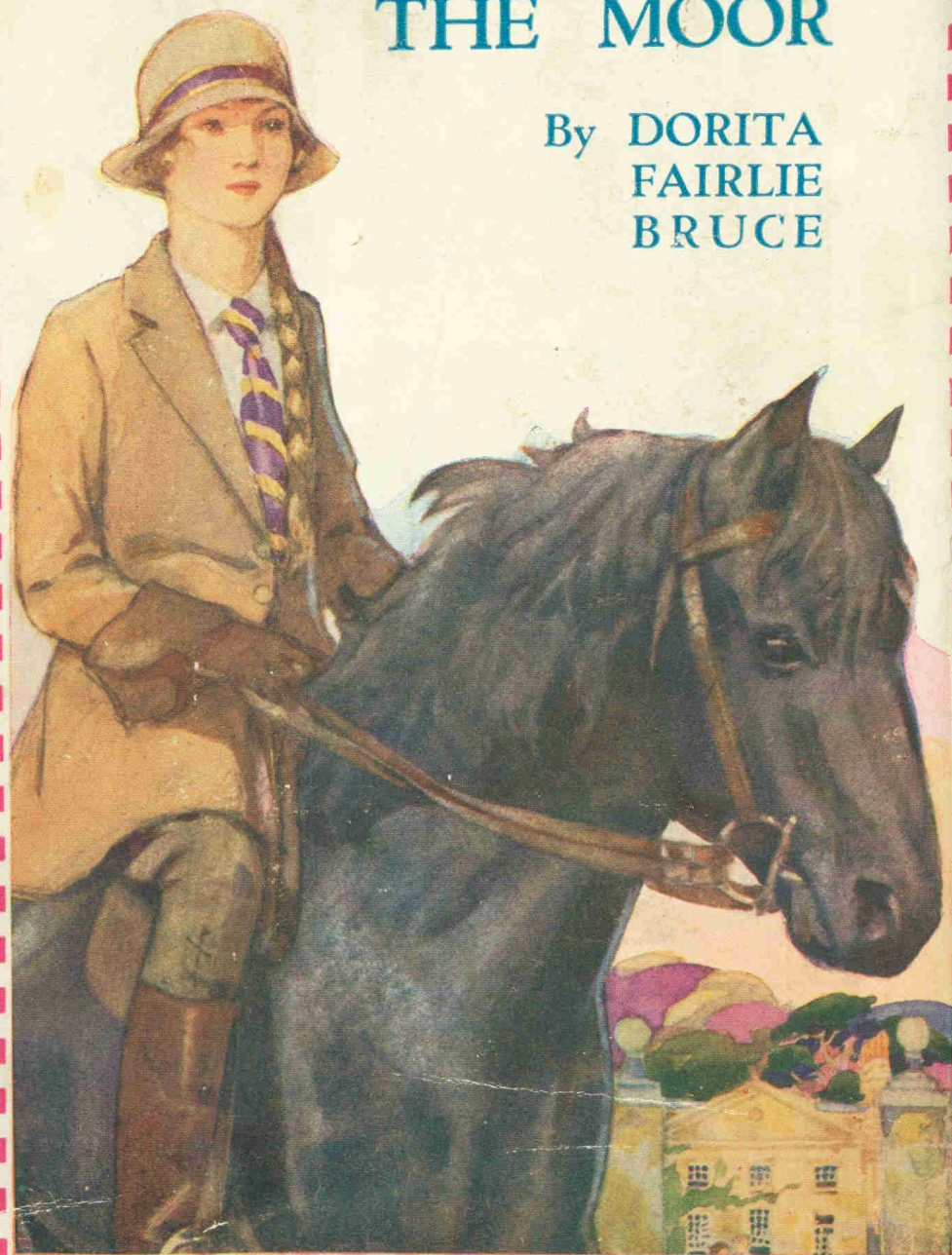


# THE SCHOOL ON THE MOOR

By DORITA  
FAIRLIE  
BRUCE



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*Stories by*

*DORITA FAIRLIE BRUCE*

The Dimsie Books

DIMSIE GOES TO SCHOOL  
DIMSIE MOVES UP  
DIMSIE MOVES UP AGAIN  
DIMSIE AMONG THE PREFECTS  
DIMSIE—HEAD GIRL  
DIMSIE GROWS UP  
DIMSIE GOES BACK

CAPTAIN OF SPRINGDALE  
THE SCHOOL ON THE MOOR  
THE BEST HOUSE IN THE SCHOOL  
THE NEW HOUSE CAPTAIN  
THE NEW GIRL AND NANCY  
THE GIRLS OF ST. BRIDE'S  
NANCY TO THE RESCUE  
THAT BOARDING-SCHOOL GIRL

*Humphrey Milford*

*OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS*

# THE SCHOOL ON THE MOOR

By

DORITA FAIRLIE BRUCE



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*To my niece*

BARBARA JEAN BRUCE

*hoping she may like Toby and her  
friends as well as she  
likes Dimsie*

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# School on the Moor

## CHAPTER I

### THE MEETING IN MRS. PAGE'S SHOP

‘You know, Daddy, my mind is quite made up.’

Toby Barrett was perched on the wide window-sill of her father's studio, with her feet firmly planted on the back of a chair below, her elbows on her knees, and her square determined little chin propped in her hands. Over one shoulder fell a long thick plait of golden-brown hair, the remainder of which rippled and waved about a small well-shaped head, breaking into rings and spirals on her temples. For the rest, her face was healthily tanned and not innocent of freckles, and she had a pair of candid hazel eyes which looked out fearlessly on all the world. Toby was one of those fortunate people who had found little to fear in the sixteen years of her life.

‘Do you hear me, Daddy?’ she reiterated sternly. ‘*Quite—made—up!*’

‘It generally is, my dear,’ rejoined her father placidly, as he took a long step back from his easel, the better to survey his work. ‘And as far as I can remember, I've never raised any reasonable objection.’

‘That's true,’ agreed Toby thoughtfully. ‘But you may, now, because this is going to cost rather a lot—more than most of the things I've made up my mind about before.’

Mortimer Barrett glanced up at his daughter with a trace of anxiety. Really, there was no knowing with Toby! and though his popular moorland paintings brought him in a generous income, he was by no means a wealthy man—rather, he might be described by the old Scottish term ‘bien’, a word adapted from the French, and usually expressing material comfort.

‘If it's to build a Home for Dartmoor Orphans,’ he began firmly, ‘or to provide funds for digging out the Ark of the Covenant from underneath Blue Tor, where you believe Jeremiah carelessly left it lying about——’

‘But it isn't,’ interrupted Toby. ‘I've managed to get all those kids of poor Josh Treggle's suitably adopted—at least, I hope so. Jan-at-the-Mill



hasn't quite decided about the youngest-but-one yet, though I've every reason to hope he will, by the time I've finished with him——'

'I don't doubt it!' groaned her father *sotto voce*.

'—because I shall tell him', she proceeded, ignoring the interruption, 'that a squint brings luck, and Jan and his wife are both frightfully superstitious. As for the Ark of the Covenant—I quite see that I can't expect you to pay for what you don't believe in, so I must attend to it myself when I've grown up and made some money. That's the point.'

'Which point?' inquired Mortimer Barrett absently, returning to his canvas. 'I say, Toby! I wish you'd come down out of that window. There isn't too much light to-day in any case.'

Toby slipped off obediently, and stood beside him, her hands clasped behind her back.

'The point about which I've made up my mind,' she said. 'You needn't bother to see about another governess, because I'm going to school!'

'Oh!' said Mr. Barrett. 'You are, are you? And where?'

'St. Githa's,' answered Toby promptly. 'That big boarding-school on the moor above Priorsford. The head mistress is a Miss Ashley, with yards of letters after her name. I thought I'd go over and see her about it to-morrow afternoon. There's really no time to be lost if I'm to start this summer term, for it begins in about a fortnight.'

'How do you know?' he asked, staring at her in astonishment.

'I wrote for a prospectus,' replied Toby tranquilly, 'when I first thought of going there. The only difficulty is that they don't take day-girls, but I shall try to persuade her.'

'And I fully expect you'll succeed!' said her father, carefully mixing some more paint on his palette. 'But has it struck you that it's a little unusual for a girl to—er—put herself to school? That sort of thing is usually done by parents, and your Miss Ashley may refuse to deal with you.'

'I thought of that,' Toby replied readily. 'It'll be all right if you'll give me a letter to her. You can write it this evening, when the light's gone, so it won't interfere with your work.'

'That's true,' assented Mr. Barrett absently, as he started in again on his canvas. 'I couldn't spare the time, of course, to go over to Priorsford while

I've got this job on hand, but that doesn't matter so much since you don't insist on going as a boarder. I daresay—a letter—might meet the case.'

And Toby, recognizing from his dreamy tone that he had already almost forgotten her existence, went off contentedly on some business of her own.

She was very well satisfied with the result of her attack—not that she had ever had any serious doubts of its issue; for her father rarely denied her anything, and it was a miracle that Toby, growing up in a Dartmoor village, motherless, and with a doting old housekeeper to look after her, had not been thoroughly spoilt. True, there had been governesses from time to time, but none of them would ever stay long at Applecleave, which they regarded as the back of beyond—and perhaps they were not far wrong. It was a very small village, straggling along the side of a hill, and entirely devoid of a railway station, or even an hotel. Its most imposing building was an exceedingly ancient church with a high Norman tower, and next in order came Stepside, the long, low, whitewashed house in which the Barretts lived.

Toby had been brought there as a toddling, top-heavy person of two and a half, shortly after her mother's death, and she could remember no other home. To her, Stepside (perched on a wide grassy shelf where the hill curved round from the village) was all that heart could desire. Its garden, chiefly cultivated by Toby herself, led in a series of smaller shelves to the stony brown beck below, and on the other side rose the moor again, a vast wave of green and gold and purple, and a thousand other nameless colours such as Mortimer Barrett loved to transfer to canvas. He was famous through the length and breadth of England, and even beyond, for his Dartmoor paintings, but he never cared to take advantage of his fame, and seldom strayed for long from Applecleave.

So it came about that Toby had grown up knowing very little of the outside world, except what she could learn from the books in the library, by which she set great store. It is possible that she had educated herself better by these means than through all the efforts of her successive governesses; but of late she had awakened to the fact that there was something missing—something that only a big school and the society of other girls could supply—and, being a practical young woman, she set about getting it for herself.

'Because', she argued, with the wisdom born of sixteen years' experience, 'there's no use expecting Daddy to bother. This will be a far more troublesome business than engaging a governess through Aunt Lydia.'

The possibility that Aunt Lydia's services might be enlisted in the finding of a school had occurred to Toby, and for that reason she had said nothing to her father on the subject till the school had been practically found by herself. She felt—judging from her relation's taste in governesses—that they were not likely to agree about this even more important choice.

The rain, which had fallen for the better part of a day, was clearing off now, and Toby, catching up a soft felt hat that lay on a chair in the hall, betook herself to the stable.

'I'll saddle Blackberry,' she thought, 'and go for a gallop up on the moor. He needs exercise, and there's just time to get to Priorscross and back before supper. I'll buy some of that cake Daddy likes, which isn't made in Applecleave. That's a good idea.'

Toby always looked after her own pony, and the two were great friends; in fact, she depended very much on Blackberry for her longer explorations. They often disappeared together for a whole day, accompanied by Algernon, the Cairn terrier, hunting for the remains of some British camp, or Druid circle, of which the girl had read in the moor records that she found in the library. Anything ancient interested Toby intensely, and she checked the pony's speed now, as they passed a large monolith that reared itself out of the young heather not far from where she had crossed the beck.

'I wonder who set it up,' she thought, 'and if it was standing there when the Phoenicians came to fetch their tin from the old deserted mines at the head of the Cleave. And I wonder if they took the tin on their mules along the little narrow packman's paths to Otters' Bay. I expect they did. It would be the nearest harbourage for their ships.'

Dreaming this way, she rode over a sweep of bare down on which the gorse was coming into flower, and so, by a steep lane between high hedges, into Priorscross. This, compared with Applecleave, was a village of some pretensions, for it boasted of two twisted wriggling streets, and a real post office instead of an ordinary thatched cottage with a red pillar-box in its wall.

Next to the post office was a tiny baker's shop, and here Toby slid from Blackberry's back, tying his reins to a post in the fence.

The little shop, with its pleasant smell of new bread, seemed filled to overflowing as she stepped down into it, but in reality there were only two people there besides herself—a tall dark girl of about twenty-six or twenty-

seven with a bright clever face, and another, fair and rather colourless, with deep thoughtful eyes.

It was at this second girl that Toby looked again eagerly, as her sight grew accustomed to the indoor twilight, for she recognized her at once. Last year the doctor's wife had taken her into Exeter for a couple of nights with her own girl—being a motherly creature, anxious to give the lonely child a treat—and part of the treat had been a concert at which they had heard a young 'cellist play. Her music had been a revelation to Toby's beauty-loving soul, and she had seen her photograph since in various papers and magazines, for Ursula Grey's name was becoming widely known. Toby had never forgotten the new delight the 'cellist had given her, and it was with a little thrill of excitement that she saw her now, actually standing in Mrs. Page's shop.

'Yes, that will do very nicely, thank you,' Miss Grey's friend was saying in quick decided tones. 'I should be able to go in and out, you say, through the orchard gate in the lane? And a 'bus runs through to Priorsford, which I could use in bad weather? Of course, when it's fine I should prefer to cycle. Very well, then, Mrs. Page—we'll consider that settled, and I shall take the rooms from the twenty-second. If I find them comfortable I may come back again, you know, after the summer holidays.'

'Thank you kindly, miss,' replied Mrs. Page. 'I'll have everything put in nice order for you, and many thanks to Miss Ashley for recommending me. We have our summer season here, of course, the same as other places on the moor, but it's none so easy to get a let, other times in the year, nor such a long one as this.'

The strangers turned to go out, Toby standing aside to let them pass, and she heard the dark girl say, as they went down the street, 'That's fixed up then, Ursula, and when you want to come for a rest, there's always that extra bed; besides, it will be a good thing to be so near——'

The clear pleasant voice dwindled in the distance, and Toby realized with a start that Mrs. Page was waiting to serve her.

'Nice-spoken ladies, both of them,' said the baker's wife garrulously, as she cut off and weighed the cake for which Mr. Barrett had a special affection. 'The taller one—her that was talking when you came in—is coming to teach the young ladies up to St. Githa's by Priorsford. That's why she's wanting to lodge with me for a bit. Likes living out, she says, and I don't wonder.'

‘And—and the other?’ asked Toby diffidently, as she searched her purse for the necessary change.

‘Oh! she’s just a friend who’s going round with Miss Musgrave,’ replied Mrs. Page carelessly. ‘Pale-looking she is—needs strong moor air, I’ll be bound. Tenpence-ha’penny—thank you kindly, Miss Toby. Turning out a fine evening, after all, bean’t it?’

Toby mounted her pony again, and rode slowly homewards across the moor smiling now in the rays of the evening sun, and fragrant with all the scents which the rain had brought out. More than ever she was determined to go to St. Githa’s. Fancy being taught anything by a friend of Ursula Grey’s! And it might even be, since she was intimate with this Miss Musgrave, and coming to visit her, that she might come to the school, and Toby might speak to her. Stranger things happened every day. It was strange enough to have been in the same shop with her, and brushed against her waterproof in passing.

Ursula Grey, who was the humblest and most unassuming of mortals, would have laughed heartily if she could have guessed the thoughts of the tall hazel-eyed schoolgirl who had stepped back to let her pass out of Mrs. Page’s shop. But the day was not far distant, though neither she nor Toby guessed it, when their paths were to cross in a manner stranger than they could possibly have foreseen.

## CHAPTER II

### TOBY MAKES HER OWN ARRANGEMENTS

Miss Ashley, head mistress of St. Githa's School, Priorsford, slipped an elastic band over the pile of business papers she had been sorting, and leaned back in her chair.

'That's done!' she exclaimed with satisfaction, and stretched her arms luxuriously above her head. 'You might give these letters to Nellie, Miss Snaith, when she comes in to clear away the tea; they'll be in time for the evening post. And ask her to send Joe over to Priorscross on his bicycle with this note for Dr. Jordan. I daresay he'll be glad to get it tonight.'

Her secretary rose to take the note, and said:

'May I ask what you've decided to do about it, Miss Ashley? It's sheer curiosity, I own, but I'm interested.'

'About Penelope Jordan, you mean? Well—it's departing from my usual rule against day-girls, as you know, but—Dr. and Mrs. Jordan are such old friends that I can't bring myself to refuse them, especially since they lost their other child. If I don't take Pen they will have to send her away to school, and I know what a terrible wrench that would be in the circumstances.'

'So you are going to let her come here as a day-girl?'

Miss Ashley nodded.

'I am—for the reasons just given. Of course, she'd have a better time as a boarder, but that can't be helped.'

'Oh, she won't do so badly!' said Miss Snaith. 'I expect, by the look of her, she'll be in the Lower Fifth with Gabrielle Marsden, and that lot. I only hope she'll leaven the lump a little.'

Miss Ashley laughed.

'Would you call it a lump?' she asked. 'It doesn't seem stolid enough for that description. More lumpishness might make for greater peace all round. And you need hardly pin any hopes to Pen Jordan. From what I've seen of her she's not likely to reform *Vb.*'

Miss Snaith sighed.

‘I rather wish somebody would!’ she said.

The Head looked amused.

‘Possibly their new form-mistress may manage it,’ she suggested. ‘She struck me as being a purposeful sort of young person. Anyhow, I shouldn’t worry about the Lower Fifth. There’s no harm in them, only perfectly natural high spirits which will tone down as they move up the school. Yes, Nellie? Come in.’

‘Please, mum,’ said the parlourmaid, hesitating in the doorway, ‘there’s a young lady to see you. I put her in the drawing-room.’

‘A young lady? Bring her up here. No, don’t go, Miss Snaith—unless you want to. I expect it’s some one collecting for something.’

‘Surely not,’ protested Miss Snaith. ‘I’ve paid all the local subscriptions that are due. But, of course, there’s always something fresh cropping up—hullo!’

The exclamation, hastily smothered, was forced from her by the apparition in the doorway, so totally different from what they were expecting. Something fresh had certainly cropped up this time.

‘Miss Barrett,’ announced the maid, and departed.

Toby, despite her father’s warning, was supremely unconscious of anything unusual in her errand. She came into the room clad in her fawn riding-coat and breeches, with her old felt hat pulled down on her brow, and held out her hand to Miss Ashley without a trace of embarrassment.

‘How do you do?’ she said. ‘I hope you don’t mind my coming to see you without asking you first if I might. I’m Toby Barrett, who wrote to you for that prospectus.’

Miss Ashley, like her visitor, was not easily taken aback. Probably her training as head mistress of a large school had amply prepared her for anything that might happen. At any rate, she smiled readily, and said:

‘I’m very pleased to see you, and I remember your letter, but I—somehow didn’t think that was the name.’

Toby coloured now.

‘It wasn’t,’ she admitted frankly. ‘I’m really Tabitha, after a great-grandmother, so I shall always have to sign business letters like that, but nobody ever calls me by it. If I come to St. Githa’s, I’d rather be Toby—at least, if you don’t mind?’

‘Oh!’ said Miss Ashley. ‘*Are* you coming to St. Githa’s?’

Miss Snaith sat back in her chair, and gave herself up to enjoyment of the scene before her. She was a student of character, and this girl in riding-kit, who had come to put herself to school, promised to be something quite out of the common.

‘I hope so,’ said Toby with a wide engaging smile. ‘If you’ll have me, I am. Daddy would have come to see about it himself, but he’s busy with a picture just now, which he must work at whenever the light’s good. I don’t know whether you’ve noticed, but it hasn’t been specially good lately.’

‘I’m afraid I haven’t noticed,’ confessed Miss Ashley, ‘not being an artist, you see. So you are Mortimer Barrett’s daughter?’

Toby nodded.

‘That’s why I have to see about myself a good deal,’ she explained simply. ‘I expect you understand, because you probably know heaps of artists. Anyhow, Daddy wrote this letter, as he couldn’t come, asking you if you’d be kind enough to let me come to school here as a day-girl. Would you mind?’

Miss Ashley pulled forward an inviting chair, as she took the letter.

‘I shall have to think,’ she said. ‘Sit down and talk to Miss Snaith while I see what your father has to say to me. Miss Snaith is my secretary, and she also teaches botany, and a few such oddments.’

‘Do you?’ asked Toby eagerly, as she sat down beside the secretary. ‘I’ve tried to teach myself from books, and the plants I’ve found on the moor. It’s most awfully interesting. Do you believe white heather is really an albino? I found some once which had pink eyes.’

‘They weren’t eyes,’ said Miss Snaith, with a little explosion of laughter. ‘They’ve got a proper botanical name—but I don’t propose to give a lecture, at the present moment. I see you came on horseback. Where do you live?’

‘At Applecleave,’ responded Toby readily. ‘It’s rather a jolly little village—but I expect you know it—up at the top of the Long Cleave, just under Blue Tor.’

While they talked she kept an anxious eye on Miss Ashley, who was reading Mortimer Barrett’s letter with knitted brows. Presently she laid it down on her writing-table, and stared absently out of the window at the mauve line of moor that rose above a nearer stretch of wood. She neither took nor desired day-girls, whom she regarded as fruitful sources of



infection for the boarders, and had strong views of her own regarding the mixture of those two types of pupil. Yet, her kind heart, which had already betrayed her that afternoon in the case of Penelope Jordan, was pleading strongly now for Toby. Despite her gallant independence, there was something rather forlorn about the girl which appealed to a warm vein of motherliness in Miss Ashley.

‘What do you do with yourself, all day long, Toby?’ she asked abruptly, as she turned back to her visitor.

‘In the holidays, do you mean? Oh, lots of things!’ Toby answered. ‘I never have time enough for everything. You see, the moor’s so frightfully interesting, and I’m out on it nearly all day with Blackberry and Algernon—they’re my pony and my dog; they’re both waiting for me outside. I don’t sketch, like Daddy, but I poke about the old Druid stones and try to find out what they mean. Do you know that some people say they aren’t Druid at all?’

‘Nobody can tell exactly what they are,’ said Miss Ashley, ‘or who put them there. It’s all guesswork, I fancy.’

Toby leaned forward earnestly, and fixed her wide hazel eyes on the head mistress’s face.

‘Just tell me this,’ she begged, lowering her eager tones to an impressive key: ‘do you believe that Jeremiah may, perhaps, have come here in the Phoenician ships which took him on to Ireland afterwards? You know—when he was escaping from Palestine with the princesses of Israel. Daddy doesn’t believe it, but I do—and what’s more,’ dropping her voice yet further, ‘I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if he buried the Ark of the Covenant under one of our tors.’

If Miss Ashley felt any surprise at the unusual turn the conversation had taken, she did not show it, being a person of great tact and consideration.

‘It’s just possible,’ she said gravely, ‘though I don’t remember having heard it suggested before. If you are coming to St. Githa’s we must have some talks about things. I am glad you are interested in really interesting things.’

‘Then’, said Toby, drawing a long breath, ‘you are really going to have me?’

Miss Ashley smiled.

‘Are you so anxious to come?’ she asked. ‘Well, Toby, I have never before had a day-girl here, but, if I let you come to me, this term, I shall have two—for I have just consented to take Dr. Jordan’s little girl, Penelope. I feel that you and she are both rather exceptional cases—both rather lonely people—so I don’t think—perhaps—I can refuse you.’

Toby left her chair with a little skip of joy.

‘Oh, how heavenly!’ she cried. ‘I was half-afraid you might,’ she added confidentially,—refuse me, I mean—because I know it isn’t the proper way for a girl to come and see about school for herself, but I can’t exactly help it. And there’s Daddy’s letter, of course.’

‘Yes,’ said Miss Ashley, still smiling, ‘so that makes it quite proper, or very nearly. I shall write an answer for you to take back to him presently, but meantime I want to tell you one or two things. The summer term begins on the twenty-third, and I shall expect you to be here by nine o’clock, in time for prayers; then we’ll find out exactly how much you know, and in which form you’ll be. Till then we shan’t know what books you will require, but I should like you to get the school uniform, and wear it—a plain dark-blue coat-and-skirt, with white blouses and a white straw hat with the school colours, also plain holland frocks for the warm weather. Miss Snaith will give you a list, and you can get the things at Green, Robinson’s in Exeter. The colours are mauve and gold—for the heather and gorse on the moor, you know—and you will require a tie as well as a hat-band. Will you make out the list for her, Miss Snaith, while I take her round the school to give her some idea of what it’s going to be like. I’m afraid you’ll find it all rather new and strange at first.’

‘That will be part of the niceness,’ declared Toby rapturously. ‘I never told any one before, but it’s always been a great ambition of mine to become a schoolgirl. Perhaps you don’t quite understand that? I shan’t be a bit surprised if you don’t, because schoolgirls must seem quite ordinary things to any one who has always been accustomed to them.’

Miss Ashley was well aware that her secretary was looking at her with dancing eyes, but she did not dare to meet them.

‘You’re wrong there, Toby,’ she said decidedly. ‘When I find schoolgirls quite ordinary things I shall give up my job, for I shall be no good at it. To me every one of you is different, though some, I must admit, are more interesting than others. Now come along and have a look at this new world into which you are going to plunge so soon.’

Half an hour later when Toby had ridden off across the moor, with her list and the letter for her father in her pocket, Miss Ashley returned to her study, and dropped limply into a chair.

‘Now at last we can laugh in safety!’ she exclaimed, ‘though I haven’t quite made up my mind yet whether I wouldn’t rather cry. Did you ever know anything so innocent, and so plucky, and so entirely on her own? How her father can leave her to run wild in that careless fashion beats me!’

‘She’s perfectly charming!’ declared Miss Snaith warmly, ‘though you know I don’t always share your enthusiasm for the modern schoolgirl. At times I’m inclined to agree with Toby that they’re apt to be ordinary.’

‘She isn’t, anyhow!’ observed the head mistress. ‘I can’t help foreseeing rocks ahead for her, though. Despite my “enthusiasm”, as you call it, I must admit that schoolgirls are conventional, and Toby Barrett isn’t.’

‘Not exactly!’ assented Miss Snaith drily.

‘Therefore she won’t have an easy time, at first, and may not be altogether popular. I hope she won’t find school less delightful than she supposes.’

‘I hope not! But she’ll have to find her own feet, and I imagine (from the glimpse we’ve had, just now) that she’s quite capable of doing so. Any one with so much character——’

‘That’s just it,’ responded Miss Ashley. ‘I rather fancy she’s got more character than will be altogether convenient at St. Githa’s. What do you suppose Kathleen Wingfield will make of a specimen like that?’

Miss Snaith laughed out.

‘It will be immensely interesting to see. Not that Kathleen is among those who count. Toby will be all right with Gillian Ewing and Dorinda. They’ve got brains enough to appreciate something out of the common.’

‘Nevertheless she’ll be bullied,’ said Miss Ashley, with conviction. ‘And I’m not so sure of Dorinda’s attitude as you appear to be. She’s somewhat unaccountable at times—the artistic temperament, I suppose!’

## CHAPTER III

### TOBY ARRIVES

St. Githa's had reassembled after the Easter holidays, had unpacked and more or less settled down in the dormitories upstairs, had renewed old friendships and taken stock of the new girls, and was now ready, when Wednesday dawned, to start in upon the term's work.

'Which, thank goodness! isn't quite so strenuous in the summer,' remarked Dorinda Earle, perching herself on the back of her desk, and swinging her long dark plait over one shoulder. Dorinda was not pretty, but she carried herself with an air which impressed the Lower School when she sailed into their class-rooms to take supervision during 'prep'. She had a certain attraction of her own, and took some trouble, in her brusque way, to win popularity, and with most of her schoolfellows she succeeded. Her sworn friend and ally, Gillian Ewing, took no trouble whatever, and succeeded even better. As Dorinda herself said, with a good deal of sincerity, 'Jill's so pretty, that she doesn't need to bother'. But Miss Ashley, having studied both girls, came to the conclusion that Gillian's gay placidity had more to do with it than her good looks. Gillian was a philosopher, while Dorinda worried over most things, big or small. And these two were the acknowledged leaders of the school.

'I mean to specialize, this term,' announced Gillian firmly, 'with an eye to my future career. You know we can when we're seventeen, and I shall be seventeen in June.'

'Why not wait till next term, then?' asked Olive Knighton, idly sharpening a pencil. 'What are you going to take up, in any case?'

'That's just it,' responded Gillian happily. 'I can't afford to waste the summer, because I'm going to be a gardener. Not the daily jobbing kind, but a regular highbrow, thoroughly versed in all the scientific side of it. You know the sort of thing.'

'How ripping!' exclaimed Dorinda. 'That means you will live for ever in the open air. But who's going to teach you all that at St. Githa's?'

'Just what I was wondering,' remarked Kathleen Wingfield, a good-looking girl who was somewhat spoiled by the hardness of her expression. 'You ought to go to Swanley, or some place like that.'

‘I may, in time,’ said Gillian, quite unmoved by their doubts, ‘but I’d like to know a little more first, and I’ve laid my plans with the Head. She spent a week-end with us in the holidays, and we thrashed the matter out. I’m to do an extra intensive botany course with Snaithie, and some chemistry, and there’s a new form-mistress coming for Vb, who professes to know something about practical gardening, and she’s going to take me on.’

‘A new form-mistress for Vb!’ exclaimed the other three, their attention at once diverted from Gillian’s future career to a matter of more immediate importance. ‘How do you know? Nobody new has appeared on the staff yet.’

‘I expect she has by now,’ said Gillian tranquilly, ‘but she isn’t living in—not this term, at least. I think Miss Ashley said she had taken rooms at Priorscross. Her name’s Musgrave, and she was at that big school in Kent—the Jane Willard Foundation.’

‘I’ve heard of it,’ said Dorinda. ‘I knew a girl who was there. And she’s coming to take on the Lower Fifth? Poor wretch!’

‘Yes,’ agreed Jill. ‘She’s got all her troubles before her, I should fancy. The present Vb don’t seem able to realize that they’ve grown into the Upper School. Their behaviour reminds one unfavourably of the Third Form.’

‘At its worst,’ added Dorinda. ‘By the way, Jill, you’re likely to come up against them a good deal yourself, this term, aren’t you?’

‘Why me, any more than any other prefect?’ asked Gillian ungrammatically.

Olive laughed.

‘The answer to that’s pretty obvious, isn’t it? Who do you suppose is going to be Head-girl?’

Gillian’s pretty face reddened self-consciously.

‘Dorinda, I should imagine—unless you’re thinking of tackling it yourself, Olive, but I’m inclined to believe you’re too lazy.’

‘Much!’ assented Olive, laughing again. ‘No, I think you’ll find, when it’s formally put to the meeting, as it will be tonight, that the school has chosen you to succeed Grace Pollard. Not a doubt about it, is there, everybody?’

‘Rather not!’ agreed the rest of the Sixth Form, to whom she had raised her voice in appeal, and when the chorus had died down Dorinda added:

‘We’ve elected you without a dissentient voice, and I think you’ll find the rest will follow suit. Also, a deputation of us went to the Head, after supper last night, to get her approval, and she gave it—pressed down and running over.’

Gillian sat silent for a moment, her desk-lid half-open in her hands, and a thoughtful look in her clear steady eyes. Then she said simply:

‘It’s awfully decent of you all to want me, and if Miss Ashley thinks it’s all right, I’m ready to try. But I can’t manage the job single-handed, as Grace Pollard did. I shall need a lot of help from everybody, and especially from the prefects.’

‘You’ll get it, old thing!’ Olive assured her warmly. ‘Grace could have had it too, if she’d chosen to take it, but, as you know, she preferred to act without consulting the rest of us. It will be rather jolly to have a Head-girl who lets us into things.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Kathleen. ‘One likes to know what’s going on, and have a say in the affairs of the school. Otherwise, why be a prefect?’

‘We’re all ready to welcome the new régime,’ said Jane Trevor, the fifth prefect, joining the group round Gillian’s desk. ‘You’ll find, tonight, that you’re every one’s choice, and a jolly popular one at that.’

Dorinda said nothing, but her blue eyes met her chum’s with a look of contented understanding which satisfied Jill. Dorinda was a person of few words where her feelings were concerned, and Gillian herself hardly realized the strength of her friend’s affection, or how proud she was of this unanimous election to their school’s place of honour.

‘Perhaps our friends in the Lower Fifth will now find——’ began Olive; but at that moment the door opened, and a newcomer stood hesitating on the threshold—a newcomer in fawn coat and riding-breeches, though these were surmounted by the school panama, and she wore St. Githa’s mauve-and-gold tie on her soft white shirt.

‘I say!’ she began, a little breathlessly, ‘is this the Sixth Form? Then would one of you please show me where I can change before school begins? I’ve got my skirt here in my case, but of course I couldn’t ride over in it.’

For a moment the Sixth were too much taken aback to respond, and Toby urged again:

‘There isn’t too much time, is there? You see, I had to unsaddle Blackberry, and turn him into the field.’

Gillian was the first to recover herself.

‘Come down to the cloak-room,’ she said. ‘You’ve still got ten minutes before Olive goes to ring the bell. This way, and down these stairs at the end of the passage. You don’t mean to tell us we’re going to have a day-girl?’

‘Yes—do you mind?’ asked Toby, a little wistfully, as she followed her. ‘Miss Ashley thought perhaps you wouldn’t.’

‘Mind? Why on earth should we? You’ll bring a breath of new life into the place, which we shall welcome. Though it’ll be pretty stale for you having to trot off home just when lessons are over, and we’re beginning to enjoy ourselves. What’s your name, by the by? It might be useful to know it. Mine’s Gillian Ewing.’

‘I’m Toby Barrett,’ replied the new girl, reddening self-consciously, and added with haste, ‘I came over for my exam. on Monday, and Miss Ashley said I’d be in the Sixth. That’s why I asked the way to your form-room.’

‘Haven’t you seen Miss Ashley this morning? Then you’ll have to go to her as soon as you’ve changed. Get into your skirt quickly, and I’ll show you the way to her study. Hullo! what’s this? Another day-girl?’

They had reached the small basement room, lined with cupboards, in which the Upper School kept their outdoor garments, and seated on the floor, changing her shoes, was a small vivacious-looking girl of about fifteen, with a turned-up nose, and a bobbed head of thick dark hair. Her coat was off, and she wore school uniform as new and creaseless as Toby’s.

‘Yes—I’m Penelope Jordan. Are there two of us?’ Then, recognizing Toby, as she emerged from behind the Head-girl, ‘Why, it’s Toby Barrett! You never told me you were coming here! But what a blessing you are! I thought I’d be the only day-girl in the place, and it’s bad enough to be new without being peculiar otherwise.’

‘The school,’ observed Gillian, ‘appears to be bristling with surprises to-day. Is no one looking after you?’

‘Dozens!’ replied Penelope promptly. ‘The whole Lower Fifth, I think—but they all disappeared after bringing me here. One said she’d come back before the bell rang, but I’m afraid she’s forgotten. She called herself Gabrielle Marsden.’

‘Then she probably has forgotten,’ said Gillian drily. ‘I never knew Gay Marsden remember anything really useful. She’s made that way. I’d better

drop you at the Lower Fifth's door on my way back. I suppose *you've* seen the Head?'

'Yes—that's how I got to know Gabrielle. Miss Ashley sent for her, and told her off to look after me.'

'Then I'll tell her off for not doing so!' rejoined Gillian in a slightly irritated tone. 'It's neither kind nor mannerly to let a new girl fend for herself—especially a new day-girl. Ready, both of you? Come on, then!'

She directed Toby to the head mistress's study, and took Penelope along to the schoolroom where she appeared to belong, returning afterwards to fetch Toby, whom she met emerging from her short interview with Miss Ashley. The new girl's face lit up with relief at the sight of her.

'Oh, have you come back for me? How decent of you! It's rather awkward to find your way about a big place like this alone, when you're new.'

'I know,' said Gillian sympathetically, 'and you feel a fool if you have to ask people. Come along! the bell's just gone, but Miss Temple takes us for the first lesson to-day, and she's usually a trifle late. She's *Va's* form-mistress, and teaches maths.'

They entered the Sixth Form-room at Miss Temple's heels, barely in time for prayers, which was held in each form separately that morning.

'It's not our usual way,' whispered Jill, 'but for some reason it always happens on the first day of a new term. Afterwards we all meet together in the hall at a quarter-to-nine, each morning. You'll have to get here in good time to-morrow.'

There was no other new girl in the Sixth that term, so Toby came in for a good deal of frank scrutiny during the course of the morning, though there was no chance of any conversation until the eleven o'clock break, when Gillian continued her good offices by remarking, with a wave of her hand:

'Our little stranger's name is Tony Barrett, and she lives at Applecleave. That's why she has to ride to school. But she has promised not to shock our eyes by another such apparition as they beheld this morning. She hopes to arrive before us, in future, decently clad and in time for prayers.'

'I liked her as she was,' declared Jane Trevor, joining in the general laugh. 'Is Tony short for Antonia?'

'No,' answered the new girl, growing red and embarrassed again, as she always did at any allusion to her unfortunate name. 'Gillian got it wrong—



it's *Toby*, not Tony.'

'But surely that can't be your real name?' exclaimed Olive Knighton, in astonishment. 'It doesn't sound possible.'

'It isn't,' admitted its owner, then blurted out desperately: 'It's no good trying to hide it! You're bound to find out sooner or later—but it's not my fault, it's my grandmother's for insisting that I should be called after her mother—my real name's Tabitha, and it's been the curse of my life!'

A shout of laughter greeted this confession, but there was nothing jeering about it, as Toby's sensitive ears quickly understood.

'Poor old soul!' said Olive, patting her kindly on the back. 'It's rough luck, of course, but in time you may live it down. I've known heavier curses than that.'

'I like it,' declared Jane stoutly, 'and I don't see that it's a scrap worse than mine. You look the world in the face, Toby, and forget all about it! We'll promise never to cast it up at you here. Why, what in the world has happened to Kathleen Wingfield?'

That damsel, who had dashed off on some errand of her own directly the class was over, burst into the room again, crimson with wrath, but far from speechless.

'I ran across to see the tennis-courts,' she cried, 'just to find out if they were in order for this afternoon, and what do you think I found? A wretched pony prancing all over them, and hoof-marks about a foot deep in all directions! We shan't be able to start play now for at least a fortnight, and there's the match with Priorsford Club coming off on the fifteenth!'

'Goodness!' exclaimed Jill in consternation. 'How on earth did it get there? Is it a stray from the moor?'

St. Githa's prided themselves on the perfection of their tennis-courts and the high standard of their play. To practise for a match on rough spoilt grass was a serious calamity, especially to Dorinda, the games-captain, and Kathleen, who was school champion.

'I'm afraid,' said Toby, in a shaking voice, '—I expect—I mean, I'm afraid it was Blackberry, my pony. He must have got out of the field I turned him into.'

'Which field was it?' demanded Dorinda sharply.

'The one on the right of the drive as you come in.'

The captain's groan was echoed by one or two others.

'The cricket ground! How could you be such a fool? Why didn't you *ask* before you turned him in anywhere?'

## CHAPTER IV

### SHAKING DOWN

It seemed a small thing to start a prejudice, and one, indeed, for which Toby was not entirely accountable (since some careless person had left the gate open which led from the cricket ground into the tennis-courts), but from that moment Kathleen Wingfield could see no good in the day-girl. Probably it would have been the same in any case; the two had nothing in common, and Toby's unconventional ways would certainly have jarred, sooner or later, on the tennis champion. Kathleen was the type of girl who likes every one to conform to pattern, and strongly resents any departures from it. Toby, on the other hand, had not been brought up according to any pattern whatever, and had no idea how to become an ordinary schoolgirl, though she tried her best.

'You don't know how badly I want to be just like everybody else,' she confided to Jane Trevor, one day, a week after the term had commenced. 'I haven't had a chance till now, because there was never any one else to be like; but here, at school, with a lot of you, it's different.'

'I shouldn't bother, if I were you,' said Jane comfortably. 'We like you as you are. It's more amusing to have you different from the rest of us. Nobody quite knows what you're going to do next.'

