take you *all* with her!—all the six who entered for the competition. That would hardly have been possible, however,' and the head-mistress laughed pleasantly at the thought of six school-girls escorting Evangeline Warner about the Continent. 'After careful consideration of the essays she decided to give the prize to Dorothy Cheyne. They are now on their way to Geneva, having left England last week and spent some days in Paris.'

‘So that’s what has happened to D.C.!’ Merle exclaimed. ‘Oh, the lucky bouncer!’
‘But—but!’—Dorothy Bayne sprang up, her face flaming again—‘but it’s not—not——’
She bit back the word just in time. They were all staring at her in consternation. Merle caught her by the arm and dragged her down and leaned in front of her, clapping excitedly.

Dorothy dropped into her seat, and hid her burning face in her hands.

‘Do you think you ought to have had it?’ Vi demanded, an incredulous note of reproof in her voice. ‘But even if you think so, it’s not the thing to say it, D.B.!’

Merle looked over her shoulder, puzzled and scandalised. ‘D.B., what *is* the matter? *Do* pull yourself together, and clap Dorothy Cheyne, whatever you think! Gwen and all the Sixth are staring at you!’

The whole room was applauding the winner. Dorothy Bayne realised what she had done, even in the midst of the cloud of misery that had fallen upon her. She clapped her hands unsteadily, her head still bent; she certainly did not want the head-girl and the Sixth holding an inquiry into her conduct or condemning her as unsporting. For the moment, in despair, she thrust away the horror that faced her; but she was so white that Merle and Vi were frightened.

‘Is anything the matter with Dorothy?’ Miss Dickinson, the form-mistress of the Fifth, came up. ‘I thought—aren’t you well, Dorothy? My dear girl, what *is* the matter?’

‘I don’t feel well, Miss Dickinson,’ Dorothy faltered. ‘I—I was excited, and—and perhaps the journey—the train was very stuffy——’

‘You had better go and lie down,’ Miss Dickinson said promptly. ‘You don’t look fit even for unpacking. This is a bad beginning for the term, Dorry! Shall I take you to Miss Willcox?’ Her eyes were searching Dorothy’s strained face; Dorothy B. had always been strong and healthy, and had never before been upset by travelling. Miss Dickinson had seen what Miss Willcox had missed, that first impulsive leap up and the wild surge of indignation in Dorry’s face; remembering the close friendship between the two Dorothys, she had been watching Dorothy B. to see how she would take the news of her friend’s success, which meant her own defeat. It was not like Dorothy Bayne to be jealous of anybody, least of all of Dorothy Cheyne. Miss Dickinson wondered if anything lay behind.

‘Could I go out into the garden, by myself?’ Dorry faltered. ‘I—I think it’s just—the train was so hot, Miss Dickinson!’

‘I’ll go with her,’ Merle exclaimed.

‘No, please. I don’t want to talk,’ Dorothy pleaded.

Miss Dickinson looked at her again. She knew, as Merle and Vi knew, that Gwen and Pat and Edna, from the Sixth, were hovering round, waiting their chance to ask D.B. what she had meant. ‘It’s not—not——’ Miss Dickinson, and the Sixth, and the Fifth all guessed what Dorry had been going to say.

‘Very well. Go out and sit in the Tower, where you can be quiet and have the sea air. I’ll see that nobody worries you. But go to bed early, Dorothy. You’ll need a thorough rest before you’ll be fit for anything.’

‘Yes, Miss Dickinson; and thank you,’ Dorothy said unsteadily, and escaped through the French window, followed by the curious eyes of her class-mates and of the Sixth.

CHAPTER IV. BIG AND LITTLE DOROTHY.

The Tower, to which Dorothy fled, was a red-brick summer-house built right on the wall of the school grounds above the sea. Between the wall and the shingle beach there was only an asphalt footpath; the main road was on the other side of the school domain. The lower room of the Tower was used by the girls as a dressing-room for bathing, and a door in the wall gave them easy access to the beach; the upper storey was a look-out, with windows giving wide views over the sea. Dorothy dropped on one of the window-sills, and covered her face, and tried to think.

'D.C. hasn't said anything. She's taken the prize. She won it on my ideas. She ought—oh, she *ought* to have owned up, and let people judge! I'm sure she hasn't explained. Willy would have said something; or she'd have sent for me first and told me. D.C.'s kept it dark. Didn't she see it wasn't fair? Or was the prize too much for her? Didn't she dare to risk it?—Oh, it's *not* fair! Such a big thing!—a whole winter abroad! Mother would have let me go. It would make a difference to one's whole life, to have a wonderful trip like that!'

She gazed out over the shingle and the shining wet sands of low tide to the distant sea. 'I'd never have believed D.C. would do it. I know she often says things don't matter. But this isn't straight; it's not playing the game. I've lost a winter abroad—and I've lost D.C. I can never feel the same to her again.'

Her faith in her friend lay in ruins. As the first numbness of the shock began to pass off, she felt that more and more, and the pain of it grew till her eyes were dark with the tragedy of loss. 'I can never like her again. I could never trust her. Not to tell them and let them judge—! How *could* she take it all and say nothing?'

Then she sat up with a jerk. 'But *I* can say something! *I* can tell Miss Willcox! I can prove it; I've D.C.'s letter, telling all about it. . . . How *could* I? How could I even think of it?' and she lapsed back again into a crumpled heap in a corner. 'I could never give D.C. away. I'm not a sneak. I can't tell anybody. I could never use that letter. D.C. trusted me when she wrote it, even if she didn't think she'd done anything wrong. How could I go to Willy and say: "Dorothy Cheyne won that prize on *my* ideas"? I couldn't possibly.—Anyway, I wouldn't. D.C.'s chosen; she's taken the prize, and that's the end of it. I feel she's been dishonest and unsporting. We can never really be friends again.—Oh, D.C.! How *could* you?—But nobody shall ever know through me. I wonder'—and again she sat up, this time in horror—'did I give the show away? Did any of them guess? What did I say? I didn't say it wasn't fair; I'm sure I didn't! But they saw something had upset me; Gwen saw, and Pat, and of course Merle and Vi. Did Dicky suspect anything?'

She remembered Miss Dickinson's searching look, and felt afraid. 'Dicky's so understanding; she's always a dear. I wonder if she guessed? What can I do? I can't explain; that would be accusing D.C. of cheating. It does seem like cheating to me; I wonder if they'd think so? I wish I knew how it would look to somebody else!' she thought. 'But I can never tell a soul. They'll have to think I was jealous.' Her face flamed, as she considered the matter. 'I don't see any other way. I can't give D.C. away.'

She was still going over the matter unhappily when a voice below startled her.

'Are you up there, Dorothy?'

‘Yes, Miss Dickinson. I’ll come down,’ and Dorry, red-eyed and weary, went down to the lower room.

Miss Dickinson gave her a quick look. ‘Dorry, I want you to go to bed. The new junior, Dorothy Denton, is sleeping in your room. If you went to bed now, she might go to sleep. And it would be good for you too; you look tired out. Do you feel any better?’

‘Oh yes, thank you, Miss Dickinson. But I will go to bed. I don’t want any supper.’ There was a quiver in Dorothy’s voice.

‘I’ll send you up something. Don’t let little Dorothy talk. We shall have to find another name for her.’

‘I told her she’d better be Dot,’ Dorry said listlessly. ‘But that was when I thought Dorothy’—she broke off, a catch in her breath.

Miss Dickinson gave her another quick look. ‘Go to bed, Dorothy, and try to sleep. If something is troubling you, it won’t seem so bad in the morning. And—Dorry! Don’t keep it to yourself unless you must. A trouble is always more easily borne by two. If it still seems bad to-morrow, find somebody to help. I’ll gladly do anything I can.’

Dorothy had flushed at the hint of understanding and at the use of her nickname. Her tired eyes gleamed. ‘Miss Dickinson, it’s awfully decent of you! I—there *is* something! You always understand. But I mustn’t talk about it. I’ll win through somehow.’

Then she fled across the garden and up to her room, for the suggestion of sympathy had been almost too much. ‘Dicky’s a sport! But how could I tell anybody?’

‘I wonder what has happened?’ Dicky mused, as she followed more slowly. ‘That child’s in real trouble. Is it jealousy of her friend? It isn’t like Dorothy! I doubt if she will come through without a friend to help. How I wish she’d come to me!’

Little Dorothy Denton had made friends with Enid and Mary and Doris, and she was no longer unhappy. She said a cheerful good-night to the grave senior who seemed in some way changed from the helpful Dorothy she had seen before tea, watching with interest—having had her own supper downstairs—while Dorry sat up in bed and pretended to eat a little from the tray sent up by Matron, and said good-night again as the light was turned out.

At this stage normally, small Dorothy should have been overcome by homesickness, and the senior, hearing her stifled sobs, should have crept across to her bed to comfort her. But Enid had whispered of a new game for to-morrow, which must be a secret until the morning, and Dot was wondering what it could be; she had no time nor desire to cry, but she lay thinking, interested in all the new people she had seen since she left home.

Suddenly she began to listen, at a strange sound. Then she sat up, staring at the other bed. Was it possible? Did big girls ever cry?

There was no doubt about it. ‘Big Dorothy’ was crying. Dot shivered and hesitated.

Then she crept barefoot across to the other bed, and without invitation hurled herself on the figure hunched up below the quilt. ‘Dorothy! Oh, do stop howling!’ she pleaded, a quiver in her voice. ‘You’ll feel all right by the morning, honestly you will! You said so yourself, Dorothy. Oh, I am so sorry! Oh dear, *do* stop!’ and she hugged the lump in the bed-clothes. ‘You’re nice! You mustn’t cry. You *said* it would be all right to-morrow!’

Dorothy flung back the quilt, her sobs very thoroughly checked. ‘Well, of all the cheek! Go back to bed, kid! You mustn’t——’

‘Say you won’t cry, then! You told me not to!’

‘The infant thinks I’m homesick.’ Dorry sat up. ‘Look here, Dot, I’m all right. Something upset me to-night. Go back to bed, like a good child.’

‘Were you dis’pointed ‘bout the prize? Enid said she thought you would be, and she wished you’d had it, for she likes you better than the other Dorothy. But Mary said that was silly, for if you’d won you wouldn’t be here. You’d be in Paris, and she said she’d rather have you at school. Is that what’s the matter, Dorothy? Did you want the prize so awfully much?’

‘Oh——! Yes—no—if you like. You may as well think it’s that,’ Dorothy said incoherently. ‘I say, kid, it was jolly of you to come, but you must go back to bed now.’

‘It will be all right in the morning, won’t it?’ Dot persisted.

‘Perhaps,’ Dorothy said. ‘You’re a good kid, anyway. Good-night!’ and she took care that no further sound came from her to disturb Dot.

CHAPTER V. DOROTHY'S DILEMMA.

It was very far from 'all right' for Dorothy B. in the morning.

'Better, D.B.?' Merle asked, as soon as they met. 'What on earth was wrong with you last night?'

'Must have been the stuffy train. I'm all right, thanks.'

'You don't look it. Have you been awake all night?' Vi inquired. 'Did your new infant howl for her mother?'

Dorothy Bayne flushed. 'No, she didn't cry. She's a good babe; no trouble at all so far.'

'Rather a change from D.C., though. Isn't it topping for her, D.B.?'

'Rather! No wonder we hadn't heard from her,' Dorothy said bravely. 'She'd have an awful rush to be ready. She'd need clothes, and all sorts of things.'

'A whole trousseau, I should think. Evening frocks, and sports things, and so on. I say, D.B., what were you going to say last night, when you were taken bad? You jumped up and said, "But it's not——" and then you collapsed. Not what? We've all been wondering.'

'I can't tell you,' Dorothy said shortly. 'Something queer came over me. I didn't know what I was saying.'

Vi looked unsatisfied. But Gwen, the head-girl, and Edna and Pat, from the Sixth, came up at that moment, so she subsided and awaited events.

'Look here, Dorothy! We want to know what you meant yesterday, about Dorothy Cheyne and the prize. What did you begin to say? You stopped yourself in time, but we want to know what it was that nearly came out,' Gwen challenged her.

Dorothy looked at them with honest eyes, full of defiance. 'What right have you to ask me that? If I stopped myself, it shows I thought better of it. You might ask me to account for something I'd said, but not for something I didn't say.'

'Hear, hear!' cried Merle. 'If Dorothy chooses to prefer her second thoughts, no one can insist on hearing her first ones.'

Dorothy faced the seniors steadily. 'I was going to say a thing I didn't really mean. I've a right to my own thoughts.'

'I'm glad you thought better of it,' Gwen said. 'It's perfectly obvious what you were going to say, though you won't own up to it. I'd never thought of you as unsporting, Dorothy Bayne.'

D.B.'s lips tightened. 'You don't know everything. You don't even know a great deal,' and she turned away.

Merle took her arm, and they walked away from the indignant seniors. '*Did* you think it wasn't fair, D.B.?' she coaxed. 'The girls all think it was that.'

'Only for a second,' Dorothy said, her voice unsteady. The encounter with the seniors had been almost too much. 'Think me unsporting, if you like. I was taken by surprise. I—I thought D.C. would have told me. But what I *know* isn't fair is that I should be rowed for a thing I didn't say.'

'No, that would be rotten,' Merle agreed. 'Why didn't it seem fair, Dorry? None of us can see why.'

But there Dorothy would not help them. 'It was only an idea,' she said. 'I'm not going to tell all my thoughts. You said yourself nobody could insist on hearing them.'

'Oh, but I thought you'd tell *me!*' Merle coaxed.

'Sorry. But I can't.'

She could not be persuaded to give any fuller explanations, so Merle and Vi had to be content to remain unsatisfied also.

'D.B.'s been queer about that prize,' Merle voiced the general feeling. 'I'd like to know what she's really thinking, but no one can screw a word out of her.'

Dorothy knew they were uneasy, and the knowledge added to her unhappiness. It was plain to everybody that she was not happy, and though she said no more, the popular idea was that the change in her was in some way connected with Dorothy Cheyne's absence. Was she merely missing her friend? Or was there more behind?

Dorothy was so silent and unlike herself, and her eyes were so heavy with unspoken trouble, that her form-mistress noticed it as plainly as did the girls. Miss Dickinson watched her for the few days following their talk in the Tower, and felt sure that Dorothy had not confided in anyone and that her burden was growing too heavy for her to bear alone. Dicky longed to help, as she always did when any girl seemed to be in trouble. But she hesitated, waiting if possible for an invitation before interfering. 'Dorothy,' she said very quietly, one evening, 'anger eats the heart out more quickly than pain or loss. Don't carry a trouble too long, dear!'

Dorothy's startled look confirmed her guess. D.B. fled, with a hurried 'Good-night!' but her eyes haunted Dicky.

'We shall have D.B. ill.' Miss Dickinson knew all the nicknames in her form. 'I shall have to speak to her if it goes on much longer.'

But Dorothy's trouble came to a head unexpectedly, and she was driven to seek help.

'I say, D.B.!' Vi hailed her, three days after the return to school. 'We've had an idea! We want to send a form-letter to Dorothy Cheyne, with congrats and good wishes. We'll all sign it, but we want you to write it. You're her chum. You will, won't you?' She eyed Dorothy anxiously, for everyone was agreed that D.B. was still 'queer' about Dorothy Cheyne and the prize.

Dorothy's start and sudden loss of colour confirmed the general feeling as to her 'queerness.' For a moment she turned white, as if from a shock; and Vi wondered if she were going to faint.

'She can't say it's the train this time!' she said to herself, watching Dorry closely. 'It isn't the train; and it never was. It's D.C. and that prize that upsets her. I do wonder what it means! But she won't tell. I don't believe she'll write.'

But Dorothy had herself more completely in hand now. In a flash she saw the consequences of refusal, as clearly as the difficulties of consent. It was a dilemma from which there seemed no escape. An insincere letter might be a possible way out, but it was a way from which she shrank. 'I don't see why I should do it, more than anyone else,' she said, trying to speak lightly. 'But if you all want me to, I'll think about it. Can't do it to-day, *or* to-morrow, though. I've a thousand things to do. Practising now, for instance,' and she escaped, leaving Vi in doubt.

'Think about it!' She was thinking of nothing else. The congratulatory letter to Dorothy Cheyne was the final blow. As she fetched her music, her lips were trembling and her eyes were strained with indecision and almost with despair.

She passed Miss Dickinson without seeing her. Dicky stood looking after her. ‘This is going to stop!’ she said to herself.

She left Dorry to practise. But when D.B. came out she met Miss Dickinson just outside.

‘Dorothy, what are you doing to-morrow morning?’ Miss Dickinson asked cheerfully. ‘There’s the match with the High School in the afternoon, but have you any plans for the morning?’

Dorothy looked startled. ‘No, Miss Dickinson. I supposed I’d bathe, with the rest; and perhaps have some tennis.’

‘Would you take me to see that dew-pond I’ve heard you talk of, up on the Downs? I’d like a cycle ride. I wasn’t able to go on that last picnic, you know. I’ve been wanting to see it.’

Dorry’s face lit up. ‘I’d love it! I like going out on the Downs!’

‘Yes, the fresh air and the space clear away the cobwebs, don’t they? Very well! We’ll start early. Can we leave our cycles somewhere? Or do we take them up on the hills with us?’

‘There’s a farm where they’d be safe. The path’s rather steep. We could pick them up again afterwards.’

‘That will be best. We’ll take some fruit and have a mid-morning picnic, and then come home for lunch.’

‘And if I haven’t reached the bottom of D.B.’s trouble, it won’t be for want of trying,’ Dicky said to herself.

‘I wonder what Dicky’s after?’ thought Dorothy. ‘Anyway, it will be ripping to be out on the Downs.’

But Dicky’s reference to cobwebs haunted her during the night, and she lay awake, trying to see her way through two new problems.

‘How *can* I write sincerely to D.C.? How can I write what I don’t feel? How can I refuse? They’ve put me in an awful hole . . . *Could* I ask Dicky’s advice? How can I tell anyone? But I need help; I can’t see my way through this new mess. I thought I could bear it alone, when it meant only saying nothing and keeping it all to myself. But now—I don’t know what to do! If I could only tell Dicky! I’ve always loved her; she understands, and she’s such a dear. But can I? Isn’t it giving D.C. away? Is it right?’

And she turned, and thought, and envied little Dorothy D., sleeping peacefully on the other side of the room.

CHAPTER VI. DOROTHY'S DEW-POND.

'Now where is your dew-pond?' Miss Dickinson asked, standing to look at the Ring of trees which Dorothy had pointed out as their goal. The cycles were left at the farm below; Dicky and Dorothy had come up by the long gradual green slope.

'My dew-pond!' Dorry laughed and roused herself from her troubled dream. 'This way, Miss Dickinson; have you really not been up here before?'

'I really haven't. I've seen the Ring from many points, but always from far below.'

'Oh, you'll love it! I'm so glad——' and Dorothy stumbled and checked herself shyly.

'That I haven't been before?' Dicky asked, laughing.

'To be with you the first time,' Dorothy said, more shyly still. 'There! Isn't it topping?'

The great Ring of beeches crowning the Downs stood before them. Miss Dickinson gazed, then said, almost reverently, 'Topping, indeed. I think we might say beautiful, Dorry.'

Dorothy laughed. 'Sorry! I apologise. It is beautiful. It's always so quiet. We've had several school picnics up here.'

When they had wandered round the Ring, and had looked down the precipitous north side of the hill to the fields and farms lying like dots far below, Dorothy led the way eastwards and up a slight rise in the turf, like a low bank. 'This is the pond I love!' and she paused on the brink of a gleaming dew-pond, an unbroken circle, with the dark Ring behind, and a wide view of the blue Weald stretching away to the north.

'Yes, that's beautiful too, and very satisfying,' Dicky agreed. 'This is the enchanted pond of your essay, isn't it?'

Dorry turned, her face flaming. 'Did you see those essays? I didn't think——'

'Mrs Warner returned them to Miss Willcox, who passed them on to me, as all six of you were in my form. Yours and Dorothy Cheyne's were altogether the best. None of the others could be compared with them. I should have found it hard to choose between them myself.'

Dorothy said nothing, but stood on the broad rampart of turf which encircled the pond and gazed out over the Weald, with eyes which saw, not fields and woods and blue haze and the spire of Cowfold, but Dorothy Cheyne in Paris, visiting Notre Dame and the Tuileries Gardens and the Champs Elysées. She was white, and her lips were tightened.

'Aren't you going to tell me, Dorry?'

Dorry turned. 'If I only could! I'm dying for help. But what about sneaking? Ought I to tell?'

'You ought,' Dicky assured her. 'If you aren't actually dying for help, you're very nearly making yourself ill. Dorry, I'll not repeat one word without your consent, to anybody whatever; and I'll take no action in consequence of what you tell me, except in company and agreement with yourself.'

'Oh!' Dorothy cried, her voice breaking in intense relief. 'Oh, if you mean *that*, Miss Dickinson, I could tell you! You'll just be friendly, and forget all about school?'

'Exactly. An elder sister, or an aunt, or a grandmother,' Dicky promised.

Dorothy laughed unsteadily. Dicky was the youngest and by far the prettiest mistress in the school, and was adored by babies and seniors alike. The Fifth knew themselves envied by every other form in being able to claim her as their own special mistress.

'If it isn't cheek to suggest it, please adopt me for this morning as a relation!' Dorry pleaded. 'I couldn't tell any school person. I can't give D.C. away.'

'I rather suspected that was the trouble,' her adopted relation assented. 'We'll enter into a secret relationship, beside this enchanted pond. Now, D.B.! What's the trouble?'

'Oh! You know our nicknames?' Dorothy was putting off the trying moment.

'My dear girl! What do you suppose I'm made of? What did D.C. do that has wounded you so deeply?'

Dorothy gave her a quick amazed look. 'How did you guess? That *is* what's wrong, of course.'

'Of course. D.C. was your friend. But the news of her success has hurt you. There must be something wrong, or you'd have rejoiced as the others are doing. You aren't petty; you aren't jealous. She has hurt you somehow. How was it? Sit down and tell me the whole story.'

Sitting on the flat turf rampart, with her back to the Weald, Dorothy clasped her knees and gazed out across the Downs, green and rolling, curves and folds, to the distant sea. 'D.C. won the prize on my ideas. It was my adventure she described, and my holiday, and I'd shown her the old church. She used them without asking my leave. And she's taken the prize and never told. That's what hurts.' She dropped her head on her knees hurriedly.

'Dorothy, are you sure?' Dicky's grave tone showed that she was not disposed to make light of the matter.

'Oh, rather!' D.B.'s voice was muffled and unsteady, but unhesitating. 'I had a letter from her in the hols, telling me all about it. She never thought I'd care; she didn't think of that. She hadn't any ideas of her own, so she bagged mine, things I'd told her; and of course she made ripping stories out of them. It's all in her own writing; I could prove it to anybody—but of course I wouldn't. I felt a bit wild that she'd done it, but I didn't tell her. I thought the prize would be books, or something of that sort. But when I heard—six months abroad—and she'd gone without saying a word——! Oh, don't you see?' and she threw back her head and gazed at her friend.

'Yes, I see. It has been very hard on you. I understand now. First of all, Dorothy, dear, I do understand what you've been going through. I won't tell anybody, as I've promised. But you must let me help you. It's too hard a thing to bear alone.'

'Just knowing that you understand will help enormously,' Dorothy said brokenly. 'The rest think I'm jealous. They say I'm queer. But I couldn't tell them, could I?'

'I think you're glad already that you didn't say more. You don't want them to know, do you?'

Dorothy flushed. 'There are times when I do. But mostly I—I hate the thought of it so much that I'm glad nobody knows. There are two sides to me, Miss Dickinson.'

'Exactly!' Dicky agreed. 'That's why you are so unhappy. The two sides are at war, pulling you different ways. If you weren't tremendously fond of Dorothy Cheyne, and if you weren't tremendously generous in yourself, there wouldn't be two sides, however. Remember that. You'd condemn her and be done with it. As it is, you can't quite bear to do it.'

'No, that's it, though I hadn't realised it,' Dorry said dazedly. 'Miss Dickinson, you do understand. It isn't so much the prize, though I'd have loved that. It was that at first; I was so angry that she'd taken it unfairly. It does seem unfair to me! But what really hurts most is that D.C. should have done such a thing. She ought to have explained, so that people could judge.'

'Of course she ought. I'm with you there, absolutely. But let's be clear about it. Do you think D.C. realised what she was doing? Do you feel that she was deliberately dishonest?'

'Oh, I know she wasn't!' Dorry cried. 'She didn't think about it. She didn't see it as I do. But that's what hurts, Miss Dickinson. I feel she ought to have seen.'

'To have seen it as you do. But in that case she'd be you and not Dorothy Cheyne.'

Dorry looked thoughtful. 'But she *ought* to see she's been unsporting, Miss Dickinson. If she could really do this and not see what it means, then I've seen a new side of D.C. I knew she was careless, but I thought she'd be all right in anything that mattered.'

'And losing your faith in your friend is worse than losing the prize, isn't it?'

'It hurts more,' Dorry said brokenly. 'In a competition one knows one may not win. But—D.C. was my chum; and I feel she's stolen from me. And the others want me to write—how can I? It's the last straw!'

'What do they want you to write?'

Dorothy explained her new dilemma. 'How can I write sincerely? How can I say what I don't mean?'

Dicky looked at her thoughtfully. 'Perhaps you could make yourself mean it. D.B., one side of you will have to conquer, before you'll be comfortable again. You can't go on like this, at war with yourself. It's the most wearing sort of trouble there is. You'll have to end it, somehow.'

Dorry's head dropped on her knees again. 'Please give me advice! I want help. You've listened, and sympathised, and understood. Can you tell me what to do?'

'What do you want to do?' Miss Dickinson leaned forward and laid a hand on her shoulder.

Dorry's head jerked up again. 'How do you mean? I don't know. What is there to do? I can't give D.C. away. She's taken the prize; I could prove she won it unfairly, but I'm not going to do it. There's nothing to do.'

'No, there's nothing to do there. It's only the question between you and D.C. that has to be decided.'

Dorothy's startled look came back. 'You do hit the spot! Yes, that's true.'

'What do you really want?' Dicky demanded. 'To bring home to D.C. what she's done?'

Dorothy flushed. 'That would be only fair,' she said in a low voice.

'Quite fair. But would it really help? If Dorothy Cheyne does not feel that she is in the wrong, will she believe it if you tell her so? Won't she merely resent it and be angry? People generally do.'

'She'd be mad, of course, and we should have a row. And that would be the end of it.'

'And is that what you want?'

Dorry gave her another quick look. 'No, Miss Dickinson.'

'I thought not. You really are her friend, you see.'

'I want,' Dorry's lips quivered, 'I want to feel to D.C. as I did before; to be chums, and—and to think a lot of her. But I don't see how I ever can.'

'To respect her,' Dicky agreed. 'Dorry, realise this! She's still your friend. You're standing by her, even standing up for her, though nobody knows it. Her good name is in your hands; and, because she *is* your friend, and quite without hesitating or even thinking about it, you're guarding her credit. You don't want anybody to know. That's because she's still your friend.'

'Yes,' Dorothy assented, gazing at her. 'Yes, Miss Dickinson, it's true. But my feeling to her is different.'

'You've lost your respect for her. You want to find it again.'

'Yes,' Dorry agreed, her head bent.

‘Then that’s settled, and we know where we are,’ Dicky said. ‘If you’d wanted to hit back at D.C.—to make her feel bad because of what she has done—to have your revenge, in fact —,’

‘It sounds awful!’ D.B. said, her face crimson; and then, honestly, ‘I felt like that at first, Miss Dickinson.’

‘I don’t suppose you’re more than human. But now you’ve thought better of it, there’s no reason you shouldn’t be a little better than human! We can all rise to it, if we will. You’re going to put friendship and what is best for D.C. before your own hurt feelings. You’re going to trust to her higher side to realise that she hasn’t been straight towards you. If she never realises it, surely you’ll be desperately sorry for her, not angry? It will mean she has a really unsporting side; and that’s a terrible thing to face the world with.’

Dorothy gave her a thoughtful look. Then she gazed down into her dew-pond before answering. ‘It had never occurred to me to be *sorry* for D.C.,’ she said at last. ‘But I do see it now. Yes, it’s awful for her either way, whether she sees it or not. Worse than for me, really.’

Dicky’s face lit up. She leaned forward, and laid her hand again on Dorothy’s knee. ‘Think how D.C. will feel, out there in Switzerland, if anything should bring it home to her that she’s been unsporting!’

Dorry looked up. ‘If I didn’t join in the form-letter, she’d want to know why. She’d begin to ask herself questions. I *will* write, Miss Dickinson; and I’ll mean what I say. I don’t want D.C. to feel as bad as that when she’s far away from everybody. It would be ghastly for her.’

‘Then all’s well,’ Dicky said warmly. ‘You’ll see this thing through, in yourself, for D.C.’s sake. You’ll win the fight with your own hurt feeling. It will come back, perhaps, but now you’ll remember that you don’t really want D.C. to suffer as she would suffer if she knew how you have felt about this; and so you’ll do your best to keep it from her. You’ll give her friendship, and you’ll trust her better side, which you know must be there. You do know it, Dorry, or you’d have turned her down completely. You do trust her, but you hadn’t thought about it.’

Dorry drew a deep breath. ‘Miss Dickinson, you’ve changed the whole thing for me. I felt hurt for myself; now—suddenly—I’m so frightfully sorry for D.C. As you say, whether she knows or not, either way, it’s awful for her. I won’t be the one to tell her.’

‘Don’t you see what that means?’ Dicky asked gently. ‘You keep her as your friend. She may never know the friendship has been in danger. That means there is a want of moral feeling and strength in her character, and she will need your help. Or she may realise what she has done. *Then*, if you have never reproached her, she’ll be your friend for ever. For she’ll be desperately cut up if she ever does realise.’

‘She’d feel awfully bad,’ Dorothy admitted. ‘Yes, I do see. Thank you! You’ve saved me from the one thing that would have made a mess of everything. If I’d been the one to tell her —,’

‘Yes,’ Dicky agreed. ‘She’d have resented it most of all from you, because you’re the one she’s hurt. It’s a little like turning the other cheek, isn’t it, D.B.?’

Dorry flushed. ‘I’ve always thought that was a beautiful idea, but quite impossible, and—and just a little soft,’ she said shyly.

‘Is it soft? Is it easy?’ Dicky asked. ‘Is it ever soft to do a thing that’s right but desperately hard? I should have thought it was tremendously sporting, not soft.’

Dorothy’s eyes widened at the idea of ‘tremendously sporting’ in such a connection. ‘I’d never thought of that . . . But it isn’t hard now, Miss Dickinson. You’ve changed everything,

and it's easy. It's what I want to do.'

Dicky laughed. 'Ah! When we reach that point, things do stop being hard. To do the sporting thing because you want to do it more than anything else is very jolly. But you have to care more for someone else than for yourself. What about leaving this hill-top?' and she took a long look at the dew-pond, the Weald, the Ring, and the stretch of Downs.

'You helped me to understand. It's awfully kind of you to have taken the trouble,' Dorothy exclaimed.

'I couldn't bear to see you looking as you've done these last three days. I hope the real D.B. will come back now. Thank you for showing me your dew-pond. I loved your description of it.'

CHAPTER VII. THE OTHER DOROTHY.

Two girls hung over the railing of their hotel balcony and gazed down at the lights of Territet and Montreux, strung like a chain of gleaming beads above the dark lake, each bead reflected in a shimmering line in the water below. Vangie Warner was fair, with long yellow hair, and she wore an evening cloak over her white frock. Dorothy Cheyne, with neatly shingled dark head, wore her big coat over a red dress that suited her well.

The girls were good friends, though, in the excitement of travel, there had as yet been no severe strain on their companionship. A fortnight's bad weather in a high mountain resort would have put their friendship to the test. Both were thoroughly enjoying the new scenes, new people, new experiences; to-day they had been to Geneva by the steamer for several hours of strenuous sight-seeing.

Dorothy tossed a letter into Evangeline's lap. 'Read that. It's awfully jolly. It was waiting when we came back to-day.'

Vangie read the form-letter, written by Dorothy Bayne and signed by all the rest. 'Gee! What a lovely letter! How perfectly sweet of them to write! Another Dorothy! Didn't you get mixed?'

D.C. explained. 'She was my chum,' she added, and changed the subject restlessly. 'Look at the steamer coming across from Bouveret! Aren't the lights pretty?'

'D.B. sounds vurry nice. She says she'll write again soon. Have you told her about Paris?'

'I haven't had time,' Dorothy Cheyne explained. 'I'm going to write, of course. D.B.'s one of the best. But I've only written to Mother so far.'

She could not have explained why she had not written to Dorothy Bayne. She dared not face the thought which lay behind her silence. She would not admit even to herself that there was a black spot in her sunshine. Everything was perfect; and a long winter of enjoyment lay before her. But she could not write to Dorry, though Dorry had been her chum. It seemed wiser not to probe too deeply. The thought of D.B. made her vaguely uneasy. She went no further, but stifled the thought whenever it arose.

Next morning another letter was waiting for her. 'From Merle!' she said in surprise. 'How decent of her! We weren't chums,' and she read the letter eagerly.

It was full of gossip of the new term. Merle told particularly, as a subject which would interest D.C., of the arrival of little Dorothy to share Dorothy Bayne's room. From that she went on to tell of the announcement of the prize by Miss Willcox, and of the envy of the rest of the form.

'D.B. was a bit funny about it. She nearly swooned when she heard the news, and we all thought she was really upset; because you hadn't written and told her, we supposed. I do think you might have done that, D.C.! After all, she was your chum. It was rotten for her not to hear such a big bit of news about you any sooner than the rest of us. I don't wonder it gave her a shock. She's all right again now, but I do think you might have told her.'

Dorothy C. folded the letter and attacked her coffee and rolls vigorously. But her hands shook. What was the shock under which D.B. had "nearly swooned"? Merely that she had not been told privately of her friend's success?

Desperately Dorothy C. thrust away every other thought. But in her heart she knew. A sense of discomfort which had haunted her ever since she heard of her success, but which till this moment she had not faced, sprang to life and confronted her. Had D.B. felt bad about those essays? *Had she minded?*

Dorothy C.'s complacency fell from her like a sheltering cloak, and she shivered. 'Did I ever ask D.B. if she minded? I never asked her leave to use her adventures. Did she feel bad about it? She goes into things so much more deeply than other people. She may have felt I'd been unfair. She may be thinking I cheated. . . . *Did I?* Wasn't it fair? Would other people think so?'

She shivered again, and Vangie sprang up to close a window. 'Have you had a chill? I'll fetch your jumper. You silly, why didn't you put it on?'

'I'm not cold.' D.C. drank her coffee hastily. 'Let's fetch our hats; I've finished. We were to start at nine.'

'Say, are you all right?' Vangie demanded. 'Wouldn't you rather stay at home?'

'Rather not! I'm crazy to go up the mountain, and it's a gorgeous day. I'm all right; there's nothing the matter.'

'You looked real green for a moment,' and Vangie eyed her anxiously.

'It wasn't anything,' Dorothy insisted.

All through the thrilling ascent by the mountain-railway, and lunch on the summit, with the marvellous view of the lake, Mont Blanc, and all the peaks of the Valais, of Savoie, and of the Oberland spread before them, Dorothy was in the highest spirits, and Vangie forgot her fright of the morning.

But behind Dorothy's light-heartedness lay a torturing question, the shadow of a terrible doubt. 'Did D.B. mind? Did I cheat? I never thought of it till now. What would other people think? If only I could ask somebody! I never meant——' and she shivered again.

'Aren't you well, D.C.?' Vangie asked. 'I sure think you have had a chill! Shall I tell Mother?'

'No, I'm all right. Don't fuss so!' D.C. said irritably.

But at night, as they rested on the balcony again after dinner, watching the lights come out in the lake-shore towns, the shadow crept over her again, and the doubt grew more than she could bear.

'Let's go down and watch the dancing!' She turned to Vangie. 'It's dull out here. I don't want to think. Come and have a good time!'

'Have you a guilty conscience?' Vangie asked, laughing. 'Gee! Don't let it worry you, D.C. I shall call you that, to remind you of your jolly chum. But you're my chum now, remember.'

'*Don't* call me that. I don't like it!' Dorothy almost snapped. 'I don't want to be always thinking about school.'

'Oh, sure! I won't, then,' Vangie said good-naturedly.

Mrs Warner watched the girls as they came in, her face puzzled. She often looked at Dorothy with puzzled eyes. This Dorothy seemed less and less like the girl of the winning essays. The girl shown in those essays had been quick to perceive and full of joy in beauty of any kind; this girl enjoyed things, but only when they were pointed out to her; she could describe what she had seen well and vividly—Mrs Warner often recognised the descriptive and narrative powers shown in the essays; but it was Vangie or her mother who had to point out what was worthy of appreciation. The girl who had written so warmly about the tiny

church among the Downs had been impressed by Notre Dame, but not so deeply moved as her hostess had expected; and Mrs Warner, who had hoped Dorothy would infect Vangie with her own enthusiasm, had been disappointed. There had been other traits also, which the essays had shown—a sense of humour, a readiness to help, and to make a joke of difficulties—which were not so clearly marked in the writer as might have been expected. D.C.'s descriptions of D.B.'s farm holiday, and of the Lakeland adventure, had been too well done; they had portrayed Dorothy Bayne in her relationships with her cousins; and D.C. was all unconsciously failing to live up to them.

She had been uncertain in her temper all day, given to alternate fits of depression and of high spirits. Mrs Warner wondered if there could be any trouble on her mind, or if she could be homesick. Dorothy denied both ideas vehemently, and insisted that she was happy every minute of the day. How could anyone guess that she was running away with all her might from the memory of a dishonest deed—an unspoken word, which in honesty should have been uttered?

The thought caught her again in the night. *Had D.B. minded?*

She drove it back desperately. 'D.B. *didn't* mind. It was perfectly fair. If she'd minded she'd have told me. She wrote me an awfully jolly letter after I'd told her all about it.'