'Kathleen doesn't like it,' said Toby, a trifle sadly. 'I'm not at all sure she even likes me—and what's much worse, I don't believe Dorinda does either.'

'Pooh!' said Jane. 'What does Dorinda matter? She judges people by their batting or bowling analysis, or the strength of their service at tennis. You've had no chance to play games yet, so you're no good to Dorinda and Kathleen—that's all.'

'I'm sure it's more than that,' persisted Toby. 'Still, there's no use letting it matter, and I don't really mind much about Kathleen. You can't expect anything to be absolutely perfect, and school doesn't fall far short of it. In fact, Dorinda Earle is my only crumpled rose-leaf! I mind about her.'

Jane laughed.

'Let her crumple, then!' she exclaimed.

But Toby shook her head.

‘I mean to iron her out, some day,’ she said quaintly, ‘only, at present, I can’t quite see how.’

Jane thoughtfully chewed a blade of grass.

‘People get taken like that about Dorinda,’ she observed. ‘There’s something awfully attractive about her, but it’s no good upsetting yourself when she has moods.’

Certainly Toby had little to complain of otherwise. St. Githa’s had received her in friendly fashion, and she had taken a better place in her form than she had dared to hope. History was her favourite subject, and in this, which the Head herself taught, she showed herself well ahead of the others.

‘It’s only because I read it for fun in the holidays,’ she explained, whereat Kathleen Wingfield snorted scornfully.

‘Ridiculous affectation!’ she muttered. ‘Does any one spend their holidays reading history for fun?’

Toby’s hazel eyes flashed, for a moment, and she answered sturdily: ‘I did, anyhow! Why should it be more affectation than any other way of spending one’s holidays?’

Not having a suitable reply ready, Kathleen hedged, remarking icily:

‘If you’d ever been to school before, Toby Barrett, you’d know that new girls should refrain from being cheeky in their first term.’

Toby opened her lips to make some indignant retort, when Dorinda Earle broke in.

‘Don’t talk like a Third Form kid, Kathleen! You started the argument, so you can’t object to Toby’s carrying it on—though, as a matter of fact, I think you’d both better stop, as it isn’t specially profitable. Will some one let me see the problems Miss Temple set for this evening’s prep.? I don’t think I’ve taken down the last question right. It doesn’t read like sense.’

Kathleen shrugged her shoulders at the rebuke, but said no more, for Dorinda’s opinion carried weight in the school, though her manner of expressing it was sometimes too autocratic. As for Toby, she looked wistfully at her unexpected supporter, and later on, when opportunity arose, she said shyly:

‘Thanks awfully for sticking up for me this morning about the history.’

Dorinda glanced at her indifferently.

‘No need to thank me,’ she answered. ‘I only butted in because Kathleen was unfair, and I dislike unfairness. I’d have done the same for any one.’

And Toby retired, feeling chilled.

During the first week of the term St. Githa’s, as it happened, had very little time to spare for its new girls, especially for the two who spent only part of their time under its roof. There was so much settling-in to be done, so many things to see to, that matters of minor importance were left over for the time being. Jill Ewing’s promotion to the vacant place of Head-girl brought various small changes and rearrangements which fully occupied her for the first few days, otherwise she would probably have continued to befriend Toby, who had attracted her from the beginning.

Toby, however, had no complaint to make. She had her own settling-in to do, and did it more easily when thus left to herself. By the end of the week she knew her way about the house and grounds, had digested most of the written rules, and was able to observe some of the unwritten ones—which was far more difficult. The desire to be ‘like everybody else’, which she had confided to the friendly Jane, led her to watch very carefully against any *faux pas*. Indeed, Blackberry had made enough of these, during his invasion of the tennis-courts on the opening day of the term, to last for some time; though Toby felt it a trifle hard that the sins of the pony should be visited on the mistress.

One court, providentially, he had spared, and on this the six players who were to be sent against Priorsford Club practised at every available moment. The groundsman, meanwhile, was doing his best to repair the damage done to the others, the cricket-pitch having escaped altogether. It appeared that Blackberry had merely crossed the playing-field, avoiding the pitch, and had devoted himself entirely to the improvement (or otherwise) of the tennis-courts.

On Friday afternoon, when Toby was down in the cloak-room with Penelope Jordan, both preparing to go home, a Junior entered in search of them.

‘Dorinda Earle says, will you please go to the prefects’ room before you leave. She wants to see you about the games,’ she announced blandly, and eyed Toby’s riding-breeches with admiration, adding on impulse, ‘I say! would you let me have a ride on your pony, some day, after school? Just once round the paddock?’

‘All right,’ said Toby good-naturedly, as she restored her house-shoes to their bag. ‘Come and ask me, any morning you like—if you’ll promise to stick on.’

‘Rather!’ cried the child enthusiastically. ‘My name’s Elfrida Rossall. You won’t forget you’ve promised me, will you?’

‘You can remind me, if I do,’ answered Toby, smiling, and the Junior disappeared with a hop-skip-and-jump. The next moment she was back again.

‘There’s my chum,’ she said, ‘Beryl Wingfield. Would you give her a ride too? We always do things together, and it would be mean of me to get on the pony if she didn’t.’

‘You certainly can’t both get on together,’ said Toby, laughing, ‘but I don’t mind if you do it singly. That’s enough though, please! Blackberry can’t carry the whole Lower School.’

Elfrida saw the sense of that, and ran off gleefully in search of Beryl, to tell her of the joys in store for them, while the two day-girls went up to the prefects’ study. Here they found Dorinda alone, seated at the table with some lists spread out before her.

‘Sit down,’ she said, in her usual curt way, plunging straight into the business in hand. ‘I want to see you about the games. Haven’t had time before, with all the usual start-of-term fuss. The point is, can either of you play anything, and if so, what?’

Toby’s eyes twinkled suddenly.

‘I’m awfully good at ping-pong,’ she replied demurely.

Dorinda favoured her with a stare of suspicion and disapproval.

‘I’m not fooling,’ she said severely. ‘I’ve got to find out what you’re capable of. Have you ever played cricket—or tennis?’

‘I can play tennis a bit,’ Toby answered, realizing that a serious matter must be treated seriously, ‘but I’ve never had the chance of cricket, though I’d love to try.’

‘You’ll have to see Miss Musgrave about that, then,’ said Dorinda. ‘She’s games-mistress, and she’ll soon find out if you’re worth while. I’ll test your tennis myself, when I get time. What about you?’ turning to Pen.

‘I’m rotten at tennis,’ replied the Fifth Former cheerfully, ‘but I can bowl a bit. I get practice when the Rectory boys are home for their holidays, and

they say I'm not bad.'

'Overhand or lobs?' inquired Dorinda.

'Overhand, of course!' replied Penelope indignantly. 'Would boys let you bowl them lobs?'

'They mightn't be able to help it, if that was all you were good for,' responded Dorinda. 'But I'm glad to hear you can do something. Turn up to-morrow morning, and I'll try you in one of the practice games. That's all just now, thanks.'

Penelope turned to go, but Toby lingered for a moment.

'Do you want me as well to-morrow morning?' she asked wistfully. Team games had been a part of school life to which she had been looking forward.

But the games-captain answered with cool politeness:

'No, thanks. I can't attend to beginners to-morrow. I shall be too busy sorting those who know something about it into teams.' Then something in Toby's crestfallen expression moved her to add, 'Perhaps you had better come over and see Miss Musgrave, though. You'll be her affair more than mine, you know, until you can play a bit, and she's sure to be free on a Saturday morning.'

'Thanks awfully,' said Toby, brightening up again. 'I'll ride across soon after breakfast then.'

And she followed Penelope out.

'Come round my way,' urged the younger girl, who was a sociable being. 'It's one way to Applecleave, and I can suit my bike's pace to your pony's. We haven't had a chance to compare notes since we joined up last week. How do you like being a day-girl at St. Githa's?'

'I love it,' said Toby simply, as she led the way towards the paddock, where Blackberry now spent the school-hours in blameless seclusion. 'Can you wait a minute while I put on his saddle and bridle? I always undress him when we get here. It's more comfortable for him, poor old boy!'

Pen propped herself up between her handlebars and saddle, with an arm on each to steady herself, and watched proceedings with interest.

'It's rather a jolly way of coming to school,' she observed, 'even if it is more trouble than a bike. But wouldn't you rather be a boarder? I feel as though we miss a lot by going home every afternoon.'

Toby buckled a strap securely before replying; then she said philosophically:

‘Well, one can’t have everything, you know, and being a day-girl’s a lot better than staying at home with a governess. What’s the Lower Fifth like? I gather, from what I’ve heard, that they’re pretty hot stuff.’

Pen’s merry eyes danced.

‘You’re right. They are—especially Gay Marsden and Nesta Pollard. That’s one reason why I’m sorry not to be a boarder; they have such decent times in the evenings—and at nights! The fact is, they’re rather a young set for that form. They all came up from the Fourth only last term.’

‘What sort of things do they do?’ asked Toby curiously, but Penelope gave her a queer look and laughed.

‘If I told you that,’ she said, ‘I should be giving them away to a Senior. However new you may be, you’re a Sixth Former after all, and no Sixth Former—no matter how humble and unimportant—could hear about some of their goings-on without feeling obliged to interfere.’

‘I’m sure I shouldn’t,’ said Toby. ‘I shouldn’t know how to set about it, for one thing. But you’re giving your form a pretty bad character, aren’t you?’

‘No one could paint them as black as they really are,’ returned Pen, with modest pride. ‘Nesta says that’s what drove their last form-mistress to resign, but I don’t altogether believe that. One of the others said she was offered a better job abroad.’

‘From your own account,’ observed Toby, ‘almost any job would be better than the one she had here. I wonder what Miss Musgrave makes of you.’

Pen grinned, as she free-wheeled down a long slope in the lane, thereby outdistancing Blackberry, who regarded her machine with the utmost contempt. When Toby had overtaken her at the foot, she said:

‘Muskie’s only had a week of us, and, of course, I only see her in school, but I fancy she’ll tame Vb before she resigns! You’ll see something of her to-morrow, if she’s going to take your cricket in hand, and you can let me know what you think of her. We seem to have discussed my form pretty thoroughly—what about yours? Do you like the girls?’

‘Yes,’ said Toby slowly, ‘I think I’m going to like them all before I’m done, but of course a week’s not very long to judge.’



‘A day’s enough for me,’ returned Pen airily. ‘I should think Gillian’s a topping girl, and I like Dorinda Earle, though she’s got a queer abrupt manner. Jane Trevor looks jolly, too.’

‘She is,’ agreed Toby. ‘They all are, but the funny thing is, I believe I like Dorinda the best of the lot.’

‘Why is it a funny thing?’ demanded Pen, jumping off her bicycle as they reached the beginning of the long straggling street which was the greater part of Priorscross.

‘Because,’ said Toby, with an odd little laugh, ‘she can’t stand me at any price! Odd, isn’t it? So long! See you on the playing-field to-morrow, I suppose.’

## CHAPTER V

### GILLIAN'S GARDEN

Dorinda, coming up from an early inspection of the damaged tennis-courts next morning, met Gillian on the terrace-steps and paused to stare at her in amused admiration. Jill's plain holland frock (the school's summer uniform) was enveloped in a very practical garden overall, whose capacious pockets held a trowel and a strong pair of scissors, also a small fork and a hank of bass. And its usefulness was not lessened by the fact that it had been fashioned out of a pretty, but gorgeous, cretonne, on which poppies and hollyhocks flared artistically against a background of deep blue.

'Fairly broken out, haven't you?' observed her friend, smiling broadly as she looked her up and down.

'I made it myself,' said Gillian proudly. 'The cretonne was a Liberty remnant. And you've only to look at the pockets to see there's nothing frivolous about me.'

'The pockets are certainly practical enough for anything,' Dorinda agreed. 'Don't, whatever you do, fall forwards while you're wearing them, or—between the fork and the scissors—there might be a nasty mess! But are you going to have a lesson now? Because I rather want Miss Musgrave down in the cricket-field at present.'

'You shall have her in half an hour,' responded Gillian generously, shouldering her hoe. 'She promised to start me in, first, in that neglected bit of garden beyond the pines, and after she's set me my prep., so to speak, she'll be free to attend to you.'

'She's going to coach one or two oddments at the nets,' exclaimed Dorinda, 'perfectly hopeless people, who have never handled a cricket bat before and have got everything to learn—Toby Barrett among them.'

Jill paused, her mind distracted for a moment from her own affairs.

'What? Toby? But she's in the Sixth—one of ourselves—you can't mix her up with a pack of new kids from the Lower School. Why not coach her on the quiet for a bit yourself?'

'Because I haven't got time,' replied Dorinda shortly. 'A lot of our old colours left at Christmas, so I've got both teams to pick and rearrange.'

Besides which Miss Musgrave is keen to start a junior eleven and that will fall on me too.'

'Then get Kathleen Wingfield——'

Dorinda grinned.

'That wouldn't be much kindness to Toby! Kathleen hasn't got a lot of patience even with people she likes, and Toby Barrett isn't her sort at all.'

'No, I suppose not,' assented Gillian. 'They're quite different in every way.' She stood a moment in thought, then said, 'Well, I don't like the idea of her being taught with the kids, and I shouldn't think Miss Musgrave would either. Send her along to me when she comes, and I'll see what I can do with her.'

'You!' Dorinda's tone was disapproving.

'Yes. Why not? Having got my colours, I should know something about the game—enough to send her down a few balls, at any rate, and teach her how to hold her bat.'

'But what about your gardening?'

'There's plenty of time in the day for everything,' returned Gillian vigorously, as she moved off. 'Besides, unlike Kathleen, I've taken to Toby Barrett. She strikes me as being a bit of a character.'

Dorinda might disapprove, but she was too wise to disobey. Jill, for all her good-natured, easygoing ways, was not head of the school for nothing, and had very decided views of her own on school affairs; her chum knew better than to thwart her. Accordingly, when Toby appeared and hung about the edge of the playing-field, Dorinda called out to her in her abrupt way:

'Jill Ewing wants you in that waste piece of garden round by the side of the house. You get to it through the pines.'

Toby went, mystified and rather disappointed, for she had ridden over under the impression that she was to learn cricket, and was determined to learn it to such purpose that Dorinda's unfriendliness could not fail to melt and vanish. She had no wish to waste the perfect morning in talking to even the most charming of Head-girls, for perfect mornings were not too frequent in Devon. When she found Jill, however, ankle-deep in a forest of weeds, a very short explanation served to cheer her up.

'Miss Musgrave's just gone off to take the kids at the nets,' Gillian told her, 'but I thought it would be rather rotten for you to learn the game with

them, so I told Dorinda I'd see to you myself. You'll have what the prospectuses call "the benefit of individual attention" that way, and get on much faster. At least, I hope so.'

Toby beamed with pleasure.

'It's awfully good of you, Gillian,' she said gratefully. 'I'm very anxious to get on, and, if you'll put me up to things, I'll practise whenever I get a chance.'

Jill stooped to collect a handful of weeds which had fallen to her hoe, and, as she flung them into the basket, she glanced curiously at the day-girl.

'Why are you so keen to get on?' she asked. 'Are you very fond of cricket?'

'I can't tell till I've tried it,' Toby reminded her, 'but I wanted to play that sort of game when I came to school. Most girls can, nowadays, and I hate being different. Besides—I've got another reason.'

She did not volunteer what that reason was, and Gillian, too tactful to inquire, went on with her hoeing in silence for a few minutes, while Toby, seated on a fallen pine at the edge of the patch, watched, in her favourite attitude, elbows on knees and her chin resting on her clenched hands. The Head-girl would have been surprised if she could have read her companion's thoughts at that moment, and known that the hidden motive was an intense desire to 'count' with Dorinda Earle. Jane had declared that the games-captain and her lieutenant, Kathleen Wingfield, judged people by their prowess on the playing-field. Toby was supremely indifferent to Kathleen's opinion, but she longed to stand well with Dorinda.

'In about half an hour,' said Gillian, 'the nets should be free. Miss Musgrave won't keep those Juniors there longer than that, and the rest are all out on the pitch—except those who are playing tennis. So we'll go down then and get the place more or less to ourselves. I suppose you don't mind waiting? It's still early.'

'It never really matters at home,' said Toby, 'if I'm late for lunch, or any meal except dinner. Daddy likes me to be in time for that. But do you want to stop gardening so soon?'

Jill laughed.

'It doesn't feel like "soon" even now,' she said. 'Weeding's warm work. No—don't you help—thanks awfully, all the same! I want to clear this ground entirely by myself.'

‘And when that’s done?’ asked Toby.

‘Then I’m going to make the wilderness blossom like a rose! The trouble is, I haven’t got a lot of money to spend on plants.’

‘Why not fill up with the rarer wild flowers?’ suggested Toby. ‘There are plenty to be found on the moor if one knows where to look.’

‘I don’t, though,’ said Gillian. ‘Otherwise it’s an idea.’

‘Well, I do,’ said Toby. ‘I could get you heaps. Or tell you where to look for them, if you’d like that better.’

‘Or show me where to look,’ Gillian amended. ‘That would be better still. We could have some glorious rambles on Saturday afternoons, if you’d play guide. Of course, I don’t know the moor, since I don’t live here.’

Toby’s eyes shone.

‘I know it inside out,’ she said simply. ‘We could have ripping times, if you really mean it.’

‘Of course I mean it,’ declared Jill. ‘I can’t imagine a jollier way of furnishing my garden. I expect Miss Musgrave will let me—though I shall have to keep part of the ground for ordinary garden plants, so as to learn their habits. I’d like to put a couple of hydrangeas into that old stone trough in the corner there.’

Toby looked at it.

‘That isn’t a trough,’ she said. ‘It’s a kistvaen. But it would be all right for hydrangeas, all the same.’

‘What on earth’s a kistvaen?’ asked Gillian in surprise.

‘Don’t you know?’ queried Toby, in equal astonishment. ‘They’re a kind of Early British coffin. There are lots of them all over the moor, though I don’t know how this one got in here. Somebody collected it, I expect. Or else, when St. Githa’s was first built on this part of the moor, they found it here, and just left it.’

Gillian examined the kistvaen with increased interest.

‘The Early Britons must have been a stunted race,’ she remarked, ‘if they could squeeze into that. Are you sure, Toby?’

‘Oh yes! They trussed them up somehow. I’ll show you more—and stone circles, too, and menhirs. The neighbourhood’s stiff with them. I’m

always hoping to come upon a tomb that's been overlooked and find something interesting in it.'

'I wish you luck, then!' laughed Jill. 'Come, now, while I put away my tools and pinnie, and then we'll go down to the nets. I really feel I've made a beginning here, and that scheme of yours will be a great help, because it's something original.'

'I'm glad,' said Toby earnestly, as she followed her through the trees to the house. 'I'd like to do something for you in return for the help with my cricket.'

'Oh, that's nothing!' said Gillian carelessly. 'If I can make you into a cricketer you won't be the only one to benefit. You don't know yet what an obsession it is with Dorinda to find new treasures in the shape of bats or bowlers—I should think it's worse than your passion for kistvaens! If St. Githa's loses a match it's a real tragedy to her, and if I introduced a new star into the firmament of the playing-fields—why Dorinda would probably lick my boots! And she's not the sort to lick people's boots easily, you know.'

'I shouldn't think she was,' agreed Toby slowly. 'I haven't much hope of starring at games, Gillian, but I'll try to be a little candle burning in the night!'

'If that's all you mean to be,' said Gillian firmly, 'I shan't consider you worth while. I see you had the sense to ride over in your hollands instead of your usual kit. Did you bring your bat?'

Toby came to a standstill and reddened.

'I—I'm afraid I forgot it,' she stammered. 'I've got a frightfully bad habit of forgetting the most important things. I'm awfully sorry, Jill!'

Gillian laughed good-naturedly.

'Never mind. I'll lend you mine; but I shall have to cure you of forgetting things like bats before I dare turn you over to Dorinda. For heaven's sake don't come without your racket on the day she's going to try your tennis!'

'I'll bring it across on Monday and leave it in the pav.,' declared Toby, 'so that there may be no danger of such a catastrophe.'

With the borrowed bat in her hands, reinforced by a large amount of determination, she did not acquit herself so badly at the nets; and when Gillian sent her out to bowl, she astonished herself beyond belief by taking her instructress's wicket in her second over.

‘Of course that was only a fluke,’ she said earnestly, ‘but it’s wonderful how comforting a fluke can be at times. Do you think I’ll ever be any good, Jill?’

‘It’s too soon to tell,’ replied Gillian cautiously, ‘and, of course, you’re starting in extreme old age—but I’ve seen worse beginnings than that. Keep your bat low—your tendency is to lift it far too much—and don’t be reckless. One of the first things to learn in any game is judgement. I suppose, after all, that’s just another name for common sense.’

Toby would have been immensely cheered if she could have overheard a remark made to Gillian that evening by the games-captain.

‘I happened to pass behind the nets this morning when you were coaching Toby Barrett,’ she said. ‘It didn’t look quite such a hopeless task as I feared.’

‘It wasn’t,’ replied Gillian. ‘I don’t say she’s an undiscovered genius—at least, if she is, I haven’t discovered her yet—but she’s far from being an utter fool.’

‘Perhaps not,’ assented Dorinda thoughtfully, ‘though she does rather strike one that way, at times.’

‘Pooh!’ said Jill, ‘that’s only because she’s never been to school before. Give her time, and she’ll shape. Any one can see she’s tremendously keen to be like other people, but she’s had no one to compare herself with till she came here.’

‘She said something like that to me, the other day,’ agreed Jane. ‘Give her a chance, and she’ll be an ornament to St. Githa’s!’

## CHAPTER VI

### TOBY PLAYS TENNIS

The chief result of the events narrated in the last chapter (as old-fashioned novelists say) was a desultory friendship which sprang up between Toby and Gillian Ewing. It was no more than desultory, because Jill had Dorinda, and, besides, her life as Head-girl was somewhat crowded that term; also Toby, though she liked Jill better than most people at St. Githa's, felt none of that curious fascination which drew her, half against her will, and wholly against Dorinda's, towards the games-captain.

Instruction in cricket continued when Gillian could fit it in, and Toby showed herself an apt pupil, eager to learn all she could and as fast as possible. She was secretly very envious of Pen Jordan, who had done so well in her trials that she had been put straight away on the reserve for the second eleven, with every likelihood of playing in a match of some sort before the term ended.

Toby was beginning to fear that her own tennis trial had been completely forgotten, when Dorinda called to her on Friday afternoon as they were leaving the dining-room after dinner.

'Toby Barrett!' she said, in her abrupt fashion, 'I shall want you on the courts at three o'clock. I suppose you're free to come? No lesson of any sort?'

'Oh no!' she answered. 'I've only got my prep this afternoon, and I'm pretty well forward with that, because I want to go on the moor after tea.'

'Very well, then. Bring your racket, and we'll see what you can do. I haven't had time to try you before, but I hope you're good for something.'

'I'm used to playing with my father,' replied Toby. 'It's the only kind of exercise he's keen on, so I get plenty of practice. We've got a hard court.'

For the first time Dorinda looked at the day-girl with some interest.

'Singles on a hard court—and with a man! Humph! you may be useful after all. Come along at three o'clock, at any rate, and we'll see.'

She went off in the direction of the prefects' room, and Toby's heart beat a little faster as she turned into the passage which led to the Sixth Form's



lair. As she passed a couple of girls who had been standing within earshot, she overheard one say:

‘Poor old Dorinda! She’s in a very unpleasant fix, and I don’t see how she can get out of it at such short notice.’

‘Why? What’s wrong?’ asked the other.

‘Oh, haven’t you heard? Lil Peterson of *Va*, who’s in the school tennis team, has been asked out for the week-end—and *she’s gone!*’

Toby knew what that meant, and, though her experience of school was only three weeks old, she understood exactly the nature of Lil Peterson’s offence. The tennis-match with Priorsford Club was fixed for to-morrow afternoon, and, unless Dorinda could provide an efficient substitute for Lil, St. Githa’s must either scratch or play with a crippled team. And this was the match, above all others, which Dorinda’s heart was set on winning. As she turned into her form-room, Toby gave a sudden gasp. Was it possible that the games-captain meant to try her in place of the defaulting Lil?

‘What rot!’ she told herself contemptuously, next moment. ‘Why, she hasn’t even seen me play, and there must be lots of girls in the Upper School who could take it on—girls whose style she knows already. Is it likely that she’d give it to an absolute stranger?’

But that was just the trouble. Dorinda, thorough in all she undertook, did know the play of the other Seniors—she made it her business to do so—and there was not one whom she could trust to play at the eleventh hour against Priorsford Club without any previous preparation. In her perplexity she had gone to the new games-mistress, and Miss Musgrave had said:

‘As things are at present, I know much less about it than you. It’s a state of affairs which I am trying to remedy as fast as possible, but meantime my advice is not of much use. I am very sorry, Dorinda. What about the Lower Fifth?’

‘All erratic, except Nesta Pollard, and she’s in the team already.’

‘Is that new day-girl any use? She’s slim and light on her feet and looks as though she’d make a player.’

‘Toby Barrett? I never thought about her. I haven’t tried her yet, but I ought to.’

‘Better try her this afternoon. It’s a forlorn hope, but you’re in a position where you have to clutch at straws. And if you take my advice, Lil Peterson will return to find her name scored off the school team-list.’

‘Rather!’ exclaimed Dorinda bitterly. ‘She *knew* how much depended on this match and she’s chucked it for her own selfish pleasure! But she shan’t have the chance to do it a second time.’

Toby was waiting at the net when the games-captain arrived, and had carefully screwed it up in readiness for the event. She had expected to find herself pitted against some other Sixth Former, or possibly a girl from *Va*, while Dorinda took notes from the umpire’s ladder. But, to her surprise, no third person appeared, and Dorinda herself was carrying a racket.

‘Am I to play against you?’ asked Toby, in some astonishment, as the other girl tossed the balls out of their net.

Dorinda nodded.

‘I can’t find anybody more suitable at the moment,’ she said. ‘Do you mind?’

‘Not in the least,’ answered Toby cheerfully, capturing a ball which threatened to roll out of bounds. ‘In fact, I shall feel far less nervous than if you were perched up there watching, as I expected. Do we spin for courts?’

‘Not just now,’ replied Dorinda. ‘If there’s any advantage you’d better have it. So choose your end and take the service. As a matter of fact, there’s not much difference in the courts on a day like this, when there’s no breeze blowing.’

Toby took the end which was likely to suit her best, and picked up her balls. A sense of exhilaration was tingling through her, for she had watched the school tennis during the past week and knew that her own play was slightly above the average. At last the chance had come to show herself of some use to Dorinda, and Lil Peterson’s defection might prove her own opportunity.

The first two balls were faults, as might have been expected under the circumstances; then Toby’s nerves suddenly steadied and the inconvenient mistiness cleared from before her eyes. Dorinda was startled by a smashing serve which was worthy of a boy’s arm, and the ball flew past her before she had quite realized that it was not another fault.

‘Fifteen all!’ sang Toby, as she crossed. ‘Ready?’

Dorinda stopped the next ball, but only to drive it into the net, and the fourth service she hit across the back line. Then, having recovered a little from her first astonishment, she settled down to grapple with the situation,

and after the second deuce, managed, by skilful placing, to wrest the first game from her opponent.

‘That’s all right,’ said Toby, as she fired the balls across. ‘Now we know where we are. At least, I think I know what I’m in for, with your service, because I’ve been watching it lately when you practised with Olive—slow and nasty, with an intermittent screw.’

Dorinda laughed, and for the first time since Toby came to school her tone was friendly.

‘The screw’s only intermittent because it doesn’t always come off,’ she said. ‘I prefer a straightforward service like yours, but, unluckily, my muscle isn’t equal to producing such force yet, so I have to make up for it by guile. Ready?’

It cost Toby a game to study the depth of Dorinda’s guile, but she remembered what she had learnt from it and, after winning her first game off her own service, she met her foe’s twisty balls with rather more intelligence—so much so, indeed, that the games-captain had some difficulty in keeping her end up and only won the set by a hard struggle.

‘Thanks awfully!’ she said, as they collected their balls when it was over. ‘Whatever your ignorance of cricket, there’s no doubt you’re going to be a find for St. Githa’s on the tennis-courts, and that’s particularly convenient at the present moment. Heard about Lil Peterson?’

‘A bit,’ said Toby, trying to make her voice sound properly offhand and natural. ‘I heard two people talking about her and saying she’d let the school down over to-morrow’s match.’

Dorinda’s mouth hardened into a straight line.

‘She might have—it’s not her fault if she hasn’t—but after this round with you I feel much happier about things. That is if—I say, are you frightfully keen on going on the moor after tea?’

She flashed a sudden smile on Toby which was full of the peculiar charm she kept for such moments of necessity. Gillian and those who knew Dorinda best were well aware of her fascination, but she seldom troubled to employ it, except in the interests of the school or where she was anxious, for some reason, to win popularity. It occurred to Toby that, for the first time, the games-captain seemed to consider her worth while.

‘I did want to go,’ she admitted honestly, ‘but if you require me for anything I can put it off till another time.’

‘Well, you see, I should like to try you now in a double. Jane and Olive could both play after tea, and Jane would have been Lil’s partner to-morrow. Olive’s mine. If you can fit in decently with Jane—she’s not hard to play with—I’m seriously thinking of putting you into the match.’

Toby had been hoping for something of the sort all along. It had been at the back of her mind all through their set, though she had kept it very far back and tried to forget it. Now that it was actually suggested, she felt that some things were entirely too good to be true.

‘You mean you’d let me—a new girl—play for the school?’ she exclaimed incredulously.

‘My good child!’ said Dorinda impatiently, ‘I’d let the boot-boy play for the school if he was eligible and a decent player! He’s neither, of course, but you are, and all I care about is that St. Githa’s should win. Olive and I combine well, and Kathleen Wingfield and Nesta Pollard are really rather strong. If you suit Jane as a partner there’s no reason why we shouldn’t put up a fairly good show at Priorsford to-morrow afternoon, even if we don’t carry off the honours.’

Toby’s hazel eyes were dancing as they had seldom danced before, but she managed to answer soberly enough:

‘Of course I’ll stay after tea, if it’s as important as all that, and I’ll do my best to suit Jane. I’m better used to singles than doubles, and if you don’t think I’m satisfactory you must just turn me down. But whether you do or not,’—and for a moment her feelings got the better of her—‘I think it’s perfectly ripping of you to try me, Dorinda.’

The games-captain walked off the court, twirling her racket.

‘That’s not the point,’ she remarked calmly. ‘As I’ve told you already, I want the best for the school, and I fancy it may be you—that’s all!’

But her tone was more gracious than her words, and Toby followed her in to tea, treading on air, for was not this the first step towards accomplishing her great and secret ambition—to be friends with Dorinda? The goal seemed pretty far distant still, for Toby knew, without being told, that Dorinda’s friendship was not given lightly; but, at least, her hostility was gone, and for the time being, at any rate, Toby knew that she ‘counted’.

‘If I can manage to play up in the doubles!’ she told herself blissfully, as she sat between Gillian and Olive, eating sparingly of the bread-and-butter provided in large slabs. She had no intention of damaging her present prospects with overmuch tea.

Half an hour later she was playing feverishly on the back line, with Jane at the net, while one or two Seniors collected in the background to see whether there was any chance of the new day-girl making good.

She did. Blackberry was forced to gallop home that evening at a pace which he considered highly unnecessary, but for once Toby ignored his opinion, usually so carefully studied.

It was all settled. She was to play for St. Githa's to-morrow against Priorsford Club, vice Lilian Peterson, defaulter.

## CHAPTER VII

### SWEET GALE AND GOLDEN ASPHODEL

Saturday morning dawned bright and fair, promising well for the great match. Toby, whose wanderings on the moor at all seasons had taught her weather wisdom, gazed at the sky with approval from her dormer window at Stepside. Then she dressed hurriedly and ran downstairs to breakfast.

Early as she was, her father had been before her, and (glancing at his crumby plate and half-empty cup) she realized that the light had been too good to resist. Mortimer Barrett was already out on the rim of the Cleave, painting gorse gilded by the morning sunshine.

Toby also had business on the moor—the business which had been deferred, the previous evening, to suit the convenience of tennis and Dorinda. It was in Dorinda's interest that she was going, though the games-captain herself would have been much astonished to hear it.

It had chanced that Miss Snaith, lecturing to the Sixth on botany a couple of days before, had mentioned sweet gale as a plant to be found on Dartmoor bogs, and had spoken of its wax-bearing properties.

'People used to get the wax from its catkins by boiling them,' she said, 'and it was made into candles which gave off the most delicious fragrance when they were lighted, scenting the whole room. I really do not know if it is ever used like that nowadays.'

'I wish it was,' Dorinda had murmured. 'I'd love to smell one of those candles. If I only had enough catkins, I'd boil them and make one for myself.'

'How could you?' asked Jane Trevor incredulously.

'By skimming the wax off the boiling water, and dropping it into a mould,' replied Miss Snaith briskly. 'The thing's not impossible, if you gathered plenty of catkins. Then there is the golden asphodel, which also grows on the bogs about here. I was telling *Vb* about it yesterday, and, according to Penelope Jordan, it's to be found on that little marsh at the back of Blue Tor. She says she has gathered it.'

Toby knew Blue Tor Mire—knew it quite intimately, in fact, for one day when exploring, she had discovered the only safe path across it, and had

used it often since then, for the sheer joy of doing so. She was sure, moreover, that she had seen sweet gale growing there, though she had not known its name; certainly there was a plant there which answered to Miss Snaith's description. And then came the inspired notion of gathering sufficient catkins to make a perfumed candle for Dorinda.

Toby was a little hazy as to whether it was the right time of year for these particular catkins, but at any rate it was worth trying. Possibly they appeared later than willow-pussies, and, besides, she had noticed that things were often backward in those high corners of the moor. So, having hurried through her breakfast and found a large basket and stout walking-stick, she called to Algernon, and set off. The part to which she was bound this morning was not a place for Blackberry, though Algy's light weight would be in no danger.

Going down the series of shelves which formed the Stepside garden, she crossed the little river by an old clapper bridge—an ancient structure made of two long slabs of stone, which lay each with one end on their respective banks, and the other on a square solid boulder in midstream. Accustomed as she was to the clapper bridge, Toby never crossed it without a tiny thrill, for nobody knew how old it was or whose hands had placed it there. These bridges were among the ancient things of the moor, like the kistvaens and hut-circles, and Toby, with her love of the past, felt proud to think that they possessed one within their own borders.

A steep scramble up the opposite hill brought them on to a shoulder which ended in Blue Tor, and, skirting the pile of weather-scarred rocks, Toby came to the edge of the marshy stretch, where grew the sweet gale. Here she settled herself down to pick, while Algernon at once decided to go about his own business. He had been to the bog before and knew that there was nothing there of interest or importance; but in the rocks behind lived rabbits, and there was always a chance that one day you might catch one, if only you could keep your wits about you and improve your speed record. Algernon was a person of unquenchable hopefulness. After all, he argued, dogs had been known to catch rabbits, so why not Algernon Barrett?

Miss Snaith's last lecture (the one in which she had mentioned sweet gale) had been exclusively about bog plants, and, with the lesson fresh in her mind, Toby found plenty to attract her as she prowled about looking for catkins. There was none of these to be found, however; either it was not the proper season or the variety of shrub on Blue Tor Mire did not produce them. Disappointed in her first scheme, Toby decided to collect as many specimens as she could find of the other plants on which Miss Snaith had

lectured. She would share her harvest with Gillian and Dorinda, who had not a day-girl's opportunities of collecting for themselves.

She had wandered round happily for over an hour, when a strange sound reached her, causing her to stand still and listen intently. She had reached the other side of the bog now, where started the long wave of moorland, which ended in the woods above Priorsford. With the exception of herself and Algy, there was not a soul in sight, yet she had heard something which sounded like a call for help. Even while she listened, it came again, with a frantic note of appeal, which started her running as fast as she dared go, over the bog, in the direction of the cry.

'It's all right—I'm coming!' she shouted. 'Where are you?'

'Here!' came the answer faintly. 'Oh, please be quick! I'm—I'm sinking fearfully fast!'

A few rapid strides brought Toby to the scene of disaster. Floundering up to her arm-pits in the marsh, beside a patch of brilliant yellow flowers, was a girl, white-faced and terrified, and near her, on the firm ground from which she had slipped, lay a panama with the gold-and-mauve ribbon of St. Githa's. It was Gabrielle Marsden of the Lower Fifth.

'How on earth did you get here?' exclaimed Toby, not unnaturally, but she wasted no time in waiting for the answer. On the edge of the mire, not more than two yards from where Gabrielle struggled half-submerged, stood a large flat-topped boulder, and on to this Toby sprang.

'Look here, Gay! stop wriggling round and trying to get out,' she said peremptorily. 'You're only making matters worse. Stretch out your arms on either side, as far as they'll go, and then keep perfectly still. If you'll only do exactly as I tell you, I'll get you out in time, but you must keep still.'

Gabrielle, more thoroughly scared than ever before in her reckless career, responded for once to the note of authority. Indeed, she was only too glad to do so. Spreading out her arms, she kept them absolutely motionless, with her eyes fixed on Toby.

'Wh—what shall I do next?' she asked.

'I'm thinking,' said Toby, and added reassuringly, 'Don't you worry! You're all right as long as you don't struggle. I suppose you'd be afraid to stay like that while I ran for help?'

'Oh, don't go!' sobbed Gabrielle, breaking down completely at the bare suggestion. 'It's—so awful—and I daren't be left again! Please—please



——’

‘All right!’ answered Toby hastily. ‘Then I must manage it myself, somehow. Luckily, I’ve got good hefty muscles, and there’s a crook on my stick. If I could only—ah! I’ve got it!’

Throwing herself face downwards on the top of the rock, she stretched her stick out till the handle came within Gay’s reach.

‘Move your arms very slowly,’ she directed, ‘no jerks, mind!—and hang on to that. Now, are you ready? I’m going to heave.’

Fortunately Gay was light and slim, for even Toby’s well-developed muscles strained and cracked as she pulled with superhuman efforts at her end of the stick. But presently, as she had begun to feel that she could pull no more, the strain slackened little by little, till Gay, making a frantic plunge, seized the edge of the rock, and crawled up on to it, covered with mud—if not from head to foot, certainly from her shoulders downwards.

For five minutes both girls lay still, gasping on the sun-warmed boulder, while Algernon, who had arrived on the scene just as Gabrielle emerged, sat on the dry heather above and gazed at them with unconcealed amazement. Really, one never knew what idiotic thing a human would do next!

Toby was the first to recover herself, and, sitting up, she rubbed her aching arms.

‘Feel better?’ she asked.

Gabrielle nodded, being still disinclined for speech.

Toby eyed her with a look which was a reflection of Algernon’s.

‘I don’t know what they’ll say to you when you get back to school, but I should think it will be something brief and to the point.’

‘I’m out of bounds,’ explained Gabrielle, rather unnecessarily.

‘Well, I’m not a prefect,’ returned Toby, ‘so that’s no business of mine. So long as you’re out of the bog, that’s the most important thing. But don’t you think you can walk back to school? It’s getting latish.’

Gabrielle, in her turn, sat up slowly.

‘I must,’ she said. ‘There’s nothing the matter with me except fright—and mud! I say, Toby!’ regarding her holland frock ruefully, ‘if I’m seen like this, it’ll all come out, and I’ll get into a most awful row!’

‘So I should think!’ answered Toby encouragingly. ‘What were you doing here, anyhow?’

‘Yellow asphodel,’ explained Gay briefly. ‘I wanted some for the botany book, and Snaithie said it grew here—or Pen did. So I slipped off after breakfast, while the others were in the playing-field, and—and—well, you saw what happened!’

‘Speaking of the playing-field reminds me,’ exclaimed Toby, springing up with surprising energy, ‘that I’m playing in the tennis-match against Priorsford at two-thirty, and I’ve got to get home and change, whether I have any lunch or not. Gabrielle, *are* you all right? Can you get back by yourself?’

‘I can walk, right enough, if that’s what you mean,’ replied Gay, ‘but my dress—if I’m caught, it’ll mean about the biggest row on record! I can’t hope to slip in unobserved like this.’