'But that was before she knew what the prize was to be,' said an inner Voice, which was annoyingly clear-sighted. 'You never asked her afterwards. You never really asked her if she minded at all. You just told her, and she said it would be all right. You weren't fair. You didn't give her a chance to say what she really felt. How could she go back on you after you'd done it?'

'Oh, bother! It's really important for me to travel,' D.C. argued. 'D.B.'s going on the stage; at least, she's going to try. You don't need to see places for that. It matters more for me, if I'm going to write.'

And the Voice, which could speak only through her own experience, could not tell her that travel was a less valuable training for her future work than an honest understanding and conquest of her own nature.

'It's not right!' that was all the Voice could say. 'You cheated. You weren't fair. You didn't explain. They couldn't judge. You were utterly unsporting. It was frightfully hard on D.B. And she's been a brick.' It did not spare her, and she found it harder and harder to stifle it.

She remembered the form-letter; and the Voice found a new argument. 'D.B.'s being awfully decent. She hasn't given you away; and she hasn't said a word to blame you. That letter was as jolly as if there wasn't anything wrong. She's sent you all good wishes and her love, and she's going to write and tell you about hockey and the form-concert. But D.B. *knows*; are you so sure she didn't mind? How would you have felt yourself?'

That was a horrible thought which had never occurred to her before. Dorothy Bayne's trust was justified. D.C.'s silence had been sheer want of thought. She had never realised her friend's point of view. But she had felt discomfort ever since she had known the prize was hers; and she had not had the courage to trace the uneasiness to its source. Every whisper had been stifled; and in the excitement of new scenes and friends she had soon forgotten that touch of discomfort which the thought of Dorothy Bayne had called up. The prize she had won was the chance of a life-time, and she was determined to have the fullest enjoyment out of it.

But her better self, which D.B. had trusted, had been merely sleeping; and it sprang into full and clamorous life at the hint in Merle's letter. It tormented her more and more, till at last the craving became irresistible to know what judgment an outsider would give. Was that Voice

right, or was it only nerves? How would her conduct look to someone hearing of it for the first time?

Unconsciously Vangie gave her the opening she needed. At dinner one night an acquaintance told a story of rock-climbing in the Tyrol; and Vangie turned to Dorothy. 'That was like your adventure in the Lakes, when you and your cousin saved the old shepherd and his dog. It was a ripping story!'

The friends begged for details. Dorothy Cheyne, crimson with embarrassment, repeated the tale she had told in her essay. As soon as she and Evangeline were alone, Vangie demanded, 'Didn't you like telling those people that story? You're real shy about it, I know. You needn't be, Dorothy! It was a vurry fine rescue!'

D.C. had hitherto refused to give fuller details than she had already written. Now, crimson again, she blurted out, 'Yes, but it didn't happen to me. It was Dorothy Bayne's adventure. She told me the story. It's all right!'—hurriedly, as Vangie gazed at her blankly. 'D.B. gave me leave to use it for my essay.'

Evangeline stood staring at her. 'But you made it sound as if it had happened to *you*!'

'That was only to make a good essay out of it. D.B. didn't mind.'

'It was vurry kind of her, then. But Mother might mind; didn't you think of that? Gee, you cheated Mother, didn't you?'

'I never meant it that way,' Dorothy protested. 'Mrs Warner asked for essays, not for true accounts of our early lives.'

'All the same,' Vangie said judiciously, 'it was real misleading. I think you should have explained. What about all the rest? I loved your story of the farm and the boys; and your picture of the little old church. Was that all the other Dorothy too?'

D.C.'s crimson cheeks and shrinking eyes answered her. Vangie cried incredulously, 'Was none of it you, Dorothy?'

'The telling was me,' Dorothy said brokenly. 'I didn't know till this minute how awful it was. I never thought you'd feel so bad. You'd better tell your mother. And I'd better go home. I'm sorry; I never meant——' Her voice broke, and she fled out to the darkness and silence of the balcony.

In a moment Vangie was after her. 'Dorothy! Oh, I didn't mean to be a pig!'

Dorothy had sunk down in a chair, her head on the railing.

Vangie's arms went round her. 'Dorothy, I sure never meant to make you cry. You aren't going home. I couldn't do without you now. I was surprised, that's all. Oh, D.C., dear, don't cry like that!'

D.C. shook with heart-broken sobbing. 'I've been miserable all the time we've been enjoying ourselves,' she whispered.

'We'll tell Mother. She'll know what to do. You want her to know, don't you, Dorothy?' Vangie pleaded. 'We must do something about the other Dorothy, mustn't we? Does she know? She can't know, or she'd have done something about it!'

D.C. quivered again. 'She knows. I told her; she didn't mind. But that was before—before we knew what the prize was to be. We thought it would be silly poets or classics. We never dreamt——'

'But she must know now,' Vangie argued. 'Mother said your Head could tell the girls.'

'Yes, she knows. But she hasn't given me away. And—and just read that letter that came to-night! It's all about school, telling me everything, and as jolly as possible. She's never said a word, to me or anybody else.'

‘What a brick! We *must* tell Mother,’ Vangie said again. ‘You do see that, don’t you, D.C.? We must do something about it. Your D.B.’s real fine.’

‘She ought to be here instead of me. Do you think we could change?’ Dorothy asked unsteadily. ‘I’ll have to go home, of course. Won’t you have Dorry instead? I think she could arrange it. You’d love her, Van.’

‘Oh, but I want you! I’m not going to give you up!’

‘Don’t be mad!’ D.C. said. ‘Your mother won’t want me now. Will you tell her for me? I’ll wait here.’

Vangie vanished, and Dorothy’s self-command went with her. Left alone, she dropped her head on the rail again and cried hopelessly.

‘Dorothy, my dear!’ Mrs Warner’s hand was on her shoulder, in sympathetic understanding.

‘Oh, you will let me go home, won’t you?’ D.C. sprang up, brushing away her tears. ‘I couldn’t bear it now. I couldn’t enjoy anything. I must tell Dorry I’m sorry.’

‘Yes,’ Mrs Warner agreed. ‘Yes, you couldn’t be happy unless you did that. I suppose a letter wouldn’t be enough?’

‘Oh, but I’ve no right to be here now. It ought to be Dorry. You’ll have her instead of me, won’t you?’ D.C. pleaded.

‘That is for me to decide,’ Mrs Warner reminded her. ‘I shall have to think it over. You were wrong, of course, to let me decide about those essays without giving me all the facts. Now that I understand, I shall have to consider the question carefully.’

‘Mother, I want Dorothy mighty badly! I’m used to her,’ Vangie urged. ‘If she goes home to see the other Dorothy, can’t she come back again? Or—and—oh, Mummy!’

Her mother’s look checked her. Mrs Warner said gravely, ‘Would a letter do, Dorothy? Or do you want to go?’

‘I’d like to go, please, if it’s possible,’ D.C. begged. ‘A letter seems so mean and shirking.’

‘Mrs Bryan is starting for London to-morrow,’ Mrs Warner said. ‘You could travel with her. She is going direct. Your father could meet you in London. I’ll wire to him, then. Don’t pack your trunk, Dorothy; we’ll send it after you. We must not burden Mrs Bryan with luggage. Take only the small case that you can carry. The maid will see to all the rest for you. I will write to your father and to your head-mistress.’

‘Father will let me go down to school for a day, to see D.B. He’s very understanding,’ Dorothy said, a catch in her breath. ‘Thank you, Mrs Warner. I haven’t said I’m sorry, but I think you know. I knew all the time I ought to tell you; I’ve been feeling very bad. But—it was too tempting. I’ve tried not to think about Dorry.’

‘Your “Dorry” has been very brave and what you girls call sporting. And she must be very fond of you. I like her; I want to know her. But that, too, needs thinking about,’ and with another warning look at Evangeline, Mrs Warner went to consult Mrs Bryan and left the girls alone.

CHAPTER VIII. VANGIE'S INVITATION.

Dorothy Cheyne stood before Miss Willcox's desk, subdued and tired, but restless. The last few days had been terrible—the farewell to Vangie; the journey with curious Mrs Bryan, who had suspected a sudden home trouble or an attack of loneliness, and had tried to find out the truth; the meeting with her parents and the necessary confession.

'I've never been expelled,' she wrote to Evangeline. 'But it feels exactly like what I suppose that would be.'

Now Miss Willcox had expressed her surprise and disappointment, and D.C. had stood before her, feeling like a criminal in the dock. One more hard moment, she supposed, when she faced Dorothy Bayne; and then she could go home and try to forget Switzerland and Italy and Spain; for her father had said he would not send her back to school till the New Year. It had been a relief to hear that; to come back among the girls at once would have been too terrible, for of course they would have to know.

Dorothy looked up wearily at the Head. 'May I speak to Dorothy Bayne, Miss Willcox?' That was what she had endured it all for. It was certainly not to see Miss Willcox she had come back to school.

'Yes, you must apologise to Dorothy. But they are all out on the Downs; it's the October school picnic. They'll be back to tea. You had better wait. There's no hurry, as you are to stay the night.'

'Couldn't I go after her?' D.C. pleaded. 'I'd like to have it over. Couldn't you tell me where they've gone, Miss Willcox? I know the usual places.'

The Head looked at her gravely, and read the signs of overstrain in her face. 'They are picnicking up by the Ring. I could not let you go alone; but Miss Dickinson is to join them after lunch and come home with them. You may borrow a cycle and ride out with her, if you like. The rest went by coach, so there are cycles in the shed.'

Miss Dickinson's face lit up in astonished delight when she saw whom she was to escort. 'Dorothy Cheyne! We thought you were prancing about the Continent. Take you to meet the others, and—of course—Dorothy Bayne in particular? Oh, with pleasure! She'll be overjoyed to see you. She's been missing you.'

She asked no questions as to the reason for this sudden return, and betrayed no inner knowledge of the situation. But she kept D.C. talking of Paris and Lausanne and Geneva, of Evangeline and Mrs Warner, and did her best not to let her dwell on past and coming interviews.

'It's almost as if Dicky understood,' D.C. said to herself, as they rode towards the Downs.

'I can promise you a very private meeting with Dorry Bayne, if you would like it,' Miss Dickinson said, laughing. 'She and I have a plan of our own for this afternoon. The other day she took me up to see the Ring and the dew-pond for the first time. But she talks of a lower pond, among the woods, and she is to show it to me to-day. She is going to slip away from the others and come down the lane, and I'm to leave my cycle and climb up, and whoever finds the pond first is to wait there for the other. I spoke to Miss Thame and Mademoiselle, who are with the picnic party, and they are allowing Dorothy to come home with me. So you shall meet her by the lower pond instead of me.'

At the foot of this lane also there was a convenient cottage. Miss Dickinson took the two cycles and wheeled them in. 'Off you go, Dorothy Cheyne. Straight up the lane among the trees! I'll come presently. I must see Dorothy's dew-pond!'

'You'd really think Dicky understood!' D.C. said to herself, as she set off up the chalky lane, ploughing ankle-deep through red-brown beech leaves.

The lane was steep. The hill-side ran up from it still more steeply, and on the other side fell away to the Weald below. All the slope was red with fallen leaves, which danced in the flurries of wind. The dark Ring towered above, overhanging an almost precipitous slope.

There was a break in the wall of trees, and a green platform of turf invited climbers to rest and gaze out over the Weald. D.C. barely glanced at it, with no heart for views or purple distances. Then she halted, with a cry, as she reached the level of the turf, for here lay the dew-pond, round and shining, ringed with its broad grass parapet, the trees reflected in its surface.

It was new to D.C., and she stood and gazed, taken by surprise. Then she turned to go on her way.

Down the winding path, between red-brown banks thick with autumn leaves, ploughing through the drift, Dorothy Bayne came hurrying to meet Dicky.

'Dorry!' Dorothy Cheyne plunged into the sea of leaves and ran towards her.

'D.C.! Oh, it's not possible! Are you a ghost? But you're in Switzerland?' Dorothy Bayne stood, rooted in leaves, and stared at her, frightened and unbelieving.

'It's all right. I came home yesterday. I came down to school this morning, and I came here with Dicky. It *is* all right, D.B.! Don't look so scared! I oughtn't to have given you such a shock. I've been chucked out of Switzerland,' D.C. said incoherently. 'Dorry, I owned up. And of course I had to come away. D.B., I've come to say I'm sorry.'

The colour flooded Dorothy Bayne's face again; for a moment she had been white. 'You did give me a fright! I thought you couldn't be real. Tell me, D.C.! I don't understand.'

Dorothy Cheyne flung her mackintosh on the rampart of the dew-pond. 'Sit down first, old thing. You're all shaky. I thought *I* was to be the shaky one!'

Dorry's knees were trembling in the reaction, but still more in the sudden realisation of what D.C. had come to say. She sank down on the coat. 'Tell me, D.C.!'

Dorothy Cheyne stood beside her and spoke vehemently, pouring out her story. 'I'm sorry, D.B.,' she ended. 'I played a dirty trick on you. But it was only that I didn't think. You've been absolutely top-hole about it all. You've never said a word. Will you believe I'm sorry?'

Dorry had listened, sitting with bent head. Now she looked up, and took D.C.'s hand and pulled her down beside her. 'I knew you'd be sorry. It was awful for you. Sit down, silly; you're so far off if you stand. D.C., it must have been ghastly for you—telling them all, and coming home to your people, and then coming here to face Willy! You are a sport; you haven't shirked a thing!'

'Least I could do,' D.C. said in an off-hand tone. 'It was rather fierce, of course; felt like being chucked out of school! But nothing else would have been any good. Mrs Warner was very kind, and Vangie cried quarts. I tried to make them see they must have you instead, but they'd only say they would think about it.'

'I'd hate it,' Dorry said. 'As if I'd go in your place!'

'You ought to. Why were you so decent about it, D.B.? Why didn't you give me away? You could have done; you had that letter of mine. It would have been splendid evidence against me.'

‘As if I would! I’m not that sort. Don’t you know that?’ Dorry asked indignantly.

‘You know I do. For I took advantage of it,’ D.C. said, flushing in shame. ‘I knew you wouldn’t give me away. But I *don’t* know how you could write those jolly letters to me, and never say a word, D.B.!’

‘Oh, that was Dicky,’ and Dorothy Bayne explained.

‘I thought she seemed to understand!’ D.C. commented. ‘I say! Let’s go and tell her—shall we?’

‘What have you done with her? Buried her among the leaves on the way up?’

‘She said she’d come presently.’

‘Then we’ll wait for her here,’ said Dorry.

Dicky appeared within a very few minutes. ‘I know all about it, Dorothy B. and Dorothy C. There was no doubt what would happen as soon as you met. You are real friends, you see.’

‘You don’t know quite how much we want to thank you, though,’ said Dorothy B. ‘Look, Miss Dickinson!’ and she waved her hand towards the round pond as if she had made it herself.

‘I am looking. It’s as beautiful as the other one. I really couldn’t choose between them. But I want you to look at something else. Miss Willcox asked me to give you this letter, as soon as you had met, and if possible before you saw the others. It came to her this morning,’ and Miss Dickinson handed Dorothy Bayne a letter.

‘It’s from Mrs Warner!’ D.C. gasped. ‘Oh, Dorry, what is it?’

‘There are two letters,’ Dorry cried. ‘Here’s one for you!’

‘That’s from Vangie. I know her scrawl,’ and D.C. seized her letter eagerly. ‘Oh—Dorry!’

Dorothy Bayne had skimmed hastily through Mrs Warner’s letter. ‘Oh—D.C.!—Miss Dickinson, what a lovely idea! Mrs Warner asks Miss Willcox to find out if we couldn’t both go for the rest of the winter. She says they want me, too, but that they want D.C. to go back. And she says Vangie’s so keen to have us both that she wants to do without going to Spain at present, and just have Italy and France, rather than have only one of us. Oh, *isn’t* it kind?’

Dorothy Cheyne had turned from the others and was gazing out over the blue misty Weald. ‘Mine’s a beautiful letter,’ she said unsteadily. ‘They knew how sore I’d feel. It’s to make me understand they really want me. I feel ashamed all through.’

Dorothy Bayne’s arm slipped through hers. ‘Old thing, that’s all done with. We’re never going to speak of it again. You’ve been splendid. I believe Mother will let me go. Mrs Warner says her brother is travelling out in a week to join them, and he could take us across. They’re waiting where they are till we come. Your people will let you go back, won’t they?’

D.C.’s shamed eyes looked away from her to the blue distance again. ‘I think so. Father was awfully cut up and disappointed. He’ll say I ought to go, and try to make good. But I feel *crushed*, Dorry.’

Dorry’s arm squeezed hers. ‘Vangie and I will soon make you forget, old chap. Come on up to the top and tell the others! We won’t tell them the beginning of the story; no, we won’t! I won’t have it. We’ll just say you came to fetch me and I’m to go too.’

‘We’ll tell them the whole of it, or I won’t go back to Switzerland,’ Dorothy Cheyne insisted. ‘Every word of it, D.B. I shall tell them myself. I couldn’t face Vangie and her mother if I hadn’t been honest.’

‘Yes, I should tell them,’ Miss Dickinson agreed. ‘Then, if you like, come down again this way, and we’ll go home together. Dorry can ride on my step. I’ll sit by the dew-pond till you come back.’

‘Come and hold an exciting meeting up by the Ring, D.C.!’ and Dorothy Bayne held out her hand.

Dorothy Cheyne caught it eagerly, and the two went off together through the autumn woods.

CHAPTER IX. TELLING THE SCHOOL.

The green stretch of Downs at the top of the lane was not lonely to-day. The brown hats and coats of 'Old Whitey's' girls were dotted everywhere; the juniors raced madly about, over-excited by the strong keen air and the freedom and space, while the seniors played rounders, the Fifth, captained by Merle, playing the Sixth under Gwen Garth, the head of the school.

Miss Thame and Mademoiselle had walked round the Ring of beeches, and had just returned to the picnic site on the southern side when the game near the dew-pond broke up in confusion. Led by Merle and Vi, the whole Upper School raced shouting to surround the two Dorothys, who had appeared from among the trees.

Greatly mystified, the mistresses and the younger girls followed. At sight of Dorothy Cheyne they understood the excitement, though the explanation itself was bewildering.

'Dorothy! We thought she was in Montreux!' cried Mademoiselle. 'It is Dorothy Cheyne, who won the prize for the essays and went to Switzerland, Miss Thame. But how she comes here I know not.'

Miss Thame, the gym-mistress, had been new this autumn term, so the explanation was necessary.

'So this is Dorothy Cheyne! Girls, if you did not talk all at once, we might be able to hear Dorothy's story.'

'It's Miss Thame, D.C.,' Dorothy Bayne explained. 'Miss Morgan left in the summer. I told you in my letters.—No, I didn't know D.C. was coming, Merle. I went down the lane to meet Dicky; and there, by the lower pond, was D.C. I nearly fainted!'

'You always do, when you're surprised,' said Merle.

Hot colour swept up into Dorothy Cheyne's face at remembrance of the letter which had come to her in Montreux.

'Trust Merle to say the wrong thing!' Gwen Garth cried. 'Merle, you are an ass!'

'Let me come up there!' and D.C. pushed her way up on to the bank which had once been the rampart of an ancient fort. 'Listen, everybody! I've something ghastly to tell you.'

Merle the tactless laughed. 'No, really?'

'It's not a joke,' said Vi. 'Look at D.B.'s face!'

'Buck up, D.C.,' Pat urged. 'What's the row?'

'Those essays. They weren't fair. I oughtn't to have had the prize. D.B.'s a sport; she never gave me away. But I cheated, though I didn't think of it as cheating at the time.' Dorothy Cheyne's story poured out in a breathless unhappy stream.

'My aunt!' cried Edna. 'We thought D.B. was funny about that prize!'

'We were sure she thought it wasn't fair,' Gwen and Pat spoke together. 'I say, D.B., what really happened?'

'Tell us, D.B.!' Merle and Vi, and half the Sixth, Elsie and Grace and Gladys and Sybil, all begged at once.

Dorothy Bayne pushed her way through the crowd and sprang up beside her friend. 'I'd like to tell you. D.C. will make it sound too awful. It isn't much, really. She used some ideas of mine in her essays; that was all. She told me afterwards. But when they gave her the prize

she began to feel it hadn't been quite the thing, so she owned up to Mrs Warner. Then she came all the way home to square things with me. And—isn't this gorgeous, girls?—if my folks are willing, I'm to go back and have the winter abroad with her and the Warners! Isn't it top-hole?"

'Oh, ripping, D.B.!' There was a universal chorus of congratulation and envy.

'We're going to race back to school with Dicky, so that I can write to Mother to-night. We only came up here to let you see D.C., so that she wouldn't be too big a shock at teatime.'

'That's all very well,' D.C. intervened bravely. 'But I'm not a rotter altogether, though I've been horribly mean to D.B. over this business. The point is—she hasn't made it plain—that I took the prize without explaining I'd bagged all my ideas from her. It was just as bad as copying. When I heard about Switzerland and Italy, I simply couldn't bear to risk it, so I didn't say anything. I've been downright horrible about it. I see it now. You ought to know; she didn't want to tell you.'

'There wasn't any need,' D.B. insisted, and she took her friend's arm. 'Come along back to Dicky, D.C. I want to write that letter.'

She led Dorothy through the crowd, who made way for them in silence. Even Merle had no comment, for once.

'They think I'm a bounder,' D.C.'s voice broke, when they were in the shelter of the lane once more. 'Of course, I am! But—it's hateful——'

'Don't worry, old chap! They'll have forgotten all about it by next Easter, when we come back,' Dorry comforted her.

'You are a brick, D.B.! It will be topping to have you. Vangie will love you; she likes you "vurry much" already. You're "real nice" and "mighty fine," and heaps more.'

Dorry laughed. 'I'm sure I shall like her too. I shall tell her how sporting you've been. The rest won't say any more, D.C. They're an awfully jolly crowd.'

'But I'll know what they're thinking,' D.C. groaned.

The girls on the hill-top walked back to the dew-pond, their game forgotten.

'Dorry Bayne's a sport,' said Gwen gravely. 'I wish she'd come up into the Sixth. I've always liked her.'

'I never felt happy about those essays,' Grace confessed. 'One felt there was something behind.'

'I wasn't worried over the essays, but I was bothered about Dorry,' said Edna. 'This explains her queerness at the time.'

'Don't make it too rotten for Dorothy Cheyne. At least, she has owned up,' Gwen spoke with authority.

As Dorry had foreseen, and thanks to Gwen, no further comment was made in D.C.'s presence. The girls were very gentle towards her, and talked hard and persistently about Paris, and Vangie Warner, and Geneva. But their very silence was full of meaning, and in spite of their care D.C. read their opinions in their eyes. Those days at school, while Dorothy Bayne waited for her parents' reply, were hard for Dorothy Cheyne to bear.

When D.C. was not in the room the girls expressed themselves freely.

'It was just like D.C.,' said Merle.

'It was exactly like D.B.,' Vi retorted. 'Fancy not giving D.C. away! Dorry's a ripping sport. No wonder she felt bad.'

The Sixth were deeply satisfied to have their problem solved. 'It's been worrying me,' Edna said again. 'I simply couldn't believe Dorothy Bayne would be so unsporting as to say it

wasn't fair, just because D.C. had beaten her in a competition.'

'I should say not!' Gwen exclaimed.

'It was frightfully puzzling, when she wouldn't give any reason, though,' said Pat. 'Dorothy Cheyne doesn't deserve a winter abroad. I wish they'd chuck her out and only take D.B.'

'As if D.B. would go!' Grace said, laughing.

Dorry's letter to her parents told merely of the invitation—to go with D.C., because we're such chums.' But D.C. wrote also, with the Head's permission, telling the whole story, and pleading that Dorry might be allowed to go. She enclosed the letters from Mrs Warner and Vangie, and both girls awaited the reply in breathless eagerness.

'They will let you go, won't they, D.B.?' D.C. asked about once an hour.

'I can't imagine any reason why they shouldn't,' was all Dorry could say.

On the evening of the second day she was sent for to Miss Willcox's study. D.C.'s eyes followed her in agonised suspense. 'Perhaps it's a message. Come and tell me, D.B.! I can't live much longer like this!'

The minutes passed and Dorry did not return. D.C.'s impatience grew with every moment, and it was as much as Gwen could do to keep her from following.

'You can't barge into the Head's study!' said Vi. 'Don't be an ass, D.C.! Dorry'll come as soon as she can.'

'Perhaps her mother's come to talk it over,' said Merle.

The door opened and Dorothy Bayne came in.

'Well? Is it all right?' burst out D.C.

'Idiot!' said Vi. 'Can't you see it's not all right?—D.B., won't they let you go? What's up?'

'How brutal of them!' cried Merle.

'D.B., what's the matter?' Dorothy Cheyne faltered. 'Is Switzerland off?'

'Oh—Switzerland! Yes, that's off.' Dorry sat down beside the fire. 'I'll tell you in a sec. I'm tired. I've had a bit of a shock, I think. Give me a minute or two.'

'She's going to swoon again,' said Merle.

Dorry did not seem to hear. But Dorothy Cheyne sprang up. 'Will somebody please stifle Merle? Here's a cushion. I can't stand much more.—D.B., tell us what has happened!'

Dorothy Bayne lay staring into the fire. 'There was a letter from Father. He sent it to the Head and asked her to tell me gently. Mother's ill; I had no idea. They've known for some time. They were trying not to tell me, but they couldn't let me go abroad, so now I've had to know. She has to have an operation, and it will be rather bad. I couldn't be out of the country.' She turned from them and hid her face against the arm of the chair.

D.C. flung herself upon her. 'Oh, D.B.! That's awful! And you can't come?'

'Mother! I can't believe it. I haven't taken it in yet,' Dorry whispered.

'That's horribly hard lines, old thing!' Gwen exclaimed.

'We won't talk about it.' D.B. raised her head. 'I'd hate it, and I know you all would. You don't know what to say; there isn't anything to say! But if I'm bad-tempered you'll put up with me, I know.'

'When will you know how she is, D.B.?' Edna asked.

'They can't do it for a week or two. We have to wait. I'm going home for the week-end to see her. She wanted me, but she didn't want me to know till it was over. So they weren't going

to tell me. They're bricks! Father says she's very brave, and by his letter I know he's being splendid. I'm going to try to be plucky too.'

'Won't you be able to come and join us later on, D.B.?' Dorothy Cheyne pleaded.

'Father says Mother will take a long time to recover from the effects of the thing. I couldn't, D.C. I couldn't be so far away.'

'It would help you to forget!' D.C. wailed.

'I'm not sure that I want to forget.' Dorry's lips quivered. 'The only way I can share in it is by thinking about her and Father. To forget would be awful; I'd be an outsider. I couldn't go away and enjoy myself. I'll write to Mrs Warner and Vangie; they'll understand.'

'Vangie will be horribly cut up. And I sha'n't have any fun without you.' D.C. was bitterly disappointed.

Dorry's face quivered. 'You mustn't go on thinking about me. I'd hate to spoil your fun.'

'I don't know how you can think about yourself at all, when D.B.'s in such trouble, Dorothy Cheyne,' said Pat.

'I wanted D.B. I was looking forward so much to showing her everything!'

'You must write and tell me all about it.' Dorry put aside the shadow that had fallen on her and tried to comfort her friend. 'I shall look forward to your letters. You'll describe it all so rippingly, D.C.'

The train that took Dorothy Cheyne to London to spend a few days with her parents until Mrs Warner's brother was able to escort her back to Montreux, carried Dorothy Bayne to town for the week-end at home. The girls said good-bye at Victoria, and each went away with a troubled father. For D.C.'s father, knowing the whole story, looked curiously at D.B., as if he would have liked to offer his apologies on his daughter's behalf, and then looked gravely at his own girl. Perhaps, he thought, the other two were to be envied, in spite of the shadow overhanging them. D.B., clinging to her father's arm, had forgotten school and Switzerland and Dorothy Cheyne, as she begged for the latest news.

CHAPTER X. GUIDES AT 'OLD WHITEY.'

'May we have a word with you, Cox?' asked Miss Dickinson, after a careful look to see that no girls were near. 'Old Whitey' did not dream that in private Miss Willcox was 'The Cox' to her Staff. They would have loved the Staff and the Cox more if they had known.

The Head laughed, and threw open her study door. 'Come in and sit by the fire. What a night! No more picnics this term. The hills will be wet for months.'

'Yes, the paths are done for till next spring, unless we have frost,' said Miss Thame, sinking into a big chair. 'This is cosy, Cox!—Sit on my lap, Dick!'

'The floor will do for me. I'm 'umble,' and Miss Dickinson squatted on the hearth-rug.

'And why this deputation?' asked the Head.

'To ask if you don't think it's time we carried out your idea and started Guides in the school?' said Miss Thame.

'Brief and to the point,' Miss Willcox commented. 'Do you feel ready to take on the job? It means a great deal of extra work, I suppose?'

'Our Captain-to-be is prepared,' said Dicky.

'I've been Captain for two years,' Miss Thame explained. 'I love Guiding. But I felt I should like to know the girls a little before starting in earnest.'

'Have you talked to them, as we suggested?'

'Oh yes! A number are very keen, and the rest will follow their lead. We shall have a very good Company. I suggest starting at once with the seniors as Rangers; there are enough of them for at least one Ranger patrol. They'll like to feel they are asked to be different from the juniors.'

'We feel they need a new interest, Cox,' said Dicky. 'They have netball and gym, but they're missing our picnics to the hills. I'm really troubled about Dorothy Bayne; she isn't happy. She'll throw herself into the Guides, and it will be good for her.'

'What's the matter with her?' asked the Head. 'She isn't worrying about her mother now, is she? The operation was serious, but it's safely over. Dorothy isn't brooding over it, I hope?'

'I don't think so, but it was a shock at the time,' said Dicky. 'But the poor kid has had a hard term, Cox. All that essay-business upset her badly.'

'I know it was a severe disappointment to her.'

'It was more than that. For a while she lost her faith in Dorothy Cheyne; and they'd been chums for years.'

'I don't blame her,' said Miss Thame. 'I was amazed that she could forgive Dorothy Cheyne. It wasn't an easy thing to overlook.'

'Dorry feels things deeply. Dorothy Cheyne doesn't. That always makes a friendship hard,' said Dicky.

'Is she still brooding over that trouble, Dick?' asked the Head.

'Cox, I don't know. But she isn't happy. It may be anxiety; her mother's recovery is very slow. Or she may be thinking of Dorothy Cheyne in Venice and Florence. *It is* very hard on Dorry! She'd have loved to travel. I'm sure she isn't brooding over the past. But it has all hurt her very deeply. We'd really help her if we gave her a big new interest.'

‘I want her as Ranger patrol-leader,’ said Miss Thame. ‘The patrol will have to choose her, of course. But I hope they’ll have the sense to know what’s good for them.’

‘I think they will, in this case. Dorry is a favourite,’ said Miss Willcox.

‘They think much more of her since that trouble early in the term,’ Dicky remarked. ‘They haven’t said much, but the way she stood up for her chum gave her a place in their hearts she had never had before.’

‘And Dorothy Cheyne went down a step or two,’ said Miss Thame. ‘Won’t you be our Lieutenant, Dick? The girls would love it.’

‘My dear, I’m leaving at Easter to go abroad, as you know.’

‘What we don’t know is how we’re going to do without you, Dick,’ said the Head.

‘That’s very nice of you, Cox. I hope my going may be only temporary. Perhaps you’ll have me back again some day.’

‘Whenever you say the word. But you could be Lieutenant for three or four months?’

‘I’ll consider it,’ Dicky promised. ‘Then may we go ahead?’

‘Certainly. I’ll give you my blessing in a special announcement to the whole school tomorrow.’

The new Guide Company was an instant success. A few seniors who were leaving soon or were working hard for public exams decided not to join, Gwen, Elsie, and Sybil among them, but the school as a whole took up the idea heartily. Miss Thame was popular and was recognised as a good Captain. Miss Dickinson as Lieutenant was an unexpected attraction, and the news of her consent was received with wild cheering. A dozen girls from the Fifth and Sixth joined as Rangers, and Pat and Dorothy Bayne were chosen as leaders by the patrols. There were three Guide patrols as well, and a crowd of Brownies, and before Christmas the enrolment had been held and everybody was in uniform.

‘We—are—swish!’ Pat proclaimed. ‘We—are—Guides! We—are—the “Old Whitey”—Company!’

‘Are you telling D.C. all about us, Dorry?’ Edna asked.

‘I hope she’s properly impressed,’ said Vi.

Dorothy Bayne sat at the table writing. Her face was clouded as she answered. ‘I’ve told D.C. a little. But she’ll have to see for herself when she comes back in the spring. I can’t make things as interesting as she can.’

Miss Dickinson was teaching a Brownie her knots in a corner. She glanced at D.B.’s face, but made no comment at the time.

Next day she caught Dorry alone. It was full moon and high tide, and with a south-west gale blowing the waves up the beach, the sea was worth watching. The girls staggered down the lawn after morning school and climbed to the upper windows of the turret on the wall, and sat watching the breakers and listening to the thunder of their fall and the roar of the back-wash tearing down the shingle.

Miss Dickinson waited her chance, and at last found Dorry alone in the upper room. ‘Now, D.B., what’s the matter?’

Dorry turned with a start. ‘Miss Dickinson! Oh—nothing!’

Dicky sat on the window-ledge and drew her big coat more closely round her. ‘I didn’t think you’d tell me an untruth, D.B.’

Dorry flushed. ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that.’

‘I know. Neither did I. But it was untrue, all the same, wasn’t it, Dorry?’

Dorothy said nothing, but stared at the waves.

'Yes, it's very grand and wonderful,' Dicky agreed. 'But why aren't you happy? Are you grudging Dorothy Cheyne her time in Florence?'

'No! Oh, not for a second!'

'Then why are you unhappy when her letters come? And why are you so serious when you write to her? What has she done now?'

'It isn't D.C.' Dorry looked away from Dicky's searching eyes and struggled to steady her voice. 'It's me; it's myself. I'm such a horrible pig. I've tried to be different, but it always comes back.'

'Things do,' Dicky assented. 'You don't drive them out by fighting against them. What about letting me try to help? Last time when we talked things over, they rather melted away, didn't they?'

'You changed everything. I'm still saying thank you inside me,' Dorry said in a low voice. 'But this—it is myself that's wrong. At least, I think so.'

'Tell me why you're such a horrible pig?' Dicky suggested. 'It doesn't sound likely to me.'

D.B. gave a rueful laugh. 'But I am! I—I criticise D.C. I can't help it. It comes from somewhere inside me.'

'What do you find to criticise in D.C.? You aren't going back to that business at the beginning of the term?'

'Oh no! That's done with. We squared that.'

'I thought so. What then, D.B.?'

Dorry spoke unwillingly and only after an unhappy pause. 'She doesn't seem to care about us any longer. She takes no notice of anything I tell her. She seems to have forgotten all about "Whitey's."'

'But she writes to you?' Dicky asked, puzzled. 'I heard her description of Florence that you read to the girls the other day.'

'She writes reams. That's why I say I'm such a pig. If she didn't write there would be something to complain of. But when she writes such long letters, and tells every single thing they do and see, it seems so hateful to find fault!' Dorry exclaimed.

'As you put it, perhaps it does. But you mean that D.C.'s letters are all about herself, and that she ignores the news you send her?'

'That's it. It's rotten of me to care. I'd never have told anybody.'

'But I've seen your face as you read her letters. You've looked disappointed, and I've wondered why. What did Dorothy say about the Guides? I suppose you told her?'

'I told her all about them, when we first started. I was so keen and so thrilled about Guiding,' Dorry confessed.

'Yes? That was natural. What did D.C. say?'

'She said it seemed queer to think of Guides at Whitey's. She hasn't said any more.'

'Do you mean she has never referred to them again?'

'No.' Dorry stared out at the waves. 'I think she's forgotten.'

Miss Dickinson pursed her lips. 'Does she know you're a patrol-leader?'

Dorry turned to her and spoke vehemently. 'I couldn't tell her. I was so bucked when they chose me. I was afraid D.C. would say that was queer too.'

Dicky nodded. 'I don't blame you. Poor Dorothy Cheyne!'

'*Poor* D.C.? Miss Dickinson!' cried Dorothy Bayne. 'Are you trying to make me sorry for her again? It's what you did before. I was feeling sorry for myself, because D.C.'s my chum

and yet she doesn't care about the things I do.'

'I'm not trying to do anything,' Dicky retorted. 'You can do it all for yourself. I'm intensely sorry for Dorothy Cheyne, though she is to blame, of course. She's self-centred, and that's always sad. She doesn't think for other people or see their point of view. You knew all that before, but you decided to stand by her. You're only seeing it from a new angle. I'm *very* sorry for her. She's paying a heavy price for her winter abroad. She's seeing Italy, but she's losing her friend.'

'Oh——!' said Dorry. 'Please go on! Do you think I'm going to turn her down?'

'Not deliberately. But you may find it has happened before you know. I'm really sorry for D.C. It's disastrous to make your friend feel you don't care about the things that matter to her. Isn't it, Dorry? Don't you agree with me?'

'I suppose it is,' D.B. admitted. 'I hadn't thought of that. But—but what if your chum didn't let it interfere, Dicky? Then it would be all right, wouldn't it?'

'It would be very generous. But it would be very hard to do.'

Dorry stared at the sea again. 'You think I should go on telling her things?'

'Do you really, honestly, believe D.C. isn't interested?'

There was a long pause. Dorothy Bayne, sitting chin in hand, was digging into her mind to find out what she really did believe. 'D.C. will be interested when she comes back in the spring,' she said at last. 'If she doesn't know things, she'll be upset. I think she does care, but it doesn't occur to her to say so.'

'She takes it for granted that you'll understand and go on believing in her interest, so she doesn't trouble to show any keenness about school news, but tells you all about her doings?'

'Yes, I think that's it. She doesn't write to the others. All her letters are to me. She always did take me for granted,' Dorry confessed. 'She did it before, about those essays; she never thought I'd mind. She doesn't think I'll mind now. I *am* a pig, Miss Dickinson! I ought to be as sporting as she thinks I am.'

'All the same, it isn't pleasant to be taken for granted,' said Dicky. 'A more thoughtful person would remember you might possibly have feelings too.'

'It's horrid,' Dorry owned. 'I'd rather D.C. remembered. But in a way it is a compliment! She's so sure of me, isn't she?'

Dicky laughed. 'You'll justify her, of course. Don't be too much hurt if her letters are full of statues and pictures. Remember how new and thrilling it all is.'

'I'd be thrilled myself,' Dorry admitted. 'I won't be hurt, and I'll go on writing to her. But I can't shove things I care heaps about down her throat. I'll tell her enough to satisfy her.'

'That's all you can do,' Dicky assented. 'Keep on friendly terms till she comes back in the spring. Then things may be all right again. You can't open your heart to someone who won't understand.'

'No.' Dorry drew a long breath. 'It *is* a little sad. Yes, I see now; it *is* sad for D.C.! I can't tell her as much as I'd like to do. For it would pass over her head, and I'd be upset. It's much better not to risk it! I'll tell her about netball and the concert and dancing. Is it true that you won't be here in the spring, Miss Dickinson? It's awful to think of!'

'I'm going abroad for some months. But I feel sure I shall come back to "Whitey's." Perhaps you and D.C. will still be here.'

'I shall miss you horribly,' Dorothy groaned.

'I'll be eager to come back, to see how things are going. You'll be glad to have D.C.'s company again. Aren't you lonely in your little room with only small Dorothy to speak to?'

'I was at first. Now I rather like it. There's more time to think.'

Miss Dickinson made no comment, but left D.B. to watch the waves and to think over her new attitude to Dorothy Cheyne.

But that evening Dicky sought the Head's study once more. 'Cox, I've made a discovery. Dorothy Bayne likes sleeping alone with that baby because it gives her more time to think.'

'H'm! What does she want to think so much about, Dick?'

'I suspect it's about the difficulty of friendship with a pal who takes her for granted and hasn't a spark of understanding or consideration for anyone else's feelings.'

'That's putting it rather strongly, isn't it?'

'Yes. It isn't as bad as all that. But Dorothy isn't very happy; she has the temperament that turns things over and over and can't let them go.'

'She has imagination, in fact,' said the Head. 'Thanks, Dick. We'll make a change next term. I'll speak to Matron. Hasn't Guiding helped as much as you hoped?'

'Guiding is great. Dorothy's very keen, and she's developing into an excellent leader. She'll be all right, Cox, but she shouldn't have too much time for thinking.'

And Dicky, very careful of the confidence she had forced from Dorry, did not explain that the trouble was not in the past, but was caused afresh by every enthusiastic letter from Dorothy Cheyne, bubbling over with excitement and the joy of travel.

CHAPTER XI. A CHRISTMAS GIFT.

‘Had a jolly Christmas, D.B?’ cried Merle, as ‘Old Whitey’ met in the middle of January.

‘Very quiet, because of Mother,’ Dorry explained. ‘The boys were all away, staying with cousins. It’s the first time we’ve been separated for Christmas. But Mother and Father and I were together, and perhaps you can guess how we felt!’

‘I’d forgotten about your mother,’ Merle confessed.

‘You would forget,’ said Vi. ‘Can’t you see they’ve been thinking all through Christmas that they might not have had her with them at all?—How is she, D.B.?’

‘Really making progress. But it will be two years before she’s herself again. It’s wonderful to have her so much better!’

‘I say, D.B., you and these two are coming up into the Sixth. Did you know?’ cried Pat.

‘Willy told us last term,’ said D.B. ‘Is it very awesome to be Sixth?’

Pat and Grace and Edna laughed. ‘We’re glad to have you,’ Edna remarked. ‘Now that you’re P.-L. and such a boss, you ought to be in the Sixth with us.’

‘And Matron’s changed your room, D.B.,’ cried Merle. ‘You’re with us now.’

Dorothy paused. ‘No, really? I’ve slept on the other side ever since I came to “Whitey’s.” How queer! I shall turn the wrong way every time from force of habit. Who’s to have my bed and take care of my baby?’

‘Grace and I are in the small room,’ said Edna. ‘Dorothy D.’s moved out too.’

Vi groaned. ‘D.B., it’s a nightmare. Matron’s shuffled us like cards. You and I and Merle are to have Dot and a new kid, another infant. Isn’t it rotten?’

‘Just us three would have been ripping. But two juniors will spoil everything,’ Merle wailed.

Dorothy Bayne laughed. ‘It will all be so new to me that an extra junior doesn’t matter much. I shall hardly feel it’s “Old Whitey”; in the Sixth, and sleeping in a crowd! I’m glad to be with you two, of course, but I was used to the little room and D.C., and I was hoping we’d have it again when she comes back. Isn’t Matron weird?’

‘Have you heard from D.C.? Where was she for Christmas?’

‘Rome. They had a gorgeous time. I’ve brought her letters; I knew you’d like to hear about the festive days in the hotel. Mrs Warner and Vangie gave her ripping presents. I’ve something to tell you two at night!’ Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright.

‘Tell us, D.B.! Don’t be a pig!’

‘No time now. I’m going to unpack.’

As Dorothy arranged her drawers in her new room, she glanced at the juniors, busy in their corner. Dot had thrown herself on her in exuberant welcome, overjoyed to be allowed to remain with her own particular senior, though in a new room. The other child, a nine-year-old also, had black eyes and a black curly mop, and gave her name as Blodwen Howell.

‘No need to ask where you come from!’ Dorry laughed. ‘*Nos da!* No, I don’t speak Welsh. I picked that up on holiday in Carnarvonshire.—Look after her, Dot.—Dot and Blodwen! My hat!’

‘Tell us, D.B.!’ Merle begged, when bedtime came. ‘It *is* ripping to have you here! Did D.C. send you something from Rome for Christmas?’

‘D.C. wouldn’t have a penny to spare,’ said Vi. ‘She’d need all her pennies to buy presents for her millionairesses.’

‘To say nothing of her home folks,’ Dorry agreed, laughing. ‘No, but somebody else did.’

‘Mrs Warner? Evangeline? How gorgeous of them! Because you couldn’t go?’

‘Mrs Warner wrote me the loveliest letter, asking about Mother and saying she’d waited till the operation would be over and the first anxiety past. She’d heard from D.C. that Mother was doing well, so by Christmas she wrote to me. She asked me to choose some present from her and Vangie; she didn’t send anything, because D.C. had seemed doubtful what I should like and had said I wouldn’t care for jewellery. So Mrs Warner asked if there was anything I was particularly keen on, and she said if there was nothing I could suggest she’d send something from Rome. I didn’t like to choose, but Mother and Father said I’d better, as she really wanted me to have something from her and Vangie; they said if I didn’t, she would certainly send something, and it might be something I wouldn’t care for. I didn’t want jewellery or curios, but there was something I did want very badly. So I wrote to her, and she told me to go and choose it as soon as I came back to school.’

‘And what was it, D.B.? How ripping of her!’

‘I wish somebody would ask me to choose a present!’ Merle sighed. ‘It’s never happened to me yet. I’d love to have a present I’d chosen myself!’

‘You know that exhibition of pictures—pastel drawings of the Downs—that Dicky took us to see last term?’

‘Rather! Lovely, they were. Are you going to have one of those? Oh, D.B.—topping! A real artist’s original picture; not a copy!’

‘I told Mrs Warner how much I loved the Downs, and how much I would like to have one of those pictures. She wrote saying it was a lovely choice, and I was to go and choose a pair, one from her and one from Vangie. I’ve told Willy, and I’m to go with Dicky to-morrow to choose them.’

‘Oh, D.B.! Lucky dog! What fun to choose!’

‘It will be awfully hard. She’ll want them all,’ said Vi. ‘What shall you have, D.B.? Hills? Or dew-ponds? Or woods? Or bridges? Or old houses? The man had painted everything, I believe.’

‘I’ll have to see them again. I’ve a mixed idea of lovely colours and windy skies and blue haze. I know I wanted them all. It will be very hard to choose!’ and D.B. went to bed with her mind full of pastel drawings of the Downs.

‘You’ll hang the pictures in our room during term, won’t you, D.B.?’ was Dot’s greeting next morning.

‘Hello! I thought you babes were asleep? We spoke quietly for your sakes!’ said Dorry.

‘We’d rather you didn’t trouble,’ Dot explained. ‘We were awake, but I told Blotty about not talking, so I couldn’t do it myself.’

‘You’ll soon be sat on, if you do,’ said Vi. ‘What do you call the other one—Blotty? How awful!’

‘You’ll show us the pictures, won’t you, D.B.?’ Dot coaxed.

‘I’ll hang them here, of course. I shall want to look at them too,’ Dorry promised.

The whole Upper School was interested in the shopping expedition next day, and the Fifth and Sixth would have liked to go in a crowd to help Dorry make her choice. As that was not possible, they crowded round her on her return, begging to be shown the pictures at once.

'They're heavy,' Dorothy laughed, as she laid the big flat package on the table. 'But I couldn't bear to leave them to be sent up. Dicky helped me to carry them. It was awfully hard to choose! Even worse than I expected!' She unwrapped the pictures and set them on the mantel-piece.

'Oh, D.B.! How lovely! Both dew-ponds!' cried Pat.

'I love those dew-ponds.' Dorry did not explain how much association and memories of D.C. had influenced her choice.

One was of a round gleaming pond, on wind-swept green hills, with flying clouds above and blue slopes behind. As soon as she saw it, Dorry had cried to Dicky, 'I must have that one! It's where we sat and talked, and you made me understand.'

The other was also a pond, round and blue, very still, with a background of autumn trees and a glimpse of purple Weald in the distance.

'It's where D.C. and I met. That's my second choice. I'll see the rest, but I know I shall choose these two,' D.B. had said to Dicky.

She did not explain all her reasons to the girls. 'Some of them were too big. I liked the small ones better, and I have a very little room at home. I wanted hills, and I've always loved these dew-ponds. There couldn't be anything I'd like better.'

'Shall you tell Mrs Warner what you chose?' asked Gwen.

'As well as I can. Perhaps when she comes back to Hurst I'll be able to show them to her.'

'I'm glad you sleep in our room, D.B.,' said Vi. 'Now we shall have the Downs all through the winter.'

'That's a compliment to the artist.'

'You can feel the wind in that one,' said Merle.

A fortnight later Miss Dickinson found Dorry alone in the gymnasium one evening, after the Guide meeting. 'Have you told Dorothy Cheyne about the pictures, Dorry? What did she think of your choice?'

'She said they sounded very pretty and that Vangie hopes she'll see them some day.'

'Dorothy didn't guess why you had chosen those two? Didn't you tell her?'

'No, Miss Dickinson, I didn't. I felt, if she didn't remember——' Dorry paused.

Dicky agreed. 'It's the sort of thing you can't say to people. I know how you felt. If the dew-ponds meant so much less to Dorothy than to you, you couldn't put it into her head. How are her letters now?'

Dorry gave a little laugh. 'Very full of Rome. And—oh, Miss Dickinson! They're going on to Athens! I could weep about Athens!' she laughed again.

'But you won't. You had Christmas with your mother.'

Dorry looked at her quickly. 'You do understand! That's the whole point, of course. No, I sha'n't weep. But isn't it topping for D.C.?''

'Is she still uninterested in school affairs?'

'She doesn't say much.'

'And you won't give her away again. Do you tell her about the Guides?'

'No,' Dorry answered, her eyes downcast. 'Perhaps I'm a pig. I'm sorry about it. But D.C. has forgotten all about the Guides, and it's so long since I mentioned them that I don't like to begin again now. She'll hear all about them when she comes back in May—if she does come back then. Vangie wants to go to Norway, and it will be too early in the year till after Easter.'

'Norway! What a tour! But will they take Dorothy wherever they go?'

'She hopes so. Vangie says she couldn't go without her.'

‘It’s evident Dorothy Cheyne’s letters are long enough,’ Dicky said to herself. ‘But obviously they’re all about her own doings. It’s a quiet little tragedy for both those girls. For D.B. because she is seeing this callous selfish side of her friend so plainly, and for D.C. because she is so unconscious through it all. But I believe Dorry is large-hearted enough to save the friendship from collapse. It’s no wonder she can’t write about the Guides, or anything else that she feels deeply. D.C. has only herself to blame. It would serve her right if she came home to find that D.B. had found another chum to confide in. But I don’t see anybody else looming in sight—fortunately for D.C.!’

‘Is your new plan working well, Dick?’ Miss Willcox asked that evening, as she sat with her Staff after supper for a few minutes. ‘Dorothy Bayne seems much brighter this term.’

‘She’s still gloating over her dew-ponds,’ Miss Thame said, laughing.

‘She has adjusted some little points that were worrying her,’ said Dicky. ‘My new plan, Cox? Oh, you mean putting her to sleep with a crowd! I’m sure it was wise. She has no time for brooding now.’

‘Not with Dot Denton and Blodwen Howell in her room!’ Miss Thame remarked. ‘I suppose you’ve heard Blodwen’s new name? They call her the School Blot. It *may* be her black head, but I think it’s more her black record. She’s a handful!’

‘We’ll give them all something new to think about—all the seniors,’ said Miss Willcox. ‘I’m booking seats for the Upper School for this,’ and she held up a handbill.

It announced the visit of a world-famed actress with her company, to the town, for one day only. Two performances would be given of *The Merchant of Venice*; ‘Portia’ was one of the parts which had made the actress famous.

‘We’ll do the thing in style and go to the evening show,’ Miss Willcox added.

‘Cox, you jewel! What a joy! I’ve longed to see her!’ cried Miss Thame.

Dicky seized the Head and waltzed with her round the room. ‘Oh, cheers! A farewell party for me! At the end of term, so you can say it’s in my honour! How the girls will love it! It will be the talk of the whole term!’

‘It will appeal especially to Dorothy Bayne,’ said Miss Willcox, freeing herself from Dicky’s embrace. ‘I’m overjoyed to be able to give her the chance. You know her ambitions, I suppose?’

‘I didn’t know,’ said Miss Thame. ‘Is she really keen on the stage? Her Rosalind was certainly very good last Christmas.’

‘She has a real gift,’ said Dicky, sobering. ‘And she has sympathy. That will be invaluable to her. I’ve great hopes for Dorothy, far more than I have for Dorothy Cheyne.’

‘Why, what are her plans?’

‘My dear, she’s the novelist of the century. Didn’t you know?’

‘In her own mind,’ said the Head. ‘I confess I share your doubts, Dick.’

‘She hasn’t an earthly chance, Cox—unless something changes her radically.’

Miss Thame sniffed. ‘Dorothy Cheyne a novelist? A journalist, perhaps. I’ll not deny her powers of description and of telling a story. But a novelist! My dear, she hasn’t a shred of imagination. How is she going to write a novel?’

‘No, she couldn’t even put herself in her friend’s place over those essays,’ Miss Willcox remarked.

‘It isn’t only the essays, Cox. She simply can’t see anyone else’s point of view. As for understanding how people feel, even her friends—she just isn’t there, that’s all. Her novel, if she writes it, will be hard and brilliant, vividly descriptive but quite without human interest.’

'Poor child!' said the Head. 'You're hard on her, Dick. Perhaps she'll learn; there's time yet.'

'She's hard on other people, Cox,' said Dicky.

The visit of 'Portia' was the excitement of the term, as soon as it became known to the girls. Miss Willcox booked seats for the Third and Fourth forms for the afternoon performance, and Mademoiselle agreed to go with the younger girls and to stay at home at night. The seniors, overjoyed to hear they were to go in the evening, talked of little else for weeks.

Dorry told the great news to D.C. in her next letter. In her excitement she could not keep it to herself. But D.C.'s answer was full of important news of her own; Mrs Warner had decided on a visit to Sicily, and Dorothy could think of nothing but her great good fortune. Writing from Naples, she had much to tell, also, of Vesuvius and Pompeii.

Dorry sighed as she took the letter downstairs to read to the rest of the form. 'If now and then I had a letter that I couldn't show to everybody, it would be rather jolly! D.C.'s letters are very interesting, but they're so *public*! They'll do for anybody. I sometimes wonder if she even reads mine. I'm sure she loses them as soon as she's read them once! It would have been nice to think she was thrilled about "The Merchant." Doesn't she know what a big chance it is for me?'

D.C.'s neglect was losing its sting, however. Dorry was growing used to having the interesting points in her letters ignored, and as Dicky had said, she was adjusting her own point of view. She laughed even as she sighed. 'It's just D.C.'s way. She can't help it. What a topping time she's having!—Merle! Gwen! Vi and Sybil! Here's a yarn from the traveller; she's been to Vesuvius! Care to hear all about it?'

'There won't be anywhere Dorothy Cheyne hasn't been,' said Edna.

'There'll be no living with her when she does finally condescend to return to these humble walls,' Pat retorted. 'Let's hear the yarn, D.B.!'

'I shall expect yards of stuff for the mag next term,' said Gladys, the editor of 'Old Whitey's' magazine.

'Yards! My dear, you'll have reams—volumes! The mag won't be big enough for D.C.,' Elsie scoffed. 'She'll be writing for the local paper.'

'Fire away, Dorry!—Shut up, all of you!' Gwen commanded.

CHAPTER XII. RED DAISIES.

The day of the great performance came towards the end of March. Eagerly looked forward to for weeks, when it came it almost brought tragedy.

It was a Saturday, and the youngest children spent the morning gardening, with several of the Sixth advising them and keeping order. The juniors were inexperienced gardeners and were usually glad of help. And sudden little quarrels between Dot, Blodwen, Enid, and others were not unusual.

The junior gardens were in a sunny southern border, protected by an old wall from winter winds. The children worked without hats, wearing blazers over their tunics; the seniors walked up and down bareheaded in the sun, and interfered to keep peace when necessary.

Vi, practising in the music-room, was interrupted by Merle, who burst into the room and poured out an incoherent story. 'D.B.—Dicky—and that little rotter, Dot! But Dorry did answer back; she can't say she wasn't rude. She must have been off her head for a moment. It wasn't like D.B. at all. Vi, can't we do something? If Dicky reports D.B. for rudeness——'

Dorry came into the room. Her face was white and frightened. She dropped limply into a chair by the table. 'Have you told Vi?'

'I was just telling her. You've done for yourself now, D.B.,' Merle said gloomily. 'To-day, of all days! Why couldn't you be more careful?'

Dorry sat gazing miserably down at the tablecloth. She knew what she had done. For a moment she could not speak.

'Fancy cheeking Dicky, of all people!' said Vi. 'She's such a good sort. You must have been off your head.'

'Good sort or not, she's bound to report D.B. to Willy for this; and that will be the end of to-night for Dorry. It is rotten luck!' Merle exclaimed.

'You can't call it that.' Dorry, though heart-broken, was honest. 'I did cheek her; I was abominably rude. Of course, I was off my head at the time, between those kids and this evening's show. The infants had made me mad, and I suppose I was too worked up about to-night to stand any more. When Dicky went for me, I didn't know what I was saying, and I slanged her. I was sorry the minute after. But the mischief's done now.'

'You could apologise,' Merle hinted.

Dorothy winced, and shrank. 'No, I couldn't.'

'It *would* seem rather like doing it so that you'd be allowed to go to the play with the rest of us,' Vi agreed.

'It isn't that. I couldn't do it till after to-night, in any case, of course. But I don't believe I could ever go to her and say I'm sorry,' Dorothy jerked. 'I never have been able to. I should feel such an ass. Mother says she could never make me say I was sorry, even as a small kid.'

'I wonder if Dicky will report you?' Vi said. 'She's tremendously understanding sometimes.'

'My dear idiot, of course she will. She'll feel she has to,' said Merle. 'I'm afraid there's no hope, old dear,' to Dorry.

'I know,' Dorry said drearily. 'Oh, she'll report me right enough. And there's no doubt what Willy will say. It's that little bounder Dot who's at the bottom of it. She made me mad,

and I passed it on to Dicky.'

'What happened?' asked Vi. 'You needn't have chosen Dicky to work off your wrath on! What did the kid do, Dorry?'

'She's an impudent little monkey. I was on duty while the babes were gardening, and I offered some advice; it was about those red daisies the kids are so keen on. I told Dot she had too many in her plot and she ought to divide them, and suggested she should give some to Blodwen, to help her to start her garden. Dot and The Blot are bosom friends, so it seemed sensible. I didn't know the daisies were the apple of Dot's eye and the darlings of her heart, so to speak. She said: "Sha'n't give any to anybody!"—so I hauled her out and lectured her for speaking to a senior like that. She was rude again and answered back, and then refused to say she was sorry. So I said unless she apologised I wouldn't let her come to tea with the rest tomorrow. It's Blotty's birthday, and I'd given her leave to have a party, and of course Dot was asked. I left the kid in tears, but she wouldn't say she was sorry.—What's the matter with Vi?' suspiciously.

'It sounds so awfully like you and Dicky, that's all. Don't be mad, Dorry; I'm horribly upset about you and to-night. But I do think you've run up against another of yourself in Dot.'

Merle interposed hastily. 'And then, before you'd got over the row with the kid, Dicky and you had a collision, and of course you let off steam, and she didn't like it. It all happened because you were so thrilled about to-night. That's what had worked you up in the first place. It *is* hard lines! I suppose we couldn't go to Dicky and explain?'

'I saw her go into the Head's study half an hour ago. It's too late,' Vi said. 'I don't think it would be any use going to Willy herself.'

'Not a scrap,' Dorry groaned. 'She'd ask if I had apologised to Dicky. Thanks, all the same; but I'd rather you didn't.'

More than once during the afternoon her friends hinted that she might still save the situation by an apology; but Dorothy's sense of shame would not allow her to offer this before the great event of the evening; it would have been too obvious an appeal to Dicky's mercy.

That Miss Dickinson would have reported her, neither she nor her friends doubted for a moment. Dicky was jolly and understanding; but she did not know about the trouble with the juniors which had set Dorothy's sensitive soul on edge. So she could not be expected to make allowances, or to overlook grave rudeness from a senior.

Merle suggested that she and Vi should be a deputation, to explain that Dorry had been over-excited all day, and then had been upset by Dot; but D.B. refused to allow them to go to Dicky.

'She'd say, "Why doesn't Dorothy come to me herself?" and if you said that I hate saying I'm sorry, she'd say, "That's shirking." I *am* shirking; I always funk saying I'm sorry. But I'm not going to have you tell her so.'

All afternoon, and all through tea, and during the early evening, Dorothy waited for the dreaded message to come, forbidding her to go to the play. 'They might tell me and have it over. They're waiting till the last moment before dashing my hopes to the ground,' she whispered to Merle. 'I wonder if Dicky really thinks I'm still expecting to go?'

'I guess she's hoping you'll go and say you're sorry,' Merle remarked. 'She'll hate to feel she's doing you out of the play. She's a jolly good sort. She'll feel quite as bad as you will. But I don't see what else she can do.'

Early supper-time came, and no message had come to Dorry. Looking bewildered, she went down with the rest. 'I suppose I'll be sent to bed with the kids, when you all go off,' she

said unhappily to Vi, and in her misery and disappointment she could hardly eat.

The rest of the senior party were excited and noisy, and the meal seemed already part of the evening's enjoyment, since no mistresses were present and the girls were left to themselves.

'They're having a private dinner with the Head,' said Pat, laughing. 'They're as keen on the play as we are, but they don't want us to see how thrilled they are.'

Miss Dickinson appeared in the doorway. 'Has everybody had enough to last till half-past eleven? We don't want you fainting with excitement. Hurry, then; dress as quickly as you can. You have twenty minutes; the clock's a little slow. We shall start in twenty minutes, with or without you,' and she vanished, racing upstairs to dress, like the youngest of them.

The girls ran after her in a laughing crowd. Only Dorothy hesitated, and caught Merle by the arm. 'She didn't say a word to me!'

'I know. I was waiting for it. It's awfully queer. What shall you do?'

'Do? Be ready; and if I'm not stopped I shall go,' Dorry exclaimed. 'I don't understand. Dicky can't have forgotten! She can't—she *can't* mean to say nothing about it! I don't know what it means. But until I'm told to stay at home, *I'm going!*' and she raced after the others.

In a whirl of bewildered doubt and excitement she changed her frock and brushed her wavy hair. 'Can I really be going, after all? But Miss Willcox would never overlook what I said! Can Dicky possibly not have told her yet? But—but what *does* it mean?'—and, still incredulous, her mind half-stunned, wildly hoping and fearing, she followed the rest down to the hall, conscious of an impulse to keep behind Merle and Vi, an impulse which she loathed so much that she deliberately took a front place, and waited for the words of doom from Miss Willcox or Miss Dickinson.

'Come along, girls! Is everybody there? Then the sooner we start the better,' and the head-mistress hurried them away, enjoying their excitement and delight.

All the way to the theatre, all through the thrilling pause before the curtain rose, even through the first scene, Dorothy sat tense and silent, asking herself what it meant. Then she was lost in the play and in the wonderful acting; but the question overwhelmed her again between the acts, and she spent the evening in alternating states of self-forgetting glamour and wild questioning periods. 'What does it mean?' she whispered once to Merle. 'Did I dream it all? Or was I rude to Dicky?'

'You jolly well were,' Merle assured her, sympathetic but uncompromising. 'I don't know; somebody must be mad, you or Dicky or Willy. But you're here, and that's the main thing.'

It was not everything, however; Dorry knew she would not rest until she understood.

'Dicky's enjoying it as much as anybody,' said Vi. 'She couldn't bear to make you miss it, so she hasn't told Willy.'

'If I thought that——' Dorothy began. And then the curtain went up.

Tired out with excitement, but all thrilled to the limit, they went home at last, and gathered in the dining-room for a special supper of cocoa and sandwiches and cakes. 'Now very quietly to bed!' the head-mistress warned them. 'I trust you not to wake one single junior. Save up all you haven't already said till to-morrow morning. There can't be much, judging by what I've heard on the way home.'

The girls laughed, and whispered their good-nights as they passed her in the doorway. 'And thank you ever so much for letting us go, Miss Willcox. It's been gorgeous!' said Gwen, speaking for the rest.

Dorothy was nearly ready for bed, when with a sudden impulse she pulled on her dressing-gown, and opened the door.

‘Hello? Anything wrong?’ whispered Merle.

Dorothy shook her head, and disappeared.

‘She’s gone to Dicky,’ said Vi, with deep satisfaction. ‘Cheers! D.B. wouldn’t have slept, if she hadn’t cleared this up.’

‘Why do you think Dicky let her go?’ asked Merle. ‘Do you think she hadn’t told Willy?’

‘Sure she hadn’t. I don’t know, but I’ve a vague feeling that I understand,’ Vi said cryptically. ‘I believe Dicky’s jolly wise. Let’s put out the light, and just say “Night!” when D.B. comes back. She’ll tell us in the morning.’

‘Dorothy! Do you know it’s a quarter to one?’ Miss Dickinson looked really startled when Dorry appeared at her door. ‘My dear girl, are you ill?’

‘No—yes—I had to come. I couldn’t have slept. Miss Dickinson, why did you let me go to-night? Didn’t you tell Miss Willcox how—how badly I’d behaved?’

Dicky saw that to order her back to bed would be useless until the matter was settled. She said quietly, ‘No, I didn’t tell her. I knew you weren’t yourself when you spoke to me as you did. Over-excitement, or something else, had upset you; I knew you’d be sorry very soon. And I didn’t want you to miss the play. I was looking forward to it too much myself. I couldn’t have enjoyed it if you had been left at home, on account of what was, I am sure, an accident. It wasn’t your real self who spoke. Wasn’t I right?’

‘Oh, you were! You did understand!’ Dorothy was half-crying, between gratitude and overstrain. ‘Oh, Miss Dickinson, I am sorry! I was rude. But one of the juniors had upset me, and I’d been worked up for days about this evening. I was sorry the moment I’d said it. But—but I couldn’t say so, somehow.’

‘I know,’ Dicky said. ‘It isn’t easy. I knew there was something behind. You won’t hurt me again like that, will you?’

‘Never! I never could. I’m awfully sorry!’ Dorothy cried. ‘You’re a—a saint! And you do understand.’

Dicky laughed. ‘I try to understand. You girls don’t always help as much as you might. It isn’t easy. But I’m certainly not a saint. Now run off to bed, Dorry, and to-morrow try to be more understanding with the juniors. Patience isn’t an easy thing to learn.’

‘Oh, I will try,’ Dorothy vowed. She turned at the door. ‘I’d better lose some marks. It would seem fairer.’

‘Very well,’ Dicky said, laughing. ‘We’ll see about that in the morning.’

‘Thank you a thousand times for letting me go!’ and Dorry crept away through the silent house, and was grateful that Merle and Vi asked no questions.

Many girls slept little that night; they were still too full of the evening’s treat, and though loyalty and gratitude to Miss Willcox kept them from talking, they lay thinking it over and recalling scene after scene, speech after speech, character after character. It was none of these things, not even the picture of Portia’s robes and the sound of her beautiful voice in the Trial Scene, which kept Dorry awake, however. She was up against a problem.

What was she to do about Dot? She had told the child she must not go to the birthday party unless she apologised, and Dot had not made any effort at an apology. And yet, in the face of Dicky’s generosity in the much greater matter, how could Dorry be hard and unforgiving?

It seemed simple enough: she must copy Dicky and be generous, allow Dot to have her treat, and trust that the child's natural honesty would bring her to the point of the apology.

'Dicky trusted me, and of course I rose to it. Anyone at all decent would have said she was sorry. I *felt* sorry, because Dicky had been such a sport! It's up to me to try the same thing with Dot. But will the kid understand? Won't she just think I'm soft, and afraid to stick it out?'

That was the problem, and it was a serious one. If Dot did not understand, and mistook forgiveness for weakness, she would feel she had scored over a senior, and Dorothy's position would be undermined. It would surely be wiser to take a strong line, insist on the apology, and then forgive her and be kind to her afterwards. And yet——!

'Dicky took risks with me,' Dorry admitted. 'I might have thought she was soft, and that I could cheek her when I liked. I might have said she was afraid to report me because it would make things so unpleasant; quite half the Sixth would have said she'd been a pig to keep me from the play. It would have been uncomfortable all round. I might have said she'd faked, and it was safe to cheek her. Of course, she knew I wouldn't; I hope I've more sense. She trusted me to do the proper thing. But can I trust Dot to understand? She's only an infant. I don't want to make a mess of things, and Miss Willcox is always talking about upholding the authority and dignity of the Upper School. I don't know what to do! Shall I consult Dicky? She said: "Be more understanding"! *Can* I trust Dot? Won't she merely think me soft?'

She found her answer in the morning, when she was sitting up in bed telling Merle and Vi of her interview with Miss Dickinson. She did not begin to speak, however, till Dot and Blodwen had been sent downstairs, on promise of hearing all about the play at breakfast-time.

'Of course, I apologised on the spot, though I'd said I never could. You have to rise to the occasion when someone treats you as decently as that. I felt as if Dicky had said: "Here's the thing you wanted most of all in the world. I've given it to you. Now you'll simply have to do your share. You're too decent not to." That's how she made me feel; that she'd trusted me, and what was I going to do about it? And there was only one thing she wanted me to do. So I simply hadn't any choice. You have to be as decent as she thinks you are. If you weren't, you'd let her down so horribly.'

'Dicky's jolly wise,' Vi said. 'I'm awfully glad it's settled. She was right enough; it wasn't really you who cheeked her, D.B.'

Dorothy was dressing, her face sober, for her problem had come upon her again. Would Dot rise to the occasion and justify trust, if it were placed in her?

'I must risk it,' was her decision at last. 'There must always be a risk, and one has to take it. If Dot doesn't rise to it, I think she's old enough to feel bad. That's her lookout, not mine. I shall follow Dicky's lead, and trust the kid, and take the risk. We'll see what comes of it.'

After breakfast she sent for Dot, and without any reference to the trouble of the day before, told her she might go to Blodwen's party.

Dot, after an astonished look, said awkwardly, 'Thanks! That all?'

Dorothy, her heart sinking, told her that was all.

Dot ran off, and Dorothy sat drumming on the table with her fingers, and wondering.

Five minutes later, as she went down the corridor, she heard Dot's voice raised eagerly in the junior room. 'Must have done those seniors good, going out last night. Dorothy never asked me to say I was sorry——'

Dorothy passed on, and went straight to Miss Dickinson's study, to tell the story of what seemed her failure.

Dicky listened gravely. ‘My dear, Dot is a very little girl. You must have patience. You can’t expect such a child to respond as quickly as I knew a girl of your age and understanding would do. Don’t be too sure she hasn’t understood. You took her by surprise, remember. Did you expect an apology on the spot? Wait a while and see. She may never say she is sorry, but she may find some way to show you what she feels. In any case, with such a child you must expect to need patience. Watch her, and see if perhaps within a few days she doesn’t find some way to thank you for her party.’

‘I’m afraid she’ll just think I was soft,’ Dorothy said ruefully.

Miss Dickinson laughed, as she remembered certain qualms of her own on the previous afternoon. ‘That is a risk one always has to face. It depends how large one’s trust is, whether it frightens one or not. Wait and see!’

‘I wonder if Dicky was frightened about me?’ Dorothy mused, as she went upstairs. ‘She is a sport, and no mistake! I’m glad I didn’t disappoint her!’

She kept a faint hope that before, or even immediately after, the party, Dot would come, driven by her conscience, to offer her apology. The child did not appear, however, and Dorothy was downcast and disappointed all day.

‘What’s the matter, old chap?’ Merle asked. ‘You’ve cleared up everything; you ought to be extremely cheerful!’

‘What have you done to that kid Dot?’ asked Vi. ‘She seems in the dumps too. Blotty says they can’t drag a word out of her to-day. But you relented and let her have her party, didn’t you?’

‘Yes, I let her go. I couldn’t be a brute to the kid, when Dicky had been so decent to me,’ Dorry assented. ‘I don’t know what’s the matter with her. It isn’t my fault this time.’

The following morning Dorry went to her desk to fetch her books for classes. And then she stood and stared.

On the top ledge of the desk stood a vase, holding a big bunch of red daisies. D.B. remembered her own words: ‘The apple of Dot’s eye and the darlings of her heart.’

‘She’s picked every one she had. For me! She was making up her mind to do it all yesterday. She did understand, after all!’ she said, half-aloud, great relief filling her heart.

‘I say, Dot! Thanks awfully for the daisies!’ Dorothy put her head into the junior-room on her way down the corridor.

Dot, embarrassed and shy, hardly looked up. ‘Glad you like them,’ she said gruffly.

Dorry laughed. ‘I’m frightfully keen on red daisies,’ she said, and went on to her own class.

During the afternoon Dorry slipped into Miss Dickinson’s room and laid a red daisy before Dicky on her desk. Triumphantly she told the story of Dot’s silent apology.

Dicky laughed. ‘My dear, I am so glad! You’ll find Dot easier to manage next term because of this. She’ll give you real love and loyalty now.’

‘Next term! I’m dreading next term,’ Dorry broke out.

‘But why? Do you expect things to be difficult when Dorothy Cheyne comes back, if she does come back?’ Dicky looked thoughtful.

Dorry’s sensitive colour rose. ‘I feel I may need you to help me to understand sometimes, and I can’t have you,’ she said. ‘We shall all miss you next term, but it will be worst for me, because you’ve helped me most,’ and she fled, as shy as Dot herself.

‘She’ll pull through,’ Miss Dickinson said to herself, gazing at the red daisy. ‘Next term may not be easy at first, but D.B.’s understanding will pull her through. I believe she’ll help

her friend as well. It will be interesting to see how matters stand when I come back. I must try to manage it by the autumn, if only to see this D.B. and D.C. business through to the end!’

CHAPTER XIII. THE NEW PREFECT.

The girls of 'Old Whitey' were gathering for the summer-term. The brown hats and coats of the winter were left at home; the bus from the station carried parties of juniors and seniors all wearing white panamas and the long white coats they would wear for Sunday church and the 'croc' walk along the promenade afterwards.

'On summer Sundays 'Old Whitey' really makes a white impression on the prom!' Vi had once said.

Dorothy Bayne entered the senior sitting-room with a touch of shyness. This term would be different and perhaps difficult, without Dicky to understand and suggest a new outlook on problems. Moreover Gladys had left at Easter, and there was a vacancy among the prefects. The Head's choice had fallen on Dorry, and D.B. had just been informed that she had come back to face new duties. She felt a little awkward, for some of those who had been passed over had been in the Sixth longer than herself.

'Hello, D.B.!' cried Merle. 'Are you going to be an awful bully?'

'We'll have to look out,' said Vi. 'I know she's come back bursting with energy and virtue.'

Dorry coloured, but laughed. 'Rag all you like. I don't know why Willy pitched on me. Pat and Grace and Edna were here before we were.'

'Willy knows Grace and I are slackers,' said Pat. 'We didn't want the fag of being prefects.'

'What about me?' Edna demanded.

'Beastly temper. You'd flare out at the kids.'

'Thanks awfully!'

'D.B., have you heard that Dorothy Cheyne's coming back?' cried Vi.

'My dear idiot, D.C. would tell her before anybody,' Merle said scornfully.

Dorothy Bayne, with heightened colour, spoke quickly. 'Miss Willcox has just told me about D.C. But, I say——'

'Hadn't D.C. told you?' There was an incredulous chorus.

'Do you know that the American girl's coming too?' cried Vi.

'Yes, I know,' Dorry said impatiently. 'But Willy says there's a new girl somewhere; a new Sixth-former. You're being awfully rude, babbling away about things she can't understand. Where is she?'

'Here!' a voice said plaintively. 'It's jolly decent of you to remember. I want to know what it's all about.'

A short, rather pretty girl sitting on a windowseat had been listening. She had long fair hair tied back loosely, and she wore a Guide badge on her jumper.

'I'm Marjorie Rogers. I'm to be in the Sixth. Why do they call you D.B.? And why ought the other Dorothy to have written? Why hasn't she? What is it they call her? Who is the American girl? Why is she coming?'

'You do want to know!' Pat said limply. 'Hustle, D.B.! Talk for ten minutes, and you may get through.'

Dorothy Bayne's eyes swept over the new girl, and met a responsive twinkle. Also, she noted the gilt trefoil badge.

'I'll have to know all about it,' Marjorie urged.

'How old are you?' D.B. demanded.