Toby looked at her again, then glanced round the empty moor.

‘There’s only one thing to be done,’ she announced with grim determination. ‘We must change dresses. Luckily, I’m not much taller than you, and anyhow it’s got to be done. Get out of that filthy robe of yours as quickly as you can, Gay, and get into mine. A pretty sight I’ll look! but even if I do meet any one it won’t matter—not half as much as it would to you at least.’

Gabrielle’s dreary face lit up with instant relief.

‘Oh, Toby! what a topping idea! Topping for me, at any rate, though I’m sorry for you, having to put on this disgusting rag! It’s awfully decent of you to do it.’

Toby, with rapid movements, pulled her own garment over her head, and tossed it towards the grateful Gay.

‘There!’ she said, snatching up the other in exchange. ‘Bah! it’s stiff with mud! but never mind—it can’t be helped. Heavens! is that one o’clock chiming from the church at Priorscross? I can’t wait another moment—goodbye, and good luck!’

‘Goodbye!’ answered Gabrielle, and called after her, ‘I say, Toby! promise you won’t tell any one about this. Though you’re not a prefect yourself, you associate with them, and if Gillian or Dorinda heard about it \_\_\_\_\_,’

‘All right, I promise,’ Toby shouted back impatiently, and made straight tracks for home across the marsh, giving thanks inwardly that she had discovered the short cut, which most of the countryside knew only by tradition.

‘As it is,’ she thought, I’ll barely have time to do it. What possessed that little ass to go hunting for golden asphodel to-day of all days?’

## CHAPTER VIII

### UNPUNCTUALITY AND OTHER SINS

The match was timed to start at two-thirty on the grounds of the Priorsford Club, Priorsford being a good half hour's ride across the moor from Applecleave, and it was nearly two o'clock before Toby, hampered by Gay's heavy mud-sodden garb, stumbled up the garden at Stepside, with an amazed and thoughtful Algernon padding in her rear. He himself at times had returned rather muddy from a ramble, and had been reprov'd forgetting his trim heather-mixture suiting into such a condition; but never, in his grubbiest moments, had he equalled his mistress's present condition. It just shows you that even humans are not always infallible.

Avoiding any encounter with her parent, or Mrs. Mullins, the housekeeper, Toby hurried upstairs to her bedroom, where she divested herself of her borrowed and bedraggled plumes and got into her riding-kit. That did not take very long, but she had still to pack her small case with the clean white piqué dress which was regulation for St. Githa's when playing in a match, white tennis-shoes and stockings, and the school blazer with its mauve-and-gold stripes. Next, Blackberry had to be caught and saddled, and when at last they trotted down the drive between its walls of shrubbery Toby had only fifteen minutes in which to cover the distance between her own house and the school.

Needless to say, it could not be done, though Blackberry galloped his hardest over the springy young heather, and down the long wood-ride into Priorsford. Toby had to go first to the school, where she left the pony and changed, and it was striking three when she hurried through the members' gate on to the Club courts.

The match was in full swing—at least, two-thirds of it was. On one court Dorinda and Olive were keeping up a thrilling rally with their opponents, and next-door to them, Kathleen Wingfield stood up to the net, while Nesta Pollard served. But the third court was vacant, and beside it Jane stood rather forlornly, casting anxious glances at the gate.

Directly she caught sight of her dilatory partner, she rushed over to her.

'Where on earth have you been?' she exclaimed indignantly. 'Our set's been waiting for half an hour, and Dorinda's simply fuming! I should think it will affect her play. To be late for a match——'

‘I couldn’t help it,’ interrupted Toby in haste, ‘and I can’t very well explain. Are we to start now?’

‘I suppose so, but their captain’s playing, and so is ours. You’d better come and be introduced to the pair we’re going to tackle, and apologize as humbly as you know how.’

At that moment the umpire on the first court called ‘Game, and—! One set to Priorsford!’ and Dorinda came hurrying across towards the late arrival. Toby glanced at her nervously. Jane’s irritation was unfortunate but natural. The feelings expressed on Dorinda’s face were also natural under the circumstances, but Toby minded them far more.

The games-captain, however, was too wise to make matters worse by expounding, there and then, what she thought. She merely said in a tone of sarcasm which was far more cutting than she realized:

‘Since you *have* come, we’d better start the third court at once. Explanations can follow at a more convenient moment.’

‘That’s just what they can’t!’ muttered Toby disconsolately to herself, as she suddenly saw that her promise to Gabrielle Marsden barred the way. However, sufficient unto the moment was the evil thereof. She followed Dorinda to the pavilion, shook hands, murmured incoherent apologies, and presently found herself out on the vacant court, with Jane and one of their hostesses, spinning for service.

It was a bad beginning, nor did Toby, for all her strenuous efforts, manage to shake off its effects. The events, followed by her wild and fruitless rush to arrive in time, had all told upon her. Added to this, she had had no food since her early breakfast, and found, to her horror, that she was beginning to grow stiff as the result of her strenuous pulling to get Gay out of the bog. Her deftness and agility seemed to have forsaken her, and the wooden feeling in her arms was telling on the strength of her service. She saw Jane regarding her out of the corners of her eyes with unconcealed consternation, but, try as she would, she could not recapture the form which had so delighted Dorinda on the previous afternoon.

Poor Dorinda! Her find was proving a failure indeed, and her own play suffered from the knowledge of it. The score mounted steadily against St. Githa’s, in the first and third courts; only Kathleen and Nesta played their usual strong and self-possessed game, neither of them being troubled by anything so unlucky as a temperament.

‘I think we’re safe this afternoon,’ Toby overheard one club member say laughingly to another, in a pause between sets. ‘Their captain, the tall dark girl, who’s usually such a strong player, seems off her game, and the truant, who arrived late, isn’t helping them overmuch.’

‘She’s only a substitute,’ her friend returned. ‘I hear Jane Trevor’s regular partner is away. Pity, of course, for the school, but it’s all to the good for us.’

And they both laughed with a heartless cheerfulness which Toby felt to be callous and disgusting. But, try as she would, she was failing miserably, and she knew it. When the match was over, St. Githa’s walked back to the pavilion a defeated team.

Miss Ashley had come round to look on, half-way through the proceedings, and Miss Musgrave had been there all the time. The two mistresses and Dorinda talked politely to the Club members, accepting their laughing condolences, and promising to meet them in a return match next month on the school grounds. The rest of St. Githa’s team also stood about, discussing the games, but Toby felt too heart-sick to join them. She had counted on this afternoon to develop Dorinda’s new friendliness, hoping to play so brilliantly that the sports-captain (whatever the result of the match) would feel that Toby Barrett was someone to reckon with. Instead, she had let them all down and helped very substantially to lose the match. Which meant that she had not only lost whatever ground she had gained with Dorinda, but was now definitely in her black books.

Suddenly she felt a touch on her arm, and Miss Musgrave said kindly:

‘Shall we slip off together now, Toby? I suppose you are going back to the school to change, and to fetch your pony, and I have to get *Vb*’s essays, as I want to correct them tonight. I expect the others will follow with Miss Ashley after they’ve had tea.’

Thankful to escape, Toby went with her out of the gate with alacrity, and, as they turned up the dusty white road towards St. Githa’s, the games-mistress said:

‘I suppose I ought to inquire into the cause of your lateness this afternoon. I am quite sure you had some good excuse, for you’re not an unpunctual person as a rule.’

Toby, with the memory of Dorinda’s compressed lips before her, had not expected any one to take such a charitable view of her misdeeds, and her spirits recovered a little.

‘I couldn’t help it—indeed I couldn’t!’ she said earnestly, and her eyes were perfectly frank as they met Miss Musgrave’s. ‘I was up on the moor this morning and—and something happened which prevented me from getting back in time. I could only just pack my case and saddle Blackberry. I was awfully upset when I found I was going to be late.’

Miss Musgrave nodded.

‘So I could see,’ she observed, ‘and that was what affected your play, I suppose? Also, the fact that you dashed over here without waiting to have any lunch.’

‘How did you know?’ asked Toby, astonished.

The young mistress laughed.

‘I guessed it,’ she said. ‘You’re not the sort of person to let a mere meal delay you further when you happen to be short of time. All the same, the meal might have helped to steady you a bit and improved your play. What about riding home by Priors Cross and having a good solid tea with me at my digs? Mrs. Page will provide ham-and-eggs, and what not, and I’ll be there nearly as soon as you, if I catch the five-ten bus.’

Toby’s dejected face lit up.

‘It would be ripping,’ she answered simply. ‘I—I don’t want to go in to tea at school, and yet I don’t feel as though I could ride all the way home without some. Sure you don’t mind having me, Miss Musgrave?’

Lesley Musgrave shook her head.

‘I should rather like it,’ she answered humorously. ‘Turn Blackberry into the orchard when you get there, and walk in through the side-door.’

Toby hurried off, much refreshed, to change in the cloak-room. Though in one way she would rather have faced Dorinda and got it over as soon as possible, on the other hand she hardly felt equal to such a stormy encounter that evening. Possibly, too, by Monday Dorinda might have cooled down a little. Much as she admired her, Toby could not deny that the games-captain had a temper.

Miss Musgrave, having no change of costume to delay her, caught the bus and got to her rooms before Toby, and was waiting behind a well-laden tea-table to welcome her. It all looked very cool and pleasant, with honeysuckle nodding in at the open window and a scent of lilacs rising from the garden below. The prim little room had been brightened by some gay chintz curtains and cushions, which had certainly not been chosen by Mrs.

Page, and various photographs—some of them school-groups—gave a homely, friendly appearance to the place.

‘It is jolly, up here!’ was Toby’s comment, as she sank down on the comfortable chair which had been pulled forward for her.

Lesley Musgrave smiled.

‘Glad you like it,’ she said. ‘It certainly might be much worse, and the food is excellent. Mrs. Page really does me very well. Milk or sugar? Will you begin with splits or brown bread? In either case help yourself to cream and jam.’

Toby obeyed, saying thoughtfully:

‘It always seems to me that tea must be rather dull in other parts of England, where they don’t have clotted cream.’

Miss Musgrave saw to it that her guest made up, as far as possible, for the lunch which had been missed, but she made no further allusion to the tennis-match, and Toby, who had dreaded a closer examination into her reasons for being late, felt her gratitude increase moment by moment. There was no doubt about it—Miss Musgrave was a sport.

When the tea-things had been removed, and Toby was rising, somewhat unwillingly, to take her leave, she suddenly caught sight of a photograph on the mantelpiece. It looked like an enlarged snapshot, and showed a girl laughing over her shoulder as she stepped out of a boat, while a man in flannels and a jersey open at the throat, steadied her with his hand.

‘Oh!’ cried Toby, coming to a standstill before it, ‘I’d nearly forgotten you knew her, and I was so excited when I saw you together that afternoon in Mrs. Page’s shop! It’s Ursula Grey, the ’cellist, isn’t it?’

Miss Musgrave looked surprised.

‘Yes—do you know her? She is an old school chum of mine. We were at the Jane Willard Foundation together.’

Toby shook her head regretfully.

‘I don’t know her,’ she said, ‘but I’ve heard her play—once, last year, in Exeter. How lucky for you to have been at school with her!’ and she regarded Miss Musgrave with envious eyes.

The games-mistress laughed, as her mind travelled back—not so very far back, after all—to those school-days at ‘Jane’s’ when Ursula Grey had been a person of very small account, except to her intimate friends. But that was



before the discovery of her marvellous talent had changed everything for her.

Something of this she told the admiring Toby, who listened with deep interest, and finally said:

‘And the man in the photo? He must be your brother—isn’t he? He’s exactly like you.’

Lesley Musgrave’s face changed suddenly, as though a black shadow had passed over it, blotting out all its pleasant brightness, and her eyes grew very sad as she replied almost curtly:

‘Yes, that’s my brother. And this snap here of the girl with the long fair hair is my younger sister, Nan. She’s still at the Jane Willard—one of the prefects now, in fact. I’ll show you my school groups when next you come, but there isn’t time now if I’m to get those essays corrected tonight. Perhaps, some day, if Ursula is staying with me for a week-end, you’d like to come back and meet her?’

‘Rather!’ replied Toby fervently. ‘Thanks awfully, Miss Musgrave! And thank you, too, for the tea, and—and for being so decent about my letting everybody down this afternoon. I’ll hurry off now, so as not to interfere with your correcting. I’ve enjoyed myself immensely.’

‘Good!’ said Miss Musgrave, and then, laying her hand kindly on the girl’s arm, she added, ‘Don’t take Dorinda Earle’s sarcasm too much to heart, if she is sarcastic about what happened this afternoon. Whatever may have been the cause, remember she had some reason for feeling provoked. Dorinda has a sharp tongue, but she has also got a good heart.’

‘I know,’ said Toby quickly. ‘I—I like Dorinda. I don’t really mind her sharp tongue.’

But as she rode slowly homewards, her thoughts were not entirely concerned with Dorinda and the wrath to come. They took another direction.

‘I wonder what’s gone wrong about the brother? I hope he isn’t dead or anything, but I’m afraid I rather put my foot into it. I’ve done that pretty well all round, to-day, thanks to that little ass Gay Marsden putting both of hers into the bog!’

## CHAPTER IX

### DORINDA THE IMPLACABLE

In the prefects' study that evening the games-captain let herself go. It was the first time for three years that Priorsford had defeated St. Githa's, and Dorinda felt it specially hard that it should have occurred during her term of office—all the more so that, until Friday morning, she had been reasonably sure of victory. Then had come Lil's defection, followed immediately by the discovery of a player who entirely eclipsed the faithless Lil. Dorinda had exulted openly over her luck, only to have the cup dashed from her lips by the very hand that had seemed to offer it.

'If she'd been at all doubtful—if I'd taken any risk in putting her in—I should have had myself to blame,' she fumed, 'but you all saw how she played in those doubles yesterday evening.'

'Well, at least it's some comfort that you haven't got yourself to blame,' Jane pointed out by way of well-meant consolation, but Dorinda would have none of it.

'It isn't,' she answered crossly. 'It's all the more maddening to know that I was perfectly right, and the girl could have played up, if she had chosen to.'

'Oh, I don't know!' said Jane, still unquenchable. 'Lots of people are erratic—play up all right one day, and let everybody down the next. *N'est-ce pas*, Jill?'

Gillian, who was studying a seedsman's catalogue on the window-seat, looked up at this appeal.

'It's true enough of some people,' she admitted, 'but I don't think it applies to Toby Barrett. I'm coaching her at cricket, as you know, and she seems to me a steady, even sort of person.'

'Exactly what I say!' declared Dorinda. 'She could have kept her end up, if she'd liked.'

'Of course she could!' exclaimed Kathleen Wingfield contemptuously. 'I said all along the girl was an idiot. The very fact of her being late showed how little importance she attached to the match! I only hope, Dorinda, it's

the last time you'll let a new girl—and a day-girl at that—play for the school—a creature whom nobody knew anything about!’

But here Gillian interposed promptly.

‘Don’t be an ass, Kathleen!’ she protested. ‘What else could Dorinda do? We all watched those doubles on Friday evening, and we all thought it would have been folly to turn Toby down simply because she was in her first term.’

Kathleen shrugged her shoulders.

‘Perhaps we did,’ she said, ‘but as things have turned out, Dorinda would have done better to put in you, or even Gabrielle Marsden.’

‘It’s easy enough to be wise after the event,’ retorted Jill, hurling her catalogue on to the table, ‘but every one knows that I can’t serve for little apples! and you’d hardly call Gay reliable.’

‘No,’ agreed Olive. ‘I don’t see what else Dorinda could have done, but it’s a pity to be too scathing about Toby. She’d never played in a match before, and anybody may be forgiven for getting an attack of stage fright.’

‘Yes—but not for coming on the courts half an hour late,’ returned Dorinda. ‘Whether or not I’m to blame for trying her—and Kathleen seems to think I am—none of you can excuse a thing like that.’

‘No,’ assented Olive. ‘That’s certainly rather unforgivable. It’s not usually done in matches.’

‘Did you think of asking how it happened?’ inquired Gillian.

Dorinda shook her head.

‘I couldn’t go into it at the Club, and she took jolly good care not to come near me afterwards!’ she said hotly. ‘Slunk off home without even waiting for tea!’

‘I don’t wonder,’ said good-natured Jane. ‘The poor kid was thoroughly ashamed of herself.’

‘And much need!’ said Dorinda. ‘But that won’t save her. I mean to tackle her on Monday morning straight from the shoulder! She’d much better have faced up to it at the time.’

And Toby was inclined to agree with her before she got back to school on Monday. Better to have had it out with Dorinda, there and then, tired and hungry though she was, than to pass the week-end in miserable anticipation.

She timed her arrival so as to allow herself a bare five minutes in which to change, and hurried into prayers just as Miss Ashley and the other members of the staff were taking their places. Slipping into the ranks of the Sixth between Jane and Olive, she glanced nervously down the line, only to remember, with a sigh of relief, that it was Dorinda's week to play the hymn. This gave her an opportunity to escape immediately afterwards to the schoolroom, and for a couple of hours there was no chance of private conversation.

At the eleven o'clock break, however, Dorinda came straight up to her.

'Look here, Toby!' she said bluntly. 'I think some sort of explanation's due from you with regard to what happened on Saturday afternoon. I suppose you realize that you let the school down pretty badly?'

Her manner was a good deal more hectoring than she intended, and Gillian, who was sharpening pencils in the background, looked for a flare, but there was none. Instead Toby answered, with the meekness of conscious guilt:

'I know, Dorinda. I'm most awfully sorry. I—I can't tell you how sorry I am.'

'That's all very well as far as it goes,' returned Dorinda curtly, 'but why did you do it?'

'I tried my hardest,' said Toby, meeting the other girl's angry blue eyes as bravely as she could, 'but I felt all stiff and useless, somehow. I couldn't get any force into my strokes.'

'That was pretty obvious!' retorted Dorinda unkindly. 'But there must have been some reason for it. People don't suddenly go stiff and useless without a cause. You were supple enough the day before.'

Toby was silent, knowing very well that a morning on the moor could hardly be offered as sufficient explanation, and Dorinda saw that no reply was forthcoming.

'That's not the worst of it, though,' she went on. 'You've never played in a match before, and probably you didn't understand that you have to save your muscles a bit. It lost us the match, of course, but people can't always help being fools if they're born that way. Perhaps I ought to have warned you, but it didn't occur to me. What anybody can help is being late for an important engagement, and you must have some excuse to give for that!'

Toby coloured hotly at the stinging sarcasm of Dorinda's cool tones. She would have stood it from no one else, but now she swallowed her resentment, telling herself that, after all, the games-captain had some reason to be annoyed.

'I was up on Blue Tor Mire,' she said desperately, 'trying to find catkins—I mean specimens for the botany class, and I was late getting back. I—I didn't allow enough time to change and ride over. I can only repeat what I said before—I know I let you down, and I'm more sorry than I can say.'

'Being sorry won't give us back the match,' said Dorinda bitterly, turning on her heel. 'Nor will it get you that place in the team which you would have had, if you'd shown yourself worth it. Bad as it is, the whole thing would be less exasperating if you'd had any decent excuse. But to feel that we lost to Priorsford simply through your slackness—it's the limit, that's all I've got to say!'

'And enough, too!' observed Gillian, *sotto voce*, as she followed her chum out of the schoolroom. 'Did you see her face, when you were bullying her, Dor? There's something at the back of this, though I can't imagine what it is.'

'Nor I!' snapped Dorinda. 'For heaven's sake don't talk about it any more, Jill! I've had more than enough! As for Lil Peterson, who seems to be back again, I'm not going to bandy words with her. Stony silence and her name struck off the tennis team-list is the only comment I shall make on *her* behaviour! We're got some nice reliable people at St. Githa's this term!'

Toby went listlessly through the rest of her morning's work, and at twelve-thirty, when lessons were over, she sought out Gabrielle Marsden.

'Your dress is down in the cloak-room,' she said, 'in a paper bag. I had it washed and ironed on Saturday night, and it looks none the worse. What about mine?'

'Well, I can't have it washed and ironed, of course,' said Gay apologetically, 'but it came to no harm on the way back. I'm frightfully obliged to you, Toby! In fact, "obliged" is hardly a strong enough word, is it? But for you, I don't suppose there would be any little Gay left by now.'

'Probably there would,' replied Toby, without any great enthusiasm. 'Some one else would have passed, or you would have crawled out somehow by yourself. Did you get back all right, without being run into by anybody?'

‘Yes, thank goodness! Not a soul knows I was out of bounds that morning except you. I’ve been giving thanks ever since that you’re only a common or garden Sixth Former and no prefect. Don’t forget that you’ve sworn not to tell any one about it.’

‘As it happens,’ said Toby, hesitating, ‘I was just going to ask you if you would mind my mentioning it to one other person. You see, I—well, I made rather a mess of things in the afternoon because of our doings up at the mire, and I haven’t any way of accounting for it except by telling the whole truth.’

‘Oh, sorry!’ said Gay, absently. ‘Tell any one you like, then, so long as it isn’t Dorinda Earle. I’ve just heard that there’s a chance of her playing me for the tennis team instead of Lil Peterson, so I simply can’t afford to get into her black books at present.’

For the fraction of a second Toby was silent, then she said, in an offhand tone:

‘Oh, all right! Perhaps I’d better say nothing at all, then. It wouldn’t do to endanger your chances at such a critical moment!’

‘It doesn’t matter, so long as you only tell one person, and that not Dorinda,’ responded Gay, in happy ignorance of any complications. ‘I’ll put your dress down in the cloak-room, then, when I go for mine.’

‘Thanks,’ said Toby, and went off to keep an appointment at the nets with Gillian.

It was bad luck, but she could quite see how it had arisen. Gay’s mind was very much occupied with her own affairs, and she had simply never thought of connecting Toby’s dilemma with the Priorsford match. When her rescuer had referred to it on the moor she had been too dazed to take in half that was said, and had probably never heard that Toby was playing instead of Lil Peterson. As the match had been on the Club courts, none of the girls had seen it, and *Vb*, if they thought about it at all, had concluded that Gillian Ewing had been given the vacant place for that afternoon. To them it would have been the obvious solution. Not until that morning had Gabrielle heard anything of her own rosy prospects. Those members of the team who were in the Sixth, had not cared to discuss the disaster outside their own form, and Nesta Pollard, who was in *Vb*, and might have mentioned Toby’s collapse, had refrained from doing so, with a vague idea that it wasn’t sporting to say too much about it. Nesta had put the day-girl’s bad play down to nerves and was sorry for her.

Toby saw that she must abandon all hope of being able to explain matters to Dorinda. She could not clear herself at the expense of Gay's chances for the tennis team—all the more as she had a shrewd suspicion that Dorinda would probably give Lil's place to her if she were able to account satisfactorily for her strange lapse on Saturday.

No. Things must be left as they were, but Toby felt that life at school was becoming difficult and complicated.

## CHAPTER X

### FROM BAD TO WORSE

Jill Ewing said no more to Dorinda about Toby's affairs, realizing that it would be more tactful to keep her opinion to herself, but she stuck to that opinion, nevertheless, and wondered if it might not be possible to win the day-girl's confidence. From Gillian's point of view it seemed a pity that St. Githa's should lose the chance of a perfectly good tennis-player in its team, simply because of a stupid misunderstanding. Dorinda was her chum, and one of the very best; but, like all strong characters, she took prejudices, and she had taken one against Toby Barrett.

'Toby's not the sort you can hector,' she argued to herself. 'She's sensitive, and shuts up like an oyster if any one bullies her. Perhaps I can find out what really happened on Saturday if I go about it in a gingerly way.'

And it was just possible that she might have succeeded, for Toby was nursing a certain soreness which made her willing to accept sympathy from any safe quarter, but unluckily she revealed herself as unsafe in her very first attempt. Gillian's methods were nothing if not direct.

'Look here,' she said persuasively one afternoon when Toby was helping her with some weeding, 'what did happen to make you late for that match? I haven't known you very long, of course, but I don't believe you're the sort to let any one down through mere carelessness.'

'Don't you?' asked Toby, with a touch of bitterness. 'Dorinda does, all right.'

'Oh, not really! Dorinda doesn't mean half she says when she's in a tantrum, and you must admit it was rather rough on her. Any captain would have been ratty. As a matter of fact she'd be only too thankful if you'd produce some acceptable sort of reason, so that she could feel she might try you again for the tennis team. You see, her only alternative is Gay Marsden, who's much too erratic for any one's comfort. And you did play extremely well at your test.'

Toby, bending down so that her face was hidden by the brim of her hat, tugged fiercely at an obstinate plantain.

'It's very decent of you to believe the best of me, Jill,' she replied, 'but I can't give any other explanation than the true one, which is that I stayed too



late grubbing about on Blue Tor Mire, and didn't leave myself enough time to get over to Priorsford.'

There was a moment's silence, during which Toby weeded industriously, while Jill, leaning on her hoe, regarded her with searching intentness. Finally she shrugged her shoulders.

'That,' she said shrewdly, 'may be the truth, but it's not all the truth. However, you know your own business best. And, talking of moor expeditions, what about that trip you and I were going in search of roots for this here garden of mine?'

Toby straightened her back and looked at Gillian out of candid hazel eyes.

'Do you think Dorinda will like it?' she asked. 'I mean—she's your chum, isn't she, and she's got no use in the world for me—won't she mind if you come for rambles with me on Saturday afternoons?'

Gillian looked amused.

'Of course not! Why should she? Dorinda isn't that kind of ass! As long as I don't go off when she requires me for cricket, she won't have a word to say against it. I'm not accountable to Dorinda for the way in which I spend my spare time, you know.'

'I suppose not,' said Toby slowly. 'All right, then, Jill. Let's go exploring, next Saturday as ever was. If you can get permission from the Head, meet me at the end of Blackcombe Lane directly after lunch, and I'll bring enough tea for both of us. It'll be topping fun!'

And from that moment Toby set herself resolutely to enjoy the friendliness of people like Gillian and Jane and Olive, who were ready to be friendly, and made up her mind to cease hankering after Dorinda, who certainly was not.

That happened to be one of the afternoons on which there was no lesson of any sort after tea, so Toby was ready to start earlier for home. She had just captured Blackberry and saddled him, when a small voice from the gate of the paddock asked earnestly:

'I say! what about our ride? You did promise, you know—Beryl and me. I suppose we couldn't have it now?'

Toby looked round, startled. On the top rail of the fence, with her arm round the gate-post, sat Elfrida, or Elfie, Rossall, and standing by her side,

on a lower rung, was Beryl Wingfield, an ethereal being of eight or nine, and very unlike her athletic elder sister in the Sixth.

‘I don’t know why you shouldn’t,’ said the Senior doubtfully. ‘Once round the paddock for each of you can’t hurt, and Blackberry’s a perfect lamb.’

‘If you’re bothering about rules,’ said Elfie earnestly, ‘you needn’t. There’s no rule against pony-rides. We can stick on, can’t we, Beryl?’

‘Yes,’ assented Beryl, without any great enthusiasm. Obviously Elfie was the leading member of this partnership.

As a matter of fact, Beryl was a timid little soul, who detested half the mad pranks into which her friend dragged her; but such was her devotion to Elfie that she would force herself through any adventure, however distasteful, rather than fall short of the other’s standard of daring. She dreaded most of their wild enterprises, but she dreaded still more to be left out. Where Elfie went Beryl followed—not without fear of the consequences, but in spite of that fear—which was very high courage indeed, though she was quite unaware of the fact.

She looked on in silence, now, as the big girl helped Elfie to mount, and put the reins into her hands with directions as to what she was to do with them. Penelope Jordan, wheeling her bicycle, appeared in the drive where it bordered the paddock, and paused to watch. She was really waiting for Toby, who could often be persuaded to go round by Priorscross when they chanced to be starting out at the same time.

‘Now grip him with your knees, and stick on,’ directed Toby. ‘You can’t go too fast, because I mean to run beside you and hold the bridle. Ready?’

They set off round the field, Elfie chuckling with glee, while Toby set the pace for Blackberry at a reasonable rate—too reasonable for his small rider, however, who managed, by a sudden adroit movement, to twitch the rein out of the Senior’s hand, and was away at a gallop before Toby could stop her.

It was useless to give chase, but Blackberry was sensible, and Elfie appeared to have a good seat. Toby simply stood where she was, till their course brought them past her again. Then she sprang forward and seized the bridle.

‘For that,’ she said firmly, ‘you will get off at once, and there will be no more rides for you, just yet! I’m not going to take the risk of any pranks you may choose to play. Want your turn, Beryl?’

Beryl hesitated, but Elfie's eye was upon her; moreover, Elfie's temper was not too good at that moment. She had intended to have a much longer ride, and she had been balked.

'Buck up, Beryl!' she said crossly, adding, with a sneer, 'You needn't be afraid of going too fast—you won't be allowed to!'

Beryl flushed, and scrambled hurriedly on to the pony's back, thankful, inwardly, for the very thing that Elfie had resented—the restraining hand on Blackberry's rein. She started to trot timidly round the paddock, with Toby running beside her, and wondered fearfully whether she was really enjoying herself or not.

Elfie soon decided that question. A demon of mischief possessed her from time to time, and at that moment it entered into her with unexpected force. Breaking a switch off one of the bushes beside which she stood, she waited until the pony was opposite her again, then, springing out, hit him a smart cut across his glossy flank.

It was enough for Blackberry, who was totally unused to such treatment, since his mistress never carried a whip. Amazed and indignant, he gave a sudden bound forward, and though Toby's hand checked him at once, the movement was too much for poor startled Beryl. With a loud scream she dropped the reins, and the next moment had rolled off, and was lying on the grass, still and senseless.

Blackberry stopped at once, and Toby, leaving him where he stood, sprang to the child's side, while Pen, depositing her bicycle on the turf at the edge of the drive, flew across to join her.

'What's happened?' she asked breathlessly. 'Is she badly hurt?'

Toby was down on her knees, carefully feeling the child's limbs.

'I hope not,' she answered in shaky tones. 'I was a fool to allow it. Pen! run for your life to the house and find Nurse. I—I hope the kid's only stunned.'

Here Elfie, petrified at first, began to recover her faculties, and burst into loud sobs.

'Oh, I've killed her! I've killed her!' she shrieked. 'Oh, Beryl! What ever shall I do?'

'Stop that noise at once, and go in,' ordered Toby sharply. 'Screaming won't help matters. Go and fetch some water—that's about the one useful thing you can do!'

Elfie turned to obey, but her shrieks had been heard on the tennis courts, where Dorinda was playing a single with Kathleen Wingfield, and both prefects came hurrying on to the scene, still carrying their rackets.

‘What on earth is the matter?’ began Kathleen, then turned white to the lips as she recognized her small sister. ‘What’s happened to Beryl? Is she hurt?’

‘I’m afraid so,’ said Toby tremulously. ‘She fell off my pony, and I think she’s hurt her head—oh, thank heaven! here’s Nurse!’

With the arrival of some one in authority to take command the strain lessened. Nurse examined her little patient with deft, capable hands, and while she did so, Beryl stirred and moaned, opening bewildered brown eyes on the anxious faces which bent over her.

‘That’s all right,’ said Nurse briskly. ‘No bones broken. She’s only a little stunned, but it might have been much worse. Yes, Beryl dear, you’ll be better in a minute or two. I’m going to carry you into the sanatorium, and you’ll have a nice quiet rest on one of the beds there till you feel comfy again.’

Stooping, she lifted the little girl in her strong arms, and turned towards the house.

‘You’d better find out what happened, Dorinda,’ she said, over her shoulder. ‘Pen tells me she fell off the pony, and I expect that little wretch, Elfie, was at the bottom of it!’

The four elder girls, left alone together, looked at one another in silence for a moment; then Dorinda asked abruptly,

‘Was she?’

‘Who? Elfie? Of course she was!’ cried Pen wrathfully. ‘Rushed out and hit the pony and startled it out of its senses. She was in a rage too with Toby for turning her off because she tried to ride on her own.’

‘What I should like to know,’ demanded Kathleen, ‘is how they came to be on the pony’s back at all? Were they riding him without permission? It’s not much like Beryl, though, of course, Elfie leads her into any mischief.’

Penelope was silent, feeling she had said enough for the time being, but Toby answered bravely:

‘I’m afraid it was altogether my fault. They came begging me for rides, and I was fool enough to give in to them. Then Beryl was nervous, and

when Blackberry shied, she fell off. That was Elfie's doing, certainly, but I was responsible.'

'I'm afraid you were,' said Dorinda coldly. 'It was a perfectly mad thing to allow that child anywhere near the pony. She's quite reckless.'

'I don't see,' observed Pen bluntly, 'how Toby could be expected to know that, being new. I'm sure I didn't. Kids who are a danger to the public should be labelled as such!'

'However new you may be,' returned Dorinda shortly, 'you're expected to use a little common sense. If Toby had chosen to let you, or Nesta, or Gay, ride her pony, it might have been different. But a couple of infants in the Second, and one of them Elfrida Rossall—it was simply asking for trouble!'

'Well, I've got it all right!' exclaimed Toby, with a queer choke in her voice. 'That ought to be enough to satisfy even you, Dorinda! Anyhow, there's no danger of my making that particular kind of mistake again. And now I'd better go and confess to the Head.'

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MOLYNEUX PRIZE

Beryl Wingfield was none the worse for her tumble, but Toby was, though no one else was aware of it. The Head's disapproval and rebuke had been kindly, though very definite, but Dorinda's cold contemptuous tone was more cutting than she knew, and Toby's sensitive pride was aroused.

'Very well! If she won't be friendly, I'm not going to bother about her any more,' she told herself resolutely, as she rode homewards across the moor; and turned her thoughts straightway to other things, such as her prospective outing with Gillian, and the interesting places which they might explore together besides searching for roots.

But Dorinda was the sort of person about whom one could not help bothering, once having felt her fascination. Curt and haughty though she frequently was to people for whom she had no liking, she could also be very charming in a bluff comradely way, which was almost boyish. Toby had been given a glimpse of this Dorinda on the tennis-courts, and wanted more. Though she believed that she had finally decided not to 'bother', she was mistaken. Deep in her heart lurked the hope that, in time, she might overcome the other's prejudice. Toby, all unbeknown to herself, was only biding her time.

Meanwhile, she was putting in some excellent work in her classes, and Miss Ashley, having questioned her staff about both day-girls, was greatly pleased with the result.

'It strikes me the innovations are likely to prove a success,' she remarked to Miss Snaith. 'There's nothing brilliant about Penelope Jordan, perhaps, but her work is quite satisfactory, and as for Toby—her brains strike me as being rather above the average.'

'I think they are,' agreed Miss Snaith. 'She has not been used to studying with other girls, and probably the competition is stimulating her. She's so intensely eager about it all, and Miss Mather tells me she has been well-taught, and therefore started level with the rest of the Sixth.'

Miss Ashley nodded thoughtfully:

'History and literature are the only subjects for which I take that form, and in both of these Toby is more than level—she's ahead. I wonder——'

‘Yes?’ queried Miss Snaith, sorting the papers on her desk.

‘I was thinking of the Molyneux Prize. Do you suppose it would be any use entering her for that?’

As Miss Ashley was the best judge of Toby’s abilities in English, the secretary realized that the Head was thinking aloud, so merely asked:

‘Aren’t History and Literature the only two subjects set for it?’

‘And Scripture,’ added Miss Ashley. ‘It was instituted by a wealthy and eccentric old clergyman, who thought these three subjects were practically all that mattered—to English girls, at any rate—and candidates from the various West Country schools have to sit for it at Exeter in July. St. Githa’s has never yet succeeded in carrying it off, but Toby Barrett might do it. It’s still not too late to send in her name.’

‘Are you entering any one else this summer?’ Miss Snaith asked.

‘Dorinda, Gillian, and Jane. Nobody else could touch the standard, and I’m not at all confident about these three. But Toby—yes, I’m glad I thought of her. I am going down at eleven-thirty to give the Sixth their history lecture, and I’ll speak to her about it. I expect she’ll be quite ready to compete, and if so, you can catch the afternoon post with her application.’

Toby was more than ready, she was eager. To her an exam which comprised her three favourite subjects and required neither geography nor maths was an ideal arrangement, and she threw herself into the morning’s lesson more wholeheartedly than ever, her hand flying at lightning speed along the paper as she took notes of Miss Ashley’s lecture.

‘I’m extremely glad she thought of letting me enter,’ she observed, when the class was over, and the Sixth were tidying up their form-room before going out to games.

‘You needn’t be so awfully bucked,’ Jane assured her kindly, ‘because you won’t get it. None of us will. None of us ever do. No St. Githa’s girl has ever been known to walk off with the Molyneux.’

‘That’s no reason, though,’ said Gillian, ‘why we shouldn’t break our record. I don’t suppose I’ll do much towards it myself, but I shouldn’t object too strongly if one of you brought it in.’

‘Don’t talk rubbish!’ exclaimed Dorinda. ‘Those papers are always inhumanly stiff. Even if one of us could manage to satisfy the examiners in the three given subjects, that still leaves the essay. Don’t you remember what Grace Pollard said about it last year?’

‘Oh yes!’ said Jane, ‘She made the place ring with her grouching about that blessed essay when they got back from Exeter! What was the subject now? “Compare the characters and behaviour of any three of Shakespeare’s women with those of any three heroines in current classical fiction.” Wasn’t that it? I’m sure I’m right, for it made such a horrible impression on me that I’ve never forgotten it!’

‘Yes, that was it,’ said Gillian, laughing at the dismayed faces of those girls who were listening. ‘It finished off poor old Grace completely!’

But Toby looked up with shining eyes.

‘Why, it was a perfectly heavenly subject! I only wish we could have it again this year.’

‘Thank goodness we can’t!’ exclaimed Jill fervently. ‘The subject set will be historical this year. That’s how they work it—literary one year and historical the next—but all equally appalling.’

‘Not in Toby Barrett’s eyes, apparently,’ said Kathleen Wingfield, with heavy sarcasm. ‘It’s a pity they never set a theological subject based on the Scripture paper. That would be just easy enough for our gifted Tabitha!’

Toby coloured with hot resentment. Kathleen had discovered that it was easy to annoy her by the use of her hated Christian name, and made free with the discovery.

‘I said nothing conceited!’ she blazed forth now. ‘I only wished I could have done that essay. I didn’t say I should have done it well, but that I should have liked to try.’

But Kathleen belonged to the type who ‘only do it to annoy because they know it teases’.

‘If *you’d* tried,’ she declared, ‘St. Githa’s would certainly have won the Molyneux. Perhaps it will, anyhow, this year, since you’re to enter. According to Jill, the essay subjects are just as highbrow every year, so probably you’ll find something to suit you.’

And she walked off with an exasperating chuckle, which caused Toby to clench her hands and bite her lips.

Gillian laughed good-naturedly.

‘You should pay no attention to her, Toby. The sight of your face just tempts her to further flights. All the same, it’s too bad of Kathleen. She’s got a nasty tongue.’



‘Toby shouldn’t be such an ass!’ exclaimed Dorinda contemptuously. ‘If she didn’t rise as she does, Kathleen wouldn’t do it. And besides, Toby, you do talk in a show-off fashion. Better win the Molyneux, and then you can give yourself airs, if you like!’

And she followed Kathleen, who was captaining a scratch eleven against hers on the cricket-field, in order that the school team might get a little practice before their first match, which was to come off on the following Saturday.

The remainder of the form, who were all playing on one side or the other, scattered likewise, leaving Gillian alone with Toby.

‘Aren’t you playing for the school team?’ asked Toby. ‘Then we can’t have any coaching this morning. I’ll go and do a bit of weeding for you. We must clear up that corner before we bring in any new plants.’

‘Oh, never mind the weeding!’ said Gillian absently. ‘I’ll put in a little time at it this evening. Find somebody who isn’t playing, and get them to send you down a few balls at the nets. It’ll do you good to sample some one else’s bowling, even if it is a bit erratic. I say, Toby, you’re rather fond of Dorinda, aren’t you?’

Toby made a comical grimace.

‘Do you think I’ve any reason to be? It’s a queer thing, Jill, and rather clever of you to have spotted it. I didn’t think any one could have noticed it, for I’m not very sure of it, myself, at times. But there is something frightfully attractive about Dorinda, and I often wish she didn’t hate me so.’

Gillian nodded.

‘I thought as much!’ she said. ‘And I’m not sure that she does hate you. I know Dorinda, you see—she hasn’t been my chum all these years for nothing. She’s an unusual sort of girl, and she can be rather disagreeable when she’s in a bad mood, but, behind all that, she’s one of the very best, as you seem to suspect. I’d rather have you two friendly because you’re both friends of mine, and it’s awkward for me when you don’t combine well—so, listen to me!’

‘I’m listening,’ said Toby obediently, ‘but you’ll be wanted on that playing-field directly.’

‘Never mind the playing-field! I’m going to give you a tip about Dorinda. Since you won’t explain your behaviour at the Priorsford match (and I suppose you’ve got some silly-fool reason which you won’t divulge!)

will you go and have it out with her? Tell her you had some perfectly good motive, which you've got an equally good motive for keeping to yourself, and ask her as a favour to try you once more. I believe she will, and that will give you a chance to show your mettle. I'm not speaking entirely in your own interests either. Dor *is* in a fix about that tennis team.'

Toby pondered this advice.

'I'll think about it,' she said guardedly, 'but I don't suppose for one minute she'll let me—and even if she does, and I do happen to play like a picture (which, of course, I shan't), that won't make her cease to dislike me.'

'Try it and see,' advised Gillian. 'The school's rather an obsession with Dorinda, and if you can do something for St. Githa's you'll count with her. All right, Jane! I'm coming. No, I hadn't forgotten—I only stopped to settle up something.'

Left to herself, Toby went in search of Rhoda Missenden, a Fifth Former, who was not at the moment on active service, owing to an unfortunate knack of dropping catches.

'If you'll come over to the nets and bowl for me,' said Toby generously, 'I'll send you up one catch in each over. I daren't do more in case it becomes a habit. My cricket's too uncertain to be trifled with at present.'

'I don't mind,' agreed Rhoda, without wild enthusiasm. 'I must do something about those catches, or Miss Musgrave will keep me at the nets all summer. When is she going to let you into any of the games?'

'When Jill Ewing thinks I'm ready to be tried, which won't be this week, I'm afraid. By the bye, do you happen to know anything about the Molyneux Prize?'

Rhoda stared.

'Just what every one else knows—that it's frightfully hard to get, so the Head only enters the cream of the Sixth. Why? Are you going in?'

Toby chuckled.

'So she says, though I didn't know I was among the cream of the Sixth! Otherwise you've told me nothing but what I knew already. I want to find out what the prize is, because I forgot to ask. Books I expect.'

'Oh no, it isn't!' said Rhoda readily. 'I can tell you that, anyhow. It's twenty pounds to spend as you like. You can get books with it if you want to.'

Toby stood still and gazed at her informant with a face of incredulous joy.

‘Twenty pounds! Goodness! I hope I’ll win it! Why, I believe it would be enough to dig out the Ark of the Covenant.’

‘Dig out the *what?*’ Rhoda edged away a little, and eyed the day-girl with alarm.

‘It’s all right. You needn’t look as though you thought I was an escaped lunatic. People always do when I talk to them about the Ark of the Covenant, but I’ve got reasons of my own for believing that Jeremiah never took it to Ireland at all. I believe he hid it somewhere on Dartmoor, when the Phoenician ships put in for tin, and I want to find it.’

‘Look here!’ said Rhoda firmly. ‘I came out here to bowl for you and to practise holding catches. We’ve had one history lecture this morning from Miss Ashley, and I’m not going to listen to another, mixed with Scripture, from you! Let’s play.’

## CHAPTER XII

### ON THE MOOR WITH GILLIAN

Toby had been carried away for the moment by the visions of unbounded wealth revealed to her in the amount of the Molyneux Prize. It was the first time she had mentioned her secret ambitions to any one at St. Githa's, and Rhoda Missenden was certainly not the confidante she would have chosen had she taken time to think.

Rhoda's attitude, however, was a warning not to do anything so rash again, and Toby grew hot and cold all over as she imagined what would have happened had she broken out like that in front of Kathleen Wingfield, or even Jane Trevor. She was aware that most of her schoolfellows might regard her views on Jeremiah as peculiar, to say the least of it, and she had no desire to be made a laughing-stock when her one idea was to be as nearly as possible like every one else—a vain hope for Toby, could she have realized it.

Hastily dropping the subject, and avoiding all further reference to the Scriptures, she tried, by sending up more than the agreed number of catches, to make Rhoda forget her unfortunate remark. For the time being she succeeded, but unfortunately her success did not last.

It happened that the following day was wet, so the time usually devoted to games was spent in the gymnasium. There was a little desultory stump-cricket, followed by some dancing, but towards dinner-time the Sixth grew bored with these harmless occupations, and drifted into a corner where they could talk without interruption from more vigorous spirits.

'By the bye, Toby, what's all this about you and the prophet Jeremiah?' asked Olive Knighton idly, as she leaned against the wall.

Toby reddened uncomfortably, but answered in tones as airy as she could manage:

'I didn't know my name had been coupled with the prophet Jeremiah's. Who's been doing it?'

'Rhoda Missenden, I believe, originally, but it's all over the Upper School by now. Did you, or did you not, say that you knew where he had hidden some treasure?'

‘If I knew that,’ retorted Toby shortly, ‘I’d go and find it. I did make a careless remark to Rhoda about Jeremiah bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Dartmoor, and I suppose that’s what she’s turned it into. Rhoda Missenden is an idiot.’

‘There I, for one, am quite ready to meet you half-way,’ agreed Jane, balancing limply on the parallel bars. ‘She can never see a joke till it has been carefully explained to her, and probably then you’ll have to parse and analyse it. Still, if you know any local tradition about Jeremiah being on Dartmoor, you might as well tell it. You’re full of old legends, and this is a good chance to tell us some. We’re all at a loose end, thanks to this tiresome rain.’

‘Even if we are,’ objected Kathleen, ‘we don’t want to sit round listening to fairy-tales, like a pack of kids. Come and play for us, Dorinda, and we’ll dance again. That’ll shake up Jane and Olive. They look exactly like a pair of boiled owls at present.’

Dorinda slid down from the vaulting-horse on whose back she had found a temporary resting-place.

‘All right,’ she said, ‘I’ll play, but it’s on one condition—that you dance some decent country dances instead of that horrid negroid Jazz. I’m sick of the sound of it, not to mention the sight!’

‘Hear! hear!’ cried Toby eagerly. ‘Let’s make up sets for “Rufty-Tufty”’. Jane, will you dance with me?’

And that was all about Jeremiah for the time being. The Sixth accepted Jane’s explanation—that it was a joke which Rhoda Missenden had failed to see—and asked Toby for no other. But Gillian said to Dorinda that night in their dormitory:

‘Toby Barrett’s a queer girl. She wouldn’t open out in the gym this morning—that’s not her way—but I believe there’s more in this than meets the eye.’

Dorinda was already in bed, where she sat up hugging her knees, while she watched Gillian brushing her sunny-brown hair. The third member of the dormitory—Jane—was absent at the moment, it being her hot-bath night.

‘More in what?’ asked Dorinda.

‘Why, this Ark of the Covenant business.’

‘As nearly as I can remember,’ said Dorinda, yawning a little, ‘the tables of stone were in the Ark of the Covenant, and—and—and—other things. I

can't think of them at the moment, but there *were* other things.'

'Don't be aggravating!' said Jill impatiently. 'You know, Dor, there are people who believe that the Ark was taken out of Palestine when the Assyrians overran the country. Miss Mather said as much last term, when we were doing that period in Scripture. So it might just as well be here as anywhere else, for those countries used to trade with Devon and Cornwall for tin.'

Dorinda tossed back her long dark mane, which was hanging loose about her shoulders.

'Associating with Toby Barrett has led to your catching her queer ideas. You can't go out together and turn up the whole of Devon and Cornwall on the off-chance.'

Gillian laughed. Her practical mind was asserting itself again over the wild dream-visions which Toby's company was apt to kindle. All the same, Toby had not discussed this particular idea with her, though plying her, as they weeded together, with various tales of the moor.

'Oh, it's nonsense, of course!' she said, 'but it's interesting nonsense, and she's an interesting girl to talk to if you'd only believe it.'

'I'm ready to take your word for it,' said Dorinda drily, 'but she annoys me, because you can't depend on her. I've no use for that sort of person. She'll never be any good to the school.'

'I think you're wrong,' answered Jill, 'but we'll see. Anyway, I'm going plant-hunting on the moor with her to-morrow. The Head says I may, and I hope to get some valuable things for my garden. I wish you'd come too, Dor.'

'Something better to do, thanks!' was her chum's brusque rejoinder, as she lay back on the pillows with her hands behind her head.

Punctually at two-thirty on Saturday afternoon, Gillian met Toby and Algernon near the head of Blackcombe Lane, a bridle-path too narrow for two to walk abreast, with high hedge-crowned banks converting it into a green tunnel.

'I haven't been as far as this before,' Jill observed, looking about. 'I came once with some other girls and Snaithie, when we were out botanizing, but she didn't take us beyond the lower bend. It comes out near Blue Tor Mire, doesn't it?'

Toby nodded.

‘It’s one of the old packmen’s paths, by which they brought their wool on mule-back across the moor to the towns. I’m always tempted to explore them, but I only know this one. People say it’s haunted.’

‘Who’s it haunted by?’ asked Jill, interested at once.

‘Oh, one of the old packmen, I suppose! They say you can hear him on Midsummer Eve, running, running, up towards Blue Tor, but nobody knows what it’s all about. Come on, Jill! We have to climb the bank here, and squeeze through that gap in the hedge. Then we’ll find ourselves near the edge of the mire, and our quickest way is straight across it. I know the path.’

Gillian looked at her admiringly.

‘It isn’t every one I’d trust myself with on a Dartmoor bog, but you seem moor-wise, somehow. You know such a lot about it.’

‘I ought to,’ said Toby, laughing, ‘seeing I’ve grown up on it. Do you mind passing Algy to me, once I’m on the top? He does his best, but his legs are rather short for such steep bits.’

Gillian obediently handed up Algernon, who had been making frantic but fruitless efforts on his own account. He was a little inclined to resent her interference, though too gentlemanly to show it, except by one or two protesting grunts. After all, it made a chap look rather a fool to be picked up like a paltry Pekinese, and shoved over the bank. If those girls had only exercised a little patience, he knew he could have got up by himself; but at any rate they meant well, and they appeared to be going a very decent walk—he couldn’t have chosen a better himself—so there was no use fussing over trifles.

Jill, treading carefully in Toby’s footsteps, had arrived at the centre of the marsh, when her leader stopped, with a sudden exclamation, and stared across the expanse of coarse grass and rushes, shading her eyes with her hand.

‘What is it?’ asked Gillian, following the direction of Toby’s gaze.

In the distance, on the edge of the mire, but plainly to be seen from where they stood, was a small knot of three or four girls in holland frocks and shady straw hats. Though too far-off for the mauve-and-gold of their school colours to be visible, there was not a doubt that they were St. Githa’s girls, and (judging from their size) Lower Fifth people at that.

‘See them?’ asked Toby. ‘Look here, Jill! I’m not a prefect, nor, in the nature of things, am I likely to be; but if I were, I’d put a stop to Gay

Marsden and her lot making a playground of Blue Tor Mire. It's horribly unsafe for kids like that, who don't know their way about.'

'How do you know it's Gay Marsden?' asked Gillian sharply.

Toby coloured and looked confused.

'Oh, on general principles, of course!' she answered, with rather forced carelessness. 'It would be Gay, wouldn't it? and Nesta Pollard. I expect Number Three is Pen Jordan. They're very much hand-in-glove.'

'As to how Pen Jordan spends her Saturday afternoons,' said Jill grimly, 'I've nothing to do with it; but I'll deal faithfully with the others this evening! Why, they might get themselves bogged with the greatest of ease!'

'They might!' agreed Toby, in a rather peculiar tone, avoiding the Head-girl's eyes. 'They haven't seen us yet—at least, I don't think so. Do you want to go back and deal with them at once? It's hardly safe to leave them sporting in their innocence, especially after yesterday's rain.'

'I'll make it safe!' retorted Gillian. 'That is, I'll clear them off without wasting any of our valuable afternoon. Sound carries up here, doesn't it?'

And, making a megaphone of her hands, she called across the marsh in ringing tones:

'Hi! Nesta Pollard and Gay Marsden!'

The terrified starts given by two of the little group showed that Toby had guessed correctly, and the next moment they broke and scattered, without waiting for any further long-distance conversation. The two Seniors stood and watched them as they fled, till their lessening figures were hidden by a fold in the moor.

'That's all right!' observed Gillian, as she turned to follow Toby once more. 'I don't know whether they'll go straight back within bounds again—that may be too much to expect of the Lower Fifth—but, at any rate, they're safely out of the boggy region, and not likely to return.'

'No,' agreed Toby. 'They can't be sure where we're going to lurk, nor how long we're likely to be here. I don't think we need worry about them any more, but, if I were you, I'd put a stop to this little practice all the same.'

Gillian glanced at her keenly.

'Is it a practice?' she inquired. 'I mean, have you ever seen any of them here before?'



Toby reddened again with embarrassment.

‘I never said so,’ she replied evasively. ‘Now, Jill, we’re off the mire, and it’s just round here that I thought we might find some roots or cuttings. To begin with, here’s the sweet gale that Snaithie was talking about in the botany class a little while ago. I thought we might take some slips of that.’

Gillian allowed herself to be diverted from the question of *Vb*’s misdeeds, and gave her whole attention to the matter in hand, but she made a mental note, nevertheless, that this was yet another incident which contained more than met the eye, and determined that one mystery should be solved before she went to bed that night.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BLUE TOR CLEFT

Toby had chosen a good hunting-ground for their purpose, and, before it was time to stop for tea, Gillian had got a very fair selection of plants in her basket, over which she paused to gloat exultantly.

‘I think it’s rather a shame to take the butterfly orchis,’ said Toby doubtfully, as she examined their spoils. ‘We got it on the edge of the mire, you know, and I don’t believe it’ll grow except in sodden ground like that. You can’t keep the garden wet enough.’

‘Don’t you remember that marshy bit under the old willow, which never dries up properly?’ said Gillian. ‘Miss Musgrave thinks there must be a spring or something there, and I mean to try the buckbean in that corner, as well as the orchises. What about having our tea, now, Toby? I’m more than ready.’

Toby smiled mysteriously.

‘I’m going to take you to a very special place for tea. I don’t suppose any one else has had a meal there for over two thousand years—at least, I don’t think any one has found it out but me. I’ve never seen traces of anybody else.’

Gillian’s eyes grew round.

‘You are certainly a most exciting person to go out with! Take me to this wonderful place quickly! How did you discover it?’

‘Algy and I found it on one of our rambles—at least, he did, for he bolted into it after a rabbit. We often find queer things, but never anything to equal this. I didn’t know what it was till I saw a photograph of one very like it, which was taken in another part of the moor; then I knew. But almost the most exciting part of this is the way into it.’

She led her guest across a long smooth stretch of level turf on the shoulder of the hill, till they reached the massive pile of granite rocks which formed the tor itself. They had walked right up to it before a sharp twist in their path revealed to Gillian that the rock was not a solid heap, as it appeared from below. There was a narrow cleft or gash in it, scarcely wider

than the packman's path of Blackcombe Lane, and into this Toby led her, while Algernon ran gaily on ahead as though he knew the way.

'Are we walking straight into the tor?' exclaimed Gillian, with a thrill of amazement in her voice.

Toby laughed triumphantly.

'That's just about what we are doing. There! what do you think of my find?'

The cleft had curved suddenly, opening into a small green space in the very heart of the tor, whose walls rose up around it, clothed in fern, with a couple of stunted rowans jutting out of their rocky sides. The whole place was roughly twenty yards in diameter, and in the centre was a ring of tumbled stones, with a gap which had once served for entrance, on the side facing the cleft.

Gillian stood still and stared.

'What a weird spot!' she said in awed tones. 'Is that a hut-circle? I've seen them in other parts of the moor.'

Toby nodded.

'Yes. Some early Briton—one of the "old men"—must have found my secret first. It was *his* secret then, and he built his home here. It must have been a beautifully secure place in those days, when wild beasts roamed the moor. One man could easily "keep the wolf from the door", if it tried to enter by this narrow cleft. And his human enemies would have found it as hard to get at him, for there's no way over the rocks from outside. They're much too sheer, without a foothold anywhere.'

'What did he live on?' asked Jill. 'Your early Briton, I mean.'

'Rabbits, I expect, and roots, and fish from the bog, which must have been a lake in those days—they say all these mires were, originally. And there's a spring over there, in the corner, which disappears below the rock somehow, so he didn't lack for water. Probably he kept sheep out on the hill.'

'And we're going to have tea in his house?' said Gillian.

'Yes—this was his hearthstone, and his cook-hole, but we're not going to cook. I've brought a thermos, and hard-boiled eggs, besides splits and cakes, and some cherries.'

‘And a pot of thick cream!’ cried Jill. ‘Toby, it’s the height of luxury to have tea with you in the heart of a tor! Do ask me again, some day.’

Toby smiled as she spread a gaily-flowered paper ‘cloth’ on a flat stone and began to arrange the feast.

‘Rather!’ she said. ‘I’ve never brought anybody here before, and I never would bring any one with whom I wasn’t very pally, no matter how nice they might be. I could ask Jane, when I get to know her better, or Pen Jordan—I like that kid.’

‘Or Dorinda?’ suggested Gillian, watching her face.

Toby’s ready flush rose, but she answered firmly:

‘Not Dorinda, unless I was quite sure she had learnt to like me.’

‘H’m! Perhaps not,’ agreed Jill. ‘It wouldn’t be much fun here, with Dorinda on her high horse. (No—another sandwich, please, if I may.) Did you go to her again about the tennis, as I told you?’

Toby munched her hard-boiled egg in silence for a moment, then she said reluctantly:

‘Yes, I went to her yesterday afternoon, just before I started for home, and I said what you told me to say, because I thought you probably knew the best way with Dorinda, being her chum. But I didn’t think it would be any good, and it wasn’t.’

‘You mean she refused to try you again?’

‘Point-blank. She said, if my excuse had been a decent one, I’d have given it at once, and so I wasn’t reliable, and she couldn’t risk my letting the school down a second time.’

It was Gillian’s turn to sit silent, for she was feeling irritated with her friend, yet was too loyal to show her irritation to a third person—even to such a ‘decent’ third person as Toby Barrett. So, when she did speak, she merely said:

‘Dorinda’s a bit pig-headed at times, but she’ll come round soon.’

‘Will she?’ asked Toby dubiously, tossing a bit of egg to Algernon. ‘I don’t know. Anyhow, I could never have hoped to play for the school in my first term, if it hadn’t been for that Lil Peterson business, so I oughtn’t to grouse about it, now that I’m back where I was before.’

‘You’re not grouching,’ protested Jill warmly, ‘and, of course, you wouldn’t mind if it hadn’t all arisen out of a misunderstanding. That’s what gives you an injured feeling.’

‘I haven’t got one,’ said Toby hastily. ‘I loathe the people who have injured feelings! Take some cream on that thing. It looks dry.’

But some one else had an injured feeling, and at this juncture he said so.

‘What on earth,’ demanded Algernon disgustedly, ‘makes you give me egg when you know I never touch it? Where’s that shortbread Cook made yesterday? I saw you getting it out just now—yes—on that plate there.’

Toby supplied his wants, and filled their guest’s cup with what was left in the thermos.

‘When you come to think of it,’ she said cheerfully, ‘I’ve got very little to complain of. School’s simply ripping, and you can’t imagine how jolly it is having other girls to work and play with. I wasn’t exactly lonely at Stepside, because there was always so much to do—besides lessons, I mean. I had Algy and Blackberry, and I made friends with the moor people. But I had a sort of feeling, all the time, as if something was being left out, and I couldn’t be like other girls if I didn’t know any to be like. Now everything’s quite complete, and you’d hardly know me from anybody else, would you?’

She looked anxiously at Jill, who threw back her head and roared with laughter.

‘My dear Toby,’ she said, when she had recovered herself sufficiently to wipe her eyes and accept a cake; ‘let me tell you at once, so as to avoid all future disappointment, that you’ll never be exactly like other people, so it isn’t a particle of use trying. I don’t know, either, why you should want to,’ she added kindly. ‘It’s much nicer to be a little different, when it’s a nice kind of difference—and it is with you.’

Toby looked unconvinced.

‘At any rate,’ she said, ‘I can go on trying to cut myself out according to the pattern, and perhaps some day I’ll succeed.’

Then Gillian asked one of her abrupt, searching questions.

‘Which pattern?’ she asked. ‘Not Dorinda’s? My dear idiot, you’re as different as chalk from cheese, and I’m very glad of it! Think how boring it would be for me to have both my friends made alike! But you’re cut out already, thank goodness! and I don’t believe you can spoil yourself much in

the making-up. Tell me some more about this hut-circle and the “old men”. What is that raised strip at the side there with the crazy paving on it?’

‘That was their family bed,’ replied Toby, always ready to talk about what interested her. ‘And that lumpy stone in the middle with the round hole was where they stuck in the centre pole which supported their roof. When this hut was in its prime it must have looked rather like a bee-skep.’

‘No chance of your friend, Jeremiah, having lived here?’ suggested Gillian, with one of her quick, penetrating looks.

Toby met it unflinchingly.

‘I shouldn’t think so. I doubt if this circle is quite so ancient. Sure you won’t have anything more, Jill? Then I’ll give the last remaining cake to Algy.’

‘Look here, Toby,’ said Gillian, ‘you know I shan’t laugh at you, if that’s what you were afraid of yesterday—if that’s what made you shut up before the others, I mean, when we were in the gym. I’m far too much interested, and I want to know what you really did say to Rhoda Missenden about Jeremiah and the Ark of the Covenant.’

This time it was Toby who laughed.

‘You never seem to believe a single word I say, Jill! First, you wouldn’t believe that it was loitering on the moor that made me late for the Priorsford match, and now you doubt the answer I gave to Olive! It was quite true, but you’re right in thinking it wasn’t the whole of it. Like an ass, I let out to Rhoda that, if I won the Molyneux, I’d like to use the money in digging for the Ark of the Covenant, because I have an idea Jeremiah left it on Dartmoor. But as for hidden treasure——’

According to promise, Gillian did not laugh, but she could not help looking a trifle sceptical.

‘Treasure enough!’ she exclaimed. ‘But even supposing he did, how would you know where to dig?’

But apparently Toby had reached the limit of her confidences on the subject of Jeremiah and the Ark of the Covenant.

‘Oh, I don’t know!’ she answered carelessly. ‘It’s a mad scheme, I suppose, and Daddy says it would take far more money than I’m ever likely to possess, before one could start the search. I know he’s right, but it is interesting to think about it all the same.’

‘What put such a weird idea into your head?’ persisted Gillian.

Toby hesitated.

‘There’s a legend,’ she said, ‘which the moor people tell—what Kathleen would call a fairy-tale, I expect, but I always fancy there must be some fact even at the bottom of a fairy-tale. They say that a wise man from the East landed once, long ago, from the ships which had come into Otter’s Bay for tin, and he brought with him treasure from Solomon’s Temple and hid it somewhere on Blue Tor. They say he sank it in the mire, which was a lake then, and that if the mire could be drained and dug, we should find the Ark of the Covenant, because he sailed away and never came back for it again.’

‘Very remiss on the part of Jeremiah!’ laughed Gillian.

‘Yes,’ agreed Toby, ‘and a very risky place to leave it! Unless he was an uncommonly good diver, I don’t see how he ever hoped to get it out again.’

‘But it is a legend of hidden treasure, after all,’ mused Jill. ‘Rhoda’s tale wasn’t so inaccurate.’

‘I never told her that story,’ said Toby shortly. ‘She made it up. And you can’t talk about the Ark as if it was just ordinary treasure. To find that would be—something like the Holy Grail of Arthur’s days. Let’s pack up now, and move on. There’s rather a good menhir on the side of the hill facing over towards us at Applecleave. You might care to see it, if you’re really interested.’

## CHAPTER XIV

### DORINDA MAKES AMENDS

The four transgressors from *Vb* had a much less enjoyable afternoon than their elders, for the appearance of Gillian and Toby had completely spoiled their plans. They, too, had gone out picnicking, Penelope being the prime mover of the expedition, though each of the others brought contributions from their tuck-boxes. These stores they had concealed in a very private part of the woods behind St. Githa's, where they were well within their rights.

'We told Miss Ashley we were going to take our tea to Blackcombe Spinney,' said Gabrielle virtuously, 'so we'd better do so. But before we start in upon it, let's go on a bit further, and I'll show you the place where I fell into the bog when I got that golden asphodel.'

For Gay had told them the story of her adventure, and they were all keen to visit the historic spot.

They had hardly reached it, however, before discovery followed, and they scattered, as we have seen, to collect their forces again on the edge of the spinney.

'So that's that!' said Gay regretfully. 'And I hadn't nearly finished showing you things. We might have had a lovely afternoon prowling round if it hadn't been for those two. I can't imagine what took them there.'

'Probably they wanted to prowl round too,' said Pen. 'Toby Barrett has always been frightfully keen on the moor. But it's rather awkward for you that she should have turned up again when you were there.'

'Yes,' agreed Nesta. 'It was jolly sporting of Toby not to report you the first time, but I don't see how you can escape now. Gillian recognized us both. She called our names.'

'It's all right for me, of course,' said Pen—'some advantage in being a day-girl—and she didn't mention Amy's name—didn't see her, perhaps, since she was behind the rock at that moment—but I'm afraid you two are for it when Gillian gets back tonight.'

'If only she has a very good time up there herself,' said Amy Hammerton hopefully, 'she may forget all about us. Or, at least, come back



in such a good temper that she'll be willing to let us down gently.'

But Nesta made a sceptical grimace.

'That's not Gillian's way, as you ought to know from sad experience. Pen's right, I'm afraid. You may escape, but Gay and I are for it, right enough.'

'Then of course I am, too,' declared Amy loyally. 'I'm not such a mean skunk as to stand out. I wonder what she'll do about it.'

'Oh, well! We may as well go back and find the tea. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die! You'll know soon enough what she means to do about it.'

Nesta was right. After supper that evening a message summoned her with Gabrielle to the prefects' study, and Amy joined the devoted band as a matter of course. Only Dorinda and Jane were in the study with the Head-girl when they arrived. Olive Knighton was away on a week-end exeat, and Kathleen was practising.

'Amy, too?' asked Gillian, raising her eyebrows. 'Then I take it you know why I sent for you? I suppose Amy was the fourth figure who bolted to cover at once.'

'I was out of bounds with the others,' replied Amy stolidly, 'so I thought I'd better come.'

'Quite right,' said Gillian approvingly. 'But you were rather more than out of bounds, let me tell you! If I'd met you strolling about Priorscross, for example, I might have tackled the business myself. Priorscross is out of bounds, too, but it's not dangerous—not to the young and active, that's to say, who know how to dodge a sudden motor if it takes them unawares. Blue Tor Mire is another pair of shoes altogether.'

The culprits heard her with growing alarm. It was very evident that they were not going to get off lightly. Dorinda looked up with interest from her needlework, and Jane, writing letters beside the window at the other end of the room, laid down her pen for a moment.

Then Gillian made one of her sudden pounces.

'Is this a first offence?' she asked, 'or have any of you ever been up there before?'

Here was an unexpected and startling development. Nesta and Amy exchanged glances, but, with some confused idea of loyalty to Gabrielle,

they remained silent.

‘Well?’ asked the Head-girl impatiently. ‘You must know whether you’ve been there or not.’

Then Gay, always fearless, spoke out.

‘I don’t know about Pen Jordan,’ she said ‘and I don’t suppose it matters about her, seeing she’s a day-girl, but the others haven’t been there. I have. I took them to show the place.’

‘What place?’ demanded Gillian coolly.

But Gay felt she had answered as much as could be required of her, having made such a noble confession, and there was no point in gratifying the idle curiosity of prefects. Accordingly, she said no more.

Gillian shifted her tactics. She had been putting two and two together, but her queries were chiefly guided by a sort of instinct. She felt, somehow, that Toby was concerned with this affair, and she was determined to find out why.

‘When did you go up there before, Gay?’ she asked.

Gabrielle saw no harm in this question.

‘One Saturday morning, a week or two ago,’ she replied vaguely.

‘Was it the day of the Priorsford match?’

Dorinda’s cotton snapped suddenly, and she gave up all her attention to listening. What had Gay Marsden’s escapade to do with that unfortunate contest?

‘Yes, I believe it was,’ said Gay, equally surprised.

‘And you met Toby Barrett there?’

There was no answer for a moment, then Gabrielle said sulkily:

‘If you know all about it, why ask me? I suppose Toby told you this afternoon about her pulling me out of the bog, so there’s no use trying to hide it from you. I was getting flowers, and I did slip in. I own things might have been a lot worse than they were, if Toby hadn’t been there, or if she hadn’t got such strong muscles.’

‘That,’ said Gillian suavely, ‘is just one of the things I’ve been trying to prove to you—that it’s highly dangerous to break bounds up on the moor, and might lead to very serious trouble. As a matter of fact Toby said not a

word about it, but I had a kind of impression that to-day's visit wasn't your first. What beats me is why you ever went back again after such an experience, not to mention taking the others with you! That's why this strikes me as being too serious for me to deal with, and I mean to report you all to your form-mistress directly she arrives on Monday morning. Thanks. You may go.'

They obeyed, subdued and dismal, for this was far worse than they had feared. Miss Musgrave had not yet spent half a term at St. Githa's, but already the turbulent Lower Fifth were much less out of hand. The worst of it was that any attempt to resent their treatment and declare war on their new form-mistress seemed utterly out of the question. Miss Musgrave was strict—as strict as the Head herself—but she had no idea of being on anything but the friendliest terms with her form, and you couldn't (as Nesta Pollard put it) fight against that sort of person. So this affair of Blue Tor Mire had been their worst break for weeks, and—having learnt to know Miss Musgrave—they were not looking forward to Monday morning.

When they had gone, Gillian glanced across the room, and met Dorinda's eyes, but she said nothing. It was Jane who first broke the silence, with the result of her private deductions.

'Now we know,' she announced, 'what happened to Toby Barrett at the Priorsford match. You can hardly expect any one to be in good condition for really first-class tennis, after hauling a big hefty girl like Gay Marsden out of a bog! I should think poor old Toby was feeling pretty stiff and strained that afternoon.'

'Yes,' said Gillian. 'And we know now what delayed her on the moor. As for being unreliable—most people would have scratched altogether after such an experience, and allowed you to play the match short-handed as best you could. *She* turned up and did her bit.'

'If you ask me,' said Jane warmly, 'I think it was jolly sporting of her!'

Still Dorinda said nothing, and Gillian, knowing her, would have left it at that, but Jane wanted something more.

'Well, Dorinda, what are you going to do about it?' she demanded.

Then the games-captain looked up from her work with straight blue eyes, and gave the answer which Jill had expected, and which completely satisfied Jane.

'Do?' she said. 'Why, I'm going to apologize to Toby Barrett, the first chance I get on Monday morning, and after that I am going to play her in the

return match against Priorsford on our own ground, next Saturday. And if that turns out as satisfactorily as I've every reason now to hope, Toby shall have her tennis colours straightaway. Will that do, Jane?'

'Not bad,' admitted Jane approvingly. 'And I don't mind telling you that I shall feel a lot happier about that return match, with Toby for my partner. I didn't relish the prospect of Gay Marsden on the back line while I was playing net.'

'You wouldn't have had her there—after this,' observed Gillian grimly, 'unless I am very much mistaken in Miss Musgrave.'

'Then goodness only knows whom I should have had!' retorted Jane, 'so all's well that ends well.'

'We'll hope so,' replied Dorinda, 'but that rather depends on how the team plays on Saturday.'

Toby arrived at school on Monday morning entirely unaware of what was in store for her. Monday, for her, was a dull day, when Geography and Mathematics figured on her time-table out of all proportion to more interesting subjects. With her mind on the exports and imports of the Chinese Empire, she was rapidly changing her riding-kit for a clean holland frock, when Dorinda entered the cloak-room.

There was no one else there at the moment, Pen Jordan being one of those people who invariably cut their arrival as close as possible, while Toby preferred to be early. To the day-girl's astonishment, Dorinda walked straight up to her and held out her hand.

'I posted one of the kids in the drive to let me know when you got here,' she began in her usual abrupt fashion, 'because I wanted to apologize as soon as possible. I know all about what happened on the day we played Priorsford, and why you were late, and couldn't hit hard. Jill knows, too, and Jane, and all the Sixth, but of course it's mostly my affair. I'm most awfully sorry I turned you down as I did, Toby, and I hope you'll forgive me, and play for us again on Saturday. I'm afraid I've been treating you rottenly, but I never guessed the real reason.'

Toby gave up the vain attempt to knot her mauve-and-gold tie, and stared at the other girl in joyful bewilderment. Apparently, however, it was no dream. Dorinda really was smiling at her in a friendly, if half-hesitating, fashion, as though not quite certain how Toby would receive her overtures.

Toby received them with a queer one-sided smile, when she actually realized what it all meant, and said shyly, but generously,

‘Of course you couldn’t guess. It wasn’t the sort of explanation that would occur to any one to accept on the spur of the moment, and I wasn’t much surprised that you rather loathed the sight of me for a bit. Are—are you really going to try me for the tennis team again? But how did you—I mean, how did you come to know, now, that I couldn’t help it?’

‘That young wretch, Gay Marsden, confessed to Jill that she had been on Blue Tor Mire before—or in it, rather—and that you had fished her out. And Jill, who can be quite bright when she likes, tumbled to it, somehow, and asked which day she’d been there before, and so it all came out. The only thing that puzzles me, Toby, is why you didn’t tell me the truth in confidence. You must have known that if you made me promise beforehand not to let it out I wouldn’t have got Gay into trouble.’

Toby hesitated. To the sarcastic and unfriendly Dorinda whom she had hitherto known it would have been impossible to explain her motives, but this new Dorinda was different. It might be possible to tell her things.

‘Well, you see,’ she said haltingly, ‘what Gay had done was pretty bad, and you’re a prefect, and it wouldn’t have been fair to bind you over to silence just on my account. And then Gay herself never knew how she had let me down with regard to the match—it never seemed to occur to her, somehow—and I found out that she was fearfully anxious to get Lil Peterson’s place in the team. I was conceited enough,’ with a sudden beaming smile, ‘to think that perhaps she mightn’t get it if you were satisfied with me! And even if you weren’t, I didn’t suppose she would be allowed to play when the Powers-that-be heard what she’d been doing!’

Dorinda gave her a curious look, more eloquent to those who understood than any words. But all she said was:

‘There’s the bell for prayers! We must fly!’

But she took Toby’s arm as they hurried upstairs.

## CHAPTER XV

### FRIENDS WITH DORINDA

Toby played in the return match on the following Saturday, and (with Jane Trevor's able assistance) helped very largely to win it. On the next Monday morning her name went up on the games-board as an authentic member of the school tennis team, and she assured Gillian rapturously that there was very little left to wish for in life, and that school was now absolutely perfect.

'Better be careful!' said the Head-girl, laughing. 'No state of perfection can possibly last, so if you expect that——'

'Oh, but I don't!' declared Toby cheerfully. 'I'm only rejoicing because it's perfect for the moment. Of course, drawbacks are bound to creep in, and one can't always keep on one's top-note, but it's very thrilling while one can.'

'Depends on the quality of the top-note!' remarked Dorinda, overhearing her; but there was no sting in Dorinda's sarcasm nowadays, and Toby was quick to appreciate the fact.

'I never thought of that,' she agreed, with a broad grin. 'It might have a different effect on the listeners. Sorry!—rotten simile! I apologize!'

'I don't think you need, Toby,' said Gillian kindly. 'At present your cockadoodling is too joyous to get on any one's nerves. Even the Head congratulated you on winning your colours during your first half-term. The thing's a miracle!'

'Oh no, it isn't!' said Dorinda. 'It's the logical result of playing singles constantly on a hard court against a good player. If Toby had spent her time footling at tennis, as most of us do in the holidays, she might still have some ambitions unfulfilled.'

'But I have—lots of them!' Toby assured her warmly. 'Only, I think you're right about hard work being the best means of getting them fulfilled.'

'It isn't, always,' said Dorinda, rather sadly. 'You need something else, at times, to give you a start.'

Gillian looked up quickly from the map she was drawing, for the conversation was going on in undertones during a spare half-hour in the

schoolroom. Miss Temple, who taught Geography as well as Maths, had been suddenly called away at the beginning of her class, and the Sixth were inclined to take it easy over the task which she had left them.

‘I know what you mean,’ said Jill, and explained for Toby’s benefit. ‘Dorinda wants to be an artist, and she can paint, too! But hard work won’t take her all the way towards *her* ambition.’

‘But if she’s got talent as well,’ said Toby, looking puzzled, ‘it ought to do a good bit for her.’

Gillian opened her lips to explain, and then hesitated, but Dorinda broke in proudly,

‘I don’t mind Toby knowing that it’s the usual trouble—lack of money to train properly. You see, I’ve got brothers coming on, and they cost a lot to launch, and art is rather an uncertain career.’

Toby bent over her map thoughtfully, and drew in silence for a moment. Then she said:

‘It’s all right if you get on, but you can’t do that without a start. I suppose, when you leave school, you ought to work in some one’s studio up in town, and learn all sorts of things that we can’t be taught at school.’

‘That’s it,’ said Dorinda, ‘but I can’t.’

‘Perhaps Toby can give you a tip about how to get trained for twopence-ha’penny,’ suggested Gillian. ‘Her father’s an artist, so she ought to know.’

‘Is he?’ cried Dorinda, looking up with a sudden light of interest in her eyes. ‘What? Not Mortimer Barrett, the moor artist? Great snakes we’ve been entertaining an angel unawares! Did you know this before, Jill?’

‘Only that he was a well-known artist,’ replied Jill vaguely. ‘Judging from your excitement, though, he seems to be rather specially well known.’

‘I should think he is! to every one except an absolute ignoramus like your miserable self! Why, he’s an R.A., and all kinds of things, and yet Toby—Toby can’t even draw this map decently!’

Toby grinned again, as little moved as was Gillian by the insults hurled at their heads.

‘Oh, I’m no genius!’ she assented modestly. ‘No picture of mine will ever be bought for the nation. But it’s not my career that’s under discussion at present. What sort of things do you want to paint, Dorinda? Figures, or landscapes, or what?’

‘Landscape,’ replied Dorinda dreamily. ‘Not just the ordinary sort, of course—something like Turner.’

‘It’s always as well,’ said Jill, with gentle sarcasm, ‘to aim as high as possible. You never know what you may hit.’

But Toby saw nothing strange in Dorinda’s ambitions.

‘There’s many a true word spoken in jest,’ she observed, ‘and what you say is perfectly true, Jill. Why shouldn’t Dorinda paint like Turner, some day? After all, Turner, and Corot, and all those people were once at the very beginning, just as she is.’

‘But I don’t wish to paint in Turner’s style,’ protested Dorinda, ‘nor in any one else’s but my own. What I meant was—I want to get new effects, as he did—put a new interpretation on landscape.’

‘Well! of all the amazing cheek——’ murmured Gillian, but Miss Temple’s return put an end to their conversation, and work went on in good earnest.

Toby, however, thought things over, and that afternoon, as she walked up from the cricket-field with Dorinda, she asked suddenly:

‘Would you like me to tell Daddy about you, Dor? Of course, I don’t know if he could help, but it’s worth while consulting him at any rate. And if he can’t help, he can probably give advice.’

A sudden light sprang into Dorinda’s eyes.

‘Oh, Toby! do you think he would? There’s no earthly reason why he should bother, but perhaps, if you just told him—he might suggest something——’

Knowing how averse her easygoing father was from ‘bother’ of any description, Toby dared not promise too much, but that evening, when the light had faded beyond all possibility of any work being done in the studio, she opened the subject.