'Sixteen. So are you, aren't you? You're wearing a Ranger badge.'

'That's why I asked you,' D.B. retorted. The centre of her own trefoil was red. 'Why aren't you a Ranger, if you're sixteen?'

'Because we hadn't enough in my last school. I'd like to be one. If you have quite small Guides in your Company you want something different.'

'You'd better join our Rangers. We've a dozen; it isn't bad, for a school the size of "Old Whitey."'

Marjorie laughed. ' "Old Whitey!" It sounds very loving! Why are you called D.B.?'

'Because there were several Dorothys,' Dorry explained. 'My chum was Dorothy Cheyne, and they had to do something about it. So she was D.C. and I was D.B. She's been abroad with some American friends for six months. She's coming back this term, but not for a day or two; and Evangeline Warner is coming with her. We'd better call her Van. She calls herself Vangie, but that's too infantile for school.'

'Ten seconds! And I gave her ten minutes,' Pat sighed. 'Terse and to the point, D.B. You'd better be the novelist instead of D.C.'

'Ass!' said Dorothy Bayne.

'Why didn't your chum tell you she was coming back?' Marjorie pursued her inquiries.

'Hasn't she been writing to you, D.B.?' asked Vi.

'Of course she's been writing,' Dorry sounded irritated. 'But she couldn't tell me every little thing.'

'Little thing! You know that's rot. You're making excuses for D.C.,' Merle suggested. 'Has she been slack lately over letters?'

'This was decided in a hurry, Miss Willcox told me,' Dorothy said more quietly. 'Mrs Warner has to make a sudden trip to the States, so she decided to hurry home with Vangie and D.C., and to send Vangie here for the summer. They'd been planning to go on to Norway.'

'They might have taken you there with them,' said Grace.

Dorothy flushed, and turned to Marjorie. 'I was invited to go to Italy too. But my mother had to have an operation, so I couldn't be out of the country. Mother was ill all winter. She's better now, and nearly strong again. But I've often been glad I didn't go to Switzerland and Italy.'

'Hard luck that it happened just at that time and cut you out of all the fun!'

'Oh well, I was here for the start of the Guides in the school. "Old Whitey" hadn't any Guides when D.C. was here. I wonder how she'll feel about them?'

'But don't you know?' asked Edna. 'I suppose you've told her we have Guides? What did she say?'

There was a moment's pause. Then Dorothy said gravely, 'I told her about the Company when we started. She didn't say much about it when she wrote, so I supposed she wasn't interested. And she never asked any more, so she evidently didn't care. I cared a good deal; I was feeling very keen. I couldn't keep on telling her about it if she didn't care. So I wrote about other things. She won't know very much; we'll have to tell her and make her keen. She'll want to be in it when she finds we all belong.'

‘But I say, D.B.!’ Merle began; ‘it doesn’t sound as if D.C. had cared much about your letters!’

‘D.C.’s written me topping letters!’ Dorothy Bayne exclaimed. ‘She’s told me everything they’ve seen. You know how often I read bits of them to you. She’s been a brick. Her letters have been splendid.’

She spoke so vehemently that Marjorie Rogers looked at her curiously. ‘It sounds almost as if D.B. was trying to convince herself that Dorothy Cheyne’s letters *had* been splendid!’ she said to herself.

Vi had claimed Dorry’s attention. ‘D.B., there’s a great sorrow awaiting you. We may as well break it to you gently. Matron has had another shuffling attack, and you and Merle aren’t going to have the joy of my company and the—er—the stimulating experience of my conversation——’

‘What a bad effort!’ Dorry cried. ‘Do you mean that you and Merle are to be separated? That’s hard lines! I dare say I can bear up, as I’d only had the joy and the stimulating for one term, but it’s rotten for you and Merle.’

‘Pig! You might say you’re sorry!’

‘Oh, I’m cut to the heart! But we shall meet now and then,’ D.B. retorted. ‘Where have they put you?’

‘With Syb and Elsie and two babes,’ Vi grumbled.

‘Syb and Elsie! Oh well, you’ve a fine opening for some stimulating there. It’s needed. Elsie’s always in a dream——’

‘Sentimental,’ said Pat. ‘I can’t imagine why she’s a prefect. And Syb’s soft; she’ll say anything anybody wants. Buck them up all you can, Violet child. That’s what “stim,” &c., means, isn’t it?’

‘And who is sleeping in Vi’s bed?’ asked Dorothy Bayne.

‘Goldilocks. Well, it *did* sound like “The Three Bears,” D.B. We don’t know; a new kid, Merle thinks.’

‘Not a kid. Willy wouldn’t give us three juniors. I suppose we still have our Dotty and Blotty?’

Then Dorry’s eyes met Marjorie’s. ‘Could it be you? Oh, cheers! We’d like to have you!’

‘How jolly of you! I’m afraid it is me—I! Matron said a prefect called Dorothy would be in my room.—I’m sorry I’ve turned you out,’ Marjorie said to Vi.

‘It had to be,’ Vi said sadly. ‘Matron has these attacks between terms. We think the empty corridors and cubies go to her head, and she starts shuffling us round to console herself. D.B. and D.C. slept together for centuries—quite three years, in fact—with no one to butt in and hear their secrets. But that’s all over now. I wonder where D.C. and the American will be put?’

‘I strongly suspect it will be with me,’ said Pat. ‘So far as I can make out, I have a large four-bed dormy all to myself, except for a baby in one corner; young Enid, to be exact.’

‘Oh, then you’ll have the pair of travellers shoved in on top of you! Hope you’ll enjoy it. They’ll babble about their exciting past for hours. You’ll be expected to applaud; you won’t have a chance to speak,’ Vi warned her.

‘I shall squash them both, rapidly and severely,’ said Pat.

CHAPTER XIV. THE DOT AND THE BLOT.

‘It’s jolly for Dorothy Bayne to have her friend coming back,’ Marjorie remarked to Merle, as they went downstairs to tea.

‘Is it? I’ve been wondering about that.’

‘Well, so had I, as a matter of fact,’ Marjorie acknowledged. ‘She may find Dorothy Cheyne different, after all these months abroad.’

‘She may find Evangeline Warner has cut her out with D.C.,’ said Merle. ‘The American girl has had D.C. all to herself for six months. They’re sure to be pally, and poor Dorry B. will be left out in the cold. Three-cornered friendships are never any good.’

‘Oh, I don’t believe that! They can be jolly, if all the three understand one another.’

‘These three won’t,’ Merle remarked. ‘Dorry’s one of the best, but when she cares about anything, or for anybody, she cares a lot. She’ll be really cut up if she finds she doesn’t come first with D.C. any longer.’

‘I don’t believe that either,’ Marjorie retorted. ‘She strikes me as very jolly and sensible. She’ll know the other two couldn’t be together all winter without being chums. She couldn’t be as silly as you’re making her out.’

‘I hope you’re right,’ but Merle did not sound hopeful. ‘D.B. feels things tremendously. I don’t think it’s really jolly for her to have her friend come back and be chums with somebody else. It didn’t matter so much while they were in Italy.’

‘You’re making out both Dorothy Cheyne and the American girl to be rather pigs,’ Marjorie observed.

‘I don’t know anything about Vangie Warner, but I do know Dorothy Cheyne.’

‘And is she like that?’

‘She’s just Dorothy Cheyne.’

Marjorie looked at her. ‘What do you mean by that?’

‘She’s just herself! I don’t suppose she’s changed much. She’s the opposite of D.B. That’s all I can tell you,’ Merle said helplessly. ‘Go to Pat, if you want her character described!’

‘I sha’n’t go to Pat. I’ll wait and see for myself. You’ve made me curious.’

‘Sorry. You shouldn’t have made me gossip,’ Merle retorted.

Marjorie’s Guide badge had been noticed by Miss Thame. After tea, a Brownie came to the bedroom where the new girl was unpacking, with Merle, Dorothy Bayne, and the two juniors as her room-mates.

‘Captain wants to speak to Marjorie Rogers.’

‘Show me where to find her, then,’ and Marjorie ran after the child. She came back ten minutes later. ‘I’m to be a Ranger as soon as I’ve qualified. If you’ll have me I’m to be in your patrol, Dorothy. I didn’t know you were a patrol-leader as well as a prefect.’

‘We chose her,’ said Merle. ‘Vi’s in ours too. We’ll be glad to have you.—Won’t we, D.B.?’

‘Jolly glad. I’m sure she’ll be keen.’

‘Perhaps D.C. and Vangie Warner will join, and we could have them too,’ Merle began.

‘Not three new people all at once,’ Dorothy explained. ‘If they join, they’ll be in Pat’s patrol. They’ll want to go together, of course.’

Marjorie looked at her. 'I don't want to stop you having your chum in your own crowd. I didn't mean to butt in.'

'You aren't butting in,' Dorry assured her. 'It wouldn't do for D.C. to be in my patrol. And anyway, we don't know that she'll care to be a Guide.'

A small girl appeared at the door. 'Dorothy, a letter for you. Miss Willcox says it came this morning; she's sorry she forgot it when she talked to you.'

'A letter? How weird! Why did it come here?'

'Must be from someone who doesn't know your home address,' and Merle sat on her bed and watched with interest. 'Or else they didn't know which day you came back to school.'

Dorothy looked at the envelope. 'Oh! It's from Van Warner. How jolly of her!'

'The American girl?' cried Merle.

'But isn't it Dorothy Cheyne who's your friend?' asked Marjorie, completely mystified by the difficulties of this three-cornered friendship.

Dorothy swept the piles of underclothing aside and sat on her bed to read the letter. 'She didn't know my address,' she said. 'She isn't coming for two days. They're in town; her mother sails on Saturday, so she'll bring Van here on Friday. This is to say she's looking forward to meeting me, and all of us. She's heard so much about "Old Whitey" that she's thrilled to be coming here. And she hopes we'll let her be a Guide.'

'She sounds all right,' said Merle.

'She seems to answer letters better than your chum does,' Marjorie remarked.

Merle sat up. 'How did she know about the Guides? You said D.C. didn't care?'

'I told her.' Dorothy folded the letter and went on unpacking.

'Have you been writing to her as well as to D.C.?' cried Merle.

'She wrote to me, so I answered. Her letters have been jolly; she's seemed so much interested in everything about school.'

'And D.C. hasn't?' Merle asked shrewdly.

'D.C. did her bit by telling me what they were doing. Van can't describe things as D.C. can.'

'D.C. always could talk! You are funny, you three!' Merle voiced Marjorie's thought, which Marjorie would have kept to herself.

'Are you and Van Warner going to be chums?' Merle persisted. 'Is it D.C. who will be out in the cold? I thought it was to be the other way; either you and D.C. as you used to be, and Van cut out; or D.C. and Van very chummy, and you left out. If you and Evangeline are pals, won't D.C. be wild?'

'D.C., as you call her, will expect one of them to chum with her, that's certain,' Marjorie observed.

'Why should anyone be left out?' Dorothy asked. 'You've a silly sort of mind, Merle. Don't imagine things that don't exist!'

Merle returned to her unpacking reluctantly. 'It's funny that Van Warner should write to tell you she's coming and D.C. not send even a line.'

'D.C.'s at home for a week, after being away all winter,' Dorry retorted. 'She won't have a second to spare. She knows she'll see us in a few days. You're making a fuss about nothing, Merle.'

'Van Warner found time to write.' Merle was not vanquished. 'D.C.'s a slacker.'

Marjorie glanced at the juniors, who were sitting on the floor, arranging shoes in a cupboard. The two bobbed heads were close together, one fair and one dark, and she felt sure

they had taken in all that had passed.

She looked at Dorothy Bayne questioningly.

Merle saw the look. 'We haven't introduced our babes. Fancy not knowing The Blot! What you've missed!'

The fair child giggled and poked her friend.

Dorothy looked up. 'Sorry! I forgot the infants. It isn't often one can. They generally remind us of their existence. The fair child is Dorothy Denton, but we call her Dot, for obvious reasons. The other is the dark spot of "Old Whitey"—Blodwen Howell, known as The Blot; reasons also obvious. She's only been here one term, but it's been quite enough.'

'I'm not as bad as all that, D.B.' The Blot spoke in an injured tone.

'You're the burden of my life. Why I, a new prefect, should be saddled with the School Blot, is more than I can tell.—Let's go down, Marjorie.—Ready, Merle?'

As they closed the door on Dot and Blodwen, Marjorie said, 'I wondered if we weren't talking too much before the kids.'

'We must be more careful,' Dorothy agreed. 'They don't know Dorothy Cheyne. Anyone who knows her would know Merle was making a fuss about what can't be helped. D.C. has certain ways, and one has to put up with them. But she's a good sort and she doesn't mean any harm.'

'I think she's a slacker,' Merle remarked.

'She isn't. Don't talk like that before The Blot. You don't know what she might make of it.'

As the door closed, Blodwen sprang to her feet. 'We're going to do something about this, Dot Denton!'

Dot sat looking up at her. 'Tell me, Blotty!' she begged, with large faith in the leading spirit of 'Old Whitey's' juniors.

'This D.C. person hasn't been nice to our D.B. I don't know exactly what it's about, but she hasn't done something she ought to have done. She's going to be friends with somebody else, and D.B. will be left out. We can't allow that! And the D.C. person's a slacker; Merle said so. We're going to stand up for D.B., Dot, and make it hot for Dorothy Cheyne.'

'She's a senior. We sha'n't have anything to do with her,' Dot objected.

'We'll find ways,' The Blot assured her. 'People say things about us, D.D., but nobody could object so long as what we do is for Dorothy Bayne's sake! We're going to give her a leg-up. Are you game?'

'Rather! I'm game for anything with you and D.B. in it.'

'The *first* thing,' The Blot argued, 'is not to tell Dorothy Bayne anything about it. She's a senior and a prefect. It would spoil the fun to have her in it. It will be all for her sake, but she mustn't hear a whisper of it. You must see that, Dot.'

'I suppose so,' Dot sounded doubtful, however.

'We ought to be downstairs,' and Blodwen began to throw stockings and handkerchiefs into drawers. 'Buck up, D.D.! Here's your gymmy—catch!' She rolled a brown tunic into a ball and tossed it across. It flew over Dot's head and fell on the mantel-piece.

Dot sprang up to pull it down. The corner had caught on a picture standing on the shelf. She pulled, and there was a crash.

'Stars! You've done it, D.D.!' gasped Blodwen.

They stood gazing miserably at the broken glass. Then Dot, with trembling lips and fingers, picked up the picture. 'It's Dorothy's pond, that she cares so much about; the one with

the cows drinking. Blotty, what shall we do?’

‘Go and tell D.B. this instant, before we’re too awfully frightened,’ Blodwen urged. ‘It won’t be any better for waiting; or for howling, Dot!’

‘I know. But Dorothy’s so frightfully keen on her old pond. She’ll be wild. We couldn’t help it, Blotty!’

‘She’ll know it was an accident,’ Blodwen declared. ‘But I wish it had been anything else. I hate to have smashed her pond-picture. Let’s get it over, Dot. Come on!’

‘I did it,’ Dot said bravely. ‘You needn’t come.’

‘Oh, rot! It was my fault. But it is an awfully Blotty way to start the term!’ The Blot sighed. ‘Come on, D.D.! Be a man!’

‘I don’t *feel* like a man!’ Dot sobbed, as they went downstairs.

They caught Dorothy and Merle at the door of the senior sitting-room.

‘Please, Dorothy!’

Dorothy looked down at the small nervous faces.

‘Blot, what *have* you done? Nothing had happened five minutes ago!’

‘Oh, Blot, beginning already?’ Merle teased.

‘It was mostly me.’ Dot spoke up bravely. ‘I pulled, and your picture fell down. It isn’t hurt, D.B., only the glass.’

‘My picture?—Blot, what does she mean?’

‘It was my fault,’ Blodwen insisted. ‘I threw her gymmy, and it fell on the mantel-piece, and it caught——’

Dorothy raced upstairs to see for herself.

‘You little horrors!’ cried Merle. ‘Can’t you exist without chucking your things about? Poor D.B.! She loves that picture!’

‘Is it the pretty water-colour of hills and water that she put on the mantel-piece?’ asked Marjorie. ‘Oh, what a shame! Come and see if we can help!’

With Dot and Blodwen following, ashamed and frightened, but unwilling to run away, Merle and Marjorie hurried after Dorothy.

They found her hastily examining the picture. ‘It *is* only the glass! It didn’t fall on the fender. I can have another glass put in.—Kids, you might have been careful! I know it was an accident, but it was an accident that needn’t have happened.’

‘Most of The Blot’s accidents are that kind,’ said Merle.

‘We’re fearfully sorry, D.B. It was chiefly me,’ Blodwen urged.

‘It wasn’t, D.B. I pulled the gymmy. I ought to have seen it had stuck,’ Dot cried.

‘You’re both blots on the landscape,’ Merle scolded.

Marjorie was looking at the picture. ‘Show me, Dorothy! It is a jolly thing.’

‘Blot and Dot, go down to supper,’ said Dorothy. ‘I know you didn’t mean to do it, but you can’t expect me to like having my treasures smashed.’

‘No, D.B. We’re frightfully sorry,’ and the two went meekly downstairs.

‘It isn’t water-colour. It’s pastel,’ Dorothy explained, in answer to a question from Marjorie. ‘I’ve two; here’s the other. I’m glad I hadn’t unpacked it, or Dot might have smashed one and The Blot the other.’

She put the framed sketches on the mantel-piece. ‘They’ve a sort of story attached to them.’

‘Don’t leave them there!’ Merle warned her. ‘The babes come to bed before we do. Anything may happen.’

‘Nothing will, though. I *shall* leave them there. It will comfort the infants to see I’m not afraid to risk it. Nothing will induce The Blot to come near the mantel-piece after what’s happened.’

‘From their own account they didn’t come near before. They just flung things about. It’s mad to risk it again, D.B.,’ Merle urged. ‘Put the pictures away till you’ve time to hang them properly.’

‘What’s the story, Dorothy?’ Marjorie asked.

‘Not much, really, except to me. When Van Warner’s mother asked me to join them abroad, and I couldn’t go because of mother’s illness, Mrs Warner wanted me to have something to make up for the disappointment. I said she mustn’t think of it, and that I wasn’t a baby; but she said if I didn’t choose she’d send some present from Rome. I was afraid it would be jewellery, and I didn’t want that. She was in earnest, and she’s enormously well off. So I said that most of anything I’d like one of these; there was an exhibition of them in the town. The artist lives near the Downs, and he had done beautiful pastel drawings of the hills, and the dew-ponds, and the villages. Mrs Warner wrote that I was to go and choose a pair. Wasn’t it kind? You can guess how I loved doing it.’

‘How topping! I love them both.’

‘They’re connected in my mind with Dorothy Cheyne,’ Dorry explained. ‘We met once by this pond, when she’d been away for some time. And the other—well, I thought a lot about D.C. once, sitting just there, where the cows are drinking.’

‘You’re very keen on Dorothy Cheyne, aren’t you?’ Marjorie asked, gazing at the pastels.

‘We’ve been friends for years,’ Dorry said. ‘She’ll love these. I wonder how long it will take to have new glass put in? I’ll want to show them to D.C. and Van at once.’

‘It won’t take long. I’m glad the cows aren’t hurt!’

‘Oh, so am I! They might have been scratched. Come down to supper!’

‘Are you really going to leave the two up there?’ Marjorie asked.

‘D.B., you’re mad!’ said Merle.

‘That’s a pity,’ Dorry said, laughing. ‘Of course I shall leave them there.’

‘I don’t wonder the juniors are devoted to you.’ Marjorie remarked, as they went downstairs.

CHAPTER XV. THE RETURN OF DOROTHY CHEYNE.

‘Look!’ Dot grasped Blodwen’s arm. ‘The other picture’s there as well!’

The Blot’s black eyes grew round. ‘I thought everything precious would be out of sight!’

They undressed with extreme care, and without going near the mantel-piece. When the seniors came up an hour later, Dorothy’s bed was turned down neatly, her pyjamas and dressing-gown were spread out ready for use, her bedroom slippers waiting by her chair. She laughed, and pointed. But the juniors were apparently asleep, their faces turned from the light, and they did not look round.

‘Shy!’ Marjorie said in an undertone. ‘Don’t want to be thanked!’

Dorry nodded. ‘Take no notice,’ she whispered.

Next morning in the whirl of settling down to classes the pictures and the accident were forgotten. But while the juniors were at the cricket-nets in the afternoon, watched critically by Pat and Merle, Dorothy left the senior tennis and carried her picture to the town to be reframed. She had merely explained that the accident had happened in unpacking, and Miss Willcox had been sympathetic.

The first Guide meeting was held the following evening. The Guides met at five-thirty and the Rangers at seven. The Brownies had a separate evening to themselves, as several of the seniors were helpers in one way or another.

Marjorie was included among the Rangers, though she wore her Guide colours instead of the Ranger red. The badges on her sleeve showed that her work had been good and that she was keen, and Dorothy Bayne’s patrol welcomed her as a useful recruit.

The seniors came out from the gym, where their meeting had been held. They had been discussing the term’s programme, and had ended with a few minutes of country-dancing, as several were anxious to try for their folk-dance badge. Others had strenuously opposed the idea, urging that it be postponed till the winter term.

‘We can dance out of doors,’ Merle argued. ‘I don’t see why Pat——’

‘Oh, cheers, there’s D.C.!’ and Dorry sprang forward. ‘D.C., it is topping to see you again!’

The Rangers surged round two girls who had been coming towards the gym.

Marjorie laughed and stood aside to watch. ‘Dorothy Cheyne and the American girl seem to have arrived!’ she said.

Dorothy Cheyne was shorter than Dorry, and neat and slim, with a smoothly-shingled black head. The American girl, Van Warner, had long fair hair hanging in plaits, and eager excited blue eyes.

‘I say, girls!’ D.C. made herself heard above the clamour. ‘It’s ripping to be back. But I’ve had a shock! I’d forgotten all about the Guides.—Let me look at you, D.B.! My goodness! What are you? A lieutenant, or a colonel, or commander-in-chief? I’ll borrow your whistle if burglars come. Where’s your sword? You do look a warrior!’

‘You’ll soon be used to it,’ Dorry said, laughing. ‘I hope you’ll be a Guide too. Is this Vangie?’ and she greeted the stranger warmly.

‘I meant to introduce her.—Everybody, this is Vangie Warner. She hasn’t been to school before, so I’m going to look after her.’

‘Oh, I expect she’ll be all right!’ Dorry laughed across at Evangeline.

‘I shall, sure! I’ve been wanting to come real badly. I’ve been looking forward to seeing you most of all, because your letters were so vurry nice,’ Van explained.

‘You used to write reams to her, D.B.,’ Dorothy Cheyne said in an injured tone. ‘I couldn’t see why, when you’d never spoken to her.’

‘She was so keen to hear all about “Whitey’s,”’ Dorry explained. ‘She understood how I felt about the Guides, and how important they were. She cared about everything.’

‘Do you mean that I didn’t?’ D.C. cried.

‘Of course not, silly! We weren’t talking about you.’ Dorry took her arm. ‘Which room are you to sleep in? Pat’s? Is Van with you? We’re going to call her Van, if she’ll let us. Vangie’s kiddish.’

‘I sure hope you will call me Van,’ Evangeline said hastily.

The rest laughed. ‘We will!’

‘Vange!’ said D.C.

A dimple showed in Vangie’s chin. ‘Say! I forgot! That’s one of the things I’m not to say,’ she explained. ‘I guess I sha’n’t remember just at first.’

‘And that’s another,’ D.C. scolded. ‘You need me to look after you.’

‘We’re to sleep in the cutest little room, with somebody called Pat and someone else.’ Van turned eagerly to Dorry. ‘Miss Willcox took us up to see it. I’ve had a regular exam, to see how much I know. We’re to be in something called the Upper Fifth.’

‘Oh!’ A look of consternation went round. ‘But D.C. ought to be with us in the Sixth!’

‘Are you all Sixth-form swanks?’ Dorothy Cheyne asked lightly. ‘I thought perhaps you’d have moved up. Willy refused to pass me for the Sixth; I never expected she would, as I’ve done nothing for six months. You’ll have to live without me.’ Her cheerful tone did not succeed in hiding her annoyance, however.

‘It’s rotten luck, D.C.,’ said Dorothy Bayne. ‘But you’ll catch up in one term, I’m sure.’

‘Don’t know that I want to,’ D.C.’s tone was instantly defiant, in response to the sympathy. ‘I’m not going to swot as the swanky Sixth has to do.’

Dorothy looked at her. ‘D.C., you do care. Why are you pretending you don’t? It’s silly.’

D.C.’s chin went up. ‘Thanks awfully for your opinion, D.B. I didn’t happen to ask for it, but that’s a detail. I suppose you have to swank a bit. I’m glad I’m still in the Fifth, since it means I’ll be with Vangie. She’ll want looking after. She couldn’t expect to be in the Sixth, as she’s never been to school before.’

Dorry bit her lip. ‘I didn’t mean to swank. It wouldn’t have occurred to me. Unless you’re very queer you’re sure to mind not being with the rest of our crowd. I hope you and Van will soon move up.’

‘Don’t suppose we shall want to,’ D.C. remarked.

‘I shall want to!’ Van exclaimed. ‘I’m going to swot—is that right?—vurry hard, till I’m moved up as high as I can go. I like to be at the top of things.’

There was a laugh from the crowd. ‘The top of the Fifth’s your first chance,’ Merle suggested.

‘You’ll soon leave D.C. behind, if she’s going to be slack,’ said Vi.

‘I must race and change. I’ve a job to do,’ Dorry said, unhappily conscious that she was glad of the excuse. Glad to escape from D.C.! Surely there was something wrong? ‘See you later, Van! D.C. will look after you,’ and she hurried away.

'D.B.'s a prefect now,' Merle explained. 'She has to take duty at the junior supper. Of course she can't do it in uniform.'

Dorothy Cheyne's eyes widened. 'D.B. a prefect? Stars! How odd!'

'Not odd at all,' Merle protested. 'She's going to do it jolly well. She's only had it this term. She's our patrol-leader too.'

'Tell me about your prefects!' Van pleaded. 'Do they report us to the Head, and that sort of thing?'

'I'd like to see D.B. report me!' Dorothy Cheyne scoffed.

Merle turned her back on her, and walked away with Van, explaining the duties of a prefect.

'Things are difficult!' Marjorie Rogers said to herself, as she followed D.B. upstairs.

'I'm an idiot!' Dorry was changing her black stockings for light evening ones, as Marjorie entered.

'Are you? I rather thought somebody else was.' Marjorie unbuckled her belt.

'That's where you're wrong,' said D.B. 'I irritated D.C. by being sorry for her because she's stuck down in the Fifth. It was mad! I might have known it would put her back up. I wouldn't have liked to be sympathised with myself. She'd think we were pitying her. She *had* to say she'd rather not move up.'

'She seemed surprised to hear you're a prefect. I'm not,' Marjorie remarked. 'You get on so well with everybody; not only with the kids, but with us as well.'

'It isn't going to be easy,' Dorry sighed. 'I expect D.C.'s saying things about me to Van at this moment. I gave her the chance. I'm an idiot.' She pulled on her blue evening-frock. 'I must go down to the infants!'

In Pat's room, Dorothy Cheyne changed from her travelling-suit to her evening-frock, in grim silence.

Van, changing also, glanced at her, and at last asked, 'What's up, Dorothy?'

'Everything. It's rotten! To have D.B. a prefect, and to be in the Fifth like a kid.'

'But you said——' Van began, bewildered.

'Oh, don't be an infant! What else could I say?' Dorothy spoke impatiently. 'You don't know anything about school. It's simply beastly. I never dreamt D.B. would be a prefect.'

'I may not know vurry much about school, but I'm certain sure you oughtn't to say beastly,' Van retorted.

'Pig! Can't you see I'm riled?'

Vangie relented. 'Dorothy, I suppose it is horrid. But you and I needn't fly at one another.'

'Sorry! But it's hideous to have all that crowd crowing because I'm left behind, and D.B. ragging because she's in the Sixth.'

'But she didn't, did she? I'm sure she never meant to,' Van protested. 'And they didn't crow, D.C.!''

'She pretended to be sorry for me,' Dorothy groaned. 'Shut up about it, Vange. I feel sick about everything! Don't you *see*? If we don't join their wretched Guides we'll be outsiders. They all belong; we'll be left out of all sorts of things.'

'My! I want to join!'

'But they're a whole term ahead of us. We'll never catch up. Didn't you see the badges and stripes? It all means something. We'd be miles behind.'

'We'd soon win stripes and badges too! You can't have everything. We've had a jolly time, while they've been winning badges. Think of Venice and Rome and Florence!'

Dorothy Cheyne said no more. Van gave her a shrewd look. 'Did you think D.B. and the rest would have been standing still while you've been away?'

D.C. shrugged her shoulders. 'Change the subject, Vange.'

But Van had found the root of the trouble. In the days that followed, other girls found it too. D.C. *had* expected 'Whitey's' to stand still till she came back. She had returned expecting to be received in triumph as a traveller; to be looked up to and admired. She found herself still in the Upper Fifth, where she had been the summer before, and not even a Tenderfoot Guide.

To anyone the position would have been difficult. To Dorothy Cheyne it was galling, almost more than she could bear. Inevitably, she blamed her former friends because they had gone ahead without waiting for her. And since Dorothy Bayne, patrol-leader and prefect, had gone farthest, D.C.'s resentment was deepest against her.

D.B., at the head of one of the junior supper-tables, found a heated discussion threatening to upset the peace of the evening meal.

'The most lovely things!' proclaimed Enid, who sat next to Dot Denton. 'I saw her nighty; it's a dream! I'm sure it came from Paris. She's a millionaire several times over.'

'She's only an American,' said The Blot. 'You needn't rave about her. Being a millionaire's nothing to make a fuss about. It's just chance that she was born one.'

'I might have been an American millionaire,' Dot remarked.

'You're jealous,' Enid retorted. 'I shall see all her gorgeous things. There's a dinky jewel-case; I saw it on her dressing-table. I expect there are diamond rings in it.'

'Hope they'll stay in it, then,' Blodwen said flippantly. 'Diamond rings in school would be *tosh*.'

'Did you see the diamonds, Eny?' asked Dot, her voice awed.

'N-no; not exactly.—But I say, Blotty!' and Enid, with one eye on the prefect, mumbled a suggestion.

'Righto!' The Blot responded. 'I'm game!'

'Blot, what are you talking about?' Dorothy Bayne had heard enough to rouse her suspicions.

'Nothing, D.B.!' Blodwen said hurriedly. 'Eny was telling us about the American girl's diamond nighties, and all that.'

'Diamond nighties!' There was a chorus of protest from Enid and Dot.

'She's sleeping with me and Pat, D.B.,' Enid explained.

'Don't meddle with things that don't concern you,' Dorothy Bayne warned them. 'I'm sure Van hasn't brought diamonds to school. She probably doesn't possess any.'

'Oh, D.B.! She's a millionaire three times over,' Dot urged.

'How do you know?' D.B. asked bracingly.

'Why—well—everybody says so. Enid says so.'

'Enid would know, of course. Don't be so soft, Dot. It's no business of yours, in any case.'

Enid's eyes met Dot's and Blodwen's, full of meaning. No more was said, but when the seniors were safely at supper, Dot and The Blot, eager-eyed, crept down the corridor to Pat's room, to see the outside, at least, of the fascinating jewel-case. Perhaps, Enid had whispered, Van might have left it open when she dressed for supper! Perhaps they would see the diamonds, after all.

CHAPTER XVI. VAN'S DIAMONDS.

Crouched in a heap on Pat's bed, Enid, Dot, and Blodwen gazed at the little blue case on the dressing-table, not three feet away.

'The key's in the lock!' Enid whispered.

'We can't open it,' Dot protested. 'That sort of thing isn't *done!*'

'No one will know. We're only going to look,' Blodwen argued. 'One peep won't hurt the diamonds!'

'You oughtn't to unlock it, Blotty,' Dot urged. 'If it had been left open it would be different. You could say she'd been careless.'

'Bosh!' said The Blot. 'We *ought* not to touch it. We *ought* not to be here. I'm going to have a look.'

'Be quick, then, Blotty,' Enid whispered. 'I don't really think we ought to open it.'

'It would be dreadfully dull if we only did things we ought.' Blodwen turned the key, and the other two crept nearer.

A laughing voice in the corridor, and a hand on the handle of the door. 'Do come in, D.B.!' cried Van Warner.

With one leap Dot and Blodwen disappeared under the nearest beds. Enid was left, bewildered and terrified, sitting on Pat's bed beside the open jewel-case.

Petrified with amazement, the three elder girls stood in the doorway. Dorothy Cheyne, on tiptoe, peered over Dorry's shoulder.

'What *is* she doing with my brooches?' cried Evangeline.

Enid, overcome with the horror of the moment, collapsed on Pat's pillow and wept.

Dorothy Bayne, with a quick movement, drew the others into the room and closed the door. Wild ideas of theft, of protecting Enid, swept through her bewildered mind. 'Whatever it means, we don't want other people to know.—Enid, what *were* you doing?—She was only looking at your things, Van,' D.B. pleaded.

'Oh, sure thing! But—well, I *say!*'

From below two beds sprang small tousled figures, and with one accord hurled themselves on sobbing Enid.

'It was me!' cried The Blot. 'I wanted to see the diamonds!'

'I wanted to see, too,' Dot sobbed in Enid's arms. 'We never meant any harm.'

'They said I mustn't unlock it,' Blodwen explained. 'But it seemed such a pity, when we'd come on purpose to see the diamonds. We didn't think she'd mind.'

'*What* diamonds?' Dorothy Bayne found her breath first. The other two were still gasping; but, as Dorry said later, they did not yet know The Blot and The Dot.

'Her diamond rings. We knew she'd have them, even if she didn't wear them.'

Van broke into a laugh. 'I haven't any diamond rings. Say, I'm real sorry to disappoint you!'

Dorothy Cheyne stood looking down at the culprits. Dot and Blodwen had wildly-dishevelled hair; Enid lay in a crumpled heap.

'Where do you two imps come from? This one was here before; but there's no room for three of you.'

'We came to see Enid. She told us about the diamonds.'

'That was mighty smart of her,' Van drawled.

'About the jewel-case,' Blodwen explained hastily. 'We only hoped for the diamonds.'

'They sleep in my room,' said Dorothy Bayne, reddening.

'Oh!' said D.C.

D.B.'s colour deepened. 'Dot and Blot, you're giving me a dreadfully bad name,' she said. 'D.C.'s wondering why I don't keep you in better order.'

'You're only a very new prefect,' Dorothy Cheyne suggested. 'I'm sure they're difficult to manage.'

D.B. laughed ruefully, though she winced at the patronising tone. 'When you've been here a few days you'll know what I have to put up with. This is the School Blot.—Children, I'm utterly ashamed of you. Apologise to Van at once and tell her how sorry you are that you touched her things.'

'You'd better count your brooches, Vange,' said Dorothy Cheyne.

Dorry reddened, angry this time for the juniors' sakes. 'There's no need. Van doesn't think the babes would take anything.'

'Mercy, no! They're vurry welcome to look,' Van said cordially. 'I'll show them what I have.'

'Not now,' Dorry said. 'They've no right to be here.—Children, go back to your own beds at once. I'll speak to you presently.'

'Say, don't row them!' Van urged. 'I'm not a scrap upset. They're welcome to look at anything I have.'

'I'm upset, though,' Dorothy Bayne assured her. 'Rules are rules, and the kids are supposed to be in bed.—Off you go, Blot!'

'And you're a prefect,' Van agreed. 'You must make them mind you, I suppose.—Come back some other time,' she said to Blodwen. 'I haven't any diamonds, but I've some real pretty foreign things. I'll love to show them to you. What is it they call you?'

'Blodwen.' The Blot blushed.

'What a dainty name!'

'It's Welsh,' Blodwen said hastily, before Dorothy Bayne could speak. 'Come on, Dotty!' and they fled.

'I could *see* D.B. beginning to say "Blot"! I know she'll tell them. But isn't the American girl a sport? We'll go and see her things, Dot!'

'I don't like Dorothy Cheyne,' said Dot. 'She said we might have stolen something.'

'She's a pig. Merle said she was a slacker, too.'

'We're lucky to be still in D.B.'s room. She's the decentest prefect of the lot,' Dot remarked.

CHAPTER XVII. A PRIVATE VIEW.

'I sha'n't join the Guides,' Dorothy Cheyne announced to Vangie next day.

Van looked at her in dismay. 'Oh, Dorothy! But I want to join.'

D.C. frowned. 'I'm not going in as a beginner, when the rest know all about it. I don't want to be a Tenderfoot, as they call it, and be trained by Dorry Bayne or Pat. It would be hateful!'

'They say we'd be in Pat's patrol. D.C., I shall join without you,' Vangie said firmly.

D.C.'s frown deepened. 'I can't stop you. But you'll have to manage without me to see you through.'

'I'll sure manage vurry well. It will be fun. But I'd like you to be there too.'

'I thought I was to help you till you were used to school?' Dorothy demanded.

'I'm getting used to it vurry fast,' said Evangeline. 'I don't need you to hold my hand. But I like to have you, Dorothy.'

'You can't have me, if you will do things I don't like,' D.C. argued. 'School isn't nice this term! I thought it would be so jolly to come back, and to have you. But it isn't.'

'The rest all seem vurry happy.'

'Do stop saying "vurry"! Speak English!' Dorothy said irritably.

'I guess I shall speak just how I like, so long as Miss Willcox isn't round,' drawled Vangie.

Dorothy Cheyne turned away. 'I'm fed up!'

Van ran after her and took her arm. 'Say, D.C.! Be a Ranger Guide along with me! They're fine.'

'No! I won't be bossed by Pat.'

'But that's all part of the game! We must start at the bottom. Some day you'll be boss, or I shall.'

'I sha'n't, for I sha'n't have started.'

'Well, it won't make any difference, D.C.?'

'It will, if you chatter Guide stuff all the time. Everything makes a difference.'

'This won't. I won't let it. I won't tease you, Dorothy.' And Vangie sought Miss Thame to ask how soon she could be enrolled.