‘I want your professional advice, Daddy,’ she announced. ‘Not for myself, of course, but for a girl at school, who wants to be an artist, and doesn’t know how to set about it. How can people get an art training if they haven’t got any money?’

‘Can’t be done!’ replied Mortimer Barrett promptly, as he lit a well-earned pipe.



‘Aren’t there scholarships or things like that for some of the big art schools?’

‘Certainly. But *some* training is required before you can go up for anything of that sort—unless your friend is that unusual kind of person—a heaven-born genius.’

‘I shouldn’t think so,’ said Toby doubtfully. ‘But she can paint jolly well, and she’s very keen to make a career of it.’

Mortimer Barrett groaned.

‘Again—it requires a heaven-born genius. What’s she want to paint?’

‘Landscape,’ answered Toby promptly, ‘with a new interpretation on it, as Turner did—only quite different from Turner, or any one else.’

Her parent’s comment on this was much the same as Gillian Ewing’s.

‘Your young friend’s cheek seems to be fairly colossal. The point is, what can she do to justify it?’

‘Can’t say,’ responded Toby cheerfully. ‘I don’t know enough about it, you see. But I do know that I like Dorinda awfully, and she’s the sort of girl who gets there. Don’t you think some people make you feel that more than others? Dorinda’s one of them. But if you saw the stuff she does, you’d be able to judge better, since it’s in your line.’ She eyed him warily, then proceeded, ‘So I’m thinking of asking her to tea next Saturday, and telling her to bring a few sketches for you to look at.’

‘Certainly not!’ exclaimed Mr. Barrett hurriedly. ‘I shall be sketching up on High Moor myself on Saturday at tea-time. I can’t afford to waste the light.’

‘You needn’t,’ said his daughter, still cheerful, but quite determined. ‘We’ll track you there, bringing tea, and while you have it, you can advise Dorinda. It won’t take you more than a couple of minutes, Daddy, but it’s got to be done.’

‘And why, pray?’ demanded her parent uneasily, for he recognized Toby’s tone.

‘Because,’ said Toby with firmness, ‘I’ve practically promised her you will. She thinks you’re a kind of oracle, and I suppose you are to any one who paints. She’s a special friend of mine, and I want you to help her.’

Mortimer Barrett resigned himself yet once more to the inevitable.

‘I suppose I must, for the sake of peace,’ he said plaintively. ‘You would be quite a nice child, Toby, if you weren’t so fond of doing people good turns at my expense. Before you went to school, it was any stray orphan you happened to pick up on the moor, or farm labourers down on their luck. Now you’ve transferred your activities to your schoolfellows, just when I was hoping to have a spell of rest and quiet.’

‘We’ll go back to the farm labourers and moor orphans in the holidays,’ Toby assured him consolingly. ‘If it wasn’t for me, Daddy, you would lead a life of selfish ease, wrapped up in your paints. You should be very thankful to me for taking you out of yourself. All right, then, that’s settled. Dorinda and I will meet you on High Moor at tea-time on Saturday—that is, if the Head will let her come.’

‘I hope she won’t!’ growled the persecuted artist.

‘Oh, she’s sure to! Jill Ewing got permission without any trouble two weeks ago. We’ll be there.’

Next morning at school she proposed her plan to Dorinda, and was surprised as well as pleased by the enthusiasm with which it was received. She realized more than ever how much Dorinda’s heart was set on this hope of becoming a landscape painter, though Dorinda herself talked very little to her schoolfellows about her ambition. Only Jill, and now Toby, had any idea of its depth and strength.

‘She’ll manage it somehow,’ declared Gillian with conviction. ‘She’s a fearfully determined person.’

‘I know,’ said Toby soberly, ‘but even if she finds her way to the top of the tree at last, how is she going to live till she gets there? Daddy says he would have starved as a young man if he’d had nothing but his art.’

‘She’ll manage,’ repeated Jill, ‘if she has to go out charring in her spare time to pay for paints and brushes. But I’m hoping your father may be able to help her. That was one reason why I wanted you two to make friends. I knew he was a successful artist, though I didn’t understand how famous he was till Dorinda went off the deep end about him the other day.’

Toby was silent for a few minutes; then she suddenly announced:

‘I’ve got a—a scheme! I shan’t say anything about it yet, even to you, because it may not come off; but I’ll do my best to work it, and if it does—well, you never know!’

‘Is it to do with Dorinda’s career?’ asked Gillian curiously.

Toby nodded.

‘Yes—but don’t tell her. I promise you’ll hear all about it first, if I think it’s going to function. If it doesn’t, there’s no need for any one to be disappointed except me.’

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE INNERMOST SECRET

As Toby had foretold, Miss Ashley made no difficulty about allowing Dorinda to spend the following Saturday with her on the moor. They had asked for the whole day, there being no cricket-practice that morning, on account of a match which the Juniors were playing against a team of small girls from a local day-school.

‘We’ll have lunch in the secret place to which I took Jill,’ said Toby mysteriously, ‘and afterwards I’ve got something to show you, which she didn’t see—something which I’ve never shown anybody else before.’

‘It sounds thrilling!’ commented Dorinda. ‘Jill told me nothing about the secret place—I suppose because it *was* secret—but I know she enjoyed herself awfully.’

‘I hope you will, too,’ said Toby, eyeing her thoughtfully. ‘I think, perhaps, you may.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder!’ Dorinda assented, laughing. ‘But a lot depends on your father, and whether he thinks my sketches worth while.’

The two girls had met at Toby’s usual trysting-place—the head of Blackcombe Lane—and under her arm Dorinda carried a small brown portfolio with shabby leather covers.

‘Yes, I’ve got them here,’ she said in answer to Toby’s questioning glance, ‘but I shan’t open the case until I show them to him. No, you don’t understand—it’s not swankiness—far otherwise! If I undid them now to let you look at them, I should probably tear them up in a panic, and he’d never see them at all!’

‘Don’t be an ass!’ said Toby bluntly, who knew something of the artistic temperament, though she did not share it, and believed in plain common sense as a good antidote. ‘A lot of use that would be to your career!’

‘I don’t expect I shall ever have one,’ said Dorinda despondently. ‘There are too many things against it.’

Toby, though she did not show it, was considerably astonished at this side of her friend’s character. It was so different from the brisk capable

games-captain, or the level-headed prefect on whom her schoolfellows were accustomed to rely.

‘You don’t talk like that on the playing-field,’ she remarked. ‘We shouldn’t win many matches if you did.’

‘That’s very different!’ retorted Dorinda scornfully. ‘There I’ve got a team behind me, and a good picked one too. There’s nothing to do except play up. But when it comes to my career (as you and Jill call it) I must stand or fall by my own merits.’

‘Of course it’s different,’ assented Toby, ‘but you can play up there too. If Daddy, when he’s seen your sketches, thinks you might have a career, we must manage to overcome the things that are against it.’

Dorinda trudged on in silence, feeling that Toby, kind and sympathetic though she was, knew very little of her difficulties. How should she? But Toby, who was pursuing her own line of thought, asked presently:

‘You’re not needed at home, are you—after you leave school, I mean? Your people could spare you to go away somewhere and train?’

‘Oh yes!’ answered Dorinda readily. ‘That isn’t the trouble. But even if I got into some art school free (which couldn’t possibly happen), I should have to live in rooms or a hostel or something, and there’s no money to pay for that either. You see, Toby, all the playing up in the world can’t overcome difficulties like mine.’

‘I do see it won’t be easy,’ Toby admitted soberly, ‘but we’ll put our heads together—you and Daddy and I—and between us we’ll find a way out.’

‘Provided he thinks I’m worth while,’ amended Dorinda.

‘Oh, of course! There’s no good wasting time over it, if you’re only a brilliant amateur. But I feel quite sure you’re more than that.’

‘Why?’ asked Dorinda, in her usual abrupt fashion.

Toby laughed and shook her head.

‘Because you’re the sort of person who would be,’ she answered. ‘Here we are on Blue Tor, and close by the entrance to my secret place! Shall I blindfold you and lead you in?’

But Dorinda, as was in keeping with her character, chose to go open-eyed into her adventure, and her delight, when she found herself within the Tor, satisfied even Toby.

‘Now you and Gillian know my secret,’ she said, ‘and some day, I think, I may show it to Jane. But there’s an inner part of it which I’m keeping entirely for you, and you’ll see it after we’ve had lunch. Let’s start in on that at once. Algy and I are hungry, if you’re not.’

‘Oh, but I am!’ exclaimed Dorinda. ‘Besides, the sooner it’s finished, the sooner we’ll get on to the next bit of your secret. You’re the most exciting person, Toby—full of surprises! But what makes you keep the innermost part for me?’

Toby, who was busily unpacking the picnic basket under Algernon’s interested and approving supervision, sat back on her heels, and looked up at Dorinda with candid eyes.

‘Because I like you best of all,’ she replied simply. ‘I always have, from the first moment I saw you in the Sixth Form classroom, at the very beginning of the term.’

Dorinda reddened with embarrassment, and her gaze dropped.

‘I don’t know why,’ she protested. ‘I’ve been a good deal of a beast to you since you came to St. Githa’s. You’ve had small reason to like me.’

Toby considered this.

‘Perhaps I have,’ she admitted frankly, ‘but that doesn’t seem to make any difference. I expect you’ve noticed that yourself. If one likes anybody—really seriously, I mean—it doesn’t matter very much what they do. One has to go on liking them, however painful the process may be,’ and she laughed a trifle ruefully, as she recalled moments when her liking for Dorinda had certainly given her more pain than pleasure.

The other girl stared at her in silence for a moment, then she said unexpectedly:

‘I do know exactly what you mean, though I’ve never heard any one put it into words before. I think it’s because, when you like some one very much, you like them straight through their surface nastiness into their real selves behind. I only hope,’ she added awkwardly, ‘you’ll find my real self worth bothering about.’

Toby sprang up with a delighted little skip, which upset the sausage rolls, whereupon Algernon at once availed himself of the opportunity.

‘Oh, I know it is!’ she cried. ‘Aren’t you proving it now by understanding what I mean, instead of telling me I’m queer and different?’

Algernon! you hound of evil! Well, you've chosen to help yourself to your share, so that's all you need expect to get.'

Algernon winked quietly to himself as he finished the sausage roll. Knowing his mistress, the threat did not alarm him unduly, for past experience had convinced him that he was the stronger character of the two.

When the meal was finished, Toby did the honours of the hut-circle and its surroundings, while Dorinda looked and listened with deepening interest.

'It's queer to think of all these ancient places scattered over the moor, so close to our modern everyday school,' she said. 'Yet once, when the "old men" lived in them, they must have seemed just as ordinary and commonplace as any cottage in Priorsford.'

'They did, of course,' agreed Toby. 'But now I'm going to show you something which never has been, and never will be, commonplace. I only found it last year, and I don't believe anybody else ever has.'

As she spoke, she paused under the larger of the two rowans, which grew straight out from the rock-face before taking their natural bend upwards and sunwards. With a light spring she caught the strong slender trunk, and swung herself up into the crook of it; then, edging in towards the little cliff, she suddenly disappeared through the solid granite—or so it seemed to Dorinda, watching in astonishment below.

'Come on!' called her laughing voice from some place of concealment, and the other girl, following, found herself peering into a high narrow slit, out of which the rowan-tree appeared to be growing.

'Toby!' she cried. 'Where on—or in—earth have you got to?'

'Come and see!' answered Toby, and the flash of a powerful torch lit up the dark recesses of a small cave.

'There's plenty of light from the opening, after you've got accustomed to being out of the strong sunshine,' she explained, as Dorinda joined her, 'but I brought the torch because I want to show you something back here, which can't be seen without it. And that,' she added, her fresh voice dropping to a tone of awe, 'is the innermost part of my secret.'

Impressed, though she hardly knew why, Dorinda bent forward, and followed the torch's slowly-moving beam over the surface of a smooth piece of stone, on which some strange characters had been roughly carved by a blunt tool a very long time ago. Awed in her turn, and considerably puzzled, Dorinda exclaimed:

‘It’s like Arabic writing, but who can have done it here, in the middle of a Dartmoor tor?’

Toby looked at her oddly.

‘It’s not Arabic,’ she said, ‘though that’s a good guess. It’s Hebrew, and it was done by some one who found this place, and hid something here, between two and three thousand years ago.’

Dorinda gave a startled gasp.

‘Jeremiah, after all!’ she cried. ‘But—but, Toby—how do you know? You can’t read Hebrew. It’s remarkable enough that you should even know it when you see it.’

‘I don’t,’ said Toby, ‘but Mr. Rushworth does. I copied it all down as carefully as I could—line by line, as you’d copy a drawing—and took it to him.’

‘And did he know what it meant?’ asked Dorinda eagerly.

Toby nodded.

‘Prepare for the most wonderful thing of all!’ she said. ‘He says it means, “Here I, Jeremiah, hid the treasure of the House of the Lord.”!’

Dorinda asked no more questions. Instead she sank down on a fragment of rock, just inside the entrance, and turned a little pale.

‘And to think,’ she said, ‘that only a fortnight ago we were ragging you about it in the gym! It seems almost—almost sacrilegious when one stands there and looks at that. But, Toby—are you sure? Who is Mr. Rushworth? Is he the Rector at Applecleave?’

Toby nodded again, and, switching off her torch, she came to sit beside Dorinda.

‘He’s an artist as well,’ she said, ‘and the funniest old dear you ever met. He always calls me Tabitha, and yet he’s one of my dearest friends, and almost the only person who doesn’t laugh at my ideas about the Ark of the Covenant.’

‘I should think he’s got good reason not to,’ declared Dorinda, with conviction, ‘if he translated that for you!’

‘Yes,’ said Toby slowly, ‘but he doesn’t know where I got it. Sometimes I feel rather mean and selfish not to show him, but I’ve never cared to bring any one here before—not even him—so he doesn’t know how ancient that



carving is. He just thinks some one has been trying to take me in with a clever hoax—some one who knows how much I believe in the old legend.’

‘What rot!’ cried Dorinda hotly. ‘How many practical jokers are highbrow enough to know Hebrew characters? But, as you say, he hasn’t seen them, and it must be hard for any one to believe in such a story just on hearsay.’

‘That’s partly why I’ve told no one but you,’ said Toby. ‘It isn’t a very believable tale, is it? But that’s not the only reason.’ She hesitated, then went on: ‘You’ll probably think I’m a jealous pig, Dorinda, but I don’t want any one to know, because I want so badly to be the first person who finds it. Wouldn’t it be marvellous? To be the one to find the Ark of the Covenant!’

‘I should think so!’ said Dorinda, with a gulp, ‘and I’m not the least surprised. I should feel just the same, myself. In fact, I think it’s frightfully decent of you to have shown even me. But I wish you could find it, Toby. It’s so tantalizing to know it’s somewhere in this very cave, and you can’t get it!’

‘That’s just it,’ said Toby, with a deep sigh. ‘If it was in an easy earthy place, where one only needed to dig! But you can see for yourself that there’s nothing softer than granite here. And where there is rock there has to be excavation with blasting, and all that sort of thing, and that needs money.’

‘And men to blast and excavate,’ added Dorinda.

‘Luckily we needn’t bother about the men,’ said Toby whimsically, ‘seeing we haven’t got the money.’

‘Is that why you’re so keen to win the Molyneux?’ asked Dorinda, struck with a sudden thought, but Toby shook her head.

‘I want to do something else with that, now, if I can only win it,’ she said; then regarded Dorinda with thoughtful eyes. ‘I should like to take you to tea at the Rectory,’ she observed irrelevantly. ‘You’d love Mr. Rushworth, and you’d like to see his paintings. Daddy thinks a lot of them. He says he might have gone far if he hadn’t preferred being a parson. And then he knows so much about old interesting things. Most of what I know about the moor I learnt from him. The church is awfully old, too, but he’s always regretting that the plate, which must have gone back (some of it) to Saxon times, disappeared in the days of the Civil War.’

‘Cromwell, of course!’ said Dorinda, who had no liking for that high-handed dictator.

Toby shook her head.

‘Mr. Rushworth says it would have been in the church records if Cromwell had bagged it. It’s a mystery that’s three hundred years old, so there’s not much hope of solving it now—but the Rector would love to have that plate! Come! it’s time we were getting down again, if we’re to go and find Daddy on High Moor. Poor old Algy must be perfectly sick of waiting for us there below.’

## CHAPTER XVII

### MISS MUSGRAVE'S DEPRESSION

When Dorinda got back to St. Githa's that evening, the girls were still scattered about the grounds, enjoying what remained to them of the glorious summer afternoon. Gillian, after a hard set played with Jane Trevor and two of the Upper Fifth, was resting in a hammock among the fir trees, and Dorinda, having found her, dropped on the grass at her side.

'I've got heaps to tell you, Jill,' she announced, in tones of suppressed excitement, as she tossed off her broad-rimmed panama.

Gillian sat up with a jerk which nearly upset the hammock.

'Oh, Dorinda! I am glad you're back, because I've been longing to know what was happening. First of all, tell me in a word, and quickly at that—is it all right?'

'If you mean—does Mr. Barrett think I'm good—well, he does!'

'Thank heaven for so much!' Gillian sank back again with a sigh of relief. 'Now, if you like, you can begin at the beginning, and go straight on.'

Dorinda complied, and gave her impressions of Blue Tor and its hut-circle, though she said nothing about the cave with its strange inscription. Jill listened and commented, but her main interest was still centred in the artist, and what he had said about her friend's sketches. The citadel of the Blue Tor could be discussed more fully afterwards.

'He was painting on High Moor when we got to him,' said Dorinda, coming at last to what Jill regarded as the main point, 'and he hardly seemed to know we were there at first. The picture is only in its early stages, but already you can see it's going to be beautiful. We stood and watched for a few minutes, and then Toby spoke to him, and told him that we'd have tea ready in no time, so he might as well stop and attend to us.'

Gillian laughed.

'Sounds like Toby! And did he?'

'Well, he grumbled a bit in a good-natured way, but presently he gave in, and Toby made me show him my sketches while she unpacked the basket.'

'Did you shiver in your shoes?' asked Jill sympathetically.

Dorinda smiled faintly at the memory of her own fright.

‘My hands were shaking so, that I could hardly unstrap my case,’ she confessed. ‘It seemed as though such a lot hung on it, you know, Gillian.’

‘Well—and didn’t it?’

Dorinda’s dark brows puckered doubtfully.

‘Not as much as I—hoped. At least, it doesn’t seem to me now that I’m much further on.’

‘Do you mean he had nothing to suggest?’

‘Nothing much. I expect that’s why I feel—not exactly disappointed, but—you know what I mean.’

And Jill, who had not been Dorinda’s chum three years for nothing, did know.

‘Let’s hear what he said,’ she urged, hiding her own disappointment. ‘You don’t look very downcast after all.’

The passing cloud melted from her friend’s face, and her eyes shone again.

‘Oh, I’m not! At first he looked at my things very politely, but not as though he was in the least interested. Then, suddenly, he seized first one and then another, and began to criticize it so fiercely that I should have wilted altogether, if I hadn’t felt that, at any rate, he wasn’t bored any more. Besides, I could see that, the more he fell upon me, the better pleased Toby looked, so I took her face for a sort of barometer. By the time he had finished she was positively beaming, and though he had been wiping the heather with me a minute before, she said, “Then you do think she’s good, Daddy? You believe she’s well worth training?”’

‘And what did he say?’ asked Gillian breathlessly.

‘I could hardly credit my own hearing, but he said—oh, Jill!—he said, “Worth training? Haven’t I just told you the girl’s got more than a spark of genius? So of course it must be fanned.” He certainly hadn’t told us anything the least like it, but I was too overjoyed to contradict him, and Toby didn’t seem at all surprised. But I suppose she’s used to his ways.’

‘But if the spark’s to be fanned—and I never doubted it was there—’ said Jill loyally, ‘what’s he going to do about it?’

Dorinda shook her head.

‘Nothing, apparently—not yet, anyhow. That’s where the disappointment comes in. He says there’s plenty of time, and when I’m ready to leave school we’ll have to see about it. But it all sounds rather vague—as if nothing much was likely to come of it.’

But Gillian refused to be damped.

‘Leave it to Toby,’ she said. ‘She’ll see something comes of it. You know now, on good authority, that your work’s worth while, and after all you can’t do anything really drastic about it till you leave school.’

And recognizing the truth of this, Dorinda cheered up. Perhaps she too felt that Toby was a force to be reckoned with, and that, when the proper time came, she would rouse her father to action. Then Jane and Olive joined the group under the fir trees, and conversation became more general.

‘Miss Musgrave has got a visitor staying with her,’ observed Dorinda casually. ‘I took the bus home from Priorscross, and they passed while I was waiting for it. I wonder if she’s Ursula Grey, the ’cellist Toby was talking about.’

‘I should have known her if I’d been with you,’ said Jane eagerly. ‘I heard her play at the Queen’s Hall in the Christmas holidays, and she was perfectly marvellous. Is she a friend of Miss Musgrave’s?’

‘They were at school together at the Jane Willard. Yes, it must have been Miss Grey,’ said Gillian. ‘I heard her tell Toby yesterday that she was expecting her, but only for a day or two. Miss Musgrave once promised she’d ask Toby to tea when Miss Grey came, because she’s so cracked about her playing, but evidently it won’t be this time. I expect she’s going again on Monday.’

Olive lay back on the grass, and tilted her hat over her eyes.

‘I like Miss Musgrave,’ she announced. ‘She’s a sport, and she’s thrown away on the Lower Fifth. I wish we had her for our form-mistress instead of Miss Mather.’

‘Oh, Miss Mather’s all right!’ protested Jane. ‘But I know what you mean, of course. I daresay Miss Musgrave wouldn’t be sorry to part from *Vb*, for she’s been looking pretty fagged of late, and probably she’s had enough of them.’

Gillian laughed.

‘She may be fagged with the heat, but she loves *Vb*—she told me so the other day—and certainly they’ve been almost civilized since she took them

over. When I think of last term, I sometimes feel, speaking as a prefect, that it's too good to be true!'

'I expect it is,' said Dorinda sagely, tossing her long dark plait over her shoulder. 'They can't keep it up for long. Some day the pressure will prove too great, and they'll go off bang! And then, woe betide whoever's in charge of them! for it won't happen while Miss Musgrave's on duty.'

She forgot her careless prophecy as soon as it was uttered, but before next week was over it was to be abundantly fulfilled. Perhaps the Lower Fifth had actually reached the limits of their virtue, or perhaps their form-mistress allowed her firm grasp to relax a little. Whatever the cause, there seemed to be a spirit of mischief abroad, and Miss Musgrave was certainly less ready than usual to cope with it. She had lost her colour, and with it something of her gay spirits, and though she tried to be as lively as usual, the more discerning among the Seniors noticed that it was an effort, and that she appeared to have a weight on her mind.

Her own form, however, had not arrived at the discerning age. They merely grasped that she was more absent, less alert than usual, and proceeded promptly to take advantage of the fact.

At first their breaches were fairly trivial, such as mild outbursts of ragging during school-hours, and other small annoyances, which might have been expected (as Miss Musgrave scathingly informed them) from the Juniors, but did no credit to Lower Fifth intellect, such as it was.

'Very well, then!' said Gay Marsden privately to her followers, who were naturally ruffled by this sarcasm. 'We'll just show her what the Lower Fifth *can* do when it uses its intellect! To-morrow is Midsummer Day, so we'll hold revels to celebrate it. That's a good old custom, and it shouldn't be allowed to lapse.'

The others giggled their approval, and waited for a further lead. Gabrielle had never yet failed them, and she did not do so now.

'As a matter of fact,' she went on, as the idea took shape in her quick brain, 'we couldn't have chosen a better day, for the Head is going to Exeter by the early bus, and won't be back till late, which removes one hindrance to our plans.'

'But what are the plans?' asked Amy Hammerton, who liked to have everything cut and dried.

'To begin with,' said Gay firmly, 'we'll help ourselves to a half-holiday. It's our due on Midsummer Day, and we're going to have it. We'll get some

food together somehow—what our combined tuck-boxes can't produce, somebody must slip out into the village and buy.'

'I'd better do that,' interposed Pen, 'then there won't be so much danger about it. Send the hat round before I go home this afternoon, and I'll bring back whatever you want when I come to school to-morrow morning.'

'That's much the best way,' said Nesta approvingly. 'But where are we going to eat the food when we've got it, Gay? We can't very well take a half-holiday and remain within reach of Miss Musgrave.'

'Of course not,' assented Gabrielle, and then hesitated. 'There are heaps of places we could go to,' she said, 'but perhaps we'd better not go out of bounds again. Gillian was so extremely snarky about it last time.'

'Then it will have to be Blackcombe Spinney again,' said Amy. 'Our own private part.'

'The whole wood will be private to-morrow,' pointed out Pen, 'as far as the school is concerned, anyway. I don't suppose anybody else will be taking the afternoon off.'

'Then you can bring your fiddle,' said Gay, 'and we'll do country dancing in the little dell. We can have competitions, too, and prizes. The more I think of it the more ideas come to me. It's going to be a regular spree.'

'If it only keeps fine,' said Nesta anxiously. 'The mist was quite thick early this morning.'

'It was thicker over at Princetown,' observed Penelope, who usually supplied her form with news of the outside world. 'Daddy was called out about five o'clock to a farm over that way, and twice he drove the car right off the road on to the moor. He heard, too, that one of the convicts had escaped from the prison.'

'How thrilling!' exclaimed one of her form-mates. 'Dr. Jordan might have met him. They never get right away though, do they? The warders always get them in the end.'

'Yes. Daddy says it's so hopeless that they don't often try it. I expect that poor soul has been caught and taken back long ago.' Pen gave a little shiver. 'I never drive with him when he goes near Princetown. I hate to think of the convicts shut up in that awful dreary place, however much they may have deserved it!'

‘Yes,’ said Amy solemnly. ‘If I ever grew up to be a burglar, or anything like that, I’d much rather be hanged than sent to prison.’

The idea of stolid Amy doing anything so sensational was too much for her companions, and the meeting dissolved in a gale of laughter. Then Gabrielle, Nesta, and Pen retired into a quiet corner to discuss their arrangements for the following afternoon.

‘Miss Musgrave shan’t have to complain about our intellects again,’ declared Nesta with satisfaction, when the programme was finally drawn up and approved. ‘It’s only a pity we can’t ask her to join us!’

‘I can’t help thinking,’ observed Gay, ‘that it’s just the sort of spree she’d have loved when she was at school.’

‘Well, she’s not at school now—at least, not in the way you mean,’ said Pen. ‘And I don’t mind betting a good deal that she won’t love it in us.’

Gabrielle grinned.

‘Where ignorance is bliss, ’tis folly to be wise,’ she quoted. ‘She won’t know anything about it till afterwards.’

‘And then there’ll be the row of a lifetime,’ said Pen a trifle uneasily, but the other two reckless spirits refused to consider the dark possibilities of the future.

‘You can’t have fun without paying for it,’ they told her philosophically. ‘The great thing is to take good care that it’s worth paying for while you have it.’



## CHAPTER XVIII

### MIDSUMMER REVELS

If Miss Musgrave had been her ordinary self next morning, she would certainly have realized that there was something brewing in *Vb*. Mademoiselle was never observant, and Miss Temple, who took them for Algebra, always expected the worst from the Lower Fifth, and was only agreeably disappointed when she failed to get it. Their own form-mistress, however, was usually quick to scent mischief, and equally swift to nip it in the bud, so it was more than a little surprising that their fidgeting, idling, and outbursts of senseless giggles met with no more than an irritable reproof, or an order-mark.

One or two would have liked to see how much further they could go on such easy terms, but were repressed by Gabrielle and Nesta. What were petty encounters over English literature or history, compared with the orgy of lawlessness which had been arranged for the afternoon? The minds of their leaders were soaring far above trifles, and were not inclined to tolerate them.

At two-thirty, when the bell rang for afternoon prep, the Lower Fifth were far from the shady classroom where their books awaited them. They were in the deeper shade (both morally and physically) of Blackcombe Spinney, and their revels were just about to commence.

There was nothing, after all, very thrilling or original in the entertainment which Gay and her lieutenants had planned, but it went with a zest because it was so entirely illegal. The truants laughed and danced and played till they were utterly exhausted, and glad to sink down on the moss and consider the provisions which (with Pen Jordan's additions bought early that morning in Priorscross) they had brought along in paper bags and packages. They had each carried her share, and piled it, till wanted, on a flat boulder on the edge of the tiny glade where their entertainment was being held.

'Come on!' said Nesta Pollard. 'I'm starving! There's no tea, but Pen bought some packets of lemonade and other stuff at the grocer's. You each fill your own cup at the stream through there, and then empty some of this powder into it. Pen's tried it before, and it fizzes up like anything.'

‘But what about food?’ asked Amy anxiously. ‘Did you manage to get anything decent?’

‘Rather!’ returned Penelope with conscious pride. ‘I thought I’d try to find something more out of the common than sardines, even if it cost a little more. So I bought one of those potted meat sausages—the long fat kind in a bright red skin—why, where’s it gone to? I laid it down here in these ferns.’

Dismayed and astonished she searched all round their *cache* for the missing sausage, but without avail. It had vanished as though it had never been, and with it had gone (as further search revealed) a bag of buns and half a pound of biscuits.

‘Somebody’s hidden them for a joke!’ declared Amy angrily. ‘All I can say is, I don’t think much of their sense of humour.’

‘Don’t be such an idiot!’ retorted Nesta, with equal irritation. ‘Who do you think would do anything so futile? Some dog’s got in and taken them, of course, when we were playing—probably that feeble-minded tyke of Toby Barrett’s.’

‘She didn’t bring him to school to-day,’ answered Gabrielle, who was rather a friend of the redoubtable Algernon. ‘And, anyhow, he’s not at all feeble-minded. Pen is, though, for not being more careful of her purchases. I expect, if the truth were told, she left them in the cloak-room.’

‘I didn’t!’ exclaimed Pen hotly. ‘Is it likely I’d forget an important thing like a sausage? And it was Edith who was carrying the buns and biscuits.’

‘I put them down close beside the sausage,’ declared Edith. ‘It must have been a dog, of course, because we know there’s no one in the wood but ourselves. There are other dogs in the world besides Algernon Barrett.’

‘Well, there’s no use quarrelling over spilt sausages,’ observed Gabrielle, cooling down a little. ‘There’s plenty left, so let’s eat it and be thankful. I wonder what they’re thinking about us at school, and whether Miss Musgrave has sent out search-parties.’

‘It’s a mercy none of them has come this way, if she did!’ laughed Pen, her good humour restored; and they all fell to on the plentiful repast that was left to them. When *Vb* feasted they did it in style, most of them possessing well-filled tuck-boxes.

It so happened that Miss Musgrave knew nothing of their escapade, for Miss Snaith, meeting her in the schoolroom passage immediately after

dinner, had exclaimed at her white face, and advised her to go straight home to her rooms.

‘If your friend’s still with you, tell her from me to put you to bed for the rest of the afternoon. I never saw such a washed-out looking object!’

‘But my work!’ protested Lesley Musgrave half-heartedly. ‘My form’s prep—and the cricket-practice after tea!’

‘As to your form—one of the Sixth can take supervision there till tea-time, and the cricket can look after itself for one evening. Dorinda Earle is a most competent captain. No, no, my dear! you clear out at once! I know it’s what the Head would say, if she were at home. You’ll just catch the two-thirty bus if you hurry.’

And Miss Musgrave, nothing loath, had obediently cleared out, while the school secretary made her way to the Sixth Form classroom.

‘I want one of you to go along and take supervision in the Lower Fifth,’ she said briskly. ‘Miss Musgrave has gone home seedy, and I promised her that some Senior would see to their prep till tea-time. Any offers?’

The Sixth did not look enthusiastic. Whoever went would have to work under difficulties, since the atmosphere of the Lower Fifth schoolroom was seldom quiet and conducive to study.

‘I’ll go, if you think I’d be any good, Miss Snaith,’ said Toby doubtfully, but Dorinda intervened.

‘No! it had better be some one who’s used to their evil ways—hadn’t it, Miss Snaith? I’ll go—I don’t mind—and they’d simply bully Toby.’

‘I’d like to see them try it!’ returned Toby placidly. ‘Still, I don’t want to be selfish, Dorinda, and interfere with your little enjoyments! So go, by all means, if you’d rather.’

Miss Snaith gave the casting vote.

‘I think it had better be Dorinda,’ she said. ‘Nothing less than a prefect can hope to be effective with *Vb*. Thank you, all the same, Toby!’

And she withdrew, leaving Dorinda to collect her books and betake herself down the passage.

Even before Dorinda reached the classroom, the silence within struck her as unnatural, but it was only when she opened the door and found herself confronted with sunshine and emptiness that she discovered the reason for it. The desks were closed and orderly, the green shade-blinds undrawn; a lazy

bluebottle buzzed languidly against the pane. As for the Lower Fifth, they were not there and—judging from the tidy aspect of their room—they had not entered it since dinner-time.

‘Well I’m blessed!’ exclaimed Dorinda, and glanced at the large round clock that hung above the mantelpiece. After all, it was only five minutes to three. Where *Vb* were, or what they were doing, they alone knew, but they would hardly dare to stay out much longer, and Dorinda settled herself grimly at the teacher’s desk, with her books spread out before her. Probably they had got wind of Miss Musgrave’s indisposition and were ‘playing-up’, believing that no one awaited them in the schoolroom. If so, they would find out their mistake when they chose to appear—that was all.

But Dorinda had worked through several pages of Virgil, and was turning her attention to politics in the reign of Queen Anne, before it occurred to her that *Vb* were doing things on a bigger scale than she had at first supposed. Very soon the bell would ring for tea, and they had not yet been near their preparation.

‘Humph!’ said the prefect to herself. ‘This looks a bit fishy! It won’t be long before they’re discovered, at this rate, and I’d rather they weren’t. Not that I care twopence about Gay Marsden and Co. getting their just deserts, but it’s a pity that Miss Musgrave should be made to feel she can’t go sick for an afternoon in peace and comfort. I’d rather cope with this situation myself, if possible, without dragging in any of the Powers-that-be.’

She pondered the situation and decided that she might be able to manage it. Their absence from the dining-room at tea (if they failed to turn up by then) would not be very noticeable. On fine summer afternoons it was quite usual for one form or two to take their tea out into the grounds and have an impromptu picnic—in fact, the Sixth had arranged to do so that very afternoon, which would make the vacant places of *Vb* even less conspicuous. Dorinda finished her work, took her books back to her own schoolroom and went thoughtfully off to her tuck-box, to get out her share of the provisions.

‘I shouldn’t mind betting,’ she remarked in a low voice to Toby, who had followed her up with a plate, ‘that we’d find very little in the Lower Fifth’s boxes, if we could open them, just now!’

‘What makes you say that?’ asked Toby, in reasonable astonishment.

Dorinda took out the remains of a substantial sultana cake and placed it on the plate.

‘Because,’ she said, ‘—hold on to that while I look for some shortbread—it’s my belief that Gabrielle and her boon companions have taken French leave, and are up on the moor at the present moment, enjoying a quite unauthorized picnic!’

Toby’s recent experiences of Miss Gabrielle Marsden set her wits working faster than Dorinda’s.

‘Then I’ll tell you what’s happened,’ she said. ‘They’ve gone back to Blue Tor Mire! When Jill sent them packing last time they were very sick about it, and it would be just like them to try again. Of course, by playing truant they’d be quite safe from interruption by any of us. I thought they had some function on, because Pen Jordan arrived at school this morning hung round with parcels like a Christmas tree—but I only thought she was smuggling in stores for some dormitory feast. Day-girls have their uses in the Lower Fifth!’

‘Nothing so tame as a dormitory feast!’ retorted Dorinda, turning a little pale. ‘I say, Toby, what’s to be done? I’d rather not report them for a variety of reasons, and yet—as Gillian said last time—I don’t like the responsibility of dealing with it myself, if that’s what they’re up to.’

‘I don’t think you need worry about their getting into danger,’ said Toby consolingly. ‘They’ve had their lesson, as far as that’s concerned. But, of course, they should be hauled over the coals.’

‘Don’t say anything to Jill or the others till I’ve thought it over,’ said Dorinda, producing the shortbread and closing her box. ‘We’ll tell them afterwards, because the prefects will have to deal with them if they’re not reported. But I’d like to get them back first, if I could.’

‘I’ll tell you what,’ proposed Toby as they made their way downstairs again. ‘I’ve finished my prep, and was only staying on after tea for the cricket-practice. If you like to excuse me from that I’ll go home instead, and I’ll go by Blue Tor. If they’re there, I’ll be certain to catch them, and I can send them back prepared for the worst when they meet you!’

‘That’s the very thing!’ exclaimed Dorinda, relieved. ‘Day-girls have their uses in the Sixth as well as in *Vb*! As you say, they’ll take good care not to get into the bog this time—I’m not really worrying about that—but I think it’s rough on Miss Musgrave if she can’t go off duty for one afternoon without something of this sort happening. And I’ve got a great regard for Miss Musgrave.’

‘So’ve I,’ assented Toby. ‘I’ll hurry up with my tea, and be off.’

She was as good as her word, and indeed, Mademoiselle (knowing nothing of the route she had taken) remarked with satisfaction over her early departure when a sudden mist rolled down from the moor behind, and encroached on the garden, driving the girls indoors. But Dorinda felt there was no cause for congratulation.

She felt so still less, half an hour later, when the Lower Fifth in a body burst into the gym, too scared to care whether their outing had been discovered or not.

‘Oh, Jill!’ they cried. ‘Dorinda! Jane! we’ve been in Blackcombe Spinney and we saw the convict! Pen looked up and saw his face peering at us through the branches. And we think he pinched our sausage, and our buns and things! Ought we to tell the police?’

## CHAPTER XIX

### FOOTSTEPS IN BLACKCOMBE LANE

Toby was inclined to regard it as lucky that she had come to school on foot that morning, while Blackberry was at the smith's having a loose shoe repaired. Hampered by his company, she would have been forced to make a long detour round the bog, but being alone she could take the short cut across it.

Swinging her satchel by its strap, she crossed the paddock which separated the school grounds from the spinney and skirted a tall hedge, picturesquely untidy and hung with travellers' joy. At the end of this was a gate and stile leading into Blackcombe Lane, which wound up and up with many tortuous twinings till it came out on the moor, and there turned into a mere track across the heather.

So closed in was the narrow bridle-path that no sunshine ever penetrated its green twilight, yet it looked even dimmer than usual to Toby, as she vaulted the stile and turned moorwards. She glanced about her with an uneasiness which deepened as she rounded the second bend and saw a faint white haze advancing to meet her. It was very slight, scarcely more than a thickening of the atmosphere, but Toby knew the ways of the weather thereabouts and realized what it meant. Quickening her steps she sped up the lane, leaving the spinney behind on her right. If the truants were caught up there on the edge of Blue Tor Mire by a moor fog, the consequences might well be disastrous—unless they saw for themselves what was happening in time to start for home.

If that were the case she ought to meet them any moment now. Having rounded the fourth bend, she paused for a minute and listened intently. The mist had grown denser, rolling rapidly to meet her, and in a few seconds she was enveloped by its white clammy folds, which eddied here and there in wreaths about her. But no sounds came to her from above, or indeed from anywhere. The birds had fallen silent, and there was no movement from any of the tiny denizens of the hedge—no stirring of ferns or grasses, no snapping of a brittle twig as a field-mouse scurried by. The silence seemed as dense and palpable as the fog itself.

Then suddenly from below, some distance behind her, came the muffled beat of hurrying footsteps, now breaking into a short run, now checking

again, as though the runner was husbanding his strength or had already spent more of it than he could afford—for it was a man's tread, as Toby knew at once. But who could it be, hastening up Blackcombe Lane at such a time? There were no sheep, grazing in the neighbourhood of the mire, for which a shepherd might be searching.

Like a flash she remembered the local legend about this old packman's path, and that to-day was Midsummer Day, and an involuntary shiver ran through her, bringing with it a wild temptation to fly, in her turn, before those weird hurrying steps. But she conquered it and held her ground, assuring herself with trembling lips that no ghost ever walked at six o'clock on a summer afternoon, even in as thick a fog as this.