Dorothy Cheyne, her dreams of importance tumbling about her, began to feel left out in the cold. She went to Gwen Garth, the head-girl. 'Isn't the Literary Society meeting this term, Gwen?'

'They've closed down till the autumn. You know they always do. The Ramblers have their turn this term.'

'I know, but I thought perhaps—well, it's this way! Vange Warner and I took topping photos abroad, and her mother offered to have the best made into lantern-slides, so that we could tell the girls all about Rome and Venice and Florence.'

'And you'd like to give a lecture to the Literary,' Gwen agreed. 'I see. If it had been last term or next, we'd certainly have put it in, D.C. But I don't see how we can just at present. We're full up, between tennis and cricket, and Guides and bathing. If we have a spell of wet

weather we might apply to you and Vangie; but as long as we can be out I don't see any opening for lantern-lectures. It will keep. Save it up for the autumn!

D.C. went away disappointed.

'They don't want that lecture from us this term, Vange.'

'No, they're all too busy,' Van agreed. 'I'd have been scared stiff, anyway.'

'Oh, I'd have done the talking! You could have seen to the slides. You took most of them. I say, let's have those kids in and show them all your jolly things, and the curios we brought. No one else seems to care about them!'

'The kid with the dandy name asked me this morning when she could see my diamonds!' Vangie said, laughing. 'Fetch her, D.C., and we'll give her a private view!'

Dorothy Cheyne came back with several other juniors besides Dot and Blodwen and Enid. When Pat presently came into the bedroom, she found eight small girls sitting on her bed and Enid's, while D.C., enthroned on pillows, talked of William Tell, and Vangie handed round coloured photos of the Lake of Lucerne. Brown wooden bears and chalets, pictures, chains of beads and brooches, and small Italian figures lay on the bed, and Van was acting as showman.

'Oh, here's Pat!—Pat, come and see! Such topping things!' cried Enid. 'Van's showing them just for us, and D.C.'s telling us all about them!'

'It's a private view,' said Dot. 'We're seeing them before anybody else.'

'Jolly fine,' said Pat. 'But who said you might prance about on my bed?'

'Isn't it allowed?' asked Vangie, as Dot and Blodwen and Enid rolled hurriedly to the floor and crowded round her bed.

'It's not exactly done,' said Pat. 'If Dorothy Bayne or any other prefect comes along there'll be a shindy.'

'But it's our room!' Van argued.

'They aren't all your beds, though. Do you suppose I like The Blot's shoes on my pillow?'

'She didn't!—Oh, Blodwen! How could you?'

'Sorry. I didn't know my feet were there,' The Blot apologised. 'Guess I was excited about William Tell jumping out of the boat and kicking it back into the stormy lake. Do you know that story, Pat?'

'We only knew about the apple, and the second arrow for the tyrant,' said Enid. 'D.C. knows gorgeous stories, Pat.'

'Do you know about the fight on the Devil's Bridge?' cried Dot.

'No, I don't. But I know you'd better clear out, before there's trouble,' Pat suggested.

'Are you going to report us?' D.C. asked flippantly. 'You aren't a prefect!'

'What's up, Pat?' Dorothy Bayne came to the doorway.

'Mercy! It's D.B.!' and Van sprang to her feet. 'Say, D.B., we invited the crowd! It's our show. We didn't know it wasn't allowed.'

The juniors were off the beds in a moment. Dorothy Cheyne, with an awkward laugh, began to pick up the beads and brooches and put them in their case, avoiding Dorry's eyes.

'Seems to be a geographical lecture, with illustrations and curios,' said Pat. 'I was suggesting an adjournment to the garden.'

'We'd promised to show them these things sometime, D.B.,' Van apologised.

'It's five minutes till teatime. Go and tidy yourselves, kids,' and D.B. stood by the door, while the audience filed out silently and then fled. Then she closed the door.

'O-o-oh!' whispered The Blot. 'Is she going to row D.C. and Vangie?'

'She's jolly fair. She knew they'd asked us,' Dot said. 'Of course, we needn't have gone!'

‘It must be beastly being a prefect,’ Dorothy Cheyne remarked, as D.B. closed the door and looked at her. ‘I suppose you always have to be a spoil-sport.’

‘It’s a hateful job!’ Dorry said vehemently. ‘I don’t see why you need make it any worse.’

‘Are you going to report us?’ D.C. mocked. ‘Or are you going to be kind and let us off?’

‘I’d jolly well report you, for that speech,’ said Pat. ‘How can you talk to Dorry like that, D.C.?’

‘D.B., I’m sorry,’ Van cried. ‘I didn’t think. I suppose it wasn’t quite the thing. I haven’t found out all your ways yet; I’m used to doing as I like. It won’t happen again. I am really vurry sorry.’

‘That’s jolly nice of you.’ Dorry’s face lit up. ‘You don’t know how I hate rows. I’d far rather not have known what was going on. But I can’t funk.’

‘No, sure, you’d be soft if you did. What shall we do? Shall we go and tell the Head we held a meeting on our beds?’

Dorry laughed. ‘No, please don’t! We don’t worry the Head if we can help it. You won’t do it again.—D.C., you won’t do it again, will you?’ she pleaded.

‘Oh, wouldn’t you like to report us? We’ve given you such a jolly chance. Pity to waste it!’ D.C. said.

Dorothy Bayne’s temper flared up. ‘I won’t report you this time. But I have to warn you. You can’t go on doing just as you like. You knew you weren’t supposed to bring a crowd of kids in here without leave, when they ought to have been in the garden. I’d hate to report you, D.C., but I’ll have to do it if you go on like this. I can’t say anything to the juniors when you’d invited them.’

‘Say, that’s so!’ Vangie remarked. ‘Guess we dragged them in with us. I’m mighty sorry about that, D.B.’

‘The babes will do anything or go anywhere you ask, because they’re interested in you, and this talk about diamonds and millionaires and all that stuff has intrigued them,’ Dorothy Bayne explained. ‘Do be careful, Van! You can do anything with them just now.’

‘I will, sure! I don’t want to haul them into rows,’ Vangie promised. ‘If they like me, I’m vurry glad; but I mustn’t let them down. I’ll be real careful, D.B.’

‘It will help ever so much, if you will.—D.C., you’ll help too, won’t you?’ and Dorry leant on the end of the bed and spoke eagerly. ‘It makes things so hard when the Fifth are difficult! You know how I’d hate to report you. But you know I’d have to do it. I couldn’t funk it. We’d be horribly uncomfortable. Of course, I’d only report to Gwen; I’m such a junior prefect. She’d know what to do. But I’d hate even that, and so would you. Don’t make things too hard, D.C.! It was only that you hadn’t thought, wasn’t it?’

The last thing D.C. had expected was an appeal. Threats, or blame, or ridicule would have stiffened her attitude. But Dorry’s vehement words threw a new light on her position. She coloured, and spoke quickly, before she had time to resent the fact that Dorothy Bayne had made her feel that she had been childish. ‘D.B., I didn’t think. It’s rotten for you. It was abominable of me. I knew the kids shouldn’t be here. But I didn’t see how horrid it was for you. I’m sorry.’

‘Then that’s all right,’ Dorry said in great relief. ‘You won’t make things worse for me than they are. D.C., I do so hate not being in the same form as you!’

‘Can’t be helped. I hate it too,’ D.C. owned. ‘I’m frightfully sick about it, D.B. But I can’t go about saying so.’

‘Of course not. So long as we understand, it doesn’t matter,’ and Dorry went off to her own room, feeling a weight gone from her heart.

‘What’s all this?’ asked Merle, as she entered. ‘The Blot says you’ve been rowing Dorothy Cheyne and Van. What were they doing?’

‘What was The Blot doing?’ D.B. demanded.

‘I only went where I was invited,’ Blodwen protested. Then she wilted under Dorothy’s look. ‘D.B., I’m sorry. We knew we oughtn’t to go.’

‘We did want to see the things!’ Dot pleaded.

‘I’m tired of you both,’ Dorothy informed them. ‘Van didn’t know you were breaking rules, but you knew perfectly well.’

‘Dorothy Cheyne knew!’

‘Go down to tea, Blot,’ D.B. said sternly.

‘If you’ve let D.C. off, that kid will say it was because she’s your chum, Dorry,’ Marjorie remarked, as Blodwen and Dot fled.

‘I know. It isn’t true. I wouldn’t report anyone without warning her; and Van was in this and she hadn’t understood. But the infants won’t see that. It’s hateful of D.C. to let me in for this!’

‘I don’t suppose she thought——’

‘Thought! When D.C. thinks, call me to see!’ said Merle. ‘Thinks of anyone but herself, I mean.’

Dorry said nothing, but went down to tea looking unhappy.

After evening prep she found Dorothy Cheyne in the garden. Van was being interviewed by Pat on the subject of the Rangers.

‘D.C., Dot and The Blot think they were let off lightly this afternoon because I made a difference on your account, because we’ve been chums. I couldn’t row them, when they’d gone on your invitation. Don’t you see how awkward it makes things for me? You won’t let me in for that sort of thing again, will you? They believe I showed favouritism to you.’

‘Well?’ Dorothy Cheyne raised her brows. ‘That’s about it, isn’t it? They’re not far wrong.’

D.B. drew back and looked at her.

‘It would have been hateful of you to report me. Hateful for you too. You wouldn’t have liked to do it. I’ll be sorry for you if you ever feel you must.’ Dorothy Cheyne’s tone was light and mocking.

Dorothy Bayne, hurt and tight-lipped, turned and walked away from her into the house.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE NEW EDITOR.

As the seniors went in to supper, Dorothy Cheyne spoke to Dorry in a low tone. 'I say, D.B., I'm sorry I upset you just now. I didn't mean to.'

Dorry's answer was quick and eager. 'You couldn't have meant what you said! D.C., I was sure that you didn't really mean that!'

'What did I say? I mean, what upset you so awfully?'

'You couldn't think I'd make any difference because it was you. You don't think I'm so unsporting, do you?'

'Ass, of course not! Who said you were unsporting?'

'You did. But I knew you didn't mean it.'

'But I didn't. I didn't mean to.' D.C. knit her brows. 'You're making it up, D.B. You've a fearful imagination. When did I say you were unsporting?'

'I thought you meant it,' Dorry said helplessly. 'You don't understand, D.C.'

'You need a lot of understanding sometimes,' D.C. retorted. 'Forget all about it and be jolly again, D.B.! You do brood over things so horribly.'

Dorry gave her another hurt helpless look. 'You don't understand. I don't believe you can.'

'My dear idiot, there isn't anything to understand, outside your vivid imagination. Come and ask Vange about the Guides! She'll want to babble to somebody, and you care about them. I don't. It's all right, isn't it, D.B.? You're not going on saying I don't understand?'

'Oh no!' Dorry said quietly. 'It's no use.—Van! Come and sit between us and tell us what Pat said to you!'

'Old Whitey's' prefects were called to a meeting by the head-girl a few days later. There were three of them besides Dorothy Bayne—Elsie, Kate, and Sybil—and all had been in the Sixth for a year. The head-girl, Gwen Garth, knew she had a difficult team to drive; she did not fear opposition, but she did expect to have hard work to rouse her lieutenants to do their share. Elsie was dreamy, with a love for sentimental poetry; Kate cared only for success in exams; Sybil was pretty and popular, and would never take any step which would arouse criticism, even from juniors.

Gwen looked at them and suppressed a sigh. She turned wistfully to Dorothy Bayne, who had come shyly to her first prefects' meeting.

'We're glad to have you as a prefect, Dorothy,' Gwen began. 'Perhaps you'll have advice for us. We want an editor for the mag, in Gladys's place. She did it jolly well. We don't want the mag to go down.'

'No, it mustn't suffer,' Dorothy agreed. 'Whom had you thought of?'

'You,' Gwen explained.

Dorry flushed. 'I couldn't possibly. Please think of someone else! Couldn't one of the others do it?'

'You've taken Glad's place,' Gwen urged. 'Couldn't you, D.B.? You'd do it well.'

'I can't take on anything more. It isn't fair, Gwen. I'm new to the Sixth last term, and a new prefect. It means a lot of work. And then there's Rangers.'

'Yes, you've a patrol. It isn't fair. The editor ought to be someone with free time. But I don't know——' and Gwen frowned. 'These three say they won't.'

'Kate's too busy with matric. But you might, Elsie,' D.B. suggested. 'You could put in your own poems.'

'I should put in nothing else,' Elsie said flippantly. 'Much easier than bullying the kids into turning out rubbish.'

'It would be a jolly mag in your hands,' Gwen remarked.—'She's no use, Dorry. And Syb would take everything that was offered her. She couldn't say no.'

'Thanks!' said Sybil. 'But I don't want the job.'

'It doesn't appeal to me, either,' said Elsie. 'An editor can't put in her own stuff, in spite of your ragging. I'd rather be a humble contributor.'

Dorothy spoke diffidently. 'I suppose you wouldn't think of Dorothy Cheyne?'

'My dear chap! She's only in the Fifth!'

'Does that matter? She's keen on literary stunts. She'd write good editorial notes.'

'Oh, we all know she's a future novelist! When the world rings with her fame, she's promised to give the credit to "Old Whitey"! But I don't fancy her as editor.'

'She's already collecting photos of the school, and the playing-fields, and *us*, to appear in illustrated interviews,' Elsie remarked. "'Where the Famous Authoress was educated," "Groups of her School-Fellows"—or will they say "Little Playmates"? We've all heard how great D.C.'s going to be.'

'What rot!' Dorry cried. 'She doesn't swank!'

'Doesn't swank! My dear, she's done nothing else this term. She's eaten up with pride because she's had six months abroad,' Elsie said scornfully.

'She's aching to be asked to lecture on "My Travels," or "A Winter in Italy,"' Kate remarked. 'It's rough on her that the Literary isn't meeting.'

'That's why I want her to be editor,' Dorothy said eagerly. 'Don't you see?'

'Then you admit she swanks?' Gwen said, laughing.

'No. I don't. She doesn't mean to. But she's full of the gorgeous time she's had, and she wants to tell about it. We're all busy with school, and Guides, and tennis; and we haven't time to listen. It's very hard on her. She feels out of things, too,' Dorry urged. 'She's left in the Fifth, when the rest of our crowd have moved up; she says she doesn't care, but she does. And she hasn't joined the Guides, so she's outside that too. She hasn't found people as ready to listen to her stories as she'd hoped. She's feeling cheap, and out of things. I wish you'd make her editor, Gwen. She'd be pleased, and she'd have something to do.'

'She ought to be swotting, to make up for the last six months,' Kate observed.

'I don't see why Dorothy Cheyne should be given one of our biggest jobs, just to console her because she feels sore that we didn't all fall down and worship the traveller,' Gwen protested. 'I see your point, Dorry. But D.C.'s feelings aren't the first thing to be considered. The question is, would she do the mag well?'

'I'm sure she would.'

'I'm sure she wouldn't,' Elsie said. 'She'd stuff it full of travel essays. She'd write the whole of it.'

'You could send in stacks of verses, every other day, till she'd be so sick of you that she'd have to take some,' said Gwen. 'Dorry, I'm not keen on your idea. But I don't believe there's anyone better.'

'What about Merle? Or Pat?' asked Sybil.

Elsie groaned. 'My dear! What a rag they'd turn out!'

'No use,' Gwen said. 'They haven't it in them. Righto! We'll try Dorothy Cheyne. But only on condition we have the right to change if we aren't satisfied after she's had a fair trial. I'm not going to appoint her permanently till I've seen two or three numbers. We'll give her six months. I'll tell her it was your idea, Dorry.'

Dorry reddened. 'I'd rather you didn't. If the prefects' meeting asks her, that's compliment enough. She might not like to know I'd proposed it.'

Gwen looked at her. 'I thought you were chums?'

'We are. She'd rather not be proposed by me, for that reason.'

'I see that, of course.' Gwen paused. 'Is she mad because you're a prefect, D.B.?'

'She doesn't like it,' Dorry admitted. 'It's rotten for her, Gwen.'

'All right. I'll leave you out of it. But D.C.'s an idiot.'

As Marjorie changed for supper the following night, Dorothy Bayne threw open the door and looked hurriedly round the room. 'Is Merle here? Oh, good! I wanted to find you alone. I've only one sec; the kids are just going in to supper. You've heard that D.C. is the new editor?'

'Rather. She's frightfully bucked. She's been begging for contributions.'

Dorry rummaged in her top drawer. 'See if you think I could offer her that. I wrote it in the hols. It's quite short.' She tossed a few pages of manuscript on to the bed, and fled. 'Don't tell a soul!' She turned at the door, flushed and embarrassed.

'Righto!' Marjorie exclaimed. 'I'll love to read it. Topping of you to ask me!'

'I must know what somebody else thinks. I can't judge. Those babes will be waiting,' and Dorothy disappeared.

'She's shy,' Marjorie laughed, and sat on the window-sill to read the story—'June's Decision.'

'D.B., it's ripping!' she whispered, as the Sixth went in to supper. 'Of course you must give it to Dorothy Cheyne.'

Dorry had not looked at her. Now she turned, sudden colour in her face. 'Did you really like it?'

'I loved it. But I want to know—is it true?'

'No.' Dorry was brief but definite.

Marjorie gave her a quick look. 'I believe it is partly true. Aren't you "June"? Did something like that happen to you? You understand so well how the poor kid felt. It's an awfully jolly story, Dorry!'

'We'll talk about it later,' Dorry said in an undertone.

Merle and Vi and Pat were being teased by Dorothy Cheyne for contributions. D.C. was full of happy excitement, her resentful manner gone. 'I shall put in Elsie's sloppy stuff at first, and drop her gradually, as I discover new talent,' she said. 'There must be girls who can write decent verses. The mag isn't going to be all Sixth, as it used to be. Van says she'll write about Rome, and I'll do a series of adventure-travel articles. Plenty of things happened to us that you people haven't heard about yet!'

Pat groaned. 'Don't turn out a geography paper, or we shall go on strike!'

'Your circulation will go down,' Marjorie remarked.

D.C. laughed. 'We won't overdo the travel business. We'll have original stories.—Edna, I want a yarn from you.'

'Hasn't she asked you, D.B.?' Marjorie asked in an undertone.

Dorry shook her head. 'I'll tell you why later.'

As they undressed at bedtime D.B. explained. ‘Everybody knows D.C.’s going to be a novelist. It’s taken for granted. It’s her great hope, and she’s jolly good at any sort of writing. Her letters from Italy were ripping; you felt you’d been there with her. Her essays are always best, and she loves any history or geography paper that gives her a chance of describing something or of telling a story. We say, “That will suit D.C.,” when we read the questions. I’m different, so it hasn’t occurred to her to ask me. I hardly dare to give her a story.’

‘Silly! She’ll love it. You’ll have to be a novelist too.’

‘Oh no!’ Dorry said gravely. ‘If I’m good enough I’m going on the stage. I’ve wanted it all my life.’

Marjorie looked at her in surprise. ‘How ripping! Have you done much acting?’

‘Whenever I’ve had a chance. Some day I’m going to play Portia and Lady Macbeth. That’s a far-off dream, but I mean it to come true. Here comes Merle! Don’t say anything about the story!’

As they came in from tennis the next afternoon, Marjorie’s hand slipped through Dorry’s arm. ‘Have you given the story to D.C. yet?’

‘Not yet. I’m not sure if I shall. She may not want it.’

‘Rot! She’ll fall on your neck.’

‘She may be mad because I’ve tried to do a story.’

‘She couldn’t be such a kid!’ Marjorie cried.

‘I don’t want it to be laughed at,’ Dorry said, in a burst of confidence.

‘D.B., she won’t laugh. It’s a jolly fine story. She’ll be proud to have it. Give it to her to-night!’

Dorry looked doubtful. ‘Perhaps I won’t give it to her at all.’

‘How will you ever act, if you’re so shy?’

‘I don’t mind when it’s acting. This is different.’

‘Don’t be a goat! It’s a jolly good story. If you don’t give it to D.C., I shall tell her to ask you for it.’

‘Bully!’ said Dorothy Bayne.

‘All the same,’ Marjorie said to herself, as she changed into Guide uniform for the evening meeting, ‘I hope the editor will have the sense to be nice about that story! She’ll upset Dorry frightfully if she makes fun of it. I don’t quite trust D.C. I don’t know why.’

Dorothy, changing also, looked up. She had been thinking hard as she dressed. ‘I shall give it to D.C. to-morrow, Marjorie.’

‘I’m glad,’ Marjorie said. ‘It will be the best thing in her first number.’

CHAPTER XIX. MARJORIE AND THE BLOT ASK QUESTIONS.

As Marjorie and Merle were making their beds next morning D.B. came in. Dorothy Cheyne and Van Warner were behind her. 'May I bring in visitors, you two? Do you mind?'

'Come in!' Marjorie said hospitably. 'To what do we owe this honour?'

'We'll be tidy in two secs,' and Merle flung the quilt on her bed.

'Is it a visit from the editor?' asked Marjorie.

Dot and Blodwen, their beds made, kept humbly in the background, but watched with interest.

'No, just from a chum,' said Dorothy Bayne. 'See, D.C.!—Van, these are the pictures.'

Van and Dorothy Cheyne stood before the pastel sketches hanging on the walls.

'They *are* vurry nice,' said Van. 'I'm real glad you chose them, D.B. I shall tell Mother.'

'Jolly fine,' said Dorothy Cheyne. 'Oh, I remember that old pond! You showed it to me last October. Topping to have a picture of it! What a queer kid I was six months ago!'

'You're different now,' Van said quickly. 'We've forgotten all that worry.—Haven't we, D.B.?'

'I thought you'd like to see my pictures,' said Dorothy Bayne.

'I love them! If you find them gone, look in my room,' Vangie said, laughing.

'They're top-hole,' said D.C. 'But I must run. I want to catch Gwen before she practises, to talk about the mag.—Come on, Vange!'

'Why was D.C. queer six months ago, and why was it a worry, Dorry?' Marjorie demanded, when the visitors had gone.

Dorothy gave her a warning look, which was not lost on Blodwen. 'I've been wanting to show Van those pictures.'

'Come on downstairs, Dotty!' said The Blot, and they retreated to the garden.

'Tactful!' Marjorie commented. 'What's up?'

'Too good to be true,' said Merle. 'But The Blot wasn't here six months ago. She doesn't understand.'

'Tell me, D.B.!' Marjorie pleaded.

'There's nothing to tell,' Dorry said. 'D.C.'s an idiot to say anything. She and I had a little trouble about some essays; and she went abroad before it was cleared up. She was upset about it and came home, and we settled the business beside that pond, where the trees are. I'm keen on the picture because I was so tremendously glad to square up things. The pond reminds me that it's all right.'

Marjorie asked no more questions, but she often glanced at the blue pond and autumn trees, with Dorry's explanation in her mind.

Dot and Blodwen, in a corner of the garden, found Enid and several other juniors, and The Blot hurled herself upon them. 'Tell me all about it! It happened last September, Dotty says, but she was so new that she didn't know what it was all about. I've only been here one term, and I didn't know there was anything *to* know! What happened about Dorothy Cheyne and our D.B.? Van Warner says it was a worry, and D.C. says she was a queer kid, and Van says she's different now. Dot says there was something about some essays, and D.B. said it wasn't fair,

and she used to cry in bed at night, and Dotty had to cuddle her and tell her it would be all right.'

'That doesn't sound likely!' Enid exclaimed. 'Dorothy Bayne wouldn't listen to a kid like Dot.'

'She did!' Dot maintained. 'Don't you remember the fuss, Eny? We had the autumn picnic up by the big pond, the one in D.B.'s picture, where the cows are. We thought Dorothy Cheyne was in Geneva or somewhere, but she suddenly turned up at that picnic, with D.B., and they laughed and talked a lot, and everybody said everything was all right now. Don't you remember, silly?' impatiently, to Enid.

'But what had been wrong?' cried the exasperated Blot. 'You are so slow, Dottums!'

'Of course I remember,' Enid said indignantly. 'D.C. had cheated over some essays. I don't know how; we never heard. But there was something queer.'

'They said she hadn't been quite straight,' said Dot. 'I heard that much. But D.B. wouldn't talk about it. I was sleeping in her room that term.'

'Oh! D.C. cheated, did she? I'm not surprised,' said Blodwen. 'I don't really like her. She said Dot and I might have stolen Van's brooches. D.B.'s a sport, and she wouldn't think any more about it, if they'd made it up. But it's just what I'd have expected of Dorothy Cheyne.'

'There's the gong!' cried Enid, and they raced in to classes.

As the seniors came back from tennis that afternoon Marjorie took Dorry by the arm. 'Have you given the story to D.C. yet?'

'My courage failed.' D.B. gave a rueful laugh. 'I'm afraid she'll be so frightfully surprised.'

'Is it true, D.B.? Are the girls you and Dorothy Cheyne? Is it the story of what happened last year?'

'No, it is made up. But that suggested it,' Dorry confessed. 'It isn't what happened. But the girl in the story felt as I had done.'

'That's how you understood her so well. Are you afraid Dorothy Cheyne will guess?'

'Oh no, I'm sure she won't. She never really understood. It won't occur to her. But I don't want my story laughed at.'

'She won't laugh. But she'll be surprised, if she doesn't know you can write. But she must know, Dorry! Your essays are always good.'

Dorry coloured. 'Essays! Those aren't stories. Yes, D.C. knows I can write essays.'

Marjorie looked at her. 'It was about some essays, wasn't it? Oh well, I won't tease! Don't give the story to D.C. if you think she'll guess, Dorry. But there are no essays in your story!'

'Oh, it's quite different. D.C. won't guess. She doesn't see through things as far as that.'

'She ought to see through things, if she's going to be a novelist. Writing isn't all she'll need.'

'I know,' Dorry assented. 'But I can't help her to see. I'm sometimes worried about her, because she doesn't understand obvious things.'

'She may be different when she grows up. I'd felt there was something queer about her,' Marjorie agreed.

'She's all right,' Dorry said. 'It's only the novelist side of her I have doubts about.'

'But that ought to be part of her!' Marjorie protested. 'Oh well, she's your chum! Of course you must stand up for her. But you're to give her that story after tea, or I shall tell her to ask you for it.'

Just before evening prep Dorothy Bayne hurried into the Fifth form-room. 'Here's something for the mag, editor!' and she laid her story on Dorothy Cheyne's desk. 'Don't use it if you're full up.'

'We aren't full yet. What is it? Dramatic notes? Oh, I say, is it a story? You *are* coming on, D.B.!'

Dorry coloured and laughed. 'I thought I'd have a try. Hope you'll like it!'

'A story by D.B.?' cried Van. 'What fun!—Let me see, D.C.!'

'"June's Decision"—good title!' said the editor. 'All right, D.B.; thanks! I'll see if it'll do and let you know.'

'I'm sure it will do!' Van exclaimed. 'I expect D.B. writes ripping yarns!'

'I've never tried before, so it may not be any good.' And Dorry laughed, embarrassed and shy, and went off to do her prep. 'The editor didn't fling my baby back at me,' she said, as she sat down by Marjorie. 'She's going to consider it. Now I shall be on pins till I know what she says. Don't be mad if I'm irritable! I shall be imagining she and Van are laughing at it together.'

'Don't be a goat!' Marjorie said.

Dorry obviously avoided the editor all evening. It would not take D.C. many minutes to read her story, and surely she would want to read it at once? Ordinary curiosity would argue that. Would she not also want to make some comment immediately?

'I wish I hadn't given that silly thing to D.C.,' the author whispered, as she went in to supper with Marjorie.

'It's not silly. You needn't be worried, old chap.'

'I don't believe she's read it. She's had time, but she might not care about it.'

'I think she'd care. You're her chum. *I* should care. I shall ask her.'

'No, don't!' Dorry took fright at once. 'Why should she read it straight away?'

'Only to see what sort of yarn her chum would turn out. If she isn't curious, she's very queer.'

'Don't ask her when I'm there,' Dorry begged.

Marjorie found her opportunity just before bedtime. Gwen Garth had called the prefects into her study, as the rest were going upstairs. 'How do you like D.B.'s story, D.C.? She showed it to me. I thought it was rather good,' Marjorie asked.

'Haven't looked at it yet. I've heaps to do. Vange says it's all right and I can put it in. But Vange isn't the editor. D.B. oughtn't to have shown it to you,' D.C. said shortly. 'Mag stuff isn't supposed to be handed round the school.'

'She didn't hand it round!' Marjorie exclaimed. 'No one else has seen it. She wanted to know if I thought it was good enough.'

'Sure she didn't show it to Merle and the rest? If she did, I won't put it in. I won't have them saying I'm using old stuff.'

'They don't even know she's written it. She told me not to say a word. She wrote it in the hols, so they don't know.' Marjorie hesitated, longing to give the editor a word of advice. She knew it would be useless and might even do harm, however. 'I hope you'll like it. D.B.'s anxious to know,' she said.

'I sha'n't use it unless I do. People mustn't say I put in D.B.'s thing because she's my chum.'

'She doesn't want that,' Marjorie said. She hung about till Dorry came up, and caught her at the door, for Merle was in the bedroom. 'D.B., don't worry. Vangie likes the story. D.C.'

hasn't had time to read it yet.'

Dorry's face cleared. 'You *are* decent!' she said. 'You knew I was thinking about it!'

'So you should be. I'd have read it first, if I'd been D.C. I don't see why Van should see it at all.'

'Van knows how to drag things out of D.C.,' Dorry said. 'I expect she sees everything that's sent in for the mag.'

The next day was Saturday, when breakfast was late to allow for early bathing by all who wished. Miss Thame, a good swimmer, was on duty; the girls ran through the garden in their bath-ropes, dropped them, with their towels, in the summer-house perched on the sea-wall of 'Old Whitey's' grounds, and ran across the promenade and shingle into the sea.

Marjorie and Dorry were among the later comers. They passed Dorothy Cheyne and Van Warner coming out as they were going down.

'Water's glorious,' shivered D.C. 'But it's chilly. And I've too much to do to stay in long.'

They hurried in for their rub down, and presently came out again in their tunics and blazers, enjoying the biscuits which were always waiting for bathers. With other early folk they strolled on the terrace behind the sea-wall in the sunshine, watching the rest in the water.

'That looks like editorial business,' Marjorie suggested, as she and Dorry came panting up the shingle after a vigorous swim.

D.C. and Vangie were sitting together on the wall, deep in the contents of a portfolio D.C. had brought out with her. Dorry glanced at them. She flushed, and hurried in to dress. 'D.C.'s reading my yarn. I saw the blue cover.'

'I'm glad she's reading it at last,' Marjorie remarked. 'Now we'll hear what she thinks about it.'

Dorry agreed, and dressed in silence, her face troubled.

'Don't look so glum, old girl!' and Marjorie took her arm, as they went out into the sunshine. 'At the worst, if D.C. doesn't like the story, you'll only lose your opinion of her good sense!'

Dorry laughed. 'It isn't that. The story doesn't matter so much. But I've a horrible feeling that I was silly to give it to D.C. I can't explain, but I believe it was a mistake.'

'You don't trust her,' Marjorie said. 'What harm can it do, D.B.?'

'I do trust her,' Dorry said quickly. 'But she does queer things sometimes. Let's have it over!' and she hurried to meet Vangie and Dorothy Cheyne, who were coming up the lawn, D.C. carrying her portfolio of manuscripts.

'I say, D.B.! Have you heard?' cried D.C. 'Pat's just told us; Elsie told her——'

'About the picnic; *to-day!* Gorgeous!' cried Van. 'I'm aching to go out on the hills!'

'Willy wouldn't tell us till this morning, for fear the weather would change,' D.C. went on eagerly. 'But she thinks now it will hold out for to-day. We're to go in buses, D.B., and climb up from the top of the Bostel——'

'To the pond by the Ring; the pond in your picture; and have lunch beside it,' Vangie exulted. 'I've never been up there yet.'

'Oh, I've been often. But a picnic's always topping,' said Dorothy Cheyne. 'D.B., we're to start——'

'Oh, I know all about it! I didn't know it was public property, though.' There was a note of irritation in Dorry's voice. She had been expecting something else. 'Gwen told us last night. But she told us not to talk about it.'

‘Oh! Swank! I forgot you were a posh prefect.’ D.C. raised her eyebrows. ‘Vange, you ass, fancy trying to tell a prefect anything! There’s the gong; I’m dying for some grub. Willy will be announcing the picnic at brekker. Come on!’

‘Come on, D.B.!’ Van held out her hand. ‘You’re glad about the picnic, aren’t you? We forgot you’d be sure to know.’

Dorry dared not meet Marjorie’s eyes. Marjorie, too, had been expecting some comment from D.C. One look of understanding between them and Marjorie would break out with the question that must be kept back.

D.B. took Van’s arm and held out her other hand to Marjorie. ‘Glad? Of course! It will be topping. It’s going to be a perfect day.—Hook on to Van, D.C.!’ and they went in to breakfast arm in arm.

‘Dorry!’ Marjorie began.

Dorry’s arm squeezed her hand warningly. ‘You’ll love the Downs,’ she said. Then, as they separated for breakfast, ‘Don’t say a word! It’s no good.’

‘But what’s the matter with D.C.?’

‘Nothing. She’s forgotten. She’s only thinking about the picnic.’

‘Forgotten!’ Marjorie said incredulously. ‘She might have said something, D.B.’

Dorry turned away quickly to take charge of the junior table. ‘You can’t ask her. You can’t do anything, Marj.’

‘I’d like to!’ Marjorie exclaimed.

CHAPTER XX. D.C. LEADS THE WAY.

During breakfast, picnic preparations, and the start for the hills, Marjorie tried in vain to find a chance to speak again to Dorry. It seemed almost as if D.B. were avoiding her.

Dorry was very busy, helping to pack sandwiches and to marshal the juniors into the big motor-coaches. At the last minute she jumped in beside Dot and Blodwen, and Marjorie knew the ride would not offer the chance she was looking for.

Leaving the coaches, the girls climbed by a narrow lane, whose banks were thick with primroses. They crossed a stretch of open turf, and then struggled up a steep little cliff with helpful steps in the chalk. A long easy rise brought them to a round pond, on the very edge of the hills, and they sat resting and gazing down into the blue Weald. From there a green road across the turf led them to the Ring of trees which crowned the Downs, and they scattered, some among the trees, some to the big round pond of Dorothy Bayne's picture.

The prefects began to unpack the lunch-baskets. Marjorie came to help. 'Hasn't D.C. said anything yet about your story?'

Dorry shook her head. 'I believe we've forgotten the salt. No, here it is! What a relief!'

'Not a word, D.B.?'

'Not a word, my child.'

'We know she's read it,' Marjorie argued.

'She's forgotten all about it.'

'Forgotten! She might have told you how she liked it.'

'The picnic put it out of her head. She isn't thinking about the mag. Look at her!'

'I can see she isn't.' Marjorie looked at D.C. playing rounders with Vangie and Pat and some juniors. 'But she might have said something, Dorry!'

'She would have done, if the picnic hadn't come along. Stop thinking about it, Marjorie. It's the only thing to do.'

'How long is she going to keep you waiting?'

'In time I shall hear whether she's going to use it or not.'

'Sha'n't you ask her how she likes it?'

'No!' Dorry exclaimed. 'I'd rather wait. Don't butt in, Marjorie. Leave her alone.'

'I'd like to talk to her,' Marjorie cried. 'But I won't interfere. It looks as if she hadn't liked the story. I don't think much of her taste.'

'Why do you think she doesn't like it?'

'You don't forget to speak about things when you've liked them,' Marjorie said. 'I didn't forget to tell you I'd liked the story. I was full of it; I wanted to tell you. If D.C. had really liked it, she wouldn't have forgotten.'

Dorry unpacked sandwiches in silence. 'That may be true,' she said at last. 'But is it the story D.C. doesn't like, or is it my having written it?'

'I can't tell you. But she hasn't liked something, or she wouldn't have forgotten—if she has forgotten. Perhaps she's mad because it's a far better story than she could have written herself; and so she won't speak about it.'

'But she isn't angry,' Dorry pointed out. 'She's quite as usual. But she has forgotten all about my story. It's just that she's thrilled over the picnic, Marjorie.'

‘Then she’s a kid, and she ought to be smacked.’

Dorry laughed. ‘Try it! You’d better not.’

After a merry lunch in the shade of the Ring, and a lazy rest, while jokes and riddles went round, the seniors began to pack the baskets again.

Marjorie took Dorothy Bayne’s place. ‘I’ll do that. You take Van to see the pond. She hasn’t been along there yet.’

With Van and Dorothy Cheyne, D.B. wandered to the edge of the great dew-pond, a perfect round, with flat raised banks making a parapet.

‘It’s vurry like the picture!’ Vangie said, in delight.

They looked across the gleaming water, over green hills to the sea, then turned their backs on the hills and walked to the edge, to look out over the plain, blue and purple and misty, far below.

‘The Sixth are going to walk home,’ Dorry remarked, turning once more to look seaward. ‘Miss Thame is going with us. It’s a glorious walk. We go right over Camp Hill, that big green one,’ she explained to Vangie. ‘There’s a prehistoric camp on the top. You go across the moat and in by gaps in the walls.’

‘We’ll walk too!’ Dorothy Cheyne exclaimed. ‘You’ll love it, Van!’

Dorry looked troubled. ‘I don’t think you’ll be allowed to. The Head said “only the Sixth.”’

‘Oh, rot! Don’t be a swank! She’ll let us go. Van and I have done real climbing abroad,’ D.C. said indignantly. ‘A little mound like Camp Hill is nothing.—Come and ask Willy, Van!’

Miss Willcox was firm. She could make no exceptions. The Fifth would go home by coach. The Sixth might walk with Miss Thame, if they chose.

Dorothy Cheyne, furious with disappointment and hurt pride, disappeared into the Ring with Van. To be sent home by bus with the juniors was a bitter blow. ‘I know there are kids in the Fifth who couldn’t do it. But it’s different for you and me, Vange. We know all about walking. We wouldn’t be knocked up. Think of the tramps we did in Switzerland! It’s abominable!’

‘It’s the worst luck ever,’ Van agreed disconsolately. ‘I sure would love to hike over that green hill. I just dote on anything prehistoric!’

‘I’m fed up,’ D.C. groaned. ‘There they go, D.B. and Marjorie and Merle and Pat, all swanking along. And we’re left to lug the baskets down to the bus! It’s utterly rotten, Vange!’

‘I guess that’s about so,’ Van said, her drawl more pronounced in her distress.

Suddenly Dorothy sprang up from the log on which she had collapsed. ‘We *won’t* be done out of it! Willy’ll be wild, but we’ll have had our fun. Are you game, Vange? You’re sure you can do it?’

‘I can walk,’ Van said. ‘But what are you going to do?’

‘Scoot down that path, to the right, till we’re out of sight, and then work our way across to their track. No one’s thinking about us. Willy’s gone off to see the pond. We can’t follow them, for we’d be seen on that open hill. But this path goes in the same direction; there’s sure to be a way across.’

Anyone knowing the Downs would have laughed. But Vangie did not know the Downs and she saw nothing to laugh at. The tracks both led towards the sea; true, there was a valley between, but it would surely be easy to cross that as soon as they were out of sight of the picnic group.

'We'll keep behind them, until they've gone so far that they can't send us back,' D.C. added. 'But we'll keep them in sight. The hills are too lonely for us to go on our own. We'll keep just behind the crowd, so that we could coo-ee to them in case of need.'

'What could happen?' asked Vangie, fascinated, as they crept round to the other side of the Ring. 'Cows? Gipsies?'

'We might meet someone we didn't like. Or you might sprain your ankle. I couldn't carry you.'

'Sure! I wouldn't like you to try,' Van said.

They left the trees behind and ran like rabbits over the green brow and down the path.

'Safe! We're out of sight. We haven't been seen!' D.C. panted. 'Now we'll show them we're as good as the swanky Sixth!'

'What will Miss Willcox do?' Van asked, as they went down the sloping green track. 'Won't she be fearfully upset, Dorothy? She'll think we're lost.'

'She'll send out search-parties. We'll go as far as we can before she finds out. If they came over that hill they'd see us here. She'll guess,' Dorothy said. 'There isn't anywhere we could hide up there. She'll guess where we've gone. We shall have a wiggling, and marks, or no shopping for a month. You'll be let off lightly; she'll know it was my idea.'

'I won't!' Van said indignantly. 'I won't let her make any difference. Can't we go across to the others, Dorothy? It sure is vurry lonely,' and she looked round at the silent empty hills with a shiver. 'There isn't a soul about. If we met tramps or gipsies we couldn't do anything. Where do you suppose the Sixth are now?'

Dorothy gazed over the rolling hills. 'That's just what I'm not sure about.'

'What d'you mean?' Vangie asked nervously. 'You said we'd go across and find them.'

Dorothy knit her brows. The valley had widened, and was now a great shallow combe. Beyond were slopes dotted with gorse and hawthorn, alight with gold and white. 'We'll see the rest when we get over there,' she said hopefully. 'I thought we'd be able to see them from here. It's a long way. We'd better plunge.'

It was farther across the valley than she had expected. The bushes gave cover and the girls did not fear to be seen; but both were tired by the time they had toiled up the opposite slope.

'We shall find the others at the top,' Dorothy said encouragingly.

'I don't believe it.' Van had been thinking and she had her wits about her. 'They were walking fast. We've been a vurry long time climbing this hill.'

The top, when they reached it, was a disappointment, for a further slope rose beyond.

'That always happens,' D.C. grumbled. 'There's always another top; and another!'

They toiled on through gorse and may, and at last stood beside another round pond, with a wide stretch of hills before them.

'It's mighty confusing,' Van remarked. 'The ponds all look alike, and so do the hills. Where are the others, Dorothy?'

There was no sign of the Sixth. Dorothy looked across ploughed fields to distant trees. 'I haven't an idea. I thought we'd be able to see them from here.'

'I can't see a sign of them. We'll have to go home on our own. You know the way, don't you?' Van demanded.

Dorothy's eyes ranged over the lonely hills, and she did not answer.

Vangie grew anxious. 'Dorothy, you know where we are, don't you? I couldn't find my way home, but you can, can't you?'

'I'm not sure of the best way,' Dorothy confessed. 'These hills do look so fearfully much alike, as you said.'

'Then I guess we're lost.' Vangie gave a cry.

'We can't be lost,' Dorothy said irritably. 'There's the Ring, beyond that hill; we can always go to it and go back the way we came. And there's Camp Hill; the town's on the other side of it.'

'It looks a vurry long way,' Van sighed. 'Hadn't we better start? It's mighty dark, D.C.'

'Dark! At four o'clock, in May!' D.C. scoffed.

'I don't mean night. I mean rain,' Van said bluntly. 'The sun's gone. There's going to be a storm.'

'It will be beastly if there is. We've only our blazers.'

'I guess we'll be well soaked. Which way shall we go?' Van demanded.

Dorothy stood by the dew-pond and gazed around. 'Not a sign of anyone. There's a broad track somewhere, leading right across to Camp Hill. If we could strike it we might catch them yet.'

'Let's go the way we know!' Van urged. 'I don't want to go further into these hills. They're uncanny now the sun's gone,' and she shivered.

An eerie silence had fallen, and a cold wind was sweeping down from the Ring. A sea-gull flew past with a scream. The hills stretched away, gloomy and mysterious, to a line of dark fir-trees.

'I'm scared of this place!' Vangie cried. 'Dorothy, come away! It's horrid! I feel something will come over those hills at us in a moment!' She turned to run down the slope they had just climbed, in sheer panic of the silence and loneliness.

Dorothy ran after her. 'Van! Don't be a goat! The other way's better. You're going away from home!'

Van paused. 'How do you want to go? I'm afraid of these hills. They've changed since the morning. I'm sure there are things about, ghosts or creatures.'

'Ass!' Dorothy caught her arm. 'It's hateful to be here alone, I know, but it's only frightening because there's rain coming. If we go that way, we shall have to fag up to the Ring again and then go down that steep path to the road.'

'But Miss Willcox and the girls are there. We'd go home in the coach.'

'They wouldn't be there. They'd go down when they saw . . . I say, the Ring's gone!'

'Everything's gone,' Van gasped. 'Camp Hill, and all. How quickly the mist came!'

'It's rushing on us.' Dorothy looked wildly round for shelter. 'We'll be soaked to the skin. In here, Vange!' She dragged Vangie under an ancient thorn bush, whose branches reached the ground. 'It's like a tent. We won't be very wet.'

They lay close together in the shelter, while the rain thundered down outside and the world disappeared in a grey blanket of mist.

Van shivered. 'Isn't it cold? How long will it go on, Dorothy?'

'Oh, not long,' D.C. said valiantly. 'It's too heavy to last. I hope the mist will lift soon. I'm not going a step until it does.'

'Would we be lost? More lost than we are?'

'Much more. As soon as it clears we can go on. We know where we are. At the worst, we could always find the Ring and go down the way we came up. Once we reached the road we'd take a bus, or somebody would give us a lift. But if we wander about in the mist we won't know where we are when it clears.'

'That's so,' Van agreed. 'But it may be all night, Dorothy.'

'Hope not. I wonder where the others are?'

'We can't go down the way we came up,' Van remarked. 'The path will be slippery. It was bad enough when it was dry.'

'I forgot it was chalk. We'd break our necks. Then we'll have to go on. It will be all right, Vange. The tracks must lead somewhere. We were on a broad path before we came down into the valley. It must have been going to some farm. The thing I draw the line at is wandering about without any path and getting mixed up in bushes and barbed wire.'

'No, that would be beastly. Listen to the rain! Doesn't it make a row?'

There came a lull in the storm. Van sat up suddenly and stared about her, with frightened eyes. 'Dorothy, there's something moving, in there behind us!' she whispered, in terror. 'I heard something. Can you see?'

Dorothy peered in among the bushes behind their thorn tree. 'Van, don't be a goat. You're all jumpy. How could there be anything? What do you suppose it was? A tiger? Or a snake? Or a mouse?'

Van gave a little scream. 'I forgot about snakes! Pat said she'd seen them on the Downs. This is just the sort of place!'

'Oh, don't be soft!' D.C. regretted the thoughtless word. 'Of course there are no snakes up here!'

'But Pat said——'

'If there are any, they're quite harmless. You didn't hear anything, Vange. Listen again—now! There isn't anything, is there?' D.C. said soothingly.

'I didn't hear it then.' Vangie grew calmer. 'But I thought something moved. If it comes again, I shall bolt out into the rain.'

'Don't be an idiot! There's nothing here.' D.C. kept her talking to steady her nerves. 'Think about something else! Aren't we going to have a jolly first number of the mag? There are some topping things sent in.'

'Was D.B. pleased to hear you liked her story?' Vangie asked, trying to quiet her fears.

'I don't believe I told her. I'll have to say something to her to-night.'

'Oh, D.C.! That was mean!' Van forgot the snakes. 'She looked real thrilled when she gave it to you. I'm sure she was shy. You might have told her it was all right.'

'I didn't think of it.'

'She'll be wondering how you feel about it. She'll think you don't like it. Don't forget again, D.C.!'

'I wish the rain would stop,' Dorothy said restlessly, changing the subject. 'I've had enough of the Downs for one day.'

'Why did the hills scare me so?' Van whispered. 'I was frightened, Dorothy. I'd have run for miles, if you hadn't been here.'

'It's the emptiness. There's such a lot of space and nobody in it. I know how you felt. I wouldn't come without someone to talk to. If I were alone and that scared feeling seized me, I should begin talking to myself, and then I should run, and then I should go mad with fright. One feels so awfully alone and small.'

'I thought you were afraid we might meet tramps.'

'It's more frightening *not* to meet anybody, sometimes. But it's all right so long as there are two. It's going off, Vange. We've been lucky.'

'I can see the Ring,' Van announced, peering through the branches. 'The mist's going.'

‘It’s the mist I’m afraid of. If it clears, we’ll bolt for home.’

‘Which way? We may wander about all night.’

‘Don’t panic!’ Dorothy scolded. ‘It isn’t five; we’ve hours of daylight yet. If we walk fast in any direction we’re sure to come to somewhere. But we’ll take the track we know. Down the way we came, Vange, and up to the green road that brought us from the Ring. A big path like that means something at the end of it.’

Van agreed, and they sat watching the rain till the sky had cleared and the distant hills were plain.

‘The storm’s going out to sea. The rain’s stopped,’ Van said. ‘Let’s start, Dorothy! I’m cold, and it’s past teatime.’

‘And we haven’t one chocolate between us. Don’t run, Vange! The turf will be slippery.’

‘There *is* something moving in there!’ Van cried. ‘Dorothy, I did hear something; I did! Don’t laugh! I believe it’s the tramp! Come away quickly!’

‘Wait a sec.’ Dorothy crawled out of their hiding-place. ‘Don’t scoot away, Vange. I’m going to see.’

‘Oh, don’t! You are mad! Dorothy, come back!’

Dorothy’s laugh rang out from the other side of the copse; the thorn bush had been on the outskirts of a clump of low trees. ‘Come and see the enemy, Vange!’

Van went unwillingly. Then she, too, laughed, for a flock of sheep had taken shelter under the trees and were staring in startled wonder.

‘They didn’t know of us, and we didn’t know of them,’ Dorothy said, laughing. ‘Good-bye, old dears! Where’s your shepherd, and your dog?—Now be careful, Vange! I’ve laid that ghost for you, anyway!’

They slid and slithered on the slippery turf, and had to go slowly down and up the sides of the wide hollow. It seemed a long time till at last they stood on the green track again, with the Ring just showing above the hill behind.

‘Wouldn’t it be better to go back there, Dorothy?’ Vangie suggested. ‘We don’t know just where this path will lead us. My! I’d like to be on a big road again and know it was the way home!’

‘Stars! You don’t want to slide down that steep path on wet chalk, do you? You know now how slippery it can be. I thought we’d sprain our ankles on that last slope.’

‘That’s so,’ Vangie admitted. ‘But will this way take us to a road?’

‘It must lead somewhere. We’re going down; no more Ring for us to-day!’ Dorothy said firmly, and she set off downhill.

A shout rang out behind them. Both girls wheeled round in amazement. They had been feeling alone in the world, except for sheep and sea-gulls.

Two small figures were dancing wildly on the turf, waving their arms and shouting—‘Stop! Wait for us!’

‘My aunt!’ said Dorothy. ‘More refugees! Who is it?’

‘It’s The Blot and Dotty,’ cried Van. ‘Where *have* they been? Were they left behind?’

The children were racing madly downhill to join them. ‘Van!—D.C., do wait!’

Dorothy’s face darkened. ‘Much more likely they stayed behind. Perhaps they saw us!—Kids, what do you mean by this? Why aren’t you at home with the others?’

‘Were you lost?’ cried Van. ‘Are you wet? Where were you in that awful rain?’

‘In a bush. We aren’t very wet! There were rabbit-holes, but we didn’t see the rabbits,’ Dot panted. ‘Do show us the way home, Dorothy!’

'Kindly explain yourselves first,' Dorothy insisted.

'We wanted to go with you and Vangie,' Dot began.

'Oh, *did* you? And who invited you to join us?'

'You went after the Sixth,' Blodwen explained. 'We came after you. We wanted to walk home too.'

At the look on D.C.'s face, Van went off into a shout of laughter. 'Dorothy, what can you say? We never asked them, but the Sixth never asked us. We're as bad as The Blot this time. It's exactly the same thing.'

'It's not the same at all,' Dorothy said wrathfully. 'Don't give yourself away, Vange! You are a lunatic! It was all right for us to follow the Sixth; we knew we could do the walk, and we're as old as they are. It's just an accident we're still in the Fifth. But for infants like these two, it was simply mad.'

'It's exactly the same!' Blodwen caught up Van's words, hopping about excitedly. 'We knew we could do the walk! We're topping walkers! We didn't know it would rain, and neither did you.—Van, it is just the same for us as for you, isn't it?'

'Can't say I see vurry much difference,' Van drawled.

'You'll find the Head will think there's a difference,' Dorothy said haughtily.

'She'll say it's worse for you, because you're older,' The Blot cried, with deep experience of the wisdom of the Head. 'She'll know we couldn't have gone after you if you hadn't gone after the Sixth.'

'You think you know a lot, don't you?' Dorothy said. 'Suppose you start for home at once. You're in our charge now.'

'We don't know the way,' Blodwen retorted. 'We'll follow all right, if you'll only start. Dotty and I haven't the least wish to stay out on the hills all night.'

Dot's hand crept round Vangie's arm. 'It was awfully cold and frightening under that bush. We didn't know where you'd disappeared to, Van. We were running after you when the rain began; we bolted into the bushes to shelter, and we thought we'd lost you for ever. Blotty said we'd have to go right up to the Ring again and down the steep path, and then we'd have to walk home, as the coaches would have gone. Then you came up the hill, and we just yelled and ran after you. Don't be cross, Van! I was so scared under the bush!'

Van's eyes met Dorothy's. 'Were there things that moved?'

'There were spiders and creepy-crawlies. And Blotty saw a little mouse, but it ran away.'

'It didn't like Blotty, I guess.—Say, Dorothy, the kids have been badly scared. Don't scold them any more! We'll all be in a row together when we go home. Let's hustle! You said we'd go down this path, didn't you?'

'It's the only way I know,' Dorothy said curtly. 'Off you go, Blot! Straight down the hill and keep to the track.—Go on, Dotty! You two must lead the way. We can't let you out of our sight!'

Reluctantly, but eager to reach home, the juniors went ahead down the green road.

'It will make things worse for us,' Dorothy pointed out. 'They are little idiots! The Head will blame us for them as well as for ourselves. She'll say it was our fault.'

'The Blot saw that. She's "some" smart,' Vangie remarked. 'I'll sure tell Miss Willcox we didn't know anything about them, Dorothy.'

'She'll say it's our fault, all the same,' Dorothy groaned. 'They're little horrors!'

It was easy going down the hill. The wet turf was very short, and there were not many patches of chalk. Before long a gate appeared, leading to a lane. The Blot and Dot hailed it

with shouts of joy and raced ahead, and were swinging on it when the elder girls came up.

‘This is the way down,’ Dorothy exclaimed. ‘Come on, you silly infants! Now we’re all right. Oh, never mind the mud! What does that matter, after all that’s happened? Don’t fall, though, Blot! You will be a Blot, if you get down in that!’

They had to wade through ankle-deep mud and to jump across cart-tracks filled with puddles. Dot and Blodwen enjoyed these, so their progress was slow. Vangie sighed with relief when a turn of the lane showed the high road.

Then Dorothy, with a shout, dashed forward and stood waving wildly to stop a green bus. ‘What luck!’ she cried, laughing, as Van and the juniors came running up, and they all climbed on board. ‘We might have had an hour to wait. I say, has anybody any money?’

‘Not a cent. Yes, I’ve my lucky franc. You said we wouldn’t need money on the Downs. We sha’n’t have to get off, shall we?’ Van wailed.

‘Oh, Dorothy, make love to the conductor!’ cried The Blot.

‘I’ll give him my watch, rather than get off, now that we’re really on a bus,’ Dorothy said.

‘Think of us crouching under that bush, on those awful hills!’ Van sighed. ‘I love this darling bus! No, I won’t get off, Dorothy.’

‘Here he comes!’ and Dorothy braced herself for the explanations.

She described their plight to the conductor: ‘We’re very sorry, but we haven’t a penny between us. We were so glad to see you that we never stopped to think. We’ve been lost on the hills in that storm, and it seemed so wonderful to see a bus that we just yelled and ran.’

‘Guess I’ll have to put you off in the village. It’s only four miles to walk from there,’ he suggested, his eyes twinkling.

‘You couldn’t be so brutal!’ Vangie cried. ‘We’re dead already!’

‘He’s pulling our legs. These conductors are all dears,’ Dorothy said confidently. ‘Will you take our names and addresses? Or do you know our hats?’

‘White House School, isn’t it?’

‘“Old Whitey,”’ Dorothy agreed. ‘Thanks so much! What is the fare? We’ll take it to the office.’

‘Dorothy! Oh, how awful!’ Vangie shrieked. ‘Here’s the village, and hundreds of people waiting for the bus, and who do you think they are? Miss Thame and all the Sixth! Oh, what shall we do? Could we hide under the seats? What will they say to us?’

Blodwen collapsed in helpless giggling. ‘There’s nowhere to hide. How simply awful!’

Dot looked ready to cry; she was overtired, and this was the last straw.

Dorothy had grown scarlet. To have to confess to the Head was bad enough. But to be ignominiously caught and taken home by Miss Thame and the Sixth—by D.B., and Marjorie, and Merle, and Pat—was a nightmare. She would have escaped from the bus if it had been possible. ‘We can’t do anything,’ she groaned. ‘We’re caught. How simply ghastly!’

CHAPTER XXI. INSIDE THE BUS.

‘Can we go on top?’ asked Merle, as the bus came up.

‘The seats will be sopping,’ Gwen remarked. ‘We can’t sit in pools.’

‘Perhaps the covers will have been on. Then it would be all right,’ cried Marjorie. She made a dash for the top of the bus. The rest crowded after her, laughing and eager. No one looked inside, where four girls in ‘Old Whitey’ hats sat in the front seats, waiting to be discovered.

‘Is it all right, Marjorie?’ called Miss Thame.

‘Quite, Miss Thame. The covers were on, so the seats are dry.’ Marjorie leaned over the side.

‘Good!’ Miss Thame ran up the steps, and the bus started.

‘It’s like a private bus for “Whitey’s”!’ said The Blot.

‘Saved!’ Van whispered exultantly. ‘They never looked inside.’

‘Only for the moment, though!’ D.C. retorted. ‘We can’t get off without being seen.’

‘Couldn’t we ask the man to stop, and then slip off, Dorothy? They’d never look to see who was getting out,’ Blodwen suggested.

‘But we’d have to walk home! I can’t walk four more miles!’ Van cried, in horror.

The conductor went up to take the fares. ‘Some more of your lot inside,’ he said pleasantly to Pat and Merle, who were on the back seat. ‘Can’t pay their way. Oh, you can’t either?’ He began to laugh, as Pat pointed to Miss Thame. ‘Better settle up for the whole crowd at once!’

‘Some more? Do you mean more of our girls?’ Merle made for the steps, with Pat at her heels and Marjorie and Dorry close behind.

‘That pig of a man’s told them!’ D.C. said wrathfully, as she heard the outcry. ‘Oh, the brute!’

Merle hung precariously over the railings and peered inside the bus. Four white hats and the backs of four blazers were all she saw. The inside passengers were gazing stonily at the road in front.

‘Who is it?—You idiots, don’t joggle me off!’ to those behind. ‘Oh well, come and see for yourselves! It’s D.C. and Van, and The Blot and Dot!’

Merle ran down the steps, with the rest following, and the bus was filled with girls and chatter. ‘D.C., how did you get here? Where are the others? Did you lose Willy and the coaches? What happened?’

‘You might pay our fares when you pay your own,’ D.C. said. ‘We haven’t a farthing.’

‘An hour ago we wanted vurry much to see you. But, say! We don’t care so much about you now,’ drawled Van.

Miss Thame came hurriedly down the swaying steps. ‘Dorothy and Vangie, what does this mean? Why are you here alone? Where are the others and Miss Willcox?’

‘We don’t know. Gone home in the coaches, we suppose,’ D.C. said sulkily.

‘Dorothy!’

‘She’s tired, Miss Thame,’ Vangie apologised hastily. ‘We’ve had the worst time ever. It’s been *the* limit! We had to hide under a bush in all that storm, and there were snakes—at least, they were sheep really—and we didn’t know the way. Then we caught the bus, and we hadn’t

any money, but the man was nice about it, and we thought we were going to get home without meeting anybody. And then we saw all of you, and it was a hideous blow. It's rotten!

'Snakes that were sheep!' Merle giggled. 'Vange, *you're* the limit! What changed them into sheep?'

'They were snakes when I heard them, and sheep when D.C. saw them,' Van explained.

'But what about these kids? Why aren't you with all the rest?' cried Pat.

'Be quiet, girls!' Miss Thame commanded. 'Dorothy, kindly answer my questions without rudeness. Why are you not with the rest of the school?'

The bus lurched round a corner, and the girls rolled into seats, laughing and falling on top of one another. An elderly gentleman, who had taken one of the back seats at the last stopping-place, eyed the excited crowd distastefully.

'He's going to complain to the bus company!' Merle whispered, and giggled behind Pat's back.

'I don't blame him,' said Gwen. 'This is an unusual sort of scene to have in a bus.'

Dorothy was apologising hurriedly. 'I'm sorry, Miss Thame. But I was feeling fed up. We never thought we should run into your crowd after we were on the bus.'

'No?' Miss Thame said politely. 'But why are you on the bus at all?'

Dorothy crimsoned. 'We followed you. We wanted to walk home too. We—we ran away from the rest.'

'Oh! Really!' Miss Thame gazed at her.

'I'm sorry,' Dorothy said, feeling, as she told Vangie later, about three. 'I see now it was babyish. It didn't seem silly at the time. We wanted to walk, so we came by another path, meaning to run across and keep behind you. But it was farther than we'd expected, and the storm caught us and we had to shelter. We couldn't find you, so we came down another way, and we met the bus at the bottom.'

'Miss Willcox will tell you what she thinks of your conduct,' Miss Thame remarked. 'You ought to be in the kindergarten. You're very lucky that you aren't still wandering on the hills.—Gwen, you must see them all back to school. I must go to find the Head and tell her these four are safe.'

'But she'll be home by now!' cried Van.

'Wouldn't she go home in the coaches?' faltered Dorothy Cheyne.

'My dear children! And leave it to chance whether four of her girls came home or not? Did you think she'd be content to wait till you happened to turn up? Of *course* she would send the rest home with Mademoiselle and Miss Coombes, and she would go back to look for you! I hope she stayed in shelter somewhere during the storm. She'd know she couldn't find you till it was over. She'll go to the village for help. I shall soon pick up her tracks.'

'Oh, Miss Thame! Let us come too! We're Guides!' An eager shout went up.

Miss Thame laughed. 'No, thank you. We don't want the whole school out tracking the Head. I don't imagine Miss Willcox is lost on the Downs. For one thing,' with withering scorn, 'she knows the hills, which Dorothy Cheyne evidently does not. I merely meant that I should soon hear where the Head had made inquiries and which way she had gone. We shall meet a bus very soon, so I'll get out and be ready for it.—Gwen, you're in charge.—I can trust you, girls?'

'Oh, rather, Captain!' There was a regretful chorus.

'But we'd much rather come with you!' Pat said, as the bus slowed down.

Miss Thame laughed again. She turned in the doorway. 'If Mademoiselle hasn't already done it, tell Charles to bring the Head's car to wait for us in the village. But I expect Miss Willcox sent a message by those in the coach. Go straight home, girls, and report to Mademoiselle at once.—If by any chance Miss Willcox should be there, Gwen, ring up the inn and ask them to take a message for me. I'll call there presently and ask.'

'Yes, Miss Thame. That's a good idea,' Gwen said warmly. 'We must be able to reach you somehow.'

'Otherwise it may be Sunday before the whole of "Old Whitey's" Staff is under one roof!' Marjorie said solemnly, as Miss Thame waved her hand from the side of the road.

Then, as the bus rattled on and left her there, the Sixth turned with one accord to look at Dorothy Cheyne.

'You really are the limit!' said Gwen.

'She didn't think,' Dorry Bayne began. 'She never meant it to be as bad as this.'

'Didn't think! She isn't an infant!' Gwen exclaimed.

'She oughtn't to be, but she is,' said Elsie. 'That's the trouble. She never does think or mean.'

Dorothy turned her back on them and stared out of the window. 'I didn't want Willy to go and lose herself. There wasn't any need for Miss Thame to go back. It's silly.'

'But we couldn't let Miss Willcox go on looking for us all night!' Van pointed out. 'What will Miss Thame do, Pat? She can't search all over those lonely hills!'

'Captain will soon pick up traces of the Head. She's fine at that,' Pat said.

'Van, if D.C.'s going to sulk, suppose you tell us more about it,' Marjorie suggested. 'Tell us about those snakes and the sheep! And why did you take Dotty and The Blot with you? Wasn't that rather mad?'

'Mercy, we never did! We didn't want them. They ran after us,' Van explained.

'We were under a bush too; a different bush,' cried Blodwen.

'Guess we'd better tell them the whole story,' Vangie drawled.

The bus was drawing up at 'Old Whitey's' gate before she had finished. As the girls jumped out, Dorothy Bayne hung back and went down the steps just in front of Vangie and Dorothy Cheyne. D.C. had sat in gloomy silence all the way, brooding over the probable results of her foolish impulse.

'D.C., why did you do it?' Dorry took her arm. 'You must have known it was mad?'

'Oh, don't talk your goody prefect-stuff to me!' D.C. wrenched away her arm. 'Leave me alone!'

Dorry drew back. 'I wasn't trying to be a prefect. I'd forgotten I was one. I thought you looked fed up and left out of things,' she said.

'It isn't fair!' D.C. flared out. 'I only wanted to walk like the rest of you. But these two kids tacked on, and Willy will blame me for that. And now Miss Thame and Willy are wandering on the hills, and it isn't my fault, but I shall be blamed for that too. I didn't want them or the kids to be in it at all. It's far worse than I meant. It's *not* fair!' She stalked into the house alone.

'But that's always the way,' D.B. said soberly. 'It seems rotten luck, but things always turn out worse than one meant, you know, Vange.'

'I guess that's so. But we didn't mean to drag other people into this, D.B.! What will Miss Willcox say to us?'

Dorry shook her head. 'How can I tell? I was an ass to let D.C. think I was sorry for her! It always makes her bristle up. She can't stand being sympathised with.'

'I rather like it myself. Just now I feel I want it quite a lot!' Van said sadly.

CHAPTER XXII. THE HEAD DECIDES.

'I feel like a prisoner awaiting execution,' Dorothy Cheyne whispered to Van, as they sat down to late tea. 'If we knew what was going to happen it wouldn't be so bad.'

'It might be vurry much worse.' Van had no experience of school rows and she was very apprehensive.

'I wish Willy and Miss Thame would come back.'

'I wish they wouldn't!' Van murmured.

Blodwen and Dot were giving a highly-coloured account of their wanderings to an admiring audience. The senior school had flatly refused admiration to D.C. and Vangie, but the juniors had no scruples, and were eager for every detail. The thought of Miss Thame and the Head wandering separately on the hills, hunting for one another or for lost girls, thrilled them, and they were slightly disappointed when the Guide Captain rang up from the inn, about six o'clock, to say they would both be home shortly.

Mademoiselle and Miss Coombes had spoken their minds plainly when they understood the story, but had taken no action. So the matter was left till the Head's return.

Before the junior supper, Miss Willcox sent for Blodwen and Dot and talked to them seriously. They came to supper looking sobered, and burdened with the thought of punishment verses to be learned on Monday.

'Willy says we're to be more strong-minded, and not copy silly seniors,' The Blot said gloomily. 'I'm sorry we ran after Dorothy Cheyne. We might have known!'

It was eight o'clock before Dorothy was sent for. Suspense had made her irritable, and she had been a difficult companion in the senior-room all evening.

When the summons came for D.C., Vangie sprang up also. 'I'm going too!'

'Willy didn't say anything about you,' Pat warned her. 'You can't go till you're sent for.'

'But I was in this as much as Dorothy! I want to go with her.'

'Willy'll tell you if she wants you. Perhaps she means to talk to you alone. You can't go, Van,' said Gwen.

'Don't be an idiot, Vange! I told you it would fall on me,' Dorothy said, and went to the study.

'It's not fair!' Vangie wailed.

'Whose idea was it?' Gwen asked sternly.

'What does that matter? I wanted to go.'

'It matters to Willy. You won't be let off; don't worry. But it was D.C.'s fault. The Head means to tell her so.'

'Well, Dorothy?' Miss Willcox asked.

'I dragged Vange into this with me,' Dorothy said steadily. 'But it was not my fault about the kids—I mean, Blodwen and Dot, Miss Willcox. We had no idea they were following us. We certainly didn't want them.'

'I can't hold you blameless, all the same. You ought to have realised by now that children will always copy a senior. You have no more sense of responsibility than a baby, Dorothy. You follow any wild impulse that happens to appeal to you, without a thought for the

consequences. I had forbidden you to walk home; that ought to have been enough. I do not expect flagrant disobedience in a girl of your age.'

'I'm sorry,' Dorothy's eyes fell before the Head's steady look.

'I hope you are. You are very much more to blame than Evangeline. This is her first experience of school life; but she has been your companion for six months; she was almost sure to follow your lead. To refuse would have needed real courage and resolution. You did not stop to think of that. It is my duty to teach you to think.' She paused, and took up a letter from her desk.

Dorothy gazed at her anxiously. What could be coming?

'I have had a letter from Evangeline's mother,' the Head said. 'She invites me to fix a day and to take all the school to Hurst Manor, for an afternoon in the grounds. She knows Vangie will want to show her home to her new friends. I shall decide on next Friday. I am sorry, Dorothy, but I shall have to leave you at home.'

Dorothy looked up, her face full of protest. 'Oh, but Vange will have to be there, as it's her house! You couldn't leave her out. You don't mean—oh, Miss Willcox! She was in this too!'

'On your invitation,' the Head reminded her.

'Well, but—but Vange will hate it if I'm not there! Miss Willcox, couldn't you——'

'Yes?' Miss Willcox waited, as D.C. stumpled.

'Wouldn't something else do instead?' Dorothy pleaded. 'Couldn't you let me go to Hurst? It will be the jolliest thing of the term.'

'And you would prefer your punishment should be something which you really would not mind very much?'

Dorothy's eyes fell once more, and she said nothing.

'You will not go to Hurst,' Miss Willcox said. 'Now, Dorothy, you have acted to-day in direct opposition to my wishes. You cannot complain if I do not trust you again. If you give me any trouble next week, when the others go to Hurst, I shall tell Gwen I cannot allow you to keep the editorship of the magazine. It is a position of trust for which you are hardly ready. I know you value it. I am not depriving you of it on account of to-day's disobedience, but I am warning you that if I have any more trouble that is what will happen. Now send Evangeline to me. Then go straight to bed. Your supper will be brought up to you.'

Biting her lips to steady them, Dorothy Cheyne went back to the senior sitting-room. 'Go to Willy now, Vange,' she said, and then she fled.

Vangie, looking very scared, ran after her. 'Dorothy! Tell me what she said!'

Pat caught her at the door. 'Go to the Head at once, you goat! Don't keep her waiting. D.C. will tell you later.'

Dorothy Cheyne was lying in bed, her face hidden, when Vangie came leaping upstairs to find her. 'Dorothy, it's a mean shame! It's vurry hard lines! and she flung herself on D.C. and hugged her. 'I said all I could, Dorothy, but she wouldn't hear a word. It's rotten! I don't want any of the girls at Hurst if I can't have you.'

'It's no use.' D.C.'s voice was muffled. 'What about you, Vange?'

Vangie made a wry face. 'I have to go to bed with the babies, and have supper with them, for a week. She said I'd acted like a baby, and she'd treat me as one. I'm real mad about it, Dorothy. The rest will laugh so.'

'It's beastly,' D.C. agreed. 'But it's not like missing the visit to Hurst. Willy's a perfect pig.'

‘I’m coming to bed. She said we’d have supper here. But I sha’n’t have you to-morrow—only Enid. A whole week, Dorothy!’

‘A week isn’t so very bad. But we may not have another chance of going to Hurst.’

‘I’ll write to Mother and say we want to go again.’

‘It won’t be the same,’ Dorothy wailed. ‘You’ll show the rest everything, and I won’t be there! Am I the only one left out? What about Dot and The Blot?’

‘They’re to learn some rotten poetry, Dot says.’

Dorothy groaned. ‘It’s hateful!’

‘I tried to say I wouldn’t go, for it didn’t seem fair,’ Vangie said. ‘But it was no use, Dorothy. There’ll be an awful fuss if I try to get out of it.’

‘Of course you’ll have to go,’ Dorothy said drearily.

‘I sha’n’t have a mite of fun out of it,’ Vangie promised.

‘Dorothy Cheyne, you’re not a scrap sporting,’ Gwen Garth said indignantly next day, when D.C. and Vangie had been telling the rest their opinion of the Head. The visit to Hurst had been announced at supper in their absence, and on Sunday the general excitement over the prospect had increased their sense of injury.

‘Why not?’ D.C. bristled.

‘You want to have your fun without paying for it. If I were you I’d shut up about its being “not fair” for you to be left at home. It sounds horribly unsporting and infantile.’

‘You don’t understand,’ D.C. said haughtily.

Gwen gave a scornful laugh. ‘That’s a cheap retort. I’ve noticed people often say, “You don’t understand,” because somebody has understood more about them than they liked. I understand perfectly well, my dear chap. The Head has been smart enough to hit on the one thing you really loathe, so you say she’s not fair. You forget you asked for it. Pull yourself together and be a sport! You’ve had your fun. Now pay up like a man, and don’t whine.’

CHAPTER XXIII. THE EDITOR DECIDES.

‘What happened to Miss Thame and the Head?’ Vangie asked Dorry, as they went to church.

‘Miss Willcox had collected some men in the village, and they were planning which parts of the Downs they should search. But Miss Thame arrived before they’d started, so it was all right.’

‘What a vurry good thing!’ said Van.

Dorothy Cheyne, hurt and angry, had not a word for anyone. Gwen’s scorn had been the last straw. Nobody understood; she felt hardly-used, and yet at the slightest sign of sympathy all her prickly side came uppermost.

‘We’ll have to leave her alone,’ was the general verdict.

D.C. buried herself in editorial work and was never seen in her free time without her portfolio of manuscripts.

‘What does the editor think of your story, D.B.?’ Marjorie asked, a couple of days later.

Dorry was examining some knots which Dot had brought to her for help. She paused before answering. ‘That’s where you’re wrong, Dot. Left over right; do you see? Try it again; now think! Don’t be in a hurry.’

Marjorie waited. ‘Well, D.B.?’

‘I don’t know,’ Dorry answered. ‘D.C. hasn’t said anything to me.’

Marjorie dropped her racquet in surprise. ‘She hasn’t? Not yet? Why, D.B., it’s days! She is a bounder!’

‘I suppose she’s forgotten.’ Dorry bent forward to examine Dot’s knot. ‘That’s better, Dotty. Try once more. You’ll be a Guide some day!’

‘Haven’t you asked D.C.?’ Marjorie demanded.

‘I didn’t like to. She’s in such a queer mood. I can’t ask her about my own story, Marj. If it were yours, I’d do it like a shot.’

‘She won’t have one from me! I can ask her about yours! I shall do it too. She’s a brute, to keep you waiting like this.’

‘Now go and show Blotty that knot,’ and D.B. dismissed Dot. ‘I’d rather you didn’t tease D.C., Marjorie. She’s forgotten that she hasn’t told me about the story. If you go and row her, you won’t get any decent opinion out of her. She’ll say: “I’m going to use the thing,” or “I don’t want her story.” But she won’t trouble to give her opinion of it, if you irritate her. And it’s her opinion I want. It’s no use hurrying her.’

‘That’s true,’ Marjorie admitted. ‘But she is a thoughtless pig, D.B.!’

‘It’s how she’s made. She doesn’t mean anything.’

‘That’s the whole point. She ought to mean something! I’m glad everybody isn’t made that way,’ Marjorie retorted. ‘Come and play, D.B. I want my revenge. You whacked me last night.’

In a corner of the garden Dot dutifully showed the knot to Blodwen. Then she announced, ‘Dorothy Cheyne’s a brute and a bounder, Blotty.’

‘My hat!’ said The Blot. ‘What has she done to you now?’

‘Not me. It’s our D.B. Marjorie said it.’

'Then it's worth listening to. I like Marjorie. She's so common-sensy.'

'I know,' Dot agreed. 'It's about a story. D.C. hasn't said whether she likes it or not, and D.B. wants to know, but she won't ask; and she won't let Marjorie ask.'

'Why not?' cried The Blot. 'I'd go straight and ask her, if I were D.B. A story of D.B.'s in the mag? What fun!'