'I will not run,' said Toby, 'and that's that! I'll let it pass me. Nobody but a fool gives way to panic!'

But it cost her something to stand waiting, with the knowledge of how narrow was the space between those high hedges, and that whatever passed her there could hardly fail to touch her in going by. Nearer came the footsteps and louder. She could hear the heavy panting breath as of one well-nigh spent. The runner had rounded the last curve and was almost upon her.

One of those queer swirling eddies, which had moved the fog from time to time, came now and lifted the curtain for a moment. Then the mist closed in again, but that one second's revelation had done its work, and Toby's fears fell from her with a rush. The man close beside her in the white gloom—the author of the footsteps—was no ghostly packman from smuggling times, but a real flesh-and-blood convict!

Some people might have preferred the packman, but not so Toby Barrett. Though she had no special liking for convicts she knew now with whom she had to deal, and was not afraid. For in that momentary ebb of the fog the man's eyes had met hers—wild, driven, terrified, yet somehow straight and trustworthy.

Toby did not hesitate for an instant. All hunted, fugitive things had a friend in her, and the broad arrow stamped on his suit made no difference, since there was nothing evil in his haggard face—nothing but terror and misery.

'Don't be afraid!' she cried impulsively into the white curtain. 'It's all right. I'll help you if I can. Where are you going?'

The man's answer came to her, hoarse with exhaustion, but in an educated tone which had nothing rough about it.



‘God knows! Not far now, I’m afraid. They’re bound to get me. I’m about played out.’

‘Oh no!’ she urged, ‘not quite. You can still run—or you could a minute ago. Are they—are they anywhere near?’

‘The warders? I hope not, but there will be plenty of people ready to help them if they see these clothes. Besides, I’ve just shown myself, by a bit of bad luck, to a crowd of schoolgirls in the wood down there. They fled screeching, so the news will soon spread.’

But Toby’s brain was working fast.

‘Schoolgirls, did you say? In the wood?’

‘Yes. They were having a picnic. I’m afraid I pinched some of their supplies a little earlier, when they weren’t looking, but I was starving. I’d been hiding there all day.’

‘Quite right!’ said Toby approvingly. ‘I’m jolly glad you did! They deserved it. And since you’ve just seen them in the spinney, *they’re* all right, which leaves me free to attend to you. Come on! We’d better take advantage of this fog while it lasts.’

‘What do you mean?’ the man’s voice stuttered out of the white darkness.

‘Why, I’m going to save you, of course!’ answered Toby firmly, yet with a touch of impatience. ‘But we can’t afford to lose time talking here. These mists often lift as suddenly as they come down.’

‘Do you mean to say,’ asked the convict incredulously, ‘that you are not afraid to be out here with me?’

‘Of course not!’ exclaimed Toby, and this time impatience got the upper hand, for she felt that valuable moments were being thrown away to no purpose. ‘I was only afraid while I thought you were the packman’s ghost. Directly I saw you, I knew it was all right. But it won’t be if we stay here much longer! We’re close to a place where there’s a break in the hedge—I know it by that stone in the bank there—and if you’ll follow me through it, I’ll take you to a perfectly safe place where you can hide for a little.’

‘I don’t know,’ said the man unsteadily, ‘whether you’re an angel or only the pluckiest kid ever made——’

‘I’m neither!’ said Toby hastily, ‘but I can’t bear things to be hunted. I’d save a fox from the hounds if I could, and I’ll do all I can for you.’

‘There won’t be any hounds in my case,’ he said grimly, as he followed her shadowy form up the bank. I spent most of the night wading down a stream to destroy my scent.’

Toby gave a little shudder as she realized what he meant. They were out on the moor now, and here the fog, though still dense, was less clinging. They could see each other, standing close, and another keen glance exchanged between them deepened their mutual confidence.

‘I hope you don’t mind,’ said Toby politely, ‘but since we can’t afford to lose time, I shall have to take you straight across a bog. You needn’t be nervous though, because I could find my way with my eyes shut.’

‘I’m not nervous,’ he assured her. ‘I’m hardly in a position to be nervous about a bog. There are worse things.’

‘Then follow just where I walk,’ Toby adjured him. ‘Perhaps you’d better take my hand.’

Neither spoke during their passage across the mire. The silence seemed to close round them again and to become as tangible as the mist. Cautiously Toby threaded her way from one coarse tussock to another, and behind her the convict followed with equal care. Once his foot slipped and went into the squelchy quaking ground which stretched away on both sides; but Toby’s grip steadied his balance and they went on again till, at last, they both stood on firm turf.

‘Now then,’ said Toby, with a sigh of relief, ‘I’ve got to find the way up to the tor, but that’s not so bad. The fog’s thinner here, and I can see the shape of the clatters. There’s a square knobbly one close to the opening, so I can’t miss that.’

‘May I ask,’ he said, ‘where you’re taking me?’

Toby was walking at his side now, the damp skirts of her Holland frock clinging about her slim legs, her hands thrust deep into the pockets of her blazer.

‘To a cave in Blue Tor,’ she answered. ‘Not very comfortable I’m afraid, but it’s dry and safe, and no one knows the way except me and two of my school chums. You can rest there while you think about what to do next, and this evening, when the fog lifts a bit, I’ll bring you some food and an old suit of Daddy’s—though I’m afraid you’re taller than he is,’ she added, eyeing him regretfully.

‘You’re a little brick!’ he exclaimed, with very real conviction. ‘But I shan’t let you come back here tonight. The stuff I stole from the picnic party has saved me from actual starvation, and as for clothes, I can—I say! how extraordinary!’

A sudden breath of air, sweeping over the high parts of the moor, had caught the mist and was rolling it up like an unwanted veil. From the west the evening sun shone palely again, and though the valleys below were still hidden under a thick blanket, everything at their own altitude was visible for miles around them, further tors floating like detached islands on a mystic sea.

‘Well!’ observed Toby. ‘It’s a mercy it didn’t go any sooner! and, even as it is, you’d better get inside quickly. People do stray up here, though very seldom, and it wouldn’t do for any one to see you yet.’

She led him through the cleft into the rock, while he followed, marvelling, and presently, when she had shown him the trick of the rowan-tree and the cave, she said,

‘I simply daren’t wait any longer, because time’s getting precious, and I mean to come back after supper, whatever you may say. I found you, after all, and there’s no one to look after you but me. It will be light for hours yet, you know, and you’ve got to have a rug to lie on, and a basket of food. Luckily our housekeeper is used to my raiding the larder, and I have picnics at all hours, so there’s nothing remarkable about that. I have got to provide for you tonight, because it may not be safe to come to-morrow. If it’s fine there’s always a danger of people rambling about the tor, and I daren’t take risks, having got you so far safely.’

She held out her hand, and he shook it with a grip which hurt.

‘I say!’ he exclaimed. ‘I can’t thank you. It’s beyond ordinary words—you can’t imagine——’

‘Yes, I can!’ broke in Toby brusquely. ‘It must be *awful* to be shut up in that dreadful place—especially when you haven’t done it, whatever it was.’

He stared at her in astonishment.

‘How on earth do you know that?’ he demanded.

She shook her head.

‘I can’t tell you,’ she confessed, ‘but I do know. I sort of feel you wouldn’t do anything mean, or—or beastly—or any of the kind of things for

which people are sent to prison. Besides, you're rather like some one I know—a mistress at our school.'

He looked at her oddly.

'Is your school St. Githa's? and is the mistress's name Lesley Musgrave?'

'Yes!' cried Toby in astonishment. 'But how did you know?'

'Because,' he answered drily, 'though it's bad luck on her, poor old Les! she happens to be my sister. And if you'll let her know I'm here, some of the responsibility for me will be off your shoulders. It ought not to be on them at all!'

## CHAPTER XX

### IN HIDING

‘Your sister? Miss Musgrave?’

Toby had spent an exciting afternoon, and this last shock completely took away her breath for the moment. While she stared, fascinated, at her protégé, her mind went back to the evening of the tennis-match, when Miss Musgrave had given her tea in her rooms, and when she had seen the snapshot of Ursula Grey being helped out of a boat by—this very man! She knew him now, despite the cropped head and hideous prison clothes, and she remembered the constraint in Miss Musgrave’s manner when she had remarked on the resemblance between them.

‘Does she—does she know?’ she stammered. ‘No, of course she couldn’t possibly!’

‘Know what? That I’ve escaped? Not yet, but she’s expecting it. I managed to give her a hint, last time she visited me, that I’d a scheme which I’d try to bring off about now. As a matter of fact, I was hiding in that wood, hoping to go to her rooms as soon as it was dark. I know she will have some of my clothes waiting for me there, and that she’ll help me, somehow, to get away, if I can only send a message to her.’

‘And that’s where I come in!’ declared Toby briskly, having recovered herself by now. ‘Poor Miss Musgrave! no wonder she’s been looking washed-out lately. I’ll try to let her know tonight. I’ll ride over to Priorscross after I’ve brought your things up here.’

‘You’re going to do a lot tonight, aren’t you?’ he said. The fear had faded from his eyes, and was replaced with a faint flicker of kindly humour, which gave Toby some idea of what he looked like under happier circumstances. ‘But what about your people? You’re only a kid, and I hate asking you to deceive them, but—I daren’t risk any one else knowing about me, or where I am.’

‘There won’t be the slightest need to deceive any one,’ declared Toby cheerfully, standing before him at the mouth of the cave, her hands again thrust into the pockets of her mauve blazer. ‘I haven’t any people but Daddy, and he never dreams of interfering—in fact, he always tells me to do what I think best about things. He’s an artist, you see—rather a famous one—and

that takes him all his time. Besides, he's just starting a picture of the evening light on Otter's Bay, and he stays down there till he can't see his hand before his face, after which he's got half an hour's good walking before he can reach home. So don't you worry. I can easily fit everything in before bedtime, if Blackberry's shoe is all right again. But I shall have to start now. Time's flying!

Cutting short another blundering effort to thank her, she stepped out on to the rowan-tree, and dropped down on the short grass below. At the cleft in the rock, which led to the outer world, she turned to wave her hand, and was gone, while Hugh Musgrave, worn out by all he had passed through, flung himself down on the hard floor of the cave to get such rest as was possible.

'It's wonderful,' thought Toby, as she hurried down the long slope towards the clapper bridge which led across to the tumbled gardens of Stepside, 'it's simply marvellous, sometimes, how things work out. If I hadn't gone up Blackcombe Lane this afternoon, I don't quite know what would have happened. I don't believe he could ever have reached Miss Musgrave's rooms, even in the dark, without being seen and retaken—especially after showing himself to those Lower Fifth people, who would be sure to rush straight back to school and squeal about it. So long as he stays where he is, he'll be perfectly safe, and I must just manage his food somehow, till Miss Musgrave makes some plans for getting him away.'

Arrived at home she found, as she expected, that her father was out, having hurried off to Otter's Bay directly the fog lifted. Algernon also, bored with too much of his own company, had gone with him. In the ordinary way Algernon despised Art, and considered it slow, but Art in Otter's Bay could be turned to some account. There was good hunting there, and one could get a swim, even if Art interfered with the throwing of sticks. So, having discovered by some occult means of his own that Otter's Bay was to be the present scene of his master's activities, Algernon had set out with him.

Also, by a piece of unprecedented good luck, the housekeeper had gone to a farm up the Cleave for eggs.

Toby, having changed her damp frock for riding-kit, hurried through her supper, and packed her faithful picnic basket, amid Cook's exclamations.

'You don't mean to say as 'ow you're going picnicking on the moor at this hour o' night, Miss Toby! and you just finished a good supper! Well, well! the ways of young ladies beats me, nowadays, and 'owever your schoolmarm comes to let your friends out with you, at these odd times, beats me still more!'

Toby felt rather guilty about the mistaken impression of St. Githa's and the discipline prevailing there, which was evidently being conveyed to Cook's mind through these erratic movements. But it could not be helped, and she only hoped that the gossip concerning them would not spread beyond Applecleeve, where nothing that 'Miss Toby' did could now astonish the natives.

She saddled Blackberry, strapping on a cushion and a couple of rugs, and, holding her basket in front of her, set out to ride him as far as possible. She led him up the last part of the ascent, and left him to graze outside while she removed his load and carried it into the cave. This time, however, she did not linger, for it was past eight o'clock and minutes were growing precious.

The direct way from Blue Tor to Priorscross avoided the mire altogether, so Toby was soon able to mount, and Blackberry (whose day had been as dull as Algernon's) worked off his freshness at a very creditable speed.

Mrs. Page's shop had long been shut and Mrs. Page herself had gone out to supper with a friend at the other end of the village, when Toby rode into the orchard and dismounted at the side-door used by lodgers. Her first timid knock brought no reply, but, at a second and louder bang, the window above opened and some one leaned out into the green June twilight.

'Who is there?' asked a low unfamiliar voice. 'Mrs. Page is out.'

'I don't want Mrs. Page,' Toby replied, peering upwards, and, suddenly remembering who this stranger must be, she added, 'Please can I see Miss Musgrave for a moment?'

Ursula Grey (for it was she) hesitated.

'Who is it?' she asked doubtfully. 'Some girl from the school? I am very sorry, but Miss Musgrave has gone to bed with a bad headache and I hardly like to disturb her, unless it's something very important. Can't you leave a message?'

'I can't possibly!' said Toby, in desperation. 'And it *is* something very important. I'm sure Miss Musgrave would *want* to be disturbed if she knew! Will you please tell her that Toby Barrett has come with a message for her, and that it has nothing to do with the school.'

Something in the urgency of the girl's voice caused Ursula Grey to lean out further, though she could not see the face raised dimly to her from below.

‘What do you want? Why will you leave no message?’ she asked in startled, eager tones. ‘Is it—is it—anything to do with her brother?’

So here was another in the secret! but somehow Toby had no fears of Ursula.

‘Yes—yes!’ she exclaimed. ‘It’s all about him. Won’t you come down now, and let me in? I must see Miss Musgrave!’

Ursula waited no longer. In a very few minutes Toby found herself upstairs in the little candle-lit bedroom, where the Lower Fifth’s form-mistress was sitting up in bed, with anxious eyes devouring her.

‘Toby!’ she exclaimed. ‘My friend tells me you have brought us news of Hugh—my brother! What does it mean? How do you know about him?’

‘I didn’t, till this afternoon,’ answered Toby, cheerful again, now that she had gained admittance, ‘but I met him in the fog, up Blackcombe Lane, and I took him to Blue Tor, to a secret cave I know there, and I’ve given him food and rugs for the night, and he asked me to come and tell you.’ She paused, a trifle out of breath, then added earnestly, ‘Don’t be frightened, Miss Musgrave. He’s all right in the meantime, and I’ll show you the way to him as soon as I can. If I were you, though, I shouldn’t go to-morrow. There are often people wandering about Blue Tor on a fine Saturday.’

Lesley Musgrave looked round the little room in search of her clothes.

‘I’ll go tonight,’ she said calmly, though Toby could see the excitement that lay behind her self-control, ‘if you can take me, and don’t mind waiting ten minutes. I shan’t be longer than that.’

She paused, and her eyes met Ursula’s, who nodded.

‘Yes, I’m coming too, of course,’ she said, in answer to the look. ‘You’ve got the parcel with his clothes? I know you’ve had it ready for more than a week. And he’ll need some money, and his passport.’

‘I’ll bring some,’ said Lesley. ‘I shan’t be a moment. Knowing that it might happen any day now, I’m quite prepared.’

Toby followed Ursula out to the tiny sitting-room, wondering to see her much more agitated than the convict’s sister. Her grey eyes shone like stars, and she had a brilliant colour which had certainly been lacking before. Moreover, she could not keep still, but flitted about, straightening things which required no straightening, and talking constantly, in a low trembling voice.



‘You know nothing about all this,’ she said. ‘Of course not. How should you? But I may as well explain as far as possible. You’re entitled to some sort of explanation, after all you’ve done for us, and I know you’re the sort of girl who can keep things to yourself. Hugh Musgrave was a member of a business firm which went in for fraudulent practices, though I needn’t say that he knew nothing about it—he was far too trusting—too easily hoodwinked by those he believed in. Then the crash came, and they fled, and he had to stand the prosecution. Because he could not prove his innocence without certain evidence which never came forward, he was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, from which, thank heaven! he has escaped at last.’

‘There!’ cried Toby triumphantly. ‘I knew quite well he’d done nothing wicked! I knew it from the very first minute I saw him in the fog!’

Ursula Grey moved across impulsively, and catching the girl’s hands, she kissed her.

‘You dear child!’ she exclaimed, with a little catch in her voice. ‘Indeed he hadn’t! He’s been splendid—splendid—all through. Lesley has been to see him sometimes. That’s why she took this post at St. Githa’s, and got rooms outside the school—so as to be at hand if anything should happen. He was to let her know, by the use of a code word in his letters, when he hoped to escape.’

‘Well, it’s happened now, right enough!’ said Toby reassuringly, ‘and the next thing is to get him safely away. If Miss Musgrave was expecting him to escape, she’s sure to have made some plans.’

‘Yes,’ said Ursula, moving away again restlessly. ‘She was to wire at once to his great friend, Phil Arnold—Oh, here you are, Les! Let’s start, then.’

And for the third time that evening Toby set out for Blue Tor. She had not bargained for this additional trip, which was likely to make her later than she had intended. Dusk had fallen by now, but the moon was rising and their way was light as day. Toby comforted herself with the knowledge that her father would be quite satisfied when he heard that she had been on the moor with Miss Musgrave, and anyhow, there would be no need to wait when she had once taken them to the hiding-place. They could find the way back quite easily alone.

Up they climbed, with the much-surprised Blackberry following, doglike, at their heels. From his point of view he had nothing to say against

this expedition, but it was certainly a trifle unusual. He could not help feeling that Algernon would be rather sick about having missed it.

‘My secret isn’t much of a secret now,’ thought Toby ruefully, as she led them through the right-angled cleft into the tor.

It was an eerie scene, that strange place, half-flooded with silver moonlight, half-plunged in ebony shadows. Leaving her companions at the hut-circle, Toby went forward under the rowan, and whistled softly.

‘Come down!’ she called. ‘I’ve brought Miss Musgrave and Miss Grey, and they’re waiting for you here. It’s quite safe.’

Then, turning back, she said:

‘I think I’ll go home now, if you don’t mind. There isn’t anything more I can do tonight. You know your way back all right, don’t you?’

Lesley gripped her hand.

‘One moment, please! Will you show me the way out again, Toby, so that we can’t miss it?’

‘It’s quite easy to find from the inside,’ began Toby, a little bewildered; then suddenly she understood as Miss Musgrave drew her quickly away.

Into the moonlight in his prison clothes a tall figure came, reaching Ursula with one stride, and the next moment she was gathered into his arms.

‘My dear!’ they heard him murmur brokenly, ‘my dear!’ and then they fled.

‘I think,’ said Lesley, with a shaky little laugh, ‘I’ll come part of the way down with you, Toby. The night air will do my head good. You see, they were engaged—Hugh and Ursula—and it rather looks as though they still are!’

Toby gulped audibly.

‘It’s been a most extraordinary evening,’ she said conversationally, in a hurry to cover up the gulp. ‘I feel as though I’d been living in the pages of a story-book. I’ve been keen on Miss Grey ever since I heard her play at Exeter, but I never dreamed I’d some day, be mixed up with her like this.’

## CHAPTER XXI

### WEEK-END HAPPENINGS

They walked down the slope together, with the murmur of the little stream rising from below, and the scattered lights of Applecleave shining starlike under the stars, on the opposite hill-side. Miss Musgrave (who seemed to have changed, in an hour, from a pleasant and popular mistress to an intimate personal friend) was ready to talk now, and Toby learnt that Phil Arnold was a flying-man, with a new and powerful aeroplane built to his own design.

‘He and Hugh have always been inseparable,’ Lesley explained, ‘and directly I told him that there was some hope of escape, he planned it all. As soon as he gets my wire to-morrow, he will start for Dartmoor in his plane, pick up Hugh, and take him to safety. Only,’ and she sighed, ‘it isn’t quite as simple as it sounds.’

‘No,’ agreed Toby soberly. ‘To begin with—how can you send him a wire which will let him know what’s happened, without giving it away to the post office? The hue-and-cry will go on for days, and everybody in the neighbourhood will be looking out.’

Lesley laughed a little.

‘Oh, that’s easy enough! We arranged a code for this very purpose. I was thinking of much steeper difficulties. Where, for example, can the biplane come down? It must land as near Blue Tor as possible. It would be horribly dangerous if Hugh had to make his way across the moor again to some suitable landing-place.’

‘I should think so!’ exclaimed Toby fervently. ‘There mightn’t be a fog then, and, if there was, I don’t suppose it would suit the aeroplane. But what about that long smooth piece of ground on the shoulder of the hill, just above the mire? It’s a kind of plateau. Couldn’t he land there?’

Miss Musgrave brightened.

‘Is there such a place? Is it long enough? But what’s the use of asking a question which neither you nor I can answer! I shall have to ask Phil to come at once and inspect the ground. We can make no plans without him, and yet it all seems such a waste of time. Every moment is precious until poor old Hugh is safely out of England.’

‘Where will he go?’ asked Toby, but Miss Musgrave shook her head.

‘That will depend on Phil. To the Continent, I suppose, and then Ursula will follow him and they will be married there. Luckily, he was going abroad for a holiday just before the crash came, and I kept his passport. I must turn back here, Toby. They have had their talk by now, and there is a lot to discuss before she and I go home tonight. It won’t do to rouse good Mrs. Page’s suspicions by staying out late.’

Putting her hands on Toby’s shoulders, she kissed her warmly.

‘My dear, I can never thank you enough!’ she said. ‘Suppose he had fallen into the hands of some hysterical little idiot, who had raised the alarm instead of bravely helping him, as you did. As long as I live I shall never forget what you have done. At school, of course, nothing can be different. I am still one of the staff, and you in the Sixth—but out of school-hours, and in the holidays, I hope we shall always be friends.’

‘I should love to be,’ replied Toby. ‘May I come and see you after school on Monday afternoon? I shall be longing to hear what you have arranged, besides, I might be of some use—you never know.’

But Lesley Musgrave shook her head and answered gravely:

‘My dear, you’ve been useful enough already, and I don’t want to mix you up in this affair more than can be helped. You’re not much more than a child and it isn’t right.’

‘Oh yes, it is! if I can help,’ declared Toby. ‘No matter what your age is, or isn’t, you ought to help every one whenever you can, and this is a perfectly ripping adventure!’

‘If it turns out all right,’ amended Lesley, with an anxious little sigh.

‘Oh, but it will—it’s bound to! having gone so well up to this. Go back now, Miss Musgrave, and don’t worry more than’s absolutely necessary. It’s sure to be all right.’

Lesley smiled, as she turned away.

‘You’re a very encouraging kid!’ she said. ‘Thank you, again, more than I can say, for everything!’

Saturday, for Toby, was the usual quiet uneventful day to which she was accustomed. She rode on the moor in the morning, and spent the afternoon reading in a deck-chair in the garden; but her book seemed flat and humdrum after the real adventures in which she had been living during the

past twenty-four hours, and she raised her eyes every now and again to gaze across the narrow winding valley at the outline of Blue Tor standing up against a hazy sky. In spite of herself her thoughts flew to the escaped prisoner concealed in the heart of the great towering rock, and she wondered how he was passing the time.

‘I never thought of putting a book in with the other things,’ she told Algernon regretfully, ‘but at least he’s got enough to eat till to-morrow, and I expect he’s got plenty to think about, too.’

Algernon snapped lazily at a passing fly, and observed silently that he also had plenty to think about. For example, had he, or had he not, buried that bone deeply enough behind the currant bushes? He couldn’t be certain, and you could never trust gardeners. It was a funny thing, but Algernon had yet to meet the gardener who was absolutely reliable with regard to other people’s bones. He thought it might be as well to take it up and find an entirely new place for it.

He had just strolled off to see to this, when Toby heard the click of the little wire-netting gate that led from the terrace in front of the house to the lower garden where she was sitting. Looking round with a start, she saw Miss Musgrave coming down the flagged steps towards her, and for a moment her heart missed a beat. Could anything have gone wrong up yonder at the cave? But Miss Musgrave smiled reassuringly when she drew near enough to see the girl’s startled eyes.

‘It’s all right, my dear!’ she said quickly. ‘I’ve only walked over because of a decision to which Ursula and Hugh and I came last night. I thought the sooner I told you about it the better.’

She sank into the chair which Toby had promptly vacated for her; Toby herself dropped on the soft grass in front of her visitor, waiting for what was to follow.

‘The others agree with me,’ said Miss Musgrave gently, ‘that it is neither fair nor right to let you help us any further. If your father knew, it might be different—though even then I should have qualms—but we dare not take any one else into our confidence. It was your courage and presence of mind that saved Hugh yesterday, and you don’t need me to tell you how grateful we are, but now we must carry on without you. It wouldn’t be right to let you take food to him or visit him again. Apart from everything else it is too great a strain. If I had any doubts before, your scared eyes, when you saw me coming just now, would have convinced me finally.’

Toby sat silent. Her common sense told her that her young mistress was right, and yet—it was hard to be dropped out of such a marvellous adventure when right in the middle of it. She felt as though she had been deprived of some exciting book just at the most thrilling chapter.

‘Then—shall I hear nothing more about it?’ she asked dejectedly.

‘Oh, yes, of course! but we daren’t let you take part. I can tell you now that Phil Arnold has got my wire, and is motoring down to the Priorsford Arms tonight. To-morrow morning I shall go to church as usual, so that Mrs. Page need suspect nothing, but Ursula will take him to Blue Tor, and in the afternoon I shall hear what they have decided. If the landing is suitable I expect Phil will go home at once, and come back in his plane very early on Monday morning. Come to my rooms on Monday afternoon, as you are riding home from school, and you will hear all there is to hear. Don’t be afraid that we shall be ungrateful enough to leave you out, Toby! It’s for your own good——’

‘Disagreeable things generally are,’ said Toby, with a wry twist to her mouth, which gave her a comical look of martyred resignation. ‘I know you’re right, Miss Musgrave, and I’m not going to be kiddish about it, but—I had so looked forward to smuggling up supplies for him.’

‘Purloined from your own larder,’ added Miss Musgrave. ‘No, no, Toby! You’ve done more than enough already—more than we can ever repay—and we can’t return your kindness by abusing it.’ She rose to her feet. ‘Now I shall have to go back, for Phil may get down sooner than he hoped, and I must be there to see him. We’ll meet at school on Monday morning, and remember! we’ve got to give our minds to our work, though it won’t be easy for either of us.’

It was not. Penelope Jordan, early for once, was in the cloak-room when Toby entered it on Monday morning, and with her was Gabrielle, though she had no business there at that hour. Their heads were together, deep in earnest conversation, but it was evidently not private, for it did not cease on the Senior’s arrival.

‘Then you’re sure they haven’t caught him yet?’ asked Gay in disappointed tones.

‘Of course I’m sure!’ returned Pen, rather impatiently. ‘Why, the place would have been ringing with it! Besides, Daddy met the police sergeant, and he said they’d been searching everywhere. They think he must have

gone down to the sea—at Otter’s Bay, or somewhere—and escaped in a boat.’

Gabrielle sighed.

‘And to think he might have been safely back in prison by now, if only the prefects had listened to us, and phoned to the police as we wanted them to do! I must say I don’t like the idea of an escaped convict at large on the moor, and able to steal sausages from our own spinney.’

‘I’ve said good-morning twice,’ observed Toby at this juncture, ‘and neither of you has taken the slightest notice. Manners appear to be missing in the Lower Fifth! What have you got to do with the convict? and why should the prefects have phoned for the police? I should think that was Miss Ashley’s job, if any one’s.’

‘Miss Ashley was out for the day on Friday, as you may remember,’ answered Gabrielle gloomily, ‘but Snaithie was the person to do it, of course—we knew that. I wish to goodness, now, we’d gone straight to her when we found Gillian and Dorinda and the rest wouldn’t listen!’

‘We should have got into a fearful row if we had,’ Pen pointed out, ‘for we should have had to confess we’d been playing truant all afternoon in Blackcombe Spinney, and she might not have believed us, any more than Gillian did.’

‘The row would have been worth it,’ retorted Gay, ‘if the convict had been caught through us—in fact, the Head would probably have been so pleased about it that she might have forgiven us altogether. As it is, we’re in for the row all right, and from what you say that villain seems to have got clear away.’

‘How are we in for the row?’ asked Pen, startled, while Toby listened in silence as she changed rapidly from her riding-clothes into clean hollands. ‘Has Gillian reported us after all?’

‘Of course not, silly! but you didn’t suppose she meant to let us off scot-free, did you? The whole of *Vb* is to come to the prefects’ study this afternoon, immediately after dinner, and they’re going to deal with us themselves. Probably that means they’ll be far harder on us than Snaithie would have been, considering the convict.’

‘And the prefects won’t consider the convict,’ said Pen ruefully, ‘for they don’t believe in him.’

‘Thank heaven for that!’ exclaimed Toby fervently, under her breath, as she hurried upstairs to her classroom.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE RED HERRING THAT FAILED

The little interlude in the cloak-room had filled Toby with a kind of nervous curiosity, which her dignity forbade her to gratify by questioning people in the Lower Fifth. Indeed, she was rather afraid of questioning anybody at all, being guiltily conscious that she knew far more than they. Upstairs, in the Sixth Form-room, however, she found it was the chief subject of conversation while they waited to go down to the hall for prayers, and that interest in it was not only natural but expected.

‘Jill, and Jane, and Kathleen are quite sure *Vb* didn’t see the convict,’ Dorinda explained, ‘but I’m inclined to think there’s never so much smoke as that without fire.’

‘It’s nonsense,’ declared Jane, leaning against the window-sill and gripping it with her hands. ‘They knew there was a convict loose on the moor, and their brilliant imaginations were inflamed by the fizzy lemonade they’d been drinking—so they started seeing things—that’s all!’

‘But what about the sausage and the buns?’ argued Olive, who was neutral, but inclined to Dorinda’s opinion. ‘They couldn’t have walked off by themselves.’

‘Not the buns, perhaps,’ agreed Jane frivolously, ‘but you don’t know where Pen bought the sausage. Probably got it at that second-hand food-shop in Priorscross!’

‘Second-hand food-shop?’ echoed Kathleen Wingfield, who suffered from a literal mind.

‘She means cooked-meat shop,’ translated Gillian carelessly. ‘Oh! that’s easily accounted for, Olive. Some village kids got in and pinched them—and I’m pretty sure that’s the explanation of the convict, too. Very likely they did see a face peering at them through the leaves, but every one who does that isn’t necessarily an escaped criminal. If you want to know what I think, it’s this—they realized that they’d gone a bit too far this time, and wanted to draw a red herring across the trail.’

‘There’s something in that idea,’ put in Toby eagerly, ‘judging by what I heard two of them saying just now in the cloak-room.’

‘They won’t succeed, then!’ remarked Gillian grimly. ‘Miss Musgrave has been looking seedy for a day or two, and those young wretches have played up in consequence, which isn’t sporting. That’s what I dislike about this, and I’m going to deal with it accordingly, convict or no convict!’

‘I agree there,’ said Dorinda slowly, ‘but I’m sure, all the same, that they believe in their own red herring. I mean, they really do think they saw the man.’

‘Amy even declares she noticed a broad arrow on his jacket,’ added Olive.

‘Sensational rubbish!’ exclaimed Gillian impatiently. ‘What convict in his senses would fool about in Blackcombe Spinney when he found it full of schoolgirls? That little scheme won’t save them!’

‘Rather not!’ chimed in Jane. ‘Nice idiots we’d have looked if we’d rung up the police-station, as they wanted!’

‘That’s what makes me think there’s something in it,’ persisted Dorinda. ‘They were even willing that we should tell Miss Snaith about it, in order to let the police know. Of course, it was all rot to talk of our phoning on our own. The police would merely have thought we were trying to be funny.’

‘Then, if you’re right,’ observed Olive rather ponderously, ‘I mean, if they really did see him, he must have got away again through your not believing Gay and her pals.’

‘Well, and if he did?’ blazed out Toby suddenly. ‘Surely you needn’t want to feel you’ve been the means of getting a poor soul clapped back into that awful dreary prison! Do be a human being, Olive!’

Poor Olive, by nature one of the most kind-hearted girls, looked rather taken aback by this unexpected onslaught, and Toby reddened, realizing she had made a slip.

‘Oh, I know!’ she said hurriedly. ‘You think he ought to go back because he did something awful. But perhaps he didn’t, you know. It may be all a mistake. And, anyhow, I can’t help siding with escaping things.’

‘Nor I,’ assented Dorinda. ‘I’m only trying to get justice for the Lower Fifth, and I fancy that’s what Olive’s driving at too. I don’t believe their red herring was a—a stuffed one!’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Gillian, ‘but I’m pretty sure that they meant to make good use of it, real or stuffed, and that’s where they’ll find they’ve made a mistake. Don’t you worry, Dorinda! I’ll be just to them, but I’ll temper

justice with common sense, and I'm not going to be side-tracked by all the convicts in Princetown!

Jane grinned appreciatively.

'Looks as though *Vb* were for it this time!' she remarked. 'And there goes the bell for prayers!'

So it came to pass that Gay Marsden and her following, when they appeared in the prefects' study after dinner, found that their thrilling adventure was to be ignored, as a thing of no account.

'I'm not concerned with what you did in the spinney, or whom you saw there,' the Head-girl assured them quite plainly. 'The point is—why were you there at all when you should have been in your own form-room doing prep? Because you thought you'd get a rise out of Miss Musgrave, I suppose, since she wasn't feeling up to the mark, nor able to cope with you. Thoroughly gentlemanly behaviour, wasn't it? The sort of conduct any one might be proud of!'

The Lower Fifth, looking supremely uncomfortable, shifted from one foot to the other. There was something stirring, almost exhilarating, in an out-and-out row, but cold sarcasm they loathed.

'I'm not going to report you,' proceeded Gillian, 'because I don't want to make your form-mistress feel sick about you—at least, not more so than she can help in the natural course of being your form-mistress—but, as you know, the inter-form matches are coming on next week. Neither the Sixth nor Upper Fifth care to play against unsporting people, so your challenges will be declined by those two forms. That's all, thanks. You can go.'

'But—but, Gillian,' protested Gabrielle blankly, 'won't you play us at tennis either?'

'Not this term, thanks,' replied Gillian courteously. 'Neither at tennis nor cricket. But possibly the lower forms, knowing nothing about this, may not mind taking you on.'

It was a very mournful procession which Gabrielle headed back to their classroom, for the inter-form matches were of great importance in the eyes of *Vb*, and now they could meet no foemen, this term, worthy of their steel, except, perhaps, the Upper Fourth; the younger teams they despised. Worse still, their disgrace (though not the reason thereof) would be known throughout the school, and even the Juniors would point to them as the form which, in some mysterious way, had been unsporting—a bitter stigma for *Vb*.

‘And she never mentioned the convict,’ wailed Nesta Pollard, ‘except to say that he didn’t interest her! The fact of the matter is that she doesn’t believe in him—none of them do.’

‘It’s enough to sour anybody!’ declared Penelope, banging back the lid of her desk, as she proceeded to search for the books she required for her preparation. ‘I’ve a good mind to go round to the police-station myself!’

‘Oh do!’ cried Amy Hammerton, round-eyed; but Pen shook her head.

‘Too late now!’ she replied dejectedly. ‘What’s the use of telling them on Monday that there was a convict in Blackcombe Spinney on Friday afternoon? Shut up, Amy! I must do those hateful gulfs and capes of Asia now. Why can’t all continents be as smooth-edged as Australia?’

Toby got through her day’s work more successfully than she had believed possible beforehand. The outside events of the week-end seemed to fade away and become, for the time, unreal beside the small commanding interests of school. Perhaps a similar experience helped Miss Musgrave also to give an undivided mind to the business in hand, but both were inwardly glad when the tea-bell set them free. Lesley was at liberty to go straight home then, since the games-captain usually attended to the playing-field after tea, if there was no special practice, but Toby stayed on to do some bowling at the nets. Directly, however, she was free to change and to saddle Blackberry she hurried off, declining Jane’s invitation to a single on the tennis-courts.

‘I’ve got to go round by Priorscross on my way home,’ she explained. ‘I’ll take you on to-morrow, Jane.’

It was school and its affairs which now receded into the background, as she trotted along the narrow high-hedged lanes that would bring her to Priorscross. What did inter-form matches—what did even the work for the Molyneux prize—matter, compared with Hugh Musgrave’s risk of recapture? Her heart was beating fast as she hooked the pony’s rein over an apple-branch in Mrs. Page’s orchard and hurried up the narrow, dark stairs by which Lesley’s visitors entered.

Lesley herself met her at the door and drew her in, closing it carefully. Ursula Grey was nowhere to be seen, but Miss Musgrave smiled reassuringly, though she still looked a little white and weary after the strain she had been undergoing during those few days.

‘It’s all right, Toby,’ she said. ‘Phil Arnold has been a perfect trump, and taken all care and responsibility off our shoulders. He is back in town to-day,

making some final arrangements, and to-morrow morning, just at dawn, he will fly down here in his plane and take Hugh away. As far as we can see, there should be no risk now. Your suggested landing-place is a perfectly good one, and Hugh need not leave the cave till everything is in readiness for them to take off.'

'Oh, I am glad!' exclaimed Toby, with a deep sigh of relief. 'I've managed not to think too much about it in school to-day, because it seemed so like a story rather than something that had really happened; but now I begin to know it's real again, and it will be a comfort to feel certain he's safe, and out of the country. Where will Mr. Arnold take him?'

'To France,' said Lesley, 'to Marseilles, where he can get a boat to Africa. We have relatives out there who have always believed in Hugh, and they will take him in and help him to start life again. He is keen to try farming—he always preferred that sort of life—and now his chance will come. Later on, when he has made good, Ursula will go out to him, and they will be married.'

'Oh, but, Miss Musgrave, what a shame! Her 'cello!' cried Toby involuntarily. 'If she goes out to Africa, nobody will ever hear her play again—in public I mean.'

Lesley Musgrave laughed more wholeheartedly than she had done for weeks.

'It does seem rather a waste, doesn't it?' she agreed. But another voice from behind struck in:

'Waste? No, indeed! There are better things than even playing in public, Toby, and I shall have to make up to poor Hugh for a lot, when I am able to go out to him. But I'm afraid that won't be just yet, you know. I shall have a year or two longer in my chosen profession, for I must do my share towards the home we hope to build in the wilderness.'

'Oh, Miss Grey!' said Toby shyly, startled by her silent appearance, 'I didn't hear you come in. Please don't think it was awful cheek for me to say that. It just came out somehow, when I thought of you going right away where we could never hear you any more.'

Ursula laughed softly.

'Would you care to hear me now?' she asked. 'I haven't touched my 'cello for days, but I should like to play this evening to such an understanding audience as you and Lesley.'

‘Oh please!’ breathed Toby eagerly.

So they sat and listened, in the little low-ceilinged room scented with honeysuckle and Devon roses, while Ursula played as, perhaps, she had never played before. Years after, when Toby had left her girlhood behind, she remembered that evening, and realized that she had been privileged to listen to the outpourings of a musician’s soul. There was joy in the music, and a passion of gratitude, but there was faith and patience too. For all danger was not yet past, nor all anxiety over, though it seemed to Ursula and her two rapt listeners that the end would surely be a happy one after all.

When the music ceased, and Toby dared linger no later, she took her leave, having first begged permission to be on the moor at sunrise to see the traveller off.

‘Sunrise is rather early at this time of year,’ Ursula reminded her, laughing; but Toby was not to be damped.

‘I’ve often got up as early, before now, for less,’ she answered stoutly. ‘Do say I may, Miss Musgrave!’

‘If I were the right kind of schoolmarm,’ said Lesley Musgrave ruefully, ‘I should tell you “Certainly not!” But I haven’t had enough experience yet in that sort of thing, and the circumstances are exceptional—not forgetting your share in them. Yes, Toby! wise or otherwise—and I am very much afraid it’s otherwise—you may come.’