'It's sure to be topping. Marjorie said *she'd* ask D.C. about it, but D.B. wouldn't let her.'

'That's rot,' said The Blot. 'It's time we did something, Dotty. But Dorothy Cheyne doesn't like us, since that day on the Downs. She looks like thunder whenever she sees me.'

'She wouldn't tell *us* anything,' Dot agreed.

As Friday drew near, the whole of 'Old Whitey' talked of little but the visit to Hurst Manor. Dorothy Cheyne buried herself still more deeply in her magazine and did not seem to hear the chatter. Vangie, who should have been one of the most eager, was silent and looked unhappy when the subject was mentioned.

'It won't be any fun without Dorothy,' she said. 'I don't care about it now.'

'You aren't exactly polite to the rest of us,' Pat pointed out.

'My! I don't care so vurry much about the rest of you,' said Van. 'Dorothy's my chum, and it's my home. All the fun's gone out of it now.'

'We'll tell her about it,' said Merle tactlessly.

'A mighty lot of good that will be!' Van cried. 'She won't speak about it. She'll only talk about the magazine, till I'm perfectly sick of it.'

'It's no use talking about Hurst to Dorothy Cheyne,' said Marjorie, coming up at that moment and hearing the last words. 'But D.B. says we ought to talk mag to her, so that she won't be able to say we left her out of everything.'

'It's rather a decent idea,' Pat agreed. 'Let's try it on at supper.—You'd better hop off to bed, Evangeline. The kids have all gone upstairs.'

Vangie made a wry face, but disappeared. The rest laughed.

'How she loathes it!' said Merle.

'D.C. and I hear her opinion of the Head every night,' Pat said, laughing. 'She says Willy's mighty smart! Now for supper, and D.C. and the mag! We may as well soothe her!'

'Haven't you nearly enough stuff sent in, editor?' Merle asked, as they sat down to supper. 'What are you short of? Ask Pat for a poem!'

'The first number's made up,' Dorothy replied, warming into interest. 'I'll ask Pat when I begin to think about the next one.'

Dorothy Bayne looked up, her colour rising. She looked at Marjorie, but did not speak.

'You needn't ask me,' Pat growled. 'Don't be an ass! You know Merle's only rotting. I never made up a poem in my life, and I never shall.'

'Did you say your first number is complete, D.C.?' Marjorie demanded. 'When are you going to give back the contributions you haven't used?'

'I've given back any there are. There weren't many I couldn't make use of, except some trash from the juniors. People haven't warmed up to it yet. I didn't have too much sent in.'

Marjorie's eyes met Dorry's again, blazing with wrath. Dorry flushed and looked at her appealingly, and tried to change the subject.

'When shall we see it, D.C.? Wasn't it rather fun arranging it?'

'Not bad. It was certainly a job making things fit.'

'And when are you going to condescend to tell your contributors that you're using their work?' Marjorie exploded. 'Funny kind of editor you are! Isn't it usual to tell people you like

their stories and things? I'm sure it's not the right way just to stick them in without a word!

Dorothy Cheyne looked at her in surprise. So did the others.

'Marj, it's all right. Don't make a fuss! It won't do any good,' Dorry exclaimed.

'Is it something of yours D.C. has been rude about?' cried Merle. 'What's up, Marjorie?'

'What about Dorry's story?' Marjorie demanded. 'You've had it for a week. You haven't said one word about it. You've never told her you liked it. *Are* you putting it in the mag? *Do* you like it? It would have been only decent to tell her so!'

Dorothy Cheyne, scarlet, looked at Dorry. 'I really forgot. I meant to tell you. I spoke to everybody else. But you meant me to use the story, so what is there to make a fuss about?'

'Only that she's keen on that story, and she's been dying to know how you liked it,' Marjorie said ruthlessly. 'You might think now and then!'

'Rot! Don't be a goat, Marjorie!' Dorry exclaimed. 'D.C., I'm glad you're using the thing, of course. It's all right; I guessed it was, as you hadn't said anything. I'm not making a fuss. I knew you'd forgotten.'

D.C. grew red again. The knowledge that on every side people were thinking, 'Just like D.C.!' did not help to comfort her.

There was an awkward silence. Dorothy Bayne's pleading look had not been lost on the others. Marjorie stirred her cocoa roughly, and took a long drink. She choked, and had to be thumped on the back.

'First Aid was rendered by the Rangers,' Pat observed. 'Better, old thing?'

'Sorry,' Marjorie gasped. 'Not fatal this time.'

D.C. spread bread and butter and went on with her supper in embarrassed silence. It was not in her nature to offer a public apology; she was so deeply annoyed with herself that she could not bear another word on the subject.

Dorry turned to Pat with a question about her patrol, and the new topic was seized upon eagerly.

'The mag wasn't exactly a success either!' Merle murmured softly to Vi. 'Isn't it just like D.C.?''

'And Dorry,' Vi added. 'You'll see, D.B. won't speak about it. She'll shut us up. She'll never listen to a word against D.C. It was just the same before.'

Marjorie deliberately kept away from Dorry when the seniors went out for quarter of an hour before going to bed. A stroll on the terrace above the sea-wall in the dusk was one of their privileges, and every fine night they walked up and down in groups, while far away the lights of Brighton hung like a jewelled chain on one side, the brilliant lamps of the pier and promenade on the other.

'Poor Vange hangs out of her window and envies us,' Merle said, laughing, as Marjorie joined her and Vi.

'She hasn't many more nights to put up with,' said Pat. 'Tell us about D.B.'s story, Marj!'

'There's nothing much to tell. I read it; it's jolly good. She was awfully shy about giving it to D.C.; I had to buck her up no end. D.C. hasn't said a word, and Dorry's been on edge for a week. I'm sorry I made a scene, but I had to say something or burst.'

'It's awfully like D.C.,' Merle remarked.

CHAPTER XXIV. A BOMBSHELL.

Dorry prepared for bed in silence. Merle and Marjorie eyed her doubtfully, till at last Marjorie ventured on a question.

‘Have you squared things up with D.C., Dorry?’

Dorothy coloured. ‘How do you mean?’

‘Hasn’t she said anything more?’

‘What more is there to say?’

‘D.B.! Do you mean she still hasn’t spoken about your story?’

‘She said all there was to say.’ Dorry jumped into bed. ‘Don’t be soft, Marj. D.C. felt awful when you challenged her. Couldn’t you see? She can’t talk about it. She’s too fed up with herself.’

‘So she ought to be,’ Merle remarked. ‘We’re all dying to read your yarn, D.B.’

Marjorie, with a curt good-night, went to bed also. Before Merle no more could be said. Dorry would not talk when Merle’s shallow comments were continually interrupting; or, as Marjorie put it to herself, ‘While Merle’s being a nuisance, we couldn’t do anything.’

But the next evening, when they were changing into uniform for the Ranger meeting, Merle went downstairs just as Dorry came up, and Marjorie seized her chance. ‘D.B., how long are you going to stand it?’

Dorry unbuttoned her gym tunic. ‘Stand what?’

‘D.C.’s selfish ways,’ Marjorie said bluntly.

‘She isn’t selfish. She sees things from her own angle, that’s all.’

‘Everybody does,’ Marjorie retorted. ‘But we aren’t all as bad as D.C. *You* seem somehow to see things from her angle; how do you manage it?’

‘What do you expect me to do?’ Dorry stepped out of her tunic and turned to hang it up. ‘Throw D.C. over, because she didn’t say she liked my story?’

‘That’s only the last thing. She thinks only of herself. It isn’t good enough. She never thought of you, or she’d have *wanted* to talk about your story. She’d have known what a big thing it was to you, and how much you cared. She doesn’t understand anyone else’s feelings, because she’s thinking so much about her own. You can’t help seeing it now.’

‘Oh, I see it all right! I saw it months ago. D.C. is like that.’

Marjorie dropped a shoe and stared at her. ‘And it makes no difference?’

Dorry drew her skirt over her head and pulled on her blouse. She sat on her bed to change her stockings. ‘Now, Marj! If you found out a thing like that about your chum, do you mean that you’d turn her down?’

‘Most people would. They’d feel fed up.’

‘I’m sorry for D.C.,’ Dorry said, speaking with energy. ‘She hasn’t an idea. She doesn’t mean any harm. She was awfully upset yesterday. She’s never seen how her ways look to other people. She does forget; she doesn’t think; she is full of herself and her own concerns. But is that any reason for turning one’s back on her?’

Marjorie stared at her. ‘Dorry, you’re rather a sport. You mean you’ve realised she’s like that, ages ago, but you’ve stuck to her and made no difference?’

‘I’m not a sport. But I’m not going back on a chum because she hurts people without knowing it.’

‘But she ought to know! She ought to think.’

‘I’m glad this happened about *my* story. One of the others might have been still more upset. I understand; it’s just D.C.’s way. One has to put up with it.’

‘Or turn her down,’ Marjorie commented. ‘A good many people would do that. When did you realise what she was like, D.B.?’

‘Months ago, when she was at school before.’

‘At the time of that other trouble—something about essays?’

‘Yes. But I didn’t understand by myself. That would have been beyond me. It was Dicky who made me see; Miss Dickinson—she was a mistress here. She left at Easter; she was a dear, and we miss her fearfully. I was angry with D.C.; I felt she hadn’t been fair. Dicky made me see that D.C. hadn’t meant it; that she hadn’t understood my side at all. She’d just seen what mattered to herself and gone ahead.’

‘She would!’ Marjorie said grimly.

‘She hadn’t meant any harm; she was awfully upset afterwards. Dicky showed me how to be sorry for D.C., because it was so difficult for her. She may some day do something really awful, without meaning it, because she doesn’t think for other people. I *was* sorry for her then; and I’m more sorry all the time, because she’s still the same and it may still happen. She’ll forget, or misunderstand, where someone she cares all the world about is concerned, and then, if they don’t know that it’s her way, she may find she’s done dreadful harm and she’ll have an awful shock. I hope it will never happen. But I’m afraid about D.C., and I’m going to stick to her.’ She bent to fasten her shoes, her lips pressed firmly together.

Marjorie made no comment. She finished plaiting her hair and swung the long plait over her shoulder. ‘But about your story, Dorry? Honestly, aren’t you frightfully hurt that she’s never said anything about it except what I dragged out of her? I was sure she’d apologise when she had you alone. Don’t you really care?’

‘Of course I care! But I’m not “frightfully hurt.” Perhaps I was at first,’ Dorry admitted. ‘I was an idiot to care so much. And I was silly to forget about D.C. When I found she wasn’t going to say anything, I knew she’d forgotten, and then I remembered it was just her way. But, of course, that doesn’t mean I’m not disappointed,’ she added. ‘I did want D.C.’s opinion on my story, and I sha’n’t have it now. Nobody else is quite the same; no one else is D.C. I wanted her to like my thing.’

‘If only the silly owl could see the chance she’s missed!’ Marjorie exclaimed.

Dorry laughed, but the laugh was rueful. ‘I’m sure Merle and the rest will be polite about my poor “June.” But D.C. will never mention her to me now.’

‘Merle! As if you care what Merle thinks!’

‘I cared more what you thought,’ D.B. acknowledged. ‘You were jolly nice and encouraging. I’m really grateful, Marj.’

‘But I’m not D.C. She *ought* to know how you’ve stuck to her, for months, no matter what she did!’

‘It’s usually the things she doesn’t do,’ Dorry remarked. ‘You can’t do anything to help, my dear chap. You see that, I hope? I know you couldn’t help it last night, but you won’t do it again, will you?’

‘I exploded. I’ll try to restrain myself in future, but I can’t promise.’

'Oh, but you'll remember now that it's just D.C.'s way, and that I understand. You'll understand too,' Dorry said gravely. 'Perhaps some day, if there's real trouble, we may be able to help, if we stand by her now.—Come in!' she called, as someone tapped at the door.

Vangie, not yet enrolled, so not in uniform, came in. Her face was full of trouble. She laid a blue note-book on the table. 'D.B., what's the row? I don't know what's up, but Dorothy's vurry mad about something. And she says that's your story, and she can't possibly put it in the magazine now. So she told me to bring it back to you.'

Dorry and Marjorie looked at one another in surprise.

'She's gone off her head,' said Marjorie.

'Something's happened.' D.B. spoke hotly. She had flushed and her eyes were wrathful. 'Something has upset D.C. I wonder who has butted in now?' She threw the story into her drawer. 'We'd better go down. It's time.'

Vangie looked at her in distress. 'D.B., what do you think is wrong?'

'Dorry, you won't sit down under this?' Marjorie asked. 'D.C. said she was using your story. If she flings it back at you, you'll make her tell you why?'

'Goodness me, yes! I'll find out what's up. It isn't anything I've done, so far as I know. But we can't do anything till after Rangers. Come on to the gym!—Van, don't tell anybody about this!'

'Mercy! I want to tell the world,' said Van. 'But I'll do what you say, D.B. Is Dorothy going silly?'

'Somebody has said something to upset her,' Dorry said again. 'And she hasn't waited to find out if it's true. She's just gone over the edge and flown out at me. Perhaps it will be all right when she understands.'

'I sure hope so!'

'If you find it's anything like that, I hope you won't give her back that story,' Marjorie said, as they went downstairs. 'She deserves to do without it now.'

Dorry shook her head. She pushed open the gym doors, and they saluted the Captain and fell into line at the word of command.

All through the drill and country-dancing and the Captain's talk, Marjorie was thinking. 'It's rotten for Dorry,' was her conclusion. 'D.C.'s still her chum, but it isn't a fifty-fifty friendship. D.B. does all the giving and understanding. D.C.'s an infant; she takes, and she doesn't even see that she's taking. How can Dorry be satisfied? She's been jolly decent to D.C., but she must have a lonely sort of feeling. She must sometimes want somebody to understand her, and to sympathise. D.C. is an idiot not to see! I wonder——'

'Marjorie, where are your thoughts to-night?' Miss Thame asked sharply. 'Second figure!—Siding and set-and-turn; then meet your opposite and lead her through between the second couple. Do wake up and think about your dancing!'

'I'm thinking too hard about a Dorothy couple!' thought Marjorie, and tried desperately to concentrate on 'If all the World were Paper.'

As they left the gym, Dorry's hand slipped through Marjorie's arm. 'Don't worry, old girl! Come and clear this thing up.'

'I want to know all about it!' Vangie wailed. 'It's rotten to have to go to bed!'

'You'd better hurry,' Dorry advised her. 'The Head let you stay longer to-night, for Rangers, but there'll be ructions if you dawdle now.'

'I know. I'll have to hustle. But I want vurry badly to know about Dorothy!'

‘Ask her when she comes up,’ Marjorie suggested. ‘Dorry, aren’t you mad with D.C.?’ she asked, as they hurried upstairs to change.

‘I was at first. But I’ve been thinking; I expect this is only another time of D.C. in a hurry and not stopping to think. Probably we’ll be able to clear it up quite easily.’

‘But she had no right to fling your story back in a temper! I hope you won’t let her have it again?’

‘I sha’n’t offer it to her,’ Dorry said gravely. ‘If she asks for it, I’ll see.’

They hurried down together, Marjorie eager for some explanation, Dorry anxious to have the ordeal over.

‘We’re early. They’re still in the garden,’ D.B. said in relief. ‘I’ll go and find D.C. Do you want to come?’

‘Rather! I’m dying to know what she has to say for herself.’

‘Come and back me up, then. But don’t barge in and make things worse.’

They found Dorothy Cheyne sitting alone on the sea-wall, looking out over the wet sands. She did not see them coming, for she was staring out to sea. At the sound of their steps on the gravel terrace she looked round, her face stormy; then she sprang to her feet, blazing anger in her eyes. ‘How can you come after me? Oh, it’s no use saying you’re sorry——’

‘I’m not sorry.’ Dorothy Bayne spoke clearly and so decisively that D.C.’s hot words were checked. ‘I’ve nothing to be sorry about. I’ve come to ask what you mean by sending back my story by Vangie, when last night you said you were using it in the magazine?’

‘As if I’d use anything of yours now!’

‘D.C., don’t be an ass!’ Dorry cried. ‘I tell you I haven’t done anything. I don’t even know what’s upset you. Tell me what has happened!’

‘Perhaps you can tell me how it is that all the juniors are talking about me and calling me a cheat? You’ve pretended to be friends, both this term and in your letters all winter; but just because you felt mad that I hadn’t raved about your story, you go and rake up all that business of the essays, and spread it among the kids that I cheated. It isn’t true; you know it isn’t. But even if it were true, it was done with and we’d squared it up and you’d said it was all right. After pretending to be friends, it’s perfectly beastly of you to bring it all up again.’ Dorothy Cheyne’s voice broke. She choked down a sob, and turned her back on them.

Dorry forgot Marjorie, everything. She threw herself on D.C. from behind, her arms about her. ‘No wonder you felt sick! D.C., I never did. I couldn’t do it. Listen to me! Don’t shake me off. I haven’t spoken of that horrid business to anybody. If the kids have got hold of it, it wasn’t through me. I’ll make them sorry! Who was it, D.C.? Tell me, and I’ll go and shake them!’

‘It’s everybody.’ D.C. collapsed on the sea-wall, her head on her knees, and sobbed. ‘They’re all saying it. The Blot said Enid cheated at tennis, and I told Enid she mustn’t; and she said: “What about you and D.B. last year?” The Blot joined in and said: “You cheated her about some essays—everybody says so”; and Dot said: “You weren’t straight to our D.B.” I was furious, but they said you’d told them.’

‘I never did!—Marjorie, you’re in our room; did I ever tell The Blot and Dot that story?’

Marjorie had been thinking hard. ‘I’m sure you never told them. I’m trying to remember how I heard; I know we spoke of it once. I believe I know how it came out.’

‘She told you!’ D.C. quivered with anger, her face hidden.

‘You told me yourself,’ Marjorie retorted. ‘You came to our room with Van to see the pictures of the ponds, and you said: “What a queer kid I was then!” Vangie said something,

and when you'd gone I asked D.B. what you meant. She didn't tell me much; just enough to shut me up. But the kids were there, and they heard. It's your own fault for not being careful before them.'

'I didn't tell them the story,' Dorry said quietly, her very quietness bringing conviction to D.C.'s strained mind. 'But they heard enough from you and Van to make them want the rest, I expect. And Enid and Dot were here at the time it happened. They'd talk it over, D.C., and when you annoyed Enid it would all come out. I'm frightfully sorry. I'll row them well. Nobody's thinking about that old story now.'

D.C. sat with bent head, her breath coming quickly. The supper-bell rang, and girls began to stream towards the house from all corners of the garden.

'It's all right, isn't it, D.C.?' Dorry pleaded.

Marjorie began impetuously, 'It jolly well isn't all right!'

'Shut up, idiot!' D.B. said.

Dorothy Cheyne spoke unsteadily. 'D.B., I'm sorry. I didn't stop to think. It wouldn't have been like you. That's what made me so mad—that you should have done it.'

'You might have thought the best and not the worst of me, old chap,' Dorry said urgently. 'Don't worry any more. I'll settle those silly babes for you. I don't suppose anyone else has heard a word about it. You'll have to explain to Vangie; she's wild to know what's up. No one else need know. But another time do trust me, D.C.!'

'I can have the story back, can't I?' D.C. spoke with new hesitation. 'D.B., did you really mind? You'll let me have it, won't you? It'—she faltered—'it's the best thing in the mag. I'm sorry I haven't been nice about it. I really did forget that I hadn't spoken to you. I want it, D.B.'

'I'll give it to you at bedtime, if you're sure you really want it. But don't take it just because——'

'It's the best story there is. The girls are wild to see it. I was just a scrap annoyed because it was so good,' D.C. said, reddening, as they crossed the lawn, Marjorie keeping discreetly silent.

'Oh, rot!' Dorry said. 'You forgot to mention it, that's all.'

'Of course I forgot!' D.C. said irritably. 'You don't think I kept quiet about it because I was jealous, do you?'

'Of course not, silly goat! You had other things to think about.'

'Heaps; all the other contributions,' D.C. grasped the excuse. 'But I did feel a bit queer about your thing, D.B. For I knew it was better than I'd ever done, though I tried not to think so. Vange said it. When she read it she said: "It's vurry, vurry good, Dorothy. You'll have to buck up, or D.B. will cut you out." I couldn't forget it. Perhaps you'll be a writer before I shall.'

'Ass! I'm never going to be one!' Dorry assured her. 'It doesn't appeal to me. Typing, and correcting proofs! No, thanks!'

'It's queer, when you've written one really good story, that you don't want to go on,' D.C. said.

Marjorie's eyes met Dorry's. 'It's because it was something that had happened to you. It wasn't a made-up story,' said Marjorie's look.

'I've no desire to go on,' Dorry assured the crestfallen editor. 'Very likely you'll never have another yarn from me.'

'Better make the most of this one,' said Marjorie, as they reached the house.

CHAPTER XXV. A DARING IDEA.

'D.B. must be lonely,' the thought recurred to Marjorie, before she fell asleep. 'She's tremendously sporting to Dorothy Cheyne, and she does understand her. But what about Dorry herself? Everybody wants a chum. She can't be satisfied; D.C. isn't a real friend for her. She must have room for someone else. I might cut in and take the place D.C. doesn't even know is waiting to be filled.'

The thought grew more attractive as she dwelt on it. 'Dorry's one of the best,' she thought, as she dressed next morning. 'I believe I could make her care. I could cut D.C. out, before Dorry knew it had happened. She *must* have an empty feeling! I could give her what she's needing; though she's ever so much bigger and more generous than I am.'

That thought brought its instant answer. 'Then I can't bag her friendship by doing a shabby thing. It would be mean to try to cut D.C. out; Dorry would say so, if she knew. Perhaps she'd guess; she's so sensitive about D.C. that she might be the same about me. I'd drive her off, instead of making better friends with her. I can't do it. I can't help what happens, but I can't butt in deliberately and try to take D.C.'s place. They've been friends for years. It would be a mean trick. But I can, and I shall, try to be jolly to Dorry, for I believe she's lonely.'

Dorry was listening coldly to Blodwen's explanations. 'What have you two to say for yourselves?' she had asked, as soon as the juniors were dressed. 'No, don't run away. I was only waiting till Merle went down for her early practice. Please explain why you told Dorothy Cheyne an untruth.'

'We never did, D.B.!' The Blot was indignant.

'How did we, D.B.? What did we do?' Dot asked apprehensively.

'You told Dorothy that I had been talking about her and saying she'd cheated.'

'But I thought she did,' cried Blodwen. 'Enid said so, and Dotty remembered it too.'

'Even if Enid and Dot said it, that was no reason for chattering about it. You ought to know better than to spread tales like that, even if you are babies. But if Enid and Dot said it, what right had you to tell Dorothy that *I* had anything to do with it?'

'Oh!' The Blot stared at her.

'Don't you see that made it ten times worse?' Dorry demanded. 'Never mind whether it was true or not. It wasn't, as a matter of fact. But what matters is that you made Dorothy Cheyne think I had raked it all up, after six months, during which I'd pretended to be her chum and to have forgotten all about it. Of course she was upset! She thought awful things of me, thanks to you silly infants. You might have made fearful trouble, if I hadn't been able to convince her I had nothing to do with it and it was only your stupidity.'

'That's right,' Marjorie remarked. 'Pitch into them. Give it them hot. I never knew a sillier pair.'

'We were standing up for you, D.B.,' Dot protested. 'Dorothy Cheyne hasn't been nice to you. Everybody says so. We wanted to give her something she wouldn't like, for a change.'

'Thanks awfully!' said Dorry. 'If that's your idea of standing up for me, please don't do it any more. You made her think me a horrid low spiteful cad; that's all your kind help did for me. Go down to breakfast. I don't like either of you. Next time you gossip, please leave my

name out and stick to the truth. I never told you anything about Dorothy Cheyne; you'd better go and tell her so. If you listened when you weren't meant to, I can't help that. You ought to have known better than to repeat things you overheard. If you found out anything, it wasn't through me. You and Enid have managed to make a lot of trouble between you. Go away, and don't come near me again. I don't want to see any more of you than I really need to.'

Crestfallen and much subdued, The Blot and Dot looked at one another out in the corridor.

'This is fearful!' Blodwen said. 'We never meant to upset D.B.!'

'Let's do what she said.' Dot was nearly in tears. 'Go and tell Dorothy Cheyne, I mean.'

Blodwen looked serious. 'Do you really think we must? D.C. won't be nice about it.'

'But if she thinks our D.B.'s been horrid, we must do something, Blotty!'

'Come on, then! I don't like it, but I'll do anything to please D.B.,' Blodwen said bravely.

Feeling very nervous, they went in search of Dorothy Cheyne. But they found only Pat and Enid, who told them D.C. and Vangie had gone into the garden, and D.C. had said they were not to be disturbed.

Much relieved, the juniors postponed the interview, and tried to forget it in discussion of the morrow's visit to Hurst, with a crowd of their form-mates.

In the little summer-house on the sea-wall, Dorothy was broaching a daring plan. 'Look here, Vange! I can't bear it. They're all going to crow over me because they'll have seen your house, when I haven't. If I could say I'd been there, it wouldn't matter. I don't mind missing the picnic, but I do mind their seeing Hurst before me.'

'I know. It's mighty bad luck. But what can we do, Dorothy?'

'I'm going before they do, that's all. Then I'll be able to say I've been and I don't care about it,' Dorothy said defiantly.

Vangie looked at her in wide-eyed dismay. 'But you can't go before to-morrow! Oh, Dorothy, don't do anything real mad!'

But Dorothy was reckless. Her pride was hurt in a tender spot. She could not bear to feel herself behind the rest of the school in any way. 'It will be easy. We'll slip out early and dress in the bathroom. Pat and Enid will be sleeping like logs at three o'clock in the morning. We'll creep down and go out by the cloak-room door, and be out of the garden before it's really light. We'll go to Hurst; it isn't more than two miles; and you'll take me round the grounds so that I'll be able to talk about them, and the girls will know I've really been there. We won't go into the house—though I don't see why we shouldn't. Your servants couldn't call you a burglar in your own house! But they might give us away to the Head. We'll see the gardens, so that I can say I've been; and then we'll race back again. If we're in time we'll go back to bed; but if we're too late we'll go into the garden with the rest and say we've been up early. Now, Vange, there's no difficulty. You're game, aren't you?'

Vangie's eyes were sparkling. She had a craving for adventure which had never found vent while she was in her mother's care. But she had some scruples and a certain amount of caution. 'Dorothy, it's mad! If the Head finds out, she'll rage. She'll stop you being the editor.'

'She won't find out. It's perfectly simple. Are you scared?'

'No, silly. But I don't think it's worth it.'

'I'll go without you, if you'd rather,' D.C. suggested.

'You *are* mad!' Van cried. 'As if I'd let you! If you must be an idiot, I'll have to be an idiot too. But my! I do hope we aren't caught!'

'We can't be caught, unless we mess things up. And we sha'n't do that,' Dorothy promised.

‘How are we going to wake at that time?’

‘That’s your job. You always say you can wake at any time you choose. You know you always woke me in Switzerland, when we were going out for a long day. Even if we’d decided on half-past five, you were always awake before we were called.’

‘Oh, I can wake at any time! Half-past three, then, Dorothy? It’s mighty early,’ Van said reluctantly.

‘We want plenty of time. I’ll go to sleep saying: “Three-thirty!” But I’m depending on you, so mind you wake,’ D.C. warned her.

‘I shall wake, but I don’t like your plan. It’s quite mad. If we’re caught, after the last time, there’ll be a fearful row.’

‘Oh, but we mustn’t be caught! I’ll see to that,’ Dorothy promised again.

CHAPTER XXVI. A SECRET VISIT.

All through the day Vangie's liking for the early morning trip grew less and less. 'I wish you wouldn't, Dorothy! It's mad,' she pleaded.

'All right. I'll go alone.'

'No, I'll go with you. But I don't like it.'

Dorothy, full of her idea, paid no attention to the explanations of Dot and Blodwen, much to their relief. 'Dorothy Bayne and I have settled all that. Go away and don't worry!' D.C. dismissed them, and they gladly dropped the subject.

'If she doesn't want us to say we're sorry, *we* don't want to!' The Blot remarked.

'The girls wouldn't crow over you, Dorothy.' Vangie tried another argument. 'Nobody's said a word. They've been vurry nice about it.'

D.C. winced. 'But they're sorry for me! That's worse. They keep saying: "Hard lines!" and "Rotten luck!" I can't stand it. I've told them I don't care. I'm aching to be able to add: "Because I've been there already." I shall feel better when I can say that.'

'I don't see that it makes such a mighty lot of difference,' Vangie sighed. Presently she exclaimed, 'Dorothy, they'll ask when you went! They know you haven't been.'

'No, they only think it,' D.C. retorted. 'Unless you told them? I asked you not to.'

'I didn't tell them anything. But I know they think you haven't been. If you say you have, all of a sudden, they'll want to know why you didn't say so before.'

'Let them!' D.C. said recklessly. 'I'll say I didn't choose to tell.'

Vangie's reluctance increased towards evening, but she dared not draw back. She had followed D.C. blindly all through their friendship, and she could not let her leader take such an adventure alone. 'Must you go, Dorothy?' was her last whisper at night.

'Rather! Mind you wake!'

For the first time in her life Vangie's power of waking at a certain hour failed her. Perhaps the fact that she did not want to wake had something to do with it.

It was Dorothy who woke promptly at half-past three. Vangie was roused by a gentle shake, to find a hand pressed over her mouth and a figure in the dim light pointing to her clothes and then to the door.

Wide awake in a moment, Van slipped out of bed, gathered up her garments and shoes, and crept after D.C.

They dressed in the bathroom, shivering, and carried their shoes downstairs. Dorothy crept to the larder and came back with a handful of biscuits, and thrust a packet of chocolate and an apple into Vangie's hand.

They put on their shoes, found their hats and coats in the cloak-room, opened the door, and sped across the wet grass. The adventure began to look more promising, and Vangie's spirits rose. 'If we're quick we may do it,' she said hopefully, munching biscuits as they went. 'Isn't it a glorious morning? See over there, where the sun's coming! Why aren't we always out at this time?'

'Ask the Head,' D.C. suggested. 'You'll be sleepy by three o'clock this afternoon. *I* shall have a nap in the garden! Don't give the show away by yawning all day!'

'I'll say I couldn't sleep for excitement,' Van drawled.

They walked through the sleeping town and on towards the Downs. Hurst Manor stood on the outskirts of the first village; the girls passed along the quiet streets and across the village green, and presently reached the gates of Vangie's home.

'We needn't be very long. The sooner we're back the better,' said Dorothy, as they tramped up the drive, leaving the shuttered lodge behind. 'We've taken longer to come than I expected. The village is two miles from the sea, but I forgot that the house was nearly a mile farther on. It's after half-past four. By the time we're back it will be six o'clock and people will be about the streets.'

'But they won't know us, D.C.?'

'Our hats,' D.C. explained.

'Mercy, I forgot! Bother! Could we leave them in a ditch?'

'We'd look funny without them. We must hurry, that's all. We won't have time to stay long here. But I can say I've been, and that's all that matters.'

'But you want to see the gardens and the house, don't you?' Van asked doubtfully.

'Oh, of course!' Dorothy exclaimed. 'I meant—never mind! Come and show me everything!'

A glance at the grounds would have been sufficient for her purpose, but Vangie's remonstrance had warned her that she must show some interest. She was not practised in concealing her feelings for the sake of other people, however, and it was not easy to be enthusiastic about goldfish and orchids and the aviary when each moment was making their position more dangerous.

Dorothy was restless and continually trying to hurry on, till at last Vangie exclaimed, 'You don't seem to care vurry much about anything, Dorothy!'

'Sorry! But we'll really have to hurry back, Vange. It's almost six; we've been here ages.'

'But you haven't seen the big vine, or the rockery, or the lily-house!'

'We can't do everything. I've seen plenty; I can talk about it as well as anybody now.'

'And that's all you really care about, is it?' Vangie cried, sorely hurt. 'You don't care one bit about seeing my home. You only want to be able to swank, so that the rest can't crow over you. Dorothy, I didn't think you were like that!'

'Vange, don't be an idiot! Don't be a petted baby!' D.C. was both annoyed and anxious. 'Of course I'm glad to see your home. I love every bit of it. But we didn't expect to see it properly to-day. You said you'd ask your mother to let us come some other time. This is just a quick look round, so that——'

'So that you can say you've been,' Vangie finished the sentence for her.

'Well, what about it?' D.C. demanded. 'You don't want to feel the whole school has been except your own special chum, do you? I should hope you'd feel bad!'

'But I did think you cared about seeing the house!'

'I do care! I tell you I'm frightfully bucked to have seen it. But we daren't stay. It's late already. Do come on, Vange! We can argue as we go, if you want to.'

'There isn't any need to argue. But I'm vurry much disappointed,' said Van, as they turned to go down the drive.

D.C., greatly exasperated, found herself up against something she could not combat. Unused to considering other people's feelings, she did not know how to handle Vangie in this mood. Van was frankly disappointed in her. There was no more to be said.

D.C. argued in vain. Van was at bottom a spoilt only child, and in spite of her travels was young for her age. 'You didn't care about Hurst. You only want to boast that you've been

there. You only care about what the girls will say.' She held to it in spite of Dorothy's pleading.

D.C. relapsed into sulky silence, and they walked homewards without a word.

'Here's a bus,' D.C. said suddenly. 'Have you any money? I forgot my purse. We'd save twenty minutes by the bus, and we're late enough.'

'I've sixpence.' Vangie was tired and wanted her breakfast, but the sight of the bus roused her hopes. 'Stop it, Dorothy! It's a mighty early bus,' she said, when they were safely on board.

'It comes in from the country. It takes the theatre people home at midnight, and comes in very early for business folk,' Dorothy explained. 'It only runs in summer. It's our jolly conductor. I hope he won't know us again!'

'Been out early to-day!' the man greeted them with a grin. 'Got your fares this time?'

Vangie offered her sixpence and looked at Dorothy.

'We've had an early ramble,' D.C. said, with dignity.

'You'll be ready for breakfast.' He clipped their tickets and retired, since neither girl replied.

'Ready! I'm faint with hunger,' Vangie whispered.

It was nearly seven o'clock when they crept across the lawn to the cloak-room door and let themselves in, hoping desperately that no one would be looking out of a window.

'Mercy, Miss Dorothy! Where have you been?' cried the housemaid, as they ran into her on the stairs.

'H'sh, Daisy! Don't give us away!' and they sped past her and up to their own room.

'Where *have* you been, D.C. and Vangie?' Pat greeted them with disapproval. She and Enid had wakened to find themselves alone.

'In the garden,' Dorothy said breathlessly. 'It's a gorgeous morning. You two should have been with us. The sun's heavenly.'

Van choked, and disappeared under her bed in search of her slippers.

'You've made your shoes in an awful state,' Pat remarked. 'Why didn't you wake me? All the same, I wouldn't have gone. Willy wouldn't like it. You didn't ask her, did you?'

'No, we only thought of it suddenly. You won't give us away, I suppose?'

'I'm not that sort of rotter,' Pat scoffed. 'But you are idiots to do it without leave.'

CHAPTER XXVII. THE TOO-FRIENDLY BUS-MAN.

Dorothy Cheyne retired to the summer-house after dinner, feeling ill-used and uneasy. Everybody was preparing for the visit to Hurst.

Vangie had not been herself since the morning episode; she was sleepy and heavy-eyed, but what troubled D.C. was a slight but definite reserve in her manner. She was less happy than usual, as if the disappointment of that visit was still weighing on her.

'She couldn't be such an idiot as to have a grouch at me because I wanted to bring her back in time!'—that was how the matter appeared to Dorothy.

She watched the crowd set out, peering through the loophole windows. Then, with an angry sigh, she spread her magazine articles on the table and sat gloating over them.

The senior elocution class had their lesson on Friday afternoons, and Miss Willcox had been unwilling to put off Miss Penfold, who was a busy person and was much in demand among the schools of the town. 'Pen' was loved by the seniors, and on her weekly visits she coached them in plays which they all enjoyed.

So that she should give her lesson and yet their time at Hurst should not be shortened, the Head had decreed that the elocution class might follow the rest by bus, in Miss Thame's charge. The Junior and Middle Schools would walk, and Vangie, as hostess, must go with them.

Dorothy Cheyne looked up from her papers half-an-hour later, and saw Dorry Bayne and Merle just vanishing through the gate, followed by Miss Thame and Gwen. 'Pigs!' she muttered.

The seniors crowded to the top of the bus, laughingly recalling the Saturday of the storm.

The conductor came to take their fares, and grinned at sight of the 'Old Whitey' hats. He looked round, but the morning ramblers were not in the party. 'Some of your lot were out early to-day.' He grinned at Gwen.

She frowned. 'I don't understand.'

'Ha'-past six they boarded my bus. Two of 'em; the two that couldn't pay their way last week. Not with your crowd, they wasn't; came on by themselves, with two kids. Came on this here bus at six-thirty this morning, they did. Hurst Manor?—twopence each. Near there they got on; tried to get ahead of the rest of you, perhaps.' And he laughed and went on punching tickets.

'D.C. and Vangie?' cried Merle. 'What does he mean? They couldn't possibly be here _____'

'Oh, *shut up*, idiot!' Dorry groaned. 'Oh, Merle, why are you such an ass?'

Miss Thame, looking serious, was questioning the man.

'Awful bounder!' Marjorie murmured. 'Why did the brute give them away?'

'He couldn't know. He thought it was a joke. How *could* D.C. be so silly?'

'Do you really think Dorothy and Vangie were wandering about in buses at that time, D.B.?' Gwen asked in dismay. 'They wouldn't dare!'

'D.C. was awfully upset at being left out of this. I'm going to speak to Captain!'

'She'll have to report them, Dorry. It's no use,' Gwen warned her.

The man was describing his early passengers. The school uniform and Van's long yellow plaits left no room for doubt. He went down the steps, winking at Merle and Dorry as he passed. 'They'll catch it hot, those two young 'uns.'

'Beast! Pig!' Merle said loudly.

'You needn't have given them away.' Dorry's voice broke with indignation. She made her way along the bus to Miss Thame. 'Captain, will you need to tell Miss Willcox? *Must* you? Couldn't you row D.C. and Van yourself?'

'My dear Dorry, how could I? This is a serious matter. I've no choice but to report it to the Head.'

'She'll take the magazine away from D.C., and it's the only thing she cares about,' Dorry pleaded.

'Dorothy should have thought of that. I must tell the Head what has happened. It would be unfair to keep her in the dark.'

Dorry went unhappily back to her seat. The joy of the expedition was gone. While the rest in low tones discussed Dorothy Cheyne's new outbreak, Marjorie tried to comfort her friend, but in vain.

As the bus drew up at the gates of Hurst, Miss Thame passed down between the rows of seats. 'Don't say anything about this, girls. Don't spread it round. Above all, don't tell Vangie what has happened. It is for Miss Willcox to decide whether to speak to her and spoil the afternoon for us all, or whether she will wait till we have returned to school. I trust you to keep the matter to yourselves.'

'Yes, Captain!' the Sixth said gloomily.

It was a hard promise to keep. Van welcomed them at the gate, for the walkers with Miss Willcox had only just arrived. She led them in, the depression of the morning gone in her pleasure in playing hostess, and joyfully showed all her treasures and the beauties of the gardens.

The juniors were wildly excited. The Blot danced a sort of hornpipe at sight of the coloured birds in the aviary; Dot was fascinated by the orchids and Enid by the rock-garden. But the seniors seemed unresponsive, and Van's enthusiasm was chilled.

'What's the matter, D.B.?' she asked, almost shyly. 'Don't you like the gardens? You're pleased to come, aren't you?'

'I love it!' Dorry exclaimed. 'It's all beautiful, Van. I'm sorry I was stupid. I was thinking _____'

'You're all thinking to-day! What's wrong? Wasn't Miss Penfold nice?'

'Oh, Pen was all right! I'm sorry that D.C. can't be here.' Dorry gave an answer which she knew would satisfy Van.

'Oh, sure! So am I! That's vurry nice of you,' Vangie agreed. 'I won't tease, if you're thinking about Dorothy, D.B.'

As they went through the house, to see the pictures and the carvings and Van's bedroom, Merle glanced out of a window to where Miss Willcox and Miss Thame were walking together on the lawn.

'I suppose Captain's telling the Head what the bus-man said!'

'What did he say? What bus-man? Merle, what do you mean?' Van whirled round in alarm.

'Merle *would* give the show away!' Pat remarked.

'What is it?' Vangie cried. 'D.B., what is it?'

The seniors looked at her and then at one another, in unhappy silence.

‘Merle said “the bus-man,” ’ Van faltered. ‘Is it about D.C. and me?’

Their faces answered her.

‘He was an idiot, but he didn’t mean any harm,’ Marjorie began. ‘It was awfully bad luck it should be the same man.’

Vangie turned and fled, and they heard her clattering down the stairs.

‘Now you’ve done it, Merle!’ said Vi. ‘Van will go and drown herself, or hide, or run away out onto the Downs, and Willy won’t be able to find her.’

‘I don’t believe it’s that.’ Dorothy Bayne went over to the window. ‘I thought so! She’s gone straight to the Head. Good for Vangie!’

‘Quite decent of her,’ Gwen commented. ‘It was really the only thing to do. But Van hasn’t been at school long; she might not have known.’

‘Let’s go down and wait for her to show us the rest,’ Dorry suggested. ‘She’ll want to take us into her own room herself.’ And they went down to the big entrance-hall to await their hostess.

Vangie was stumbling over a breathless apology to Miss Willcox. ‘Indeed, I’m vurry, vurry sorry! I knew it wasn’t right. But we wanted to come so mighty bad. I wanted to show the place to Dorothy myself. I just couldn’t bear to come here with the others when she hadn’t been.’

‘Miss Thame has told me what she has heard,’ the Head said very gravely. ‘Tell me the whole story, Vangie.’

‘Why, we woke up at half-past three o’clock——’

‘But who planned this escapade?’

‘Sure! We did that together.’

‘Whose idea was it?’ Miss Willcox demanded.

Van grew scarlet. ‘Miss Willcox, I wanted to show Dorothy the house. And—and I’m a Guide. I ought to be able to be trusted. I knew it wasn’t right. I’m more to blame, because I’m a Ranger, Miss Willcox.’

‘Very well. I will ask Dorothy Cheyne for her version later. But tell me all about it, Vangie!’

Vangie’s words tumbled over one another as she told the story. ‘Dorothy kept telling me to hustle, and saying we ought to go home. But I wanted her to see it all.’

‘I’m convinced it was Dorothy’s fault you were here at all,’ the Head commented. ‘I’m very sorry you have spoiled your day in this fashion, Vangie. I will speak to you again to-night. Go now and entertain your guests as well as you can.’

Much subdued, Van returned to the others. ‘There isn’t anything to tell. I told her about it, and she’ll speak to us to-night. Come and see the rest of the house!’

‘It’s the only thing to do, but we can’t be very jolly over it,’ Marjorie remarked.

‘Now you know why D.B. was silent,’ said Merle.

‘If only Merle would be silent for a change!’ Gwen suggested. ‘Tie her head up in a bag, somebody! She hasn’t an ounce of sense!’

Dorothy Bayne slipped her hand through Vangie’s arm. ‘What’s going to happen to you and D.C., Van?’

Van quivered. ‘I don’t know! I wish I did. The Head looked furious. Will she send us home?’

‘No, silly. But I wish D.C. hadn’t done it.’

'It was just as much me,' Vangie cried.

'Rubbish!' Dorry said: 'My dear chap, we know D.C. She couldn't bear to feel behind the rest of us, so she made you bring her here.'

'You know too much, D.B.!' Vangie wailed. 'I never told you that! How did you know?'

'I know D.C., that's all. I'm sorry about it, Van. I'll help, if I can.'

CHAPTER XXVIII. D.B. TO THE RESCUE.

As the school reached 'Old Whitey's' gates on their return from Hurst, Vangie darted away from the rest and into the garden.

'Vangie!' Miss Willcox called her back. But Van was out of sight among the trees.

Dorothy Cheyne had carried her tea out on a tray to the sea-wall. It felt like a picnic to sit there in the sun and breeze. To eat in lonely state indoors would have reminded her of punishment. She persuaded herself that she was enjoying her picnic, and threw over scraps to the gulls on the shingle.

She was sitting pondering a point of arrangement in the magazine—should Elsie's silly poem come next to Dorry's really good story, or could it be fitted in somewhere else?—when with a wild rush Van was upon her.

'Oh, Dorothy, Miss Willcox knows!'

Dorothy sprang up, catching her falling papers. 'Vange! You didn't tell her?'

'Of course I did, when she asked me. I couldn't help it, D.C. There's an awful row.'

'Row! I should think so. She'll take all this away from me,' D.C.'s voice shook, and she held her precious papers more tightly. Her face blazed. 'You are an awful idiot! Why did you babble like a baby and give me away? You might have thought of someone besides yourself. I suppose you swanked to the girls! That's what comes of being a footling American! I'll never trust you again, Vange Warner.'

Vangie drew herself up. 'Vurry likely you won't have the chance. I'm dead sick of you, Dorothy Cheyne. You don't care a cent for anybody but yourself. And, gee! That isn't the way to speak to an Amurrican girl. You'll have to say you're sorry before I'll speak to you again.'

'I'll not say I'm sorry. You've let me down horribly. You've given me away and spoilt everything. You're an absolute baby!'

'You made me take you to Hurst so that you could swank. You never cared at all about its being my home. Now, when we're in trouble about it, you throw me over. I've done with you.' Vangie turned and walked away, her head high.

Dorothy, her lips trembling, looked out at the sea as she clasped her loved manuscripts to her breast. Then with a sobbing cry—'She'll take them from me! She sha'n't have them!'—she ran along the terrace towards the summer-house on the sea-wall. She fumbled with the bolt of the door, in the half-dark of the lower room, drew it back, and ran out into the sunshine. She was making her way along a groyne towards deep water, still clasping her bundle of papers, when a hand caught her arm roughly. She lost her balance, and sprang down onto the shingle to save herself from falling. 'What did you do that for, idiot? You nearly knocked me over!' She turned angrily, expecting to see Vangie.

'What were you going to do, D.C.?' asked Dorothy Bayne.

D.C.'s eyes fell. She answered brokenly, defiantly, 'Chuck all the mag stuff into the sea. I know Willy's going to take it from me because of this morning. If I can't be the editor, nobody else shall. Let me go, D.B.!'

'But you'd hate the whole school to say you were unsporting!' Dorry said very quietly.

Dorothy shivered. 'D.B., I can't give it up!'

‘It would be worse to be turned down by the whole school. Nobody would speak to you. You couldn’t stand it, D.C.,’ Dorry argued. ‘Be a sport, old chap! It’s hateful, of course. But you’ve done one number, and we’ll all know it’s yours. If Willy won’t let you do another, at least let us have one from you! I dare say there’ll never be another as good. Perhaps before it’s time to do the next, we’ll be able to talk her round. She sent me to find you. Give me the mag, and go and explain to her, if you can. I’ll take care of the thing for you. Where’s Vangie?’

‘I don’t know or care. She had no right to give me away.’

‘Van! She only explained after it had all come out. It was the bus-man. Didn’t she tell you?’

Dorothy bit her lip. ‘I didn’t ask her. I was too mad. I thought she’d done it.’

‘But she wouldn’t do such a thing. Didn’t you know that? Oh, D.C., what did you say?’

‘Footling American,’ flashed across D.C.’s tormented mind. She reddened. ‘I don’t know. I tell you I was mad, and scared. I didn’t think. I’d better go and have the row over. Take this, D.B. It would have been in the sea, but for you.’

‘Don’t tell anyone what you were going to do!’ Dorry pleaded, as they went up the shingle together.

All the defiance had gone out of Dorothy. She said drearily, ‘Won’t you give me away? No, I suppose you won’t. I was an idiot this morning, D.B. But I couldn’t bear to think you’d all have been when I hadn’t. I wanted to say I didn’t care because I’d been already.’

‘I thought it was something like that,’ Dorry sighed. ‘Tell Willy, D.C. Perhaps she’ll make allowances.’

Then, as Dorothy Cheyne went heavily towards the house, Dorry sank down on the seawall and dropped the portfolio on the gravel. Those few tense seconds when she saw D.C. on the groyne, walking out to sea, and ran desperately after her, had tired her more than the day’s outing, and she was shaking in the reaction after the strain. ‘Oh, D.C., how can you be such a baby? And you don’t see it yourself. I wonder if you’ve said something that Vangie will never forgive?’

CHAPTER XXIX. CONSEQUENCES.

Miss Willcox heard Dorothy's faltering explanation and apology. She spoke pointedly on the subject of childish pride, and demanded the return of the magazine portfolio. 'You are not ready for any position of trust. For the rest of this term you will go to bed with the First form. Give the magazine papers to Gwen, and tell her she must find another editor. Now send Vangie to me.'

Dorothy, heart-broken, deputed both tasks to Dorothy Bayne. 'See Vange for me, old thing. I've upset her. She won't have forgiven me yet.'

'I'll find her, D.C., and I'll give this to Gwen. Perhaps we can talk Willy round later on.'

Dorothy reddened. 'I'm going to bed. I'm to go with the infants. I'm glad; I've a rotten headache.'

'Poor old D.C.! She'll loathe that as much as Vangie did,' Dorry thought, and went to look for Van.

'Does the Head want me now?' Vangie came out from the shrubbery, her eyes red. 'I'll go.'

'Van, what's up?' Dorry asked anxiously. 'You didn't cry before! What has happened now?'

'I should say Dorothy Cheyne can tell you that.' Van passed her and ran to the house.

Dorry looked after her in despair. 'It's what I was afraid of! D.C.'s upset her fearfully. I wonder what she said? D.C. doesn't know how bad it is, I'm certain.' And she went in search of Gwen, and then sought Marjorie for comfort.

Vangie reappeared presently, and came straight to them. 'D.B., I'm to sleep in your room. I'm to change beds with one of the kids. Do you mind?'

'Mind? We'll love to have you! We'll send The Blot to Pat's room!' Dorry exclaimed. 'It will break her heart to be parted from Dot, but they'll live through it. But I'm sorry for you and D.C., Van.'

'You needn't be. I'm vurry glad.'

D.B. and Marjorie exchanged looks.

'Shall I go and break the news to Blotty?' Marjorie suggested. 'She ought to have warning!'

'Miss Willcox has told Matron to move our things. I must go and have some supper,' said Van. 'I'm to go to bed early all this term.'

'So is D.C.,' Dorry remarked. 'Don't tell her you're glad not to sleep in her room, Van!'

Vangie gave her a startled look. 'Will she be there?' Her chin went up. 'I don't want to speak to her any more. She made me take her to Hurst this morning. I didn't say so to the Head, but it was all Dorothy's doing. And then she said I'd given her away. And she said things about Americans. I've had enough of her. She only thinks about herself.' She turned and ran to the supper-room.

Dorry followed anxiously. But a glance told her she could not help just now. Vangie had carried her milk and bread and butter to one window, Dorothy stood at another. The juniors were eyeing them both; they were used to Vangie's company, and they understood D.C.'s

presence. What puzzled them was that the companions in misfortune did not seem to be on speaking terms.

Matron had had her orders from Miss Willcox. When Dorothy Cheyne went upstairs, dreading an hour alone with Vangie and Enid before Pat came, she found Dot sitting sadly on Van's bed. Dot had wept, and The Blot had stormed, but Matron had been unsympathetic. 'A very good arrangement. You two have been together long enough. You'll see plenty of one another in the daytime. You're a handful by yourself, Blodwen; one junior is enough in a room, if the junior's you.'

'I'll never be able to sleep without you, Blotty,' wept Dot.

'Merle ought to go! It's mean to mess up things for us because Dorothy Cheyne's a rotter,' Blodwen raged. 'I'll put pins in Vangie's bed every night!'

The sight of Dot was a relief to D.C. She made no comment, but went to bed in silence, and Dot turned to Enid for sympathy.

'It's topping to have you here, Dotty!' Enid was congratulating herself on the turn of events. 'I was so lonely without anybody sensible in the room!'

'Seniors can't understand,' Dot agreed. 'It's rotten to have to leave Blotty, but I'm glad you're here, Eny.'

D.C. pulled the bed-clothes over her head and had not a word for them, nor for Pat, when she came up an hour later.

'It's a horrid prospect for me!' Pat remarked aloud, to no one or everyone. 'If the Head had had a scrap of decent feeling she'd have sent me Merle. I shall have a thin time for the rest of the term!'

Vangie avoided questions by being apparently asleep when Dorry, Merle, and Marjorie came up. But she could not shirk for ever, and next morning D.B. called her to account.

'Van, what did you mean last night? Have you quarrelled with D.C., after all these months?'

Vangie brushed her long hair and said nothing.

'I dare say D.C. said too much,' Dorry pleaded; 'but remember how upset she was, Van! You can't pay too much attention to anything she said just then.'

Vangie brushed and plaited in silence.

'Van, say something!' D.B. commanded.

Vangie tossed back her plaits and faced her. 'I've done with D.C. I didn't know what she was really like until yesterday. Now I know, and I've had enough.'

Dorry and Marjorie looked at one another.

'What do you know?' D.B. demanded.

'I know that D.C. threw me over when she was frightened. She turned round and blamed me, when it was all her fault. I didn't want to go to Hurst at four o'clock in the morning! Why should I? I was going in the afternoon. But I did want to show the house to Dorothy. She didn't care about it. She was only thinking of swanking before the girls. I had to ask her if she liked it. And then she thought I'd given her away to the Head. She said I was an idiot and a baby and I'd let her down. And she said things about Americans.' Van's lips tightened angrily. 'I don't like her any more. It's no use talking, D.B.'

'Leave her alone, Dorry,' Marjorie advised. 'She'll come round presently.'

'It isn't vurry likely,' Vangie drawled, and turned to strip her bed.

Gwen accosted Dorothy Cheyne as they went out for the Saturday morning bathe. 'I've looked through your number of the mag, and it's jolly decent. You've had some good stuff

sent in. Dorothy Bayne's story is topping, and I like your travel bits and Vangie's article on Rome. I've no idea who will be the next editor, but I hope the girls will play up and help her as well as they've done for you. You couldn't help turning out a good number with such ripping material.'

'I don't care about it any more.' D.C. covered her hurt with defiance as usual. 'I'm sick of the sight of the thing.'

'It's only fair to tell you,' Gwen spoke sharply, 'that you'd never have had the job if it hadn't been for Dorothy Bayne. She nominated you and practically insisted we should appoint you.'

D.C. looked at her, speechless and scarlet.

'Ask her!' said Gwen, and walked away.

'D.B., is it true you made me editor?' Dorothy demanded, as they went in to breakfast.

Dorry turned quickly. 'Who said I did? It's rot, of course. I couldn't; the prefects' meeting asked you.'

'Gwen says you made them ask me. It was frightfully decent of you, if it's true.'

'I said you'd do it well, and you've proved I was right,' Dorry said. 'Gwen says it's a topping number. I hadn't the right to look at it, of course, so I handed it straight to her.'

'It was awfully sporting of you to nominate me,' D.C. said again, her tone burdened. 'I wasn't nice about your story. I knew it was better than any of mine.'

'Rot! D.C., what about you and Van?'

'She hasn't spoken to me.'

'Haven't you spoken to her?'

'I'm going to, of course. I must put things right. After all these months, we can't go on not speaking to one another. It's too silly.'

'Do get it settled!' Dorry pleaded, more anxious than she would show. 'I'm sure Van's unhappy. If you said anything rude about Americans, D.C., do say you're sorry. You couldn't expect her to put up with that.'

'All right. I'll square things up after brekker. I was putting it off,' D.C. confessed.

Van was going towards the tennis-court to meet Merle and Dorry when Dorothy Cheyne came up. D.C. had been trying to catch her alone, but Van had avoided her till now.

'Vange, it's all right about yesterday, isn't it? I didn't mean anything. I never meant to hurt your feelings.'

Van stopped and stared at her, without speaking.

'I was upset to know Willy had dropped on us. I suppose I said too much. But I didn't mean any harm, Vange. I honestly thought you'd given me away.'

'I know you did. Sure, it was vurry like you! You always think first about yourself.'

It was Dorothy's turn to stare. 'Vange! You don't mean that?'

'I guess I do! I feel I never knew you properly till yesterday. I thought a mighty lot of you once,' Van's voice was hard. 'I saw just exactly what you were like yesterday, with your swanking and your thinking first about yourself. I don't want any more to do with you.'

'Vange!' Dorothy's voice had a note of terror. 'Vange, what do you mean?'

Vangie turned to go towards the court.

Dorothy sprang after her and caught her arm. 'Vange, you don't mean you're going to turn me down because of something I said in a hurry?'

Van shook off her hand. 'Oh no, it isn't that. It's just that I know now what you're like, and I don't care about you any longer.' She walked away, hard-faced and determined.

Dorothy stood gazing after her, thunderstruck. 'Of all the absolute rotters!' she muttered. 'But she won't stick to it. She couldn't!' She went to join Pat and Vi, who were bowling to Edna at the nets. 'Room for one more?'

'You're no good to-day, D.C.,' Edna said presently, as Dorothy's balls went wide. 'What are you thinking about?'

'Been up at four-thirty again?' asked Vi.

'Oh, all right! I don't want to spoil your fun,' and D.C. turned away. She told Dorry what had happened. 'Vange has taken the hump badly. Won't say a word. She's an ass, but she always was a bit of a spoilt mother's-babe.'

'D.C. can't believe it's serious.' Dorry drew Marjorie away to the terrace, and they walked up and down together. 'She thinks Van's a little peeved and it will soon blow over. I'm afraid it's more than that.'

'You think Van's really hurt and angry?'

'I think she's hurt. That's worse than angry. I'm afraid it's what happened to me last autumn,' D.B. said gravely. 'But Van hasn't Dicky to help her. If I hadn't had Dicky I might never have spoken to D.C. again.'

'Can't you tell me more, Dorry?' Marjorie pleaded. 'I've never really understood.'

'It was only that I'd thought such a lot of D.C.; we were such chums. When she disappointed and hurt me I felt I could never forget it. My feeling for her seemed to change, and I thought I could never like her again. She wasn't fair about some essays, and I was frightfully upset that she could do it. I'm afraid the same thing has happened to Van. She's looked up to Dorothy for months and done everything D.C. wanted. Now all that has crashed. She says she didn't know what D.C. was like and now she does know. It's true. I believe it often happens between friends. You look up to people and have a fancy idea of how great and fine they are, and then something happens and it tumbles down. That's what has happened to Van, Marjorie. It's not just that D.C. said something that upset her. The point is, Van suddenly had her eyes opened. We know what D.C. is, and we put up with her, but Van didn't know till yesterday.'

'I'm afraid D.C. has done for herself with Van, then,' Marjorie remarked. 'Vangie won't make allowances, as you've done. She'll turn D.C. down and be done with her.'

'Unless we can help her to see a jollier way out of this mess. Marj, *do* you think, if you're disappointed in your chum, that's a reason to be done with her? Now that you see Van trying to do it, doesn't it look babyish and brutal?'

'Maybe it does,' Marjorie admitted. 'But it isn't easy for some people to do anything else. What are you going to do about it, D.B.?''

'Help, somehow. I haven't a notion how. But it oughtn't to be impossible, Marjorie! We have to make them see what they really want, that's all. Vangie doesn't *really* want to quarrel with Dorothy for ever!'

'I don't suppose she does. But she thinks she does just now.'

'She'll be sorry later, unless we can help them to start again. We'll find some way; I'm sure we shall! I want to hand on to Vangie and D.C. what Miss Dickinson did for me. She showed me that what I really wanted was to find the real D.C. again. We'll help Van somehow, between us!'

'You'll have to do it. I'm no good at that sort of thing,' said Marjorie.

CHAPTER XXX. MANAGING D.C.

Dorothy Cheyne went about all through the week-end with dazed eyes, bewildered and frightened. At one blow she had lost the two things she really valued—the editorship and Vangie’s good opinion. She had known the first must go, if her early morning prank was discovered; but she had never expected anything to disturb the second.

But Van was implacable. ‘I don’t care vurry much about Dorothy Cheyne now,’ she said, when Dorry or Marjorie remonstrated with her. ‘She isn’t like I thought she was.’ She avoided D.C. and would not speak to her when they met.

After a day or two Dorothy went in despair to Dorothy Bayne. ‘I must speak to somebody! D.B., what *is* the matter with Vange? What can I do? I’ve tried to talk her round. I’ve told her I never meant any harm. But she won’t listen. What did I say that upset her so fearfully?’

They were standing by the sea-wall, while Van, Merle, Vi, and Pat played tennis on the court below.

Dorry paused before answering. ‘I don’t think it’s what you said, exactly. D.C., I believe I understand what’s happened, but you won’t like it if I tell you.’

D.C. sat down on the low wall. ‘For goodness’ sake, tell me anything you can. I don’t know what’s the matter with her. Say what you like; pitch into me, if you want to. I’m awfully keen on Vange, D.B. I didn’t think anything could upset her and me, after all those months on the Continent. This mess is the most fearful thing I ever imagined. I can’t understand it. If you can, I’m ready to listen. I’ll do anything to put it right.’

Dorry sat beside her, gazing out to sea, considering her words. ‘Van thought so much of you,’ she said at last. ‘She’d lived alone with her mother; you were the first girl she’d ever had as a friend. She made a sort of hero of you, and looked up to you enormously. Anyone could see it. She’d do anything or go anywhere you asked. Of course it was too much. You couldn’t live up to it.’

D.C. reddened. ‘You mean I wasn’t good enough?’

‘You disappointed her. Don’t be mad! You told me to say it.’

‘Yes. Go on,’ D.C. said unhappily. ‘How did I do it?’

‘It wasn’t all your fault. You didn’t know how much she admired you. But I think she feels you let her down, and she’s hurt. You can’t be angry, D.C. It isn’t so much that she’s mad with you.’

‘No,’ Dorothy acknowledged. ‘She hasn’t said much, and she does, when she’s mad. She’s different, that’s all.’

‘She’s come out of her dream. She had a fancy picture of you, and she’s found it wasn’t true. She thinks she’s seen you as you really are, and she’s gone to the other extreme.’

‘Then it’s hopeless,’ D.C. quivered. ‘We can never be the same again. She doesn’t care about me now. That’s what she says.’

Dorothy Bayne leaned forward and gripped her wrist. ‘But what if you could make a new friendship, old chap? You can’t go back to the old one. That’s crashed, and it can’t be built up again. But you’re fond of her, and I’m sure she’s fond of you. Can’t you build up something new?’ There was the ring of eager experience in every word.

D.C. heard it, without understanding what it meant. ‘Tell me how, D.B.!’ she pleaded. ‘I’d do anything! What is it Vange doesn’t like? How can I be different? What was it made her change her mind about me?’ She reddened.

‘You’ll be mad with *me*.’ Dorry hesitated.

‘I won’t; I promise I won’t. I’d put up with anything to have Vange back. What’s wrong with me? You can say any single thing you want to, D.B.’

‘You always put yourself first,’ Dorry said. ‘You can’t help it; it’s the way you think. But I’m sure it’s a thing you could change, with practice. You can try, every time, to think first of the other person.’

D.C. reddened again. ‘Do I? How do I, D.B.?’

‘You *know* you were thinking all the time on Friday morning of what the girls would say about you! Your whole reason for going to Hurst—why did you go, D.C.?’

Dorothy stirred restlessly. ‘So they shouldn’t crow over me. I didn’t care about the house; Vange saw that. I suppose it’s true; I hadn’t realised it.’

‘Then when she told you it had all come out, you didn’t think about her, but only about the magazine. I suppose you said things that opened her eyes. Another girl might not have cared. It was because Van cared so tremendously about you that she was so easily upset, D.C. When you care like that, a little thing will do it.’

‘You might have warned me,’ D.C. muttered.

‘You wouldn’t have listened,’ Dorry retorted.

D.C. stared at the white cliffs beyond Seaford. At last she asked, ‘Is there anything I can do, D.B.? If I go to Vange and say I’ll try to be different, she won’t believe me.’

Dorry spoke eagerly. ‘Don’t *say* anything, D.C.! *Do* something that will give her a shock and make her take notice! Then she’ll find all the jolly parts of you are still there, and she’ll want to go back to where you were before.’

‘But what could I do?’

‘You’d give her a real shock if you joined the Rangers,’ Dorry suggested. ‘She’d be so much surprised that she’d have to take some notice. You know we want you to join, D.C.!’

Dorothy coloured. ‘She wanted me to join. I wouldn’t, because I felt I’d be so far behind all the rest of you. It was the same feeling that made me go to Hurst. I believe you’re right, D.B. How did you understand?’

‘The whole feeling of Guides and Rangers is against shutting yourself up to think of what you want for yourself,’ Dorry said thoughtfully. ‘You work with your patrol. It’s team-work. So is country-dancing, and we’re doing a lot of that. You aren’t strong on that side. I believe it’s what you want. Oh, D.C., *do!*’

‘I’ll think about it,’ Dorothy promised, a spark of hope in her face. ‘Could I be in your patrol, D.B.?’

‘Wouldn’t you rather be with Vangie?’

‘Does it make much difference? Can’t I be in your patrol and yet be with her a lot—if she gets over this? You and I were chums before I knew her. And you’ve been awfully decent about this. I’d rather drill for you than for Pat.’

‘We’d love to have you.’ Dorry’s face was radiant. ‘It won’t take you away from Van, D.C. Oh, do be one of my Robins! Come to to-morrow’s drill! I’ll tell Captain and the others, shall I?’

‘I’ve *hated* being outside the Guides, when you all belonged!’ D.C. burst out. ‘But I’d said I wouldn’t join, and I didn’t want to be the rawest recruit you had.’

‘Oh, you’ll soon be through that stage!’ Dorry laughed. ‘D.C., you’ll love it. You’ve been staying outside so many things. Being editor didn’t really make up; you could do that on your own. You’ve been walking by your wild lone for long enough. You’ll feel far jollier when you’re in the crowd with the rest of us!’

CHAPTER XXXI. A FOUR-SQUARE FRIENDSHIP.

‘Heard the news, Marj?’ asked Dorry, as they prepared for bed. ‘Dorothy Cheyne’s going to join the Rangers and be in our patrol!’

‘My hat!’ said Marjorie. ‘What did it?’

‘My! What a vurry odd thing!’ Vangie had been in bed for more than an hour, but she sat up in astonishment.

‘We had a talk. She’s needing something instead of the mag. Haven’t you seen how lost she’s looked these last few days?’

‘It’s a topping idea,’ Marjorie remarked. ‘Did you put it into her head?’

‘She jumped at it. I believe she’s been wanting to come into the Guides, but she wouldn’t say so.’

Van lay down again, turning her face to the wall. Dorry and Marjorie and Merle glanced at one another, but said no more about D.C.

Marjorie was coming in from tennis the following afternoon when Dorothy Cheyne caught her. ‘I say!’ she said awkwardly, for they had never become real friends; ‘you’re chummy with D.B. You know she’s lugging me into the Rangers?’

‘I guessed it was her doing,’ Marjorie admitted. ‘I’m sure you’ll like it. Dorry’s patrol is ripping.’

‘I want to ask you—does she always understand? How does she manage it? She understood how I felt about Vange, and what was wrong. Nobody else took the trouble. How did she know?’

‘Because it had happened to her. She felt you’d done to Van just what you did to her,’ Marjorie said bluntly. ‘She knew how Vangie must be feeling because she’d felt it all herself.’

Dorothy Cheyne stared at her. ‘What *on earth* do you mean?’

‘That you once upset Dorry as much as you’ve hurt Van now. But Dorry’s such a good sort and so sporting that she hasn’t let it make any difference. That’s what I mean. I know it’s so.’

‘I never did anything of the kind! I *never* upset D.B.! When?’

‘Last autumn, when you cribbed her ideas for your essays and then bagged the prize. Merle told me; D.B. wouldn’t tell; she shut me up. It’s true. She cared as much as Van cares now. But she went on being as jolly as ever. She’s a real sport.’

Dorothy Cheyne turned and left her.

Marjorie watched her racing across the lawn. ‘I wonder if I did right? I couldn’t help it; I had to say it. She ought to know. But D.B. will be wild!’

Dorothy Bayne was practising when D.C. burst into the room. ‘D.B., is it true?’

Dorry swung round and stared at her. ‘D.C., what’s up?’

‘Marjorie says you understood about me and Vange because I’d made you feel as she does—because it had happened to you. Last year, when I was such a pig over those essays. D.B., you didn’t care as much as that, did you?’

‘I’ll talk to Marjorie! That’s all done with, D.C. We can’t go back to it now.’

‘You did care!’ Dorothy leaned against a chair and stared at her. ‘You felt as Vange does. I see it now. But you’ve never let me guess. You’ve stood up for me all these months. You’ve

been just the same as before. *You* didn't say you didn't like me any more, because I wasn't what you'd thought!

'Van's a spoilt baby,' D.B. said quickly. 'And I had Dicky to help me. She showed me that you didn't mean any harm. I knew it was true, and so I was able to go on without any difference. I want to help Vangie to do it too, but I haven't had a chance yet.'

Dorothy Cheyne came up to the piano. A new view of herself was opening before her dazed eyes. She would never be quite so self-centred or satisfied again. 'You *have* been sporting! I say, D.B., how does it feel to be as decent to anybody as you've been to me? All these months, and I've never understood! How does it feel, D.B.?'

Dorry looked up at her. 'The jolliest feeling in the world, old chap! It's ripping to know you have something really worth while to give your chum.'

'You give everything. I've given nothing to you.'

'Oh, but you have! You've given me chances.'

'I must have been beastly to you over and over again. *Have* I upset you often, D.B.?'

'Not so very badly, old thing. I knew you didn't mean it.'

'That's what Vange didn't know. You are a brick, Dorry Bayne!'

'Don't think any more about it. We have to help Van to understand too, and then we can all three be jolly together, can't we, D.C.?'

'It will have to be three,' Dorothy cried. 'I can't ever be satisfied with Vange now, if we leave you out. You and I belonged before we knew her, D.B.!'

'It will have to be four, I think,' Dorry warned her. 'You'll bring in Van, and I'll bring in Marj. She's one of the best, D.C. She's helped me no end.'

'We'll pair her off with Vange,' D.C. suggested.

Dorry laughed. 'A four-square friendship would be jolly. You can have so many changes. I don't really like threes. There's always one left out.'

CHAPTER XXXII. MANAGING VANGIE.

‘What’s D.C. joining the Rangers for?’ Vangie demanded of Dorothy Bayne, as Dorry and Merle and Marjorie changed into uniform for the meeting that evening.

‘To tell you the truth, Van Warner,’ D.B. replied, ‘she wants to show you she’s sorry, and she feels it will be a good way to do it. You told her she thought too much about herself. Nobody could say that of a good Guide. D.C.’s going to be a good one. It’s rather a big thing to do for one’s chum.’

Van sat staring at her, saying nothing.

Dorry turned to Marjorie, with a question about the evening’s country-dancing. ‘What’s the second figure of “Parson’s,” Marj? I always feel lost in the thing.’

‘Say! Does D.C. really care such a mighty lot?’ Van interrupted.

Dorry buckled her belt and turned to her. ‘You say D.C. threw you over. It doesn’t seem to have struck you that you did the same thing yourself.’

‘I never did!’

‘Yes, you did. D.C. said things when she was frightened and upset, and you turned round and refused to speak to her. Have you never said too much when something had upset you?’

Vangie had been considering herself the injured one. She stared in blank surprise.

‘D.C.’s sorry, and she’s said she’s sorry,’ Dorry continued severely. ‘She’s showing you she’s in earnest. She’s taken a really big step out of her narrow ways; she *was* shut up in herself. She knows it, and she’s sorry. If you don’t go to meet her, you’re mean and ungenerous.’

‘But D.C. isn’t like——’ Vangie faltered.

‘Like you thought she was? Perhaps not. But is that any reason for throwing her over?’ D.B. was very much the prefect as she stood over Van, who felt about three, as she said later to Dorothy Cheyne. ‘Who asked you to think she was perfect? She’s as much upset about all this as you are. But she’s doing something about it; she’s trying to put it right. You’re only criticising and saying you don’t like her. What’s the use of that? If she isn’t what you thought, wouldn’t it be better to help her to be what you thought she was?’

Van, scarlet, faltered, ‘You sure do make me seem a baby, D.B.!’

‘You haven’t thought, that’s all. You won’t be a baby once you’ve thought it out. Van, aren’t you sorry to lose D.C. after all these months? Be honest and own up!’

‘I’d be sorry, if she was the Dorothy who went to Switzerland with us. But she seemed like a new Dorothy.’

‘She’s going to be a new Dorothy, and you’re going to help her. If I told you a big thing, a really hard big thing, that you could do for D.C., would you do it, Van, for old times’ sake, or would you refuse?’

‘What could I do for her?’ Van looked startled.

‘You’ve passed your tests and you’re ready to be enrolled. You’re keen to have your uniform and be really a Ranger. But we can’t keep on having enrolments. D.C. will be just as keen, but she can’t be received until she’s been attending for a month. That brings us nearly to the end of the term, and Captain won’t want to have another ceremony just for her. It would be much jollier if you’d wait a month longer, till you and she could be enrolled together.’

‘Oh, D.B.! I’m wanting to be enrolled mighty badly!’ Van cried in dismay.

‘Of course you are. So you know just how D.C. will feel, when she has drilled and danced with us for a few weeks and passed her tests.’

Vangie looked troubled. ‘Couldn’t we do it again for her, D.B.?’

‘Perhaps we could. But it would be much jollier to receive you both at once. And perhaps we couldn’t, for the Commissioner has to be asked, and we can’t keep bothering her. If she comes to “Whitey’s” in June, just for you, she won’t want to come again in July, for one more girl. Captain wouldn’t like to ask her. She’ll say D.C. had better wait till September.’

‘Pity D.C. didn’t make up her mind at the proper time,’ Merle remarked.

‘It gives Van a gorgeous chance to be generous and sporting, though,’ said Marjorie.

Van looked at her and then at Dorothy Bayne. ‘Does D.C. really care, D.B.?’

‘About being enrolled? She’d hate to wait till September.’

‘No; I mean about me.’

‘Yes,’ Dorry said.

Vangie hesitated. Suddenly she cried, ‘I’ll go right now and tell her it’s all square!’ She fled from the room.

D.B. called after her, ‘She’s in the gym, waiting for us!’ Then she turned to Marjorie and laughed.

‘You do boss, D.B.!’ Marjorie mocked. ‘You’ve a way of twisting people round that’s most surprising!’

‘I didn’t do it! Van did it herself, as soon as she saw it.’

‘Rubbish!’ said Marjorie. ‘Come and see if they’re in one another’s arms!’

‘Dorothy, I’m real sorry I was horrid, and I’m going to wait to be enrolled till you’re ready, so that we can be done together!’ Vangie panted, hurling herself on D.C., who was standing alone in the gym, a little shy of her first drill. ‘But you’ll be quick about your tests, won’t you? It’s a mighty long while to wait another month!’

‘Vange! Oh, I’m so glad! How jolly nice of you!’ D.C.’s face was radiant.

‘It isn’t me. It’s D.B. She told me I wasn’t being sporting.’

‘It would be D.B. She twists us all round and makes us go as she wants us to,’ D.C. cried, and turned to the rest as they crowded into the gym. ‘Dorry Bayne, you’re a brick! Thank you!’

‘Sure! Thank you vurry much, D.B.,’ said Vangie. ‘But say! Aren’t you “some” boss?’

‘She bullies us all,’ said Dorothy Cheyne.

‘I don’t! But I do know what I want,’ D.B. protested. ‘You two don’t. You never really wanted to break away from one another.’

D.C. and Van exchanged guilty looks.

‘I don’t believe we did,’ said D.C. ‘We only thought we wanted it. But why should you know what we wanted better than we did ourselves?’

‘Oh, I just guessed!’ said Dorothy Bayne.

THE END.

[The end of *Dorothy's Dilemma: A School Story* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]