## CHAPTER XXIII

### SUNRISE ON THE MOOR

Toby had the ordinary schoolgirl's healthy appetite for sleep, but the consciousness of some strange and stirring event was strong upon her, and she woke next morning when the first grey twilight of dawn was creeping in at her window. In a moment she was wide awake and out of bed. There was no time to be lost if she hoped to be up on Blue Tor by sunrise.

Twenty minutes later she was running down the steps of the terraced garden and across the clapper bridge, having dodged Algernon with some skill.

'For he's not accustomed to aeroplanes, and he might not like it,' thought Toby. 'We can't have him barking and making a scene to attract any one who happens to be awake within earshot.'

But it seemed, as she climbed the hill to the towering grey rocks above, as though no one in all the world was awake except herself. Dew lay thick on the short turf and springing heather. Across the little valley, in Applecleave, a cock crew, and was answered from a farm-house farther off and out of sight in a fold of the moor. As the light strengthened a soft pearly haze rose and drifted away in wisps, and as she watched it Toby suddenly heard, far away, the droning of an aeroplane.

'He's coming!' she thought with a thrill, and hastened her climb.

She had reached the tor, and was hurrying round it to the cleft which led into its hidden recesses, when she came upon Miss Musgrave, standing with her hands thrust deep in the pockets of her long tweed coat, and her eyes fixed on the approaching machine.

'Ursula's inside there with Hugh,' she said, jerking her head in the direction of the entrance. 'She's beginning to feel the parting badly, poor old thing!'

Toby came nearer and slipped her arm into that of the mistress.

'It's awfully rough on you, too,' she said, but Miss Musgrave shook her head.

'No, no!' she answered bravely. 'I'm so thankful to know he's free, and away from that awful prison, that I can't think of anything else yet. Besides,

I've had this glimpse of him. If only our parents and Nan could have seen him as well—but it would have been too risky.'

The biplane came nearer and nearer, and swept in a wide circle over their heads. As if in response to the sound of its engines, Hugh Musgrave and Ursula stepped out of the deep cleft and joined them. He was wearing a leather coat, belted round the middle, over a light-grey lounge suit, tan shoes, and an airman's close helmet, for his friend had brought these things with him when he motored down in answer to Lesley's summons.

'Pretty complete disguise, eh?' he observed cheerfully, as he pulled a pair of goggles out of his pocket and prepared to put them on. Then, catching sight of Toby, he held out his hand, seizing hers in a grip that hurt.

'So you've come to see me off?' he said. 'It's very sporting of you, but you've been a sport all through. When I think how you guided me to safety through that fog, when most girls would have bolted at sight, I——'

'Oh, please!' interrupted Toby earnestly. 'Don't thank me, because I simply loathe it! I only did what anybody with ordinary decency would have done, but it was lucky that I happened to know the moor so well, and that I'd found this secret place, where you could hide.'

'There, perhaps, I can make some small return,' said Hugh, speaking rapidly, with his eyes on the great machine, which was planing downwards to its landing. 'I have found another secret in that cave of yours—or rather, I've left things ready for you to find it, because I felt it belonged to you, since you'd discovered the rest. You know about the inscribed stone, of course? I can't make it out myself, but you can hardly have failed to notice it.'

'Yes—yes!' cried Toby eagerly. 'Have you found out something more?'

'I've found out how to move it,' he answered, 'and you'll have no difficulty—*Hullo!*'

Round the angle of the rock, on the Priorscross side, threading their way through the clatters, came a couple of men in the dress of prison warders and carrying guns. For a moment the little group stood petrified, awaiting their advance, while behind them the big aeroplane sank gently to the ground.

'Oh, run, Hugh—run!' breathed Ursula, in a frenzy of despair, but he shook his head.

'They'd be after me before the machine could take off,' he said hoarsely. 'It's—all up now, Ursie! And with safety just across the grass there!'



It was then that Toby rose to the occasion—Toby, who never knew that she had it in her to act the simplest role. Running eagerly over the rough sward to meet the warders, they heard her cry:

‘Oh! are you hunting for the convict who escaped on Thursday? For goodness’ sake, don’t say he’s anywhere here! I don’t mind, but Miss Grey,’ waving her hand towards the obviously terrified Ursula, ‘is scared to death of meeting him!’

The warders paused, and the elder of the two laughed.

‘Why, to be sure, it’s Miss Toby!’ he said. ‘Mister Barrett the artist’s little maid! No, no, Missie! neither you nor your friends has any cause to be afear’d. We’ll settle the rascal for you, if he comes this way—but he’s likely to be far enough off by this time, worse luck!’

‘Why, it’s you, George!’ exclaimed Toby, recognizing a man who had lived at Applecleave until a few years ago, and to whose sick child she had often given her toys and books in earlier days. ‘Are you a warder at Princetown now? How is your wife and Rosie?’

But by now her prompt action had given the others time to recover themselves, and she heard the airman hailing Hugh from where his plane had come to rest.

‘I say, old chap, hurry up! I’ve no time to lose if you want me to drop you at Croydon in time for breakfast. What’s up? An escaped convict? Well, they don’t want you to help ’em, do they? You can’t do any good, so get in.’

‘What’s that?’ asked the warder. ‘We don’t often see a hairyplane come to ground in these parts.’

‘You wouldn’t now, but for us,’ answered Lesley, managing to speak and laugh naturally, as she joined them. ‘That is Mr. Arnold’s private plane—Phil Arnold, who flies a lot at Hendon—I expect you’ve heard of him, if you’re interested in such things. He has come to take my brother back to town by way of a joy-ride. But that dreadful convict isn’t really anywhere about here, is he?’

‘No, miss. I expect he’s got farther away by now. Me and my mate were just beating this bit o’ the moor on the off-chance, so to speak. We’ll wait, if we may, and see the plane take off, since we’ve been lucky enough to happen along.’

To Hugh Musgrave and his friends the next few minutes were like a nightmare of eternity. Somehow he managed to stride nonchalantly across to

the machine and clamber into his place, while Arnold got back into the pilot's seat. Realizing that only the most casual farewells were possible under these watching eyes, the girls stood back and waved, and shouted 'Good luck!' while Toby added shrilly and cheerfully, 'Don't be late for the office!'

Then the biplane began to move, and even poor frightened Ursula breathed again as it glided over the turf, and rose slowly but steadily, up, up, and up. That last danger, terrible and unforeseen, was over, and Hugh was safe.

It was Lesley who grasped the necessity for continuing to play their parts as the aeroplane soared higher and dwindled in the distance. Though longing to see the last of the warders and their dreaded uniform, she turned back to them, at last, and said:

'I wonder if it would be interfering with your duty—I hardly like to ask it—but it would be rather reassuring if you and your friend would walk with us just to the edge of the moor. We had no idea, when we came up to see my brother start, that there was any suspicion of that dreadful man lurking in the neighbourhood, and at this early hour, when no one is about——'

The warders exchanged glances and laughed indulgently. It was natural that the young ladies should be nervous, though—discouraged by their fruitless search—they themselves thought there was little danger of any unpleasant encounter.

'We may as well go your way as any other, miss,' Toby's friend replied civilly. 'Is it over to Applecleave with missie, here, you're staying?'

'No,' replied Lesley, quick to see that there was no wisdom in unnecessary lies. 'My friend and I have rooms at Priorscross. Perhaps, Toby dear, you wouldn't mind going home by the longer way this morning, so that we can keep together till we are off the moor?'

'Not a bit,' responded Toby, readily falling in with the ruse. 'I'm not nervous, but I dare say it would be better to go back by the lane. Only, let's hurry, or we shall all be late for breakfast, and that means I shall be late for school.'

So the little procession took its way down the shoulder of the hill, to separate in the lane at its foot, and the warders, as they accepted the girls' thanks for their escort, never guessed that they had been looking on at the escape of their quarry. That convict's disappearance remained for ever one of the mysteries of the moor.

The strain and suspense of the morning's adventures told not at all on Toby. Now that Hugh Musgrave's danger was safely past, her mind reverted at once to his last few words with her before the arrival of the warders. Was it possible that, after all, her dream of four long years was coming true? Had he hit on some way of moving the stone which would make it possible to get quite easily at the something that lay behind?

'It seems too simple to be true,' thought Toby, as she hastened homewards through the wild-rose fragrance of the dewy lanes. 'I was so sure men would be needed to dig and blast, and do all sorts of hefty things like that—and all the time it only wanted a touch in the right place! It was awfully thoughtful of him to guess how badly I'd want to find it and leave it to me! He must have longed just to take one peep—especially when he had nothing else to do up there.'

Her imagination worked rapidly all the time she was breakfasting and changing into her riding things; but before she went down to saddle Blackberry for the ride to school, she got out her Bible and read carefully, once again, through the description of the Ark of the Covenant.

'Of course it may not be that at all,' she warned herself when at last she put the book away and was ready to start. 'He may have hidden some other part of the Temple treasure there. At any rate, I shall soon know now. Directly school is over this evening I'll gallop home and be off to Blue Tor. No—Dorinda wants me to practise for the tournament tonight—I shall have to put it off till to-morrow evening. *Then* I shall know, at last, what Jeremiah left in the cave!'

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE TREASURE IN BLUE TOR

But Toby had to put her entrancing hopes away at the back of her mind for a little longer and give her whole attention to school and its demands during the remainder of the week. There was no chance, nowadays, of getting home in time for tea, or even shortly afterwards. With various matches coming on, Dorinda reminded her that her excellence at tennis, and far-from-excellence at cricket, made it necessary for her to devote a lot of her spare time to games. Spare time, as a matter of fact, was not easily come by just then, since the examination for the Molyneux Prize was looming in the near future, and Toby was working very hard at the required subjects. All these things considered, there was no chance of visiting the cave in Blue Tor until Saturday afternoon. In the morning the Sixth was playing the Upper Fifth at cricket, and Toby was included in the tail—‘for lack of any one better’, as Dorinda candidly told her.

She was sitting alone at her desk in the deserted classroom on Wednesday evening, poring over her school copy of *Macbeth*, when Dorinda entered, swinging her tennis racket and whistling in an absent fashion.

‘I’m not coming!’ growled Toby determinedly, eyeing her weapon. ‘I played a set with Jill directly after tea, and now I’ve got this Shakespeare to see to.’

‘All right,’ said Dorinda reassuringly. ‘I’m not going to drag you out. I’ve come in to have a look at the Shakespeare myself, as it happens. Miss Musgrave has stayed on to-day, so I’m not wanted at the nets, and I feel I’m very much wanted here.’

She threw down her racket and, going over to her desk, took out notebook and pencil, sighing a little as she pushed her heavy dark hair off her brow, and settled down to work. Toby glanced across at her with an uneasy frown, for Dorinda looked depressed—a state of affairs which troubled her friend, who feared she knew the cause.

‘Are you worrying about your training still?’ she asked abruptly. ‘I wish you wouldn’t, Dor. I’m perfectly certain it’s going to be all right when the time comes.’

‘But how?’ asked Dorinda gruffly. ‘Unless you’ve been endowed, all of a sudden, with the gift of prophecy, I don’t see why you should be so sure.’

Toby hunched her shoulders with an obstinate air.

‘Well, I am,’ she insisted. ‘You needn’t think because—because Daddy didn’t say very much about it that afternoon that he isn’t going to help. He was awfully struck with your sketches, but he thinks there isn’t much to be done while you’re still at school. Wait till you’re ready to leave, and I—I *promise* you he’ll help!’

Dorinda looked across at her with an affectionate smile.

‘Thanks awfully, old thing!’ she said gently. ‘I know that if you were my fairy godmother I’d be starting my career to-morrow. And that’s what I might do,’ she added, half to herself, ‘if I could win the Molyneux.’

Toby pricked up her ears instantly.

‘What’s that got to do with it?’ she demanded.

Dorinda hesitated, and stared down at her blotting-paper, in which she was jabbing holes.

‘Your old Rector over at Applecleave—Mr. Rushworth—didn’t you say he was rather a pal of yours?’

Toby nodded.

‘Rather!’ she said. ‘We’re great chums. He likes old things, and so do I. He read my inscription for me—didn’t I tell you? But what’s he got to do with the Molyneux?’

‘If I won it,’ said Dorinda, continuing to destroy the blotting-paper, ‘I should have twenty pounds of my very own. And if you know Mr. Rushworth, perhaps you can tell me whether it’s true that he takes art pupils, now and again.’

‘When he can get them,’ replied Toby. ‘Of course it’s rather an unusual thing for a clergyman to do, but he’s pretty well known, and sometimes students come down and board in the village, and go to him for a course. Oh, I see!’ as light dawned upon her. ‘That’s what you would do with the twenty pounds!’

‘If I had the faintest chance of winning them,’ said Dorinda, with a rueful smile. ‘I’d go to him for lessons as long as the money lasted. Miss Ashley is such an understanding old brick—she’d let me go over on Saturdays, and perhaps some other afternoon as well, if it could be arranged

so as not to interfere with my school work. Then I'd go in for an art scholarship—there are some that cover one's living expenses—and that would start me on my career. But of course it's all a day-dream! I can never win the Molyneux.'

'I don't see why you shouldn't,' argued Toby. 'You're good in all three subjects—better than Jill, or Jane, or me—so perhaps you're better than the other candidates, too, if we did but know.'

Dorinda groaned.

'Even if I beat everybody else in those, there's still the essay. You know how feeble I am at compo! Don't let's talk of it any more, Toby—it's only keeping us from *Macbeth*.'

Toby obediently turned back to the red-covered text-book, and both girls plunged straightway into the work on hand; but the conversation lingered in Toby's mind, though she said no more about it, and Dorinda felt the sympathy which her friend was too tactful to express in words. Somehow she guessed that Dorinda could not stand too much of that at present, but (casting about for some means of cheering her up) she at length decided to share her precious new secret with her. When she went to Blue Tor on Saturday afternoon, she would ask Dorinda to go with her and see the ancient wonders which, she felt sure, lay behind the loosened stone.

'I've shown her all there was to show, up till now,' thought Toby, 'and she'd be thrilled if she could be there to see the rest. Of course, I can't say anything about Hugh Musgrave—that's not my secret. I must tell her a—a friend, who was here for the week-end, moved the stone. That's true, and it doesn't give any one away.'

Accordingly she proposed another moor tea to Dorinda, who accepted with enthusiasm.

'If we're going to Blue Tor again,' she said, 'I'd like to sketch the view from there, looking over to Applecleave. It's bound to be difficult, of course, but that makes it better worth trying.'

'I'm quite sure,' said Toby approvingly, 'that speech shows the proper sort of spirit for a budding artist. I'm not an artist myself—either budding or in bloom—nor am I ever likely to be, but if I were——'

'Oh, shut up!' said Dorinda, laughing. 'Go and ask the Head if I may go to tea with you on Saturday. And you might ride home by Priors-cross tonight and buy me a new sketching-block. I'll tell you the size I want. They've got quite good ones at that little stationer's.'

‘All the same,’ said Toby to herself, as she went off to the Head’s study, ‘there won’t be much sketching done at Blue Tor on Saturday afternoon, if I know anything about it! Still, I suppose the new block may come in handy another time.’

Not until they had actually reached the top of the hill, that Saturday, did Toby divulge the real reason for their expedition, and then it was in reply to a chance remark of her companion’s.

‘I rather wish,’ said Dorinda carelessly, ‘that you’d asked Jill too. I believe she would have liked to come with us.’

‘I felt rather horrid about it,’ Toby confessed, ‘and I mean to ask her as well next time. But I’ve brought you here to-day for a very special reason, Dor, and I didn’t want anybody but you.’

Dorinda stopped short and stared at her earnestly.

‘You’re always full of mysteries when we come up here,’ she said. ‘Is it anything to do with Jeremiah this time? What? Not really, Toby? Have you found the treasure, after all, without excavating?’

Toby shook her head.

‘Not yet,’ she said, ‘but some one—a friend—who was—was spending a few days on the moor, found out that the stone with the inscription could be moved, and he loosened it for me. He didn’t know what was behind it, of course, or I don’t see how he could have *borne* to leave it for any one else! But he did, anyhow, and now you and I can find it together.’

Dorinda’s blue eyes opened widely, partly in awe, and partly from another feeling.

‘Oh, Toby! have you actually waited till I could come too? How ripping of you! when you must have been dying to see what was behind that stone!’

‘I was too busy, at first, to come up,’ Toby disclaimed honestly, ‘and then I thought it would be jollier to have you with me. But I’m afraid you won’t have much time for sketching to-day. Leave your things in the hut-circle, and we’ll get them when we come out.’

Together—Toby first, and Dorinda following—they swung themselves up into the cave and groped their way to the back, where was the stone with its old inscription. Then, their eyes growing more used to the gloom, they bent eagerly forward, and Toby, with hands which trembled a little, pushed at the rough granite boulder, which Hugh Musgrave had shifted in its groove. It shook, moved a little, and then—as, gathering more courage, she

exerted all her strength and pushed—it slipped back and swung round, as though on some rough pivot, leaving a dark cavity revealed behind.

‘Quick! The torch!’ cried Toby in a half-stifled voice, reaching out her hand.

Dorinda gave it to her and craned forward eagerly to see what its beam would reveal. Pressing the stud, Toby flashed the light into the recess, and both girls gasped as it fell upon a stout oak coffer, about a yard long by half a yard in width, its corners bound with blackened brass.

‘It looks awfully modern,’ murmured Dorinda anxiously. ‘At least, only medieval. I didn’t know they had things like that in Jeremiah’s time.’

But Toby’s face was glowing with excitement.

‘They found things far more modern-looking in Tutankamen’s tomb,’ she declared. ‘It just shows you that one can’t judge unless one is an expert. Dorinda! help me to move it. We must pull it out very carefully.’

‘But it doesn’t look a bit like the Ark of the Covenant,’ objected Dorinda, with growing scepticism. ‘The Bible says nothing about brass corners—and where are the staves for carrying it by? And the cherubim?’

‘They might have got broken off,’ said Toby doubtfully. ‘But, anyhow,’ brightening, ‘it was only my idea that we’d find the Ark of the Covenant here, and of course I’ve been quite wrong. There’s no room here for anything like that, with its angels and handles. This must be part of the Temple treasure. I expect the Ark of the Covenant is buried in the Hill of Tara over in Ireland, after all.’

Together they tugged at the heavy chest, moving it very cautiously till they had dragged it to the edge of its hiding-place. Here, where it was possible to see something of its contents, they attempted, still carefully, to force up the lid. It was not a difficult feat. The fastenings, rusted with age and damp, suddenly yielded to their gentle pressure, and the lid fell back.

‘What is it? What’s in it?’ cried Dorinda breathlessly. ‘Oh, Toby! there goes the torch; battery failed. Can’t we lift the chest between us to the mouth of the cave? We can’t see anything back here.’

‘It’s so frightfully heavy,’ said Toby dubiously. ‘Let’s try. You hang on to that end, and I’ll take this.’

Staggering and panting, they carried their load to daylight and set it down where the afternoon sun was streaming into the cave through the flickering leaves of its guardian rowan-trees.



‘Doesn’t it seem rather wonderful,’ said Toby in hushed tones, ‘to think that the last hands to touch this chest were Jeremiah’s? It gives me a queer sort of feeling—as if I were in church, or something, and oughtn’t to speak above a whisper.’

‘I know,’ assented Dorinda, in the same low voice. ‘See! there’s a mouldered cover over the top. Toby, they must have had stuff in those days just like our green baize!’

Toby removed the cloth with reverent fingers, and her brown head touched Dorinda’s dark locks as they bent over the treasure—vases, servers, and candlesticks of tarnished silver, some set in barbaric fashion with rough stones, some chased and chiselled in quaint patterns.

‘It’s an extraordinary thing to see,’ said Dorinda solemnly, ‘that the vessels they had in the Temple were exactly what we have in any of our old churches to-day. When we went to Norfolk for our holidays——’

She stopped abruptly, arrested by the look on Toby’s face as she raised it from a large server which she had been examining.

‘They’re—they’re not Temple vessels at all!’ cried Toby brokenly. ‘This has got a coat-of-arms on it—the arms of the Petrie-Bullivants, who used to own all the land round here! I’ve often seen them on the wall above their pew in church.’

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE WRONG JEREMIAH

It was a bitter blow, and for a minute or two the girls faced each other in mute disappointment across the open chest. Then Toby, in a characteristic effort to make the best of things, said, with forced cheerfulness:

‘Well—it looks as though we’d been had about Jeremiah’s treasure, but this is certainly somebody else’s, and it seems to have been here a few hundred years by its appearance.’

‘What’s a few hundred years,’ said Dorinda dejectedly, ‘when we thought we were going to find something that had been there for thousands?’

‘It’s better than nothing,’ Toby persisted. ‘Fancy if we’d only found an empty space! As it is, we’d better go down at once and see Mr. Rushworth.’

‘Why?’ asked Dorinda, startled; for she had come to associate the old Rector with one thing only, since reading a paragraph about him in the local paper. To her he was an artist, who occasionally, and by favour, took pupils.

‘Because,’ answered Toby, ‘except for us and the friend who moved the stone, Mr. Rushworth is the only person who knows anything at all about this, and I don’t want to tell the whole neighbourhood. These are church vessels of some sort, and he’s sure to know what to do with them, being a clergyman himself.’

‘I wonder,’ said Dorinda, staring down at the confused heap of tarnished silver, ‘how on earth they came here.’

‘Probably the rector of those days hid them here during the Civil War, when Cromwell’s Roundheads were out to strip and destroy the churches. I say, Dorinda!——’

She broke off, and stood gazing again at their find.

‘What is it now?’ asked Dorinda in surprise.

‘Only, I was thinking—do you remember my telling you that Mr. Rushworth was always mourning some of the church plate which had been stolen? Do you suppose—can this possibly be it?’

‘Goodness!’ exclaimed Dorinda. ‘I never thought of that! It might. Anyhow, let’s lay the lid on again carefully and then go and tell Mr.

Rushworth what we've found. He'll know what's the best thing to do about it, even if it isn't his.'

'I'm beginning to believe more and more that it must be,' said Toby. 'You see, the Petrie-Bullivants had a lot to do with Applecleave.'

Together they replaced the lid, and, leaving the coffer where they had dragged it (since no one was likely to come there or molest it during their absence), they departed down the hill, and up again, through the Stepside garden to the lane behind it, and thence through the village to the Rectory.

Mr. Rushworth was in, and very pleased to see them. Toby was a favourite of his, and he was the only person permitted to call her by her full name.

('Because, from him it sounds like a pet name,' she explained to Dorinda afterwards. 'Very different from Kathleen Wingfield's way of using it.')

'I hope you and your friend mean to stay to tea,' he observed, his little eyes twinkling out of a shaggy forest of eyebrows and beard. 'My cook baked a very good cake yesterday, and I didn't eat it all. It's a great pleasure to me,' he added to Dorinda, 'to see my young friend, with a girl of her own age. Too much of her long life has been devoted to mooning about by herself among monoliths and kistvaens. Now, I take it, she plays cricket and tennis.'

'Not this afternoon,' Toby informed him. 'Dorinda and I would love to come to tea another time, but to-day we're going to have it up on Blue Tor. We've left it there, in fact, and we want you to come and have it with us, because we've got something rather marvellous to show you. Will you come?'

'First, tell me what it is,' said Mr. Rushworth suspiciously. 'I'm not buying any pig in a poke.'

'It isn't a poke,' said Toby, with a wide and cheerful grin. 'It's an old chest with brass corners—but I shan't tell you anything more till we get there.'

'Then I suppose I shall have to come,' said the old Rector, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his smoking jacket. 'And I'd better bring that rather special cake with me, as my contribution to the feast. But if you're hoodwinking me, Tabitha, I'll never trust a woman again!'

'She's not,' Dorinda assured him eagerly. 'We have found something very marvellous, and we want you to explain it to us.'

‘That depends,’ said Mr. Rushworth oracularly; but he came, and even submitted to being blindfolded, when they reached the tor, and led inside.

‘Because we don’t want you to know all our secrets,’ Toby explained, half in fun and half in earnest, as she remembered how glad she had been, a few days before, that no one but Gillian and Dorinda knew of the entrance she herself had discovered by the purest chance.

When the handkerchief had been removed and he was able to look about him, Mr. Rushworth’s astonishment was exceedingly satisfactory. His interest in the antiquities of the moor had always been the great bond between himself and Toby, though he chose to poke fun at her for what he called her ‘venerable pursuits’, and the place in which he now found himself was as a gem to a collector.

‘An entirely perfect hut-circle!’ he cried. ‘I suppose because nobody has got in to despoil it. I’d like to know,’ looking at the rock walls around him, ‘how I got in myself, Tabitha, you witch! But that seems to be asking too much.’

‘It is,’ said Toby firmly. ‘But we’re going to show you something else instead. At least,’ eyeing him doubtfully, ‘we may not be able to show you the whole of it, unless—do you think you could get up on to that bent rowan-tree there? It takes a bit of doing.’

‘You are a rude young woman!’ replied Mr. Rushworth, with dignity. ‘That is, if you mean to imply that I am past the age for such gymnastics. I can assure you that, like Father William, I have kept all my joints very supple—and, after seeing this hut-circle, I’m ready to follow you anywhere.’

‘Good!’ said Toby, laughing. ‘We’ll show you the way up. But first—do you remember that inscription you translated for me once about Jeremiah?’

‘I do. Something in the nature of a hoax, I fancied.’

‘Well, you’ll see in a minute that it wasn’t—at least, not altogether.’ Toby’s tone grew a little uncertain. ‘I’m beginning to think that perhaps it was the wrong Jeremiah. It couldn’t have been the prophet, worse luck!’

‘I told you all along it wasn’t,’ declared the Rector.

‘Yes, but it wasn’t a hoax. Come up, and see.’

The girls scrambled up and Mr. Rushworth obediently followed them, with much puffing and groaning, which they suspected was exaggerated. He arrived in the cave, at any rate, not far behind them, and when, in eloquent silence, they lifted the lid of the chest, he straightway forgot them altogether.

Kneeling on the hard floor of the cave, he picked up one article after another, cooing over them, 'for all the world', as Dorinda whispered to Toby, 'like an elderly wood-pigeon!'

At last, however, he came to earth again, and got up, brushing the dust from the knees of his trousers.

'My dears,' he said impressively, as he straightened himself, 'this is an extraordinary discovery of yours—extraordinary! By the coat of arms engraved on some of these things—the Petrie-Bullivants' arms—I recognize them as part of the Applecleave church plate which disappeared nearly three hundred years ago and has never since been traced. It looks as though the old legend was the true version after all.'

'What old legend?' asked Dorinda, deeply interested; but Toby interposed.

'Let's go down and have tea in the hut-circle,' she suggested, 'and you can tell us the story while we're having it. I thought you'd know what to do about the treasure.'

'Do?' repeated Mr. Rushworth, as they descended once more to ground level. 'There's only one thing to do, of course. It must be returned to the church as soon as possible. You can guess something of what your discovery means to me, Toby, for I've often talked to you about the lost plate—though I never dared to hope it would be restored in my lifetime. And I owe it all to you two girls—that is, the parish owes it to you. I fear I am too much given to regarding this as a personal affair. Well, well! I'll go in and see the churchwarden about it, on my way home.'

Toby made a wry face.

'Then that means,' said she regretfully, 'that it's all up with my secret! Every one will know about this place, and every one will come to see it, and trippers will leave their banana-skins about, and light fires on this old hearthstone——'

She stopped, arrested by the look of mild horror on the Rector's face.

'My dear Tabitha! the thing is out of the question! Trippers here—in this place—or even the natives! We know how the stone avenues have been demolished in other parts of the moor, and monoliths carried off to act as door-jambes in some ordinary farm-building. Would this circle be as intact as it is (by the mercies of Providence!) if its whereabouts had been known all along to every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the neighbourhood?'

‘I should think not!’ replied Toby emphatically, while Dorinda listened in silence, as she helped to unpack the tea-basket.

‘Only a miracle can have preserved it so far. I don’t know how we got in here, but even supposing your entrance is not a very obvious one, how does it come that nobody, scrambling on the tor, has looked into it from above?’

‘Because nobody ever does scramble on this tor,’ Toby answered promptly. ‘The upper part of the rocks is sheer and as smooth as glass, and there’s no foothold anywhere. I know, for I’ve often tried it!’

‘Thank heaven for that!’ exclaimed Mr. Rushworth fervently. ‘If you’re sure of that, then we should be able to keep the secret a while longer. I’ll tell the churchwardens you’ve found the church plate, but that we prefer not to say where, and, being decent chaps, they won’t press me. We can carry it down between us, bit by bit, to the Rectory, and if we set to work after tea, the job should be done by this evening. Of course, we don’t want to advertise to the whole parish what we’re carrying.’

‘That’s easy enough,’ said Dorinda quickly. ‘Toby and I can take our share under our school blazers and yours can go in the tea-basket, Mr. Rushworth. It’s sure to be empty enough by then.’

‘And now,’ said Toby, as she passed the sandwiches round, ‘please do tell us how these silver things came here. I didn’t know there was a legend about it.’

‘It’s not much of one,’ answered Mr. Rushworth deprecatingly, ‘but my predecessor at the Rectory lived on in Applecleave for a bit after his retirement, and he handed it on to me. I didn’t think much of it at the time, fancying it was a mere fairy-tale, but it came back to me just now with some force. He got it out of some ancient parish annals, I believe, and it had to do with the Rector of those days—a queer old fellow, by all accounts—called Jeremy Bullivant—some connexion of the people at the Hall, apparently, though he hadn’t got the Petrie in his name. Well, this old chap had a bee in his bonnet, towards the end of his days—thought the Commonwealth was going to call up all the church plate throughout the country, and mint it down for coinage. As you’ve probably heard, Oliver’s rabble pretty well wrecked his church for him during the Civil War, on their way back from Cornwall, and it was said that crazed him—anyhow he was never the same man after it, and I don’t wonder! Every one thought when the church plate disappeared that he knew more than he would admit, and afterwards he took to spending hours up on the moor in all weathers. As likely as not he was in the cave there, fixing things up, and cutting that inscription on the stone about

Jeremiah and the treasure of the House of the Lord—the inscription which completely took you in, Tabitha, though I don't suppose he thought of any other Jeremiah when he did it.'

'But why did he do it in Hebrew?' asked Toby, in bewilderment.

The parson shrugged his shoulders.

'Some whim, I suppose. He was an eccentric, to say the least of it. Perhaps he wanted to deceive the uninitiated.'

'But wouldn't you think,' said Dorinda slowly, 'that he would have passed on the secret of the hiding-place to some one else before he died? He can't have meant the things to lie in the cave for ever.'

'Probably he intended telling some one, but just put off, and put off, as people will, till the end came so hurriedly that he had no time to do so.'

'It did,' observed Toby suddenly. 'I've seen his tombstone in the churchyard—haven't you, Mr. Rushworth?—in the corner by the tower. It says, "To the memory of the Rev. Jeremy Bullivant, one-time Rector of this parish, who perished on Blue Tor in the Great Storm." Perhaps he was coming back from this very place.'

'Quite likely,' agreed Mr. Rushworth. 'Poor old soul! No, I haven't looked at the stone for years. I must go and examine it again now.'

During the remainder of their meal, he told them queer tales of other finds which the ancient places of the moor had yielded from time to time, tales which his audience drank in with eager ears. Finally, they packed up the scanty remains of the feast in the basket with one of old Jeremy's heavy altar vases, and Toby concealed a pair of candlesticks in her mauve blazer, Dorinda taking a silver censer for her share.

Thus laden they set out for the Rectory again, the old parson quite unconsciously chanting a Te Deum to himself, as though he could not keep his joy from bubbling up in this (to him) most natural manner. It took three or four journeys to carry down all the plate, before Dorinda, tired but happy, had to make her way back to St. Githa's, while Toby and the Rector restored the now-empty chest to its original hiding-place in the cave.

'I think you may justly keep that for your share of the spoil,' remarked Mr. Rushworth. 'I'm sure you've earned it, and far more. If you would rather have it in your own room at home, we'll manage to get it down there, between us, some day.'

‘Thank you very much,’ said Toby, ‘but I think I’d rather keep it here for the present.’



## CHAPTER XXVI

### TOBY SCHEMES

The recovery of the lost church plate created a small sensation whose ripples extended beyond the parish confines of Applecleave; but Mr. Rushworth, true to his promise, kept Toby's secret well, and though his churchwarden called at Stepside on the following Monday evening to thank and congratulate her, he asked no questions, nor did the Rector permit any one else to do so afterwards.

It had been a thrilling find, but Toby (having built her hopes for so long on one which would have been much more thrilling) might have suffered from a feeling of flatness but for the work at school. The examination for the Molyneux was to be held on Thursday, and her ambitions, being baulked regarding the Ark of the Covenant, were now centred entirely on winning the prize.

'I want the honour most frightfully,' she confided frankly to Gillian, as they came out of school on Wednesday morning. 'I can't pretend I don't. But I want the money more.'

'What on earth for?' inquired Gillian bluntly. 'You don't seem to be exactly destitute and starving, Toby! Besides, twenty pounds would be no use to you, if you won it. Ten pounds might be different, perhaps, or five, but no parent would allow you to play with a sum like that. You'd only have to put it in the bank—which always strikes me as being an awful waste!'

'Rather!' agreed Toby wholeheartedly. 'But luckily for me, my parent is different from other people's. I doubt if he'd give the prize itself a second thought, supposing I won it. He would be tremendously pleased and excited, but he'd never ask whether it was a cheque or a calf-bound volume of Shakespeare.'

Gillian looked as though she hardly knew what to make of such an unworldly father, and was not at all sure that she approved.

'It doesn't seem right, somehow,' she said, shaking her head, 'though I can see that it might be convenient. But—if it isn't a rude question—why do you want twenty pounds so badly?'

Toby looked round at the little streams of girls hurrying off in various directions.

‘I don’t mind telling you,’ she said, ‘because you happen to be Dorinda’s chum—but not here. Where are you going to, at the present moment?’

‘My garden,’ Jill replied. ‘I’ve got an assignation with Miss Musgrave there in about twenty minutes. She’s going to give me a lesson in budding roses. Better come and see how I’ve been getting on. You’ve been too much taken up with games and things lately to do any weeding for me. I’m not complaining, of course—don’t think that—but there it is.’

‘I know I have,’ admitted Toby contritely, ‘but that’s been Dorinda’s fault. She’s running round now, seeking whom she may devour for a practice game, so let’s dodge her, and I’ll weed for a bit—though I shan’t hide it from you that it’s chiefly because I want to talk.’

‘All right,’ said Gillian indulgently. ‘I don’t mind listening to your childish prattle if you dig plantains out of the lawn at the same time. Oh, you needn’t sneer! I confess it’s not much bigger than a pocket-handkerchief, but I’m making a lawn of it, for all that—and it contains as many plantains as plenty of bigger ones.’

‘And that’s about its only resemblance to a lawn, I should think!’ remarked Toby unkindly. But she set to work vigorously enough with Gillian’s spud, seated cross-legged on the grass close to where Jill herself was hoeing.

‘And now,’ said the latter, tilting her hat over her eyes, ‘what about that twenty pounds which you haven’t won yet, and aren’t going to win? And what’s it got to do with my being Dorinda’s chum? At the present moment I can’t see the slightest connexion.’

‘You’re not very encouraging,’ observed Toby plaintively, ‘about my winning the prize, I mean. After that remark I’m half-afraid to confide in you in case you think I’m being conceited.’

‘Oh no!’ said Jill. ‘I shouldn’t think that, because you aren’t, you see. Olive’s got a good opinion of herself, and so have Kathleen and some of the others, but conceit isn’t a failing of yours.’

‘Thanks awfully!’ said Toby, laughing, and then added earnestly, ‘I suppose you know, Jill, that Dorinda’s most frightfully keen to win the Molyneux, because she wants the money for her training?’

‘Of course I know that,’ said Jill, still looking puzzled. ‘But *you* don’t want to train for anything.’

Toby made a comic grimace.

‘Haven’t got the brains!’ she replied. ‘The only thing I’m good at is Composition, and that’s just the point. You know I’m monitress of our form-room this week? Well—I was tidying up yesterday when you’d all rushed off at half-past twelve—and the door was open, and Snaithie and Miss Mather stopped to speak to each other in the passage. I don’t think they knew any one was in the room, and, anyhow, I wasn’t listening, and didn’t realize it was private till I heard my own name. Miss Snaith must have asked some question, for Miss Mather said, “Toby Barrett is the only one. Dorinda is the best all round, and has worked exceedingly hard, but so much depends on the Essay, and there she is no good at all, while Toby is excellent.”’

‘Humph!’ said Jill. ‘I can understand your hesitating to repeat such a speech to any one, but I’m afraid there’s a lot of truth in it. None of us can touch you at Compo., and you’re pretty good at the other subjects, too——’

‘But not so good as Dorinda,’ Toby amended. ‘Miss Mather said so again. But when Miss Snaith asked if she didn’t think that would give Dor a chance, Miss Mather said she was afraid not—that the Essay mattered most to the examiners and that I should score there.’

‘Well, I hope you will,’ said Gillian warmly. ‘Jane and I both know very well that we’re only entering because the Head, for some obscure reason, thinks it’s good for us. Personally, I believe that the usual ill-luck of St. Githa’s will hold good, and none of us will win, but if Miss Mather has hopes for you, I’m very glad—though I can’t help telling you candidly that I’d rather it was Dorinda.’

‘So should I,’ agreed Toby, not at all offended, ‘and if I thought it could be, I’m afraid I might be tempted to slack. But, after what Miss Mather said, I mean to try my very hardest, because—don’t you see, Jill?—if I get it, then it will be the same thing.’

‘How can it?’ asked Jill blankly. ‘Oh, you mean for St. Githa’s!’

‘No, I don’t. I expect I ought to think first of that, but there’s no use pretending—and Dorinda’s affairs matter more to me, for the present. If I can win it, and she can’t, then I’ve jolly well got to win it and give it to her! Do you remember my telling you ages ago that I had a scheme to help Dorinda, only it mightn’t come off? Well, this is it, and, of course, it can only come off if I win the Molyneux.’

Gillian’s hoe came to an abrupt standstill, and, leaning on it, she looked down at Toby with a face of mingled amazement and protest.

‘My dear girl! you’re chums with Dorinda yourself now—do you really suppose she’d take twenty, or even two, pounds from you or any one else? Why, she wouldn’t take five shillings! At times, Tabitha, you’re a bit of a fathead, though well-meaning.’

Toby frowned.

‘Don’t call me by that hateful name! I’m glad you’re willing to admit that I’m well-meaning, at least, but I’m really not such a fool as you think. I don’t propose to walk up to Dorinda and stuff a roll of bank notes into her hand!’

The bewilderment returned to Gillian’s face.

‘Then what exactly do you propose to do? I feel a trifle out of my depth.’

‘You are!’ assented Toby, her good humour reasserting itself. ‘I’m too subtle for you. Dorinda must never know anything about it, but I’m going to take that twenty pounds (always supposing I get it!) to Mr. Rushworth and ask him to train Dor for as long as it lasts—just as she meant to do herself if she’d won it—only he must pretend that he’s doing it out of a fund for needy art-students. It will be perfectly true, Jill, though I’m afraid the fund will be so small that it will only cover part of one student’s training! Still, as long as Dorinda never discovers that, it won’t matter.’

Gillian shook her head.

‘You’re not as subtle as you think you are, Toby,’ she said gently. ‘The fact is, you’re too honest to make a good schemer, and it would need something super in that line to deceive any one as poor and proud as old Dorinda. All the same, there are germs of sense in your idea, and Mr. Rushworth may think out something better, if you consult him. Who on earth is he, by the by?’

Toby explained, rather crestfallen by Gillian’s lack of enthusiasm, and as Miss Musgrave arrived at the moment, followed by one or two gardeners from *Va* who were anxious to learn about the budding of roses, private conversation came to an end. Toby watched for a little, and then returned to the plantains. The plot, which had seemed so sound when it first occurred to her, looked much less promising when seen through Gillian’s eyes, but Toby could think of nothing better.

‘Jill’s right about consulting Mr. Rushworth, anyhow,’ she decided. ‘He may have an idea—and meanwhile I must get on with trying to win the Molyneux. That’s the first step towards helping Dorinda.’

The examination day arrived in such a downpour of rain that any of the girls might have been pardoned for allowing it to damp their spirits, but Dorinda was the only one who showed signs of nervousness. Gillian and Jane, quite convinced that they were entering merely as a matter of form, were cheerfully indifferent, and Toby's spirits were apparently at concert-pitch.

Dorinda watched and listened a little wistfully, as her three companions joked and chattered together in the bus which was conveying them, under Miss Snaith's wing, to Exeter.

'I know the others don't care much,' she said to Toby, as a change of seats brought them together, 'but you do—even though you don't need the money—so I can't understand how you can be so light-hearted over it. I'm quaking in my inside.'

'I've got the queerest feeling,' Toby confided, 'as though I was sure of doing well. It's rather comfortable, but I mustn't get too sure or I may crash. I'm dying to know what the essay subject will be!'

'I'm not!' said Dorinda gloomily.

Toby had a private reason for her good spirits, which she could not share even with Dorinda. Miss Musgrave had whispered to her, just before they started, that a letter had come from Hugh that morning, written on board ship, to say that all had gone well, and he hoped soon to be in Africa and to start on his long trek down-country to his cousins' farm.

'And Ursula is back in town, working for a big end-of-season concert at which she is to play. If she does well, her name will be established finally as one of the foremost lady 'cellists in England, and engagements should pour in,' finished Lesley happily.

'I should have thought her name was established already, but she's sure to do well,' said Toby loyally, and took this news as a good omen for her own success.

When they entered the examination-room, and took their seats among the other girls, gathered from different schools all over the county, Toby opened her question-papers eagerly, and directly she saw them her face cleared. These were questions which she felt she could answer, and her brain seemed as clear as crystal. Wasting no time, she fell to at once, while Jane, a few seats away, gnawed the end of her pen in sorrowful perplexity and wondered what Toby found in the papers to make her look so contented.

At the luncheon interval they compared notes, and anxiously demanded Miss Snaith's opinion on the answers they had given. She, being a sympathetic person, entered wholeheartedly into their difficulties, and her verdict, given over the plates of fruit salad which closed their meal, was far from discouraging.

'Gillian and Jane have done far better than I expected, and ought to come out well above the average, according to these answers, but Dorinda and Toby appear to have done the best papers. Of course, everything depends on the other candidates, but I don't think any of you need feel she has disgraced St. Githa's. I shall ask the examiners to let us have your papers back when they are done with, because I know Miss Ashley wants to see them. I think she will be quite satisfied, for you have all evidently done your best, and you can't do more!'

'There's still the essay,' said Dorinda with a little sigh.

Toby, glancing quickly at her across the little restaurant table, saw with a pang that she was looking white and strained, and wished she could impart some of her own surprising self-confidence to her.

'I can't think why I'm so happy and easy in my mind,' she said to herself. 'I hope I'm not fey. But I do feel as though nothing could stop me, somehow, and I believe it's because I'm trying to do it for Dorinda's sake. It must be my lucky day.'

'Courage!' said Miss Snaith, smiling at the downcast prefect. 'It may prove a nicer subject than you expect. Take some more lemonade to stimulate your brain.'

When lunch was over, and they were walking back to the public hall where the examination was being held, Dorinda slipped her arm through Gillian's, and her chum was distressed to feel that she was trembling.

'Oh, Jill!' she sighed, 'I wonder if I've got the ghost of a chance. Snaithie's a comforting sort of person to take with you on these occasions, but even if my papers are as good as she seems to hope—can I beat Toby when it comes to the essay?'

Gillian longed to be more encouraging than she felt, but her natural honesty betrayed her.

'Of course Toby's awfully good,' she said, 'but we may get a subject which doesn't suit her. And even if you lose, Dor, it won't matter so tremendously. We'll find some other way of helping you to get your training.'

Dorinda shook her head despondently.

‘I don’t believe there can be any other way,’ she said. ‘I’ve thought and thought about it, and I believe this is really my only chance. If I want to be trained I must make the money to pay for it, and there’s no other way of making money while I’m still at school.’

Gillian hesitated for a moment, then said diffidently, ‘Suppose—suppose some one were to lend you enough? You could have your training then, and pay it back when you were able to earn something.’

Dorinda turned on her fiercely.

‘That would be sheer speculation, and I’m not going to be led into anything of that kind! I’m surprised at you, Jill! Don’t you know that’s how all the heroes of Sunday School stories go wrong—by borrowing money which they’re not sure of being able to return? Then their creditors come and press them, and they’re obliged to steal from the till to pay them back.’

Gillian laughed, relieved to see that Dorinda’s drooping spirits were beginning to revive a little.

‘Oh, I wasn’t proposing that you should put yourself in the hands of the Jews! But if a friend were to lend you what you need—you wouldn’t refuse to take it from some one who was fond of you and wanted to help?’

They had reached the steps of the hall by this time, and Dorinda, dropping her arm, stared at her in astonishment.

‘My dear old Jill!’ she said, laughing a trifle uncertainly, ‘you are not a bloated capitalist, and, if you were, I wouldn’t take it from you—not even from *you*, and certainly not from any one else! No! if I can’t pay for my own ambitions, I’ll go without. I can’t tell you how I loathe the idea of any one—*any one*—paying a penny piece for me!’

‘I was afraid that was how you would look at it,’ said Gillian quietly, as they joined the others on their way to the cloak-room. ‘Never mind. It was only a suggestion.’

‘A remarkably useless one, then!’ retorted Dorinda.

Back in the big bare room where they were being examined, Toby, with trembling fingers, seized the slip which the examiner handed to her and spread it open on her desk. For a moment the type seemed to run together before her eyes, then it gradually grew steadier, and she read:

‘SUBJECT FOR ESSAY—Historic and Prehistoric Remains  
on Dartmoor.’

‘This,’ thought Toby, with a gasp of delight, ‘is simply Providence and nothing else! The one subject I’ve really got at my finger-ends, and I bet I know more about it than most of the other candidates. That twenty pounds is Dorinda’s!’



## CHAPTER XXVII

### TOBY VISITS MR. RUSHWORTH

The entrants for the Molyneux Prize had a week to wait before the result was made known—not a long time as compared with other examinations, but it seemed endless to Toby and Dorinda. The other competitors from St. Githa's were more or less indifferent, though Gillian wondered what would happen if Toby won it.

'I hope she realizes that Dorinda's pride is on a hair-trigger, ready to go off at any moment,' she thought, a little anxiously. 'However, I don't suppose for an instant that any of our people will be successful.'

But it turned out that Gillian was wrong—St. Githa's for once had broken its record for failure. On the seventh morning of that interminable week Miss Ashley paused before dismissing the school as usual after prayers.

'Girls,' she said, smiling down at the expectant and inquiring faces below the dais, 'I have got something very special to say to you—some good news which I know will delight you all, though it chiefly concerns only one of you. I heard this morning from the committee of the Molyneux Prize that at long last it has been won by a St. Githa's girl, and that girl is—Toby Barrett!'

The cheers of her schoolfellows nearly raised the roof, for Toby, in her short time at school, had managed to achieve a popularity for which she had made no conscious bid. Jill's friendship (which had been given unasked) and Dorinda's (which had been hard to win) were all that Toby had desired, but the ready goodwill of the rest had come with these, as their deafening cheers testified.

It was Dorinda's eyes which she sought now, a trifle diffidently—but she need have had no fear, Dorinda smiled back at her in frank self-forgetful congratulation. Toby had done something for the school which the games-captain was quick to recognize as a bigger thing than any triumph on the playing-field. Her school's prestige meant a great deal to Dorinda, and as for her personal disappointment, it had been keenest on the afternoon of the examination itself, when she had discovered that the essay was quite beyond her. With a simpler subject she might have won through, but her knowledge of the moor and its history was chiefly at second hand from Toby, though, in

common with the rest of the Sixth, she had attended lectures on that and other subjects when the Molyneux lecturers had toured the schools during the previous winter.

Miss Ashley was reading out the marks by now, and finished by saying:

‘You have all put up a satisfactory fight, but I gather from the examiners’ report that it was Toby’s essay which really brought her the prize.’ She smiled kindly down at her successful candidate. ‘A lucky subject for you, wasn’t it, Toby? But your other papers were also above the average, of course, or you couldn’t have won.’

As the school streamed out of the hall to its various form-rooms, Toby found Kathleen Wingfield beside her, with a dubious expression on her face, which struck her former antagonist as rather comical.

‘Congratulations, Toby!’ she said abruptly. ‘I say! I—er—rather jeered when you first entered for the Molyneux, but I’d just like to say that you’ve pretty well proved your side of the argument, and—well, I needn’t have jeered.’

‘Oh, I don’t know!’ disclaimed Toby, with twinkling eyes. ‘I expect I sounded horribly swanky, but I didn’t really mean it, Kathleen. You see, school was all new to me, and I hadn’t learnt to be quite like the rest of you. I hope I know better now.’ Then she added deprecatingly, ‘Anyhow, I’m not different any longer, am I?’

Kathleen, still a trifle embarrassed, considered the question, and finally gave judgement.

‘I think you’ll always be a bit different—I suppose it’s the result of coming late to school—but I don’t think you need mind that. It’s not a difference that really matters.’

It seemed to Toby as though school that day would never end and leave her free for her next move—the visit to Mr. Rushworth. Since Gillian had shaken her faith in her own plan for helping Dorinda, she had been unable to think of another, but now she was all eagerness to consult her friend, the Rector.

‘Mr. Rushworth will know what to do,’ she thought confidently. ‘He’s always taken pupils from time to time, and he must have had cases like this sometimes—at any rate I hope so, for it looks as though it were going to be rather difficult for me.’

Directly preparation was over she flew off to saddle Blackberry, refusing all invitations to remain to tea and join in an impromptu cricket-match afterwards.

‘I’ve got to see some one at Applecleave on rather important business,’ she said impressively, and was very soon riding home by short cuts across the moor. Tea was of minor importance compared with her present problem—though she was glad enough to accept it from the Rector, since it was possible, between mouthfuls of home-made cake, to lay the said problem before him.

‘Jill says my plan’s no good,’ she finished regretfully, having explained it in detail.

The Rector shook his shaggy head thoughtfully.

‘I’m afraid she’s right,’ he said. ‘Those proud people are the very dickens to help! As it happens, Tabitha, I was going to ask you myself about Dorinda, because the other day your father spoke very highly of her gift, and wondered if we could do something for her. He even said that her talent was one that ought not to be wasted.’

Toby set down her cup, which was half-way to her lips, and her eyes grew round with surprise and pleasure.

‘I wasn’t sure Daddy meant to do anything about it,’ she confessed frankly. ‘He’s so absorbed in his Otter’s Bay picture just now. But I’m awfully glad he did. And what had *you* thought of, Mr. Rushworth?’

‘Well,’ he said slowly, ‘I was going to ask you to bring your friend here to tea next Saturday, with those sketches which so much impressed your father; and then I was thinking of suggesting to her that I should write to her parents and offer to take her on as a pupil, just for the pleasure of teaching her—but if you think she’s going to resent anything of the sort——’

‘I’m afraid,’ said Toby sadly, ‘that she’s almost sure to—from what Jill said. And Jill really knows her best of all.’

Mr. Rushworth ran his hands through his wild grey hair with an impatient gesture which left it shaggier than ever.

‘It’s such appalling nonsense, of course!’ he exploded. ‘Doesn’t the Bible tell us we’re to help one another? Don’t we hear it every Sunday in church?—it’s not my fault, as your rector, if you don’t—and yet people like your chit of a Dorinda do all they can to prevent us! It might be possible, though, to adopt your scheme with modifications. Let me think, now! Since

I mayn't do the right and proper thing (which is to train her for nothing), how would it be if I took charge of your twenty pounds temporarily—only temporarily, mind you! for the sake of convenience—and told her that a friend of mine who is interested in art (which I hope you are) had lent me so much for the training of some promising student? That I'd heard of her talent from your father, and proposed, if I were satisfied with it, to make her that student. How's that, eh? Genuine enough, too! because, if she insisted on paying it back out of her eventual earnings, I'd simply apply the money to helping some other young struggler in similar circumstances. In fact, now you've put the notion into my head, I don't see why I shouldn't do it, in any case. I'm a childless old man with no claims on me. As for your twenty pounds, my dear, it will, of course, go back to you intact directly she gets her scholarship and leaves me for some teacher up in town with a studio.'

'I think she might consent to that,' said Toby reluctantly. 'But—but then \_\_\_\_\_'

'Well, what's the objection?'

'I wanted to help—most frightfully—and you'll be doing it all!'

The old Rector pushed his chair back from the table and glared at her ferociously.

'I shall be doing nothing of the sort!' he cried, with heat. 'I'm an honest man, and unless some one lends me twenty pounds for such a purpose, how can I spin her that yarn? It's the only way in which it can be done, without pauperizing the girl, so I hope you're not going to make trouble next! Besides, you're doing your bit all right. That twenty pounds will probably have to cover a couple of years' tuition, and, meanwhile, *you* won't get any good of it. They call artists and clergy unpractical, but I'd like to know what business man could have drawn up a sounder proposition, under such peculiarly difficult circumstances. I grant you, the proper course (if I were dealing with sensible people, which I'm not!) would be for me to train her gratis—and then, where would your twenty pounds come in? If you're so keen to help, you ought to be devoutly thankful that her silly pride and my business brain have made it possible! What are you laughing at now, Miss Impudence?'

'I'm not!' protested Toby untruthfully. 'I think you're a perfect brick, Mr. Rushworth! and there doesn't seem any other way.'

'Then stop arguing with me, and pour me out another cup of tea. I shall write to your head mistress—no, I'd better call on her and explain matters.'

The proposal may sound more convincing if she puts it to the girl—and then you will both come to tea with me next Saturday, bringing those wonderful sketches about which Barrett has been raving to me. If I share his opinion of them, I shall write at once to her parents.’

‘Oh, you will—I’m sure you will!’ cried Toby gleefully. ‘Daddy thinks they’re marvellous for her age and lack of training.’

‘Humph!’ said Mr. Rushworth. ‘Well, I’ve got a great opinion of your father’s judgement.’

Later on, when she was going away, he put both his hands on her shoulders—the sensitive long-fingered hands of the artist—and said gravely:

‘I owe you something rather special, little Tabitha, for the return of that church plate, and—being the sort of girl you are—I fancy this will be the best way of paying my debt. Somehow, I believe that, through life, people will always find *that* the best way of paying their debts to you—to help your friends. Mind, I feel (and so do you) that we’d rather do it in a more open and above-board fashion, but unluckily we’ve got to take temperament into consideration, and set aside our own inclinations to save somebody else’s feelings.’

It was very hard for Toby next day to keep her own counsel with Dorinda, but she felt her fellow-conspirator had been right in deciding that the proposal should reach her first through the Head. It was all the harder as Dorinda seemed quiet and depressed, though she did her best to conceal the fact.

‘She built more than she knew on her chances of the Molyneux,’ thought Toby, watching her a little wistfully while the Sixth listened to a French lecture with their usual regrettable lack of attention; somehow Mademoiselle could never hold the Seniors. ‘Now that hope’s failed, she doesn’t know which way to turn. I wonder if I dare give her a hint that things are not as impossible as they look.’

Mademoiselle was in full swing by now, and thoroughly enjoying the sound of her own flowing periods. At such times she was apt to forget the existence of her pupils, and lose herself on the tide of her eloquence. Toby felt it was a safe moment to lean over towards Dorinda’s desk and whisper:

‘I say, Dor! I know of something ripping that’s going to happen to you.’

Dorinda brought her gaze back from the glimpse of moor to be seen through their schoolroom window, and shook her head with an unbelieving smile.

‘It’s true,’ persisted Toby. ‘Daddy’s done something about your art-training after all—he hasn’t waited for you to finish school! He’s spoken to Mr. Rushworth, and *he’s* coming over to see the Head about a plan he knows of——’

‘Toby et Dorinda! Pourquoi parlez-vous? Il faut que vous attendiez—c’est au grand moment——’

The transgressors obediently sat up straight and fixed their eyes on the indignant little French-woman, but not for long. Dorinda’s curiosity was completely aroused and, as soon as she considered it safe, she whispered eagerly:

‘What sort of a plan?’

Toby realized the need for caution from every point of view, but she could not resist rousing her friend’s interest a trifle further. ‘It’s—it’s a kind of loan, if you know what I mean. Well, never mind—you soon will. I can’t possibly explain properly, but the Rector will make it quite clear. He may come to-day——’

‘Toby Barrett!’ exclaimed Mademoiselle, relapsing into English in extreme exasperation, as though hoping thus to make her meaning clear to an English imbecile. ‘You vill stay in ven ze oders go to zere creequette! I vill not haf zis. I vill not support it! Et vous aussi, Dorinda! C’est dommage que vous êtes la capitaine, mais je ne puis le supporter! If you vill play ven you s’ould vork, zen you vill vork ven you s’ould play. It ees sound logique, that.’

Before the games-captain had time to recover from her dismay at this pronouncement, there was a knock at the door, and the parlourmaid announced:

‘Miss Ashley wishes to see Miss Dorinda at once please, Mademoiselle, in the drawing-room.’

The interruption could not have been better timed for Dorinda, who escaped with a laughing wink at Toby, left to bear the full brunt of the lecture. Nor did she return till the class was dismissed, and Toby remained alone with several pages of very dull translation. It was plain that Mademoiselle, bereft of one victim, meant to deal faithfully with the other.

She was plodding disgustedly through her task, while the click of bat meeting ball on the playing-field reached her through the open window, when the door flew open as though a whirlwind impelled it, and in burst Dorinda.

‘Toby! it was Mr. Rushworth! And Miss Ashley sent me for my sketches—and he liked them—and he knows of a fund—you’re right, it is a loan, not a charity, and it’s in his hands to arrange. He’s writing to Father and Mother, and so’s Miss Ashley. If they approve, I’m to begin training with him next term! It’s all too ripping for words, but I shan’t forget in a hurry that I owe it to you.’

‘Oh, rot!’ said Toby awkwardly, but her eyes danced, nevertheless, as she submitted to her friend’s frantic hug. After all, her ambition, too, was fulfilled—she had done something for Dorinda. ‘What about telling Jill? She’s over on the tennis-courts——’

‘I’m dying to,’ admitted Dorinda, flopping down at the next desk, ‘but I can’t leave you in the lurch, to-day of all days. Hand over the dic. and I’ll look up the words for you while you scribble the translation. No—it’s only fair, for it’s just by good luck I’m not on the same job myself. Mademoiselle meant me to be.’

‘But you did get off—and you ought to be at cricket,’ objected Toby.

‘That’s all right. Miss Musgrave will see to the practice game. Shut up, and don’t argue, Toby! The sooner we’re finished, the sooner I can tell Jill. Where have you got to? The second paragraph on page 102?’

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### FOUND OUT!

When St. Githa's reassembled after the long summer holidays, Toby went back joyfully, convinced that her school-days henceforth were to be more perfect than ever. True, she had everything still to learn on the hockey-field, but the games-captain was her fast friend, and there were plenty of others ready to give her a helping hand—even Kathleen Wingfield had ceased to be hostile and contemptuous—and Toby felt that her position at St. Githa's was assured. Being a day-girl, she observed to Pen Jordan on their way home, didn't matter a bit, except for missing what happened in the evenings.

Poor Toby! Before long she was to remember Gillian's warning of the previous term, that no state of perfection could possibly last, but in the meantime all was *couleur de rose*. Dorinda's school-work had been rearranged, and on two afternoons in each week she cycled over to the Rectory at Applecleave for her lesson from Mr. Rushworth, who had begun to coach her for a scholarship; and Toby watched her go with a deep sense of satisfaction.

'She seems quite different this term, doesn't she?' she observed confidentially to Gillian, on one of these occasions, as they watched Dorinda's departure from the schoolroom window. 'She's lost that anxious restless look which she used to have when she wasn't working. I'm so glad.'

'So am I,' responded Jill, as they turned back to their desks to prepare for Miss Snaith's science lecture, the next item on their time-table. 'Dorinda's rather a worrier, you know, and I think it was always at the back of her mind—the dread that she might have to give up all hope of an art career. Now, thanks to you, that dread's removed, for she says Mr. Rushworth thinks she'll have a fair chance of the scholarship if she works hard.'

'No danger of her not doing that!' laughed Toby. 'Oh, Jill! it's heavenly to feel that I've had a hand in it, though she doesn't know it.'

'And I hope to goodness she never will!' added Gillian piously. 'The fat would be in the fire, and the cat out of the bag, and the gilt off the gingerbread, and—every other unpleasant thing that you can possibly imagine! I know Dor!'



‘Oh well! she never will find out, so that’s all right,’ said Toby happily. ‘Only three people could tell her—you, I, and the Rector—and none of us ever would.’

Conversation closed at that moment with the entrance of Miss Snaith, but Gillian, though she said no more about it, felt uneasy. As she had said, she knew Dorinda and her troublesome pride, and the scheme which Mr. Rushworth and Toby had concocted so carefully between them had seemed dangerous to Jill from the very beginning.

‘However carefully you sew up a secret,’ she thought sagely, ‘it’s liable to come unstitched, and if Dorinda ever happens to discover the truth there may be a very nasty scene.’

But Gillian, in her capacity of Head-girl, had something more to think about than a mishap that was highly improbable. Gay Marsden and her boon companions appeared to be taking life more seriously this term, but Elfie Rossall was developing unpleasant tendencies which were likely, Gillian felt, to have a bad effect on the Juniors. The prefects strongly suspected Miss Elfie of bullying, but had not yet been able to convict her. She was, beyond doubt, the leader of the Lower School and a child with a good deal of imagination, which was not always put to the best uses. Kathleen Wingfield had spoken of her small sister’s strange unwillingness to return to school after the holidays, and Jill had noticed that two little new girls were going about looking more white-faced and miserable than could be accounted for by ordinary homesickness.

‘I believe,’ said Jane, laughing, ‘that Jill and the Head share the distinction of being the only two people of whom Elfie has a wholesome fear. She manages to hoodwink the mistresses and she despises the rest of us—but if she could only be caught redhanded, and ran against Jill, it might be the turning-point in her career.’

‘Then I hope she will be!’ observed Toby, who happened to be present at the discussion, ‘for it’s my belief she scares that unlucky little Beryl stiff.’

‘Beryl’s a fool to hang round her as she does,’ said Kathleen brusquely. ‘I’ve told her so again and again, but I can’t get any sense out of the kid.’

‘Exactly!’ said Jill, looking troubled. ‘Toby’s right—she’s scared. It’s the fascination of the snake for the bird. I don’t like to think that sort of thing’s going on at St. Githa’s and we can’t put a finger on it.’

‘I shall be tempted to put something more than a finger if I catch her at it!’ remarked Toby grimly, and went off in answer to a message from Miss

Musgrave, who wished to speak to her in one of the empty music-rooms.

The games-mistress had some instructions to give her regarding a new hockey-stick which she was ordering, and also some practical criticism on her bungled attempts to handle her borrowed one on the playing-field that morning.

‘That’s all I’ve got to say at present on the subject of your hockey,’ finished Miss Musgrave, dropping her official tone, ‘but—I’ve had some good news this morning which I know you’ll be glad to share with me. Hugh is cleared at last—entirely cleared—and is free to come and go as he chooses, without a stain on his character! Isn’t it perfectly wonderful?’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Toby, with shining eyes. ‘I’m so delighted! I can’t tell you how delighted I am! What happened?’

‘The papers which he was unable to produce have come to light, and a fresh witness has come forward unexpectedly, and his information, together with the papers, has completely exonerated Hugh. He gets a “free pardon”, as they call it. I had to tell you, Toby, because you’ve been such a little brick all through, and I knew it would please you.’

‘Please me!’ exclaimed Toby. ‘I should think so! Thanks awfully for telling me, Miss Musgrave. Will he stay in England now?’

Lesley shook her head.

‘No, I think not. He’s anxious to make a success of his farming out there, and Ursula, too, is keen that he should do so. Well—I mustn’t keep you chattering here any longer. The prep bell will be ringing very soon.’

After the games-mistress had left her, Toby lingered for a moment in the music-room, puzzled by a strange scraping sound which seemed to come from just outside the open window. The passage into which these small rooms opened had only two dormitories on the opposite side of it, and was, therefore, more or less deserted, except when practising was going on. The music-rooms, moreover, looked out on a part of the garden which was seldom used, and altogether (it occurred to Toby) they were a most suitable part of the school for carrying out any piece of villainy quite undisturbed by the authorities.

Toby could hardly have told why she at once associated that peculiar scraping with dark deeds of some description. She had heard it off and on during her talk with Miss Musgrave, and directly she was alone she went to the window and leaned out a little, but it had ceased by now, and there was nothing to be seen. A narrow ledge or coping ran along the wall about four

feet beneath the row of windows, and the only thing that caught her attention was a white rag fluttering from the edge of this on some nail by which the creeper had been fastened.

‘Somebody’s dropped her hankie,’ she thought idly. ‘Perhaps she tried to fish it up with a stick, and that was the noise I heard. I’d better be going back to the schoolroom.’

She was about to draw her head in again, with a parting sniff at the sweet moor air outside, when from the window on her left came a shrill squeal of terror, and a voice, which she recognized as little Beryl Wingfield’s, cried, ‘I can’t! I can’t! Oh, Elfie, don’t make me! I know I’ll fall and be killed!’

Toby waited for no more. Realizing that the chance had come to her for which the Sixth had been waiting, she darted silently out of the room and into the next.

The scene which greeted her here was more or less what she had expected to find. The two little new girls about whom Jill had been concerned were cowering beside the piano, while Elfie Rossall struggled near the window with the terrified Beryl, who was resisting her with all her might.

‘You’ll climb down and bring back that hankie,’ Elfie was proclaiming in breathless but domineering tones, ‘or else I’ll tell the whole of the Lower School that you’re a coward. They probably know it already, but they’re not sure. They’ll know it for certain, this very night, unless you go down for the hankie.’

‘I won’t! I won’t! I daren’t!’ wailed Beryl.

‘Nessie Brownlow dared, though she made nearly as much fuss. If she can do it, you can. Bah, you little funk! it’s quite easy—I’ve done it heaps of times.’

They were too much engrossed in their wrangle to discover the Senior’s entrance, but the other pair had noticed her at once, and little Nessie Brownlow, still shaking from the ordeal through which she had evidently just passed, suddenly flew to Toby and clung to her skirt.

‘Oh, don’t let her make Beryl do it!’ she cried piteously. ‘I know she’ll fall. I nearly did, and she’s frighteneder than me. Do stop her—please do!’

‘That’s what I’m here for,’ replied Toby grimly. ‘Elfrida Rossall! drop Beryl’s arms—they must be black and blue—and come here at once!’

It was the small bully's turn to be alarmed now. Releasing her victim she faced round on the Sixth Former with startled eyes. An interruption of this sort was the last thing she had expected to befall her in the seclusion of the music-room wing. Meeting Toby's gaze fixed sternly upon her, she felt a strong dislike for this interfering big girl.

'Well?' she asked impudently, trying to brazen it out with a swagger.

'What were you doing with Beryl just now, when I came in?'

'Nothing at all,' replied Elfie sullenly. 'At least—I was just scrapping with her. You could see for yourself.'

'You were trying to force her to do something—what was it?'

No answer. Elfrida's face took an obstinate set.

'Beryl, what was Elfie trying to make you do?' asked Toby more gently, but Beryl, loyal even in extremities, only sobbed on without attempting to reply.

'She won't tell you,' declared Elfie in contemptuous triumph. 'She may be a beastly little funk, but she isn't a sneak.'

'*I am, though!*' announced Nessie Brownlow unexpectedly. 'I don't care what you say, or make the others say—I'll be a sneak if I like—and I do like—so there! She was daring Beryl to climb out on the ledge below the window, Toby, and get that hankie. She climbed out herself and put it there, but then she *enjoys* doing it. We don't—we hate it! She made me go, and I nearly fell, and—and—I feel sick. She's always daring us to do things that we're afraid of, and Beryl and Norah are afraid not to, because she says she'll tell all the rest what cowards they are.'

She stopped abruptly, scared by the sound of her own high-pitched voice now that her excitement was beginning to die down a little. Toby Barrett's calm manner, however, reassured her.

'Thank you, Nessie,' she said gravely. 'Whatever you are, I'm sure you're not a coward, and as for being a sneak—well, I don't suppose it is telling tales to answer my questions, for I'm not even a prefect. There's one girl in this room, all the same, who is both coward and sneak, and that's Elfrida Rossall!'

'I'm not! I'm not!' shrieked the furious Elfie, nearly beside herself with rage. 'And, since you're only a day-girl, you've no right to interfere with us. I'm not afraid of you, anyhow! I——'

‘No,’ said Toby significantly, ‘but you are afraid of Gillian Ewing, and it’s Gillian you’ll be up against now, for you’re coming to the prefects’ study with me straight away. Oh yes you are! and quietly too, unless you want me to carry you, so quick march!’

And, taking Elfrida’s arm in a firm grasp, she led her down the passage and across the landing into the large airy room where the prefects usually worked together. It was empty at present, except for Gillian and Dorinda, the others having gone down to Miss Temple for a special algebra lesson.

‘Hullo!’ exclaimed the Head-girl, glancing up from her Latin grammar at Toby’s dramatic entrance. ‘What’s all this about? Elfie Rossall, is it? Well, Elfie, I’ve been expecting you along here for some time.’ Her tone grew suddenly stern, and the Junior wilted visibly. ‘What has she been doing, Toby?’

Toby told her story clearly and concisely, and—when she remembered Elfie’s three victims—with considerable satisfaction. Gillian heard her through to the end, then turned to the prisoner.

‘Well, Elfie?’ she asked gravely.

Elfie said nothing, having an inner conviction that it was best not to. In her opinion Toby had said more than enough.

‘What possible pleasure can you get,’ demanded Gillian, ‘from torturing children who are weaker and more timid than yourself? It’s about the most horrible kind of nature that any one could have—a desire to torment the people whom you ought to help and protect! I’m thoroughly disgusted with you, Elfie Rossall!’

‘I didn’t torture them,’ said Elfie sulkily. ‘I tried to teach them not to be cowards—that’s all. I never made them do anything till I’d done it first myself.’

‘And who made you a judge of what’s cowardly or not?’ inquired the Head-girl. ‘Courage doesn’t consist of climbing out of windows, or silly childish tricks like that, which do no good to anybody, and would have been entirely against the rules if it had ever entered Miss Ashley’s head to forbid them. It hasn’t, of course, because the girls who come to St. Githa’s are supposed to be more or less sane. Toby’s right when she says that you’re the only coward among them.’

‘I’m not!’ cried Elfie, wounded in her tenderest spot. ‘I’m not afraid of anything! Any of the others will tell you I’m not.’

‘Aren’t you?’ asked Toby drily. ‘Then why do your bullying in quiet corners and at times when you think you won’t be found out? If you’re training Beryl and Norah and Nessie to be brave, why not do it openly?’

Elfie’s temper, which she had never yet been taught to control, gained the upper hand completely as she realized that she was getting the worst of the argument. Flouncing round on her accuser, she shrieked, almost incoherent with passion:

‘It isn’t only me that doesn’t do things openly! I was sitting up in the fir tree when you talked to Gillian in her garden, last term, and I heard what you said about paying the man for Dorinda’s painting-lessons with your prize-money. I heard you say that Dorinda mustn’t know—but she knows now, for I’ve told her! There! If I’m a bully, you’re deceitful, and that’s worse!’

## CHAPTER XXIX

### PROUD DORINDA

For a moment the three Seniors were petrified, but Jill was the first to recover. Seizing Elfrida by the shoulders, she ran her out of the room, and in the corridor she paused for a moment, glaring down at the culprit so fiercely that for once Elfie was awestruck at the result of her own behaviour.

‘That last speech of yours’, said the Head-girl, restraining her anger by a tremendous effort, ‘was a spiteful attempt to make mischief, and goodness knows how far you’ve succeeded! Anyway, I don’t propose to deal with you after this. You can go back to your form-room till I’m ready to take you to the Head.’

The passion died out of Elfie’s small impish face, and she forgot her proud boast of a moment before, that she was frightened of nothing. Jane Trevor had been right when she declared that the troublesome Junior knew how to hoodwink the mistresses, but there was one exception. St. Githa’s had not yet seen the girl who could get the better of Miss Ashley, and Elfie was quite sharp enough to be aware of her own limitations. She could guess only too well what the Head thought about little bullies; it was even possible that she might not care to keep one in her school. Elfie Rossall, who was afraid of no one, slunk off to her form-room with real terror in her heart, but she was too proud to appeal against her sentence.

At the desk next to her own, Beryl (who had been watching for her return) slid a forgiving little hand into her tormentor’s and left a cake of squashy chocolate behind. Elfie felt a sudden and quite unexpected desire to cry. In years to come, when she herself was a prefect of St. Githa’s, she learnt to look back on that afternoon and its subsequent interview with Miss Ashley as a turning-point in her school career, and to be thankful that Gillian Ewing conscientiously fulfilled her threat of reporting her.

Jill, meanwhile, turned back into the prefects’ study to face the situation there, which, she knew, must be handled by herself alone; there could be no alternative of Miss Ashley in this case. She found Dorinda had risen and was leaning back against the table, pale and silent, with both hands gripping its edge. A few yards away stood Toby, looking the picture of guilty misery. As Gillian entered, she took a step forward, and said beseechingly:

‘Dor, don’t condemn me unheard! It’s—it’s only partly true.’

‘If it’s true at all,’ said Dorinda, with frozen stiffness, ‘there is nothing more to be said—except that I’m done with you—and Mr. Rushworth—from this moment!’

Toby gave a piteous little cry.

‘Oh, Dorinda! I didn’t mean any harm! I—I wanted so badly to help you, and so did he—and this was the only way we could think of.’

‘That you should pay for my lessons with the prize which I failed to get! How would you have liked it yourself, Toby Barrett, if the cases had been reversed?’

Toby’s stricken face quivered.

‘I think I shouldn’t have minded very much,’ she answered simply, ‘if you’d wanted to do it, Dor. It makes a difference who does things.’

Then the devil entered into Dorinda as he had a habit of doing at times.

‘Exactly!’ she retorted, with deliberate cruelty. ‘And I don’t feel that we’re intimate enough for me to accept so much from you. I shall write and tell Mr. Rushworth so tonight, and say that I shall not be going over to him for any more lessons.’

‘Dorinda!’ exclaimed Gillian sharply. ‘How can you be such a brute! Upon my word, I don’t see much to choose between you and that little wretch, Elfie Rossall!’

Dorinda looked at her with a queer unpleasant smile.

‘Are you in this too, Jill?’ she inquired. ‘May I know how much you subscribed? Some day I might like to pay it back, you know, when I am earning money. I strongly object to being pauperized by my schoolfellows.’

‘Then wait till they pauperize you before objecting!’ retorted Jill angrily, for she recognized the allusion to their conversation on the day of the Molyneux exam. ‘Since you’ve heard so much, you’d better listen to the full story. Mr. Barrett thought such a lot of your work that he talked it over with the Rector and consulted him as to the best way of having you trained, till Mr. Rushworth got interested and wanted to write to your people, offering to teach you for nothing.’

Dorinda winced, but Gillian took no notice.

‘Luckily,’ she went on, ‘Toby had the sense to see that wouldn’t do, because you’d be certain to resent it, so he thought it over and decided to start a fund, there and then, for training art-students who weren’t eligible for



any other scholarship, and said he'd begin with you. I admit it was your difficulties which started the idea in his mind, but you won't be the only person to profit by it, though you are the first. Don't be silly, Dorinda! *Some one's* got to be first in a case like that. You wouldn't think you were being pauperized if Mr. Rushworth had used his fund to train three or four others before he took you on.'

Dorinda relaxed her grip on the table.

'If that was all,' she said, thawing a little. 'But then—what has the Molyneux Prize to do with it? Either Toby gave it, or she didn't—and she confesses that the kid's story is partly true.'

'I didn't give it—I lent it,' said Toby, thankful now that she had yielded to the Rector's decision on that point. 'He didn't need it, of course—he would have started his fund directly he thought of it whether I'd won the prize or not—but he took it because I begged him. I wanted so frightfully to help,' she finished piteously, 'and I never thought you'd find out. Please forgive me, Dorinda!'

Dorinda stood silent, regarding her with an odd expression which neither Toby nor Gillian could understand. It seemed as though some struggle was going on within her, and it was doubtful, for the moment, which side would win.

'Why should you want to help?' she asked, her sullen pride still struggling for the ascendancy. 'Why couldn't you let my affairs alone? If you hadn't butted in——'

Then it was that Gillian suddenly lost all patience.

'If Toby hadn't butted in—if she hadn't badgered her father to look at your work——' she exclaimed sharply, 'you'd be no nearer realizing your ambition to-day than you were six months ago! You've got the chance of a lifetime, and you talk of throwing it up rather than owe it to the generosity of a friend whose one idea has been to serve you! Yes, I know you don't like the word "generosity" because you're utterly devoid of it yourself! Oh, I'm quite aware you'd give your last crust or the clothes off your back to help any one in need, but that's only one side to being generous, and the easiest, at that! Nobody's worth a snap of the fingers who can't take as well as give, and I know whether it's you or Toby that I respect most at the present moment. I hate ingratitude!'

She paused, out of breath with her own vehemence and a little startled by it. Never since they came to St. Githa's had she treated her chum to such

plain-speaking, and she began to feel a trifle uncertain as to how Dorinda would take it. She was not, as a rule, very patient of criticism. As for Toby, she gasped, and, being a little shaky about the legs, sank abruptly on to the nearest chair and clung to the back of it for support.

As a matter of fact Dorinda took it in a manner which surprised all three, and no one more than herself. A slow smile overspread her face, wiping out all the disagreeableness and crinkling up the corners of her eyes in a delightful fashion.

‘You’re quite right, Jill,’ she announced frankly. ‘I’m a graceless beast, and you’ve done well to tell me so—I’m not ungrateful for *that* service, at least! It may arouse me to mend my ways in future. There’s some humour, when you come to think of it, in Toby apologizing abjectly to me for having given me my chance in life! but I’m afraid the apologies are due the other way round.’

‘Yes,’ said Jill sturdily, ‘I think they are.’

Dorinda turned to Toby again, and held out her hand.

‘What about forgiving *me*, old thing?’ she asked in her abrupt way. ‘Think you can do it?’

But Toby—ignoring the outstretched hand because she hardly saw it—went straight for what was, in her mind, the crux of the whole matter.

‘Do you mean,’ she demanded eagerly, ‘that you won’t write to the Rector—that you’ll carry on with your lessons even if—if——’

Dorinda nodded, reddening a little.

‘Even if I do owe them to you?’ she suggested in subdued tones. ‘Yes, that’s what I mean, Toby. I’m afraid I’ve got a hateful sort of nature which dislikes being in any one’s debt, but please do believe that I’m not really so ungrateful as I must seem. In fact—if I’ve got to owe my luck to any one—I don’t mind confessing that I’d rather it was you than anybody else—except, of course, Jill.’

Toby heaved a profound sigh of relief.

‘Then I’m jolly glad you know all about it,’ she declared candidly, ‘for I’ve hated to feel that we were deceiving you, even for your own good. Now that everything’s been found out, nothing can go wrong.’

‘Except our prep for to-morrow,’ observed Gillian drily. In her opinion ‘scenes’ might sometimes be unavoidable, but there was no need to prolong

them unnecessarily. ‘We ought to have started exactly half an hour ago, and the others will be back from their algebra directly. Cut along down to the Sixth Form-room, Tabitha, my child, and don’t even wait to inform us yet once again that school is absolutely the most perfect place in this best of all possible worlds. It never can be, you know, with temperaments like Dorinda’s knocking up against us at every turn!’

And Toby obediently departed, dodging on her way the exercise-book which the indignant Dorinda was hurling at Gillian’s head.

‘It is, all the same!’ she retorted firmly over her shoulder as she disappeared into the passage.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by Mary S. Reeve (1891-1974) have been omitted from this etext.

[The end of *The School on the Moor* by Dorita Fairlie Bruce